

Deterring the Ayatollahs

Complications in Applying Cold War Strategy to Iran

Patrick Clawson and Michael Eisenstadt, Editors



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Front cover: A missile truck drives past banners—one (left) showing the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and another (right) that reads “Peaceful nuclear technology is an essential need of our country”—during a ceremony marking Army Day in Tehran, April 18, 2007. Copyright AP Wide World Photos/Hasan Sarbakhshian.

AGENDA: IRAN

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Introduction

GIVEN THE POSSIBILITY that diplomacy might not succeed and that preventive military action might provide only a temporary fix, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy commissioned a series of essays to investigate the challenges posed by deterring a nuclear Iran. Authors were asked to compare and contrast classic Cold War deterrence with the challenges of deterring a nuclear Iran, and to examine how the idiosyncratic nature of the regime in Tehran would influence efforts to deter it.¹

Consideration of deterrence should not be read as resigned acceptance that Iran will acquire nuclear weapons. Quite the contrary: a strong deterrent posture implemented now could be a useful way of demonstrating to Iran's leaders that nuclear weapons will bring them little if any benefit, and that the nuclear program is not worth the high political and economic cost. History offers ample precedent for deterrence as a means of dissuasion, such as the Soviet Union's agreement to dismantle the SS-20 missiles after NATO deployed similar intermediate-range missiles. Furthermore, a sober examination of the risks and costs of deterring Iran could be a useful reminder of why a diplomatic agreement is a much better solution, thereby stimulating the international community to more vigorously support diplomatic initiatives, including active enforcement of the diplomacy-supporting sanctions mandated by the UN Security Council.

Those diplomatic efforts may well succeed. The coercive diplomacy of sanctions, be they the more narrowly focused UN-mandated measures or the de facto sanctions on Iran's financial system imposed by the United States with acquiescence of other Western powers, remind Iran of the high price it is paying for its nuclear stance. Iran is in a fundamentally weak position that has been temporarily masked by a combination of circumstances

favorable to the Islamic Republic. Iran's revolutionaries were riding high in 2006 with oil prices up, friendly forces doing well from Lebanon to Iraq, the United States bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan, and domestic opponents scattered. But the longer the nuclear crisis continues, the more apparent Iran's profound problems will become to the country's leaders. These weaknesses could well force them to adopt a more cautious stance. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the main decisionmaker, has generally been loath to risk the Islamic Republic's grip on power. And Tehran has shown twice in recent years that it is prepared to accept nuclear compromises it had previously insisted were unthinkable. A reversal of policy should not be ruled out should Tehran conclude that its nuclear program is of dubious strategic value due to the possibility that it could spark an arms race that would threaten Iran, and isolate the country even further. Whereas North Korea may have developed nuclear weapons out of desperation, Iran is pursuing them as much out of aspiration—to be accepted as a great power with modern technology. The more effort the world community puts into pressing Iran, the more likely Iran's leaders will become sensitive to their weaknesses and decide to postpone their nuclear ambitions.

In the end, however, Iran may make a breakthrough to at least ambiguous nuclear status, with the outside world uncertain if Iran has or could quickly build nuclear weapons. Now is the time to puzzle through the implications of various policies that could be proposed in such a situation. The point of this study is to stimulate more thinking about what it would take to make deterrence work in the Iranian case and what risks it would entail.

Patrick Clawson and Michael Eisenstadt
July 2007

1. For more on classic deterrence strategy, see Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Boston: Little and Brown, 1971; Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1974; Robert Jervis, Janice Gross-Stein, Richard Ned Lebow, *Psychology and Deterrence*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989; Herman Kahn, *Thinking about the Unthinkable*, New York: Horizon Press, 1962; Henry Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1958; Keith Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction*, Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001; and Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Deterring Iran: The Values at Stake and the Acceptable Risks

Keith Payne

DETERRENCE AND COERCION consist of using threats as leverage to change the behavior of a target audience. Actually executing a threat is not deterrence. If the threat has been executed, deterrence more than likely has failed.

The dominant approach to deterrence during the Cold War assumed that a universal rationality drives decisionmaking. Deterrence was expected to function predictably vis-à-vis all sane leaders. As long as the mechanics were right—that is, the nuclear force structure and capability behind the threat were in place—deterrence was expected to “work.” Why? Because rationality demanded that opponents be prudent and cautious in the face of U.S. nuclear retaliatory threats.

The ongoing debate during the Cold War centered on what the proper force structure, i.e., the “mechanics,” should look like for deterrence. Whether the discussion was about strategic defense, counterforce warheads, or a threat to cities, the requirements for deterrence focused on the force structure mechanics. That view remains common today. Some analysts continue to assert that if the mechanics are right, deterrence will “work” reliably and consistently. Therefore, according to this view, nuclear proliferation need not be considered a threat. Instead, it can be welcomed because many little “stable nuclear relationships” can be created in a world where deterrence among sane leaders works reliably and predictably.

As this logic suggests, the Cold War experience brings mostly unhelpful baggage to the deterrence debate. Although discussions of deterrence invariably invoke Cold War images and language (e.g., the “balance of terror”), present conditions are so far removed from those of the Cold War that most of its deterrence language is now meaningless. For instance, the concept of a “stable deterrence relationship” that made some sense in the Cold War context of mutual and comparable nuclear threats and mutual familiarity lacks any coherent meaning in describing the likely future relationship between the United States and Iran and other regional powers.

Old deterrence concepts, buzzwords, and terms of art have essentially lost their meaning because the conditions of current power and political relationships have become so different from Cold War conditions.

A four-year study in which I was involved essentially asked whether the United States can deter Iran from continuing with its nuclear weapons program. The main conclusion found that the fundamental question is less about specific force comparisons than it is a reflection of stakes, values, and risks. During the Cold War, the assumption was that roughly the same values were at stake on both sides and that comparable risks confronted each side. Today, that condition does not exist in most plausible cases; the first priority in thinking about U.S. deterrence requirements with regard to the Iranian nuclear program is understanding the value of a nuclear weapons program for the Iranian leadership and the value to the United States of Iran *not* having nuclear weapons. On one side of the equation, if the latter value is extraordinarily high, then the United States, at least in principle, should be willing to accept considerable risk to prevent that development. On the other side, if the value of nuclear weapons to the Iranian leadership is very high, then it will presumably be willing to accept great risk to pursue that capability. The question becomes which side places higher value on the stakes and is more willing to absorb cost to prevail in this competition of wills. Whereas the Cold War saw the conditions and the values on both sides of the deterrence equation as largely comparable, that is no longer true today, when the risks, stakes, and values are asymmetric, and “balance of terror” guidelines provide little guidance for deterrence.

After the balance of values is established, the next issue of concern with regard to contemporary deterrence is that of strategic communication. During the Cold War, the United States communicated deterrence “red lines” through formal government-to-government communiqués, speeches, and demarches. Sovietology became the great art of understanding what particular part of the Politburo and Central Committee to deal with on a particular

deterrence question and how to do so. Deterrence was about strategic forces and having undistorted communication with the important elements of leadership on the other side. In the contemporary era, knowing with whom to communicate and how to do so is a primary challenge. The presence of so many competing sources of information, particularly in the United States, means that Washington's expressed red lines will be heard amid background noise that can negatively affect the intended meaning of any strategic communications intended for a specific purpose. For opponents, the question is how to discern which voices in the United States constitute background noise and which should be taken seriously. Our strategic communications occur against a backdrop of information that is not easily controlled, and what the opponent hears and believes with regard to U.S. deterrence threats and red lines frequently may not follow our intended script.

How and with whom one communicates for deterrence purposes involving Iran, North Korea, a terrorist organization, or any other party is an open question. The mode or channel of communication matters. Communication is an enormously complicated process, and deterrence can fail at any point along the way. For example, an examination of U.S. statements of so-called red lines vis-à-vis the Iranian nuclear program and subsequent Iranian reactions illustrates the difficulty of communication. In June 2003, President Bush essentially said that Iranian steps leading to a nuclear weapons capability were intolerable. This point was reiterated by the secretary of state in January 2006, an undersecretary of state in February 2006, an assistant secretary of state in December 2006, and the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations on January 25, 2006. In August 2005, Iran stated to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it would resume uranium enrichment-related activities at Isfahan. In January 2006, Iran reportedly broke IAEA seals on nuclear facilities, including at Natanz. In April 2006, the Iran Atomic Energy Organization announced that Iran had enriched uranium to 3.5 percent in the lab and that it was seeking to complete a 3,000-centrifuge complex by March 2007. In August 2006, Iran reportedly began initial heavy-water production in a plant at Arak and, in April 2007, announced that 3,000 centrifuges were in operation with a goal of eventually having 50,000 centrifuges in operation. A look at

apparent Iranian violations of Washington's expressed red lines and the lack of significant, apparent consequences for transgressing those lines illustrates that deterrence is not just about having overwhelming military capabilities, but includes laying out red lines that the opponent believes will carry intolerable consequences if crossed.

Understanding the values of the Iranian leadership is vital in establishing a viable and effective policy of deterrence. The central deterrence question is whether the United States can put at risk Iranian values in a manner credible enough to encourage Iran to give up the value of having a nuclear program. Because understanding the Iranian strategic culture and decisionmaking process is crucial, deterrence has to be taken out of the purview of the economist and physicist; political scientists, anthropologists, political psychologists, and historians are needed. The question really requires a look at what room exists within the decisionmaking calculus of a particular leadership, at a particular time, over a particular value for the grudging cooperation needed for deterrence. In some cases, such room exists. In other cases, deterrence will not function. To understand which may be the case for any given contingency requires a sophisticated understanding of the opponent as a unique decisionmaking actor in specific circumstances. General principles about deterrence derived from deductive logic and assumptions about how rational leaders must think and act no longer provide much value.

A close examination of Iranian decisionmaking suggests that deterring Iran from pursuing a nuclear weapons program is going to be extremely difficult because the external and internal value of nuclear weapons are high for the leadership. Acquiring nuclear weapons is seen to be one way for Iran to have more leverage abroad, to be immune from U.S. pressure, and to score nationalist points internally.

Finally, the question of reassuring allies in the context of nuclear proliferation is important. If Iran achieves a nuclear weapon capability, then the question becomes how to deter its exploitation and use of that capability. Reassuring allies in the context of a nuclear Iran would take a combination of new words, capabilities, and deeds. Establishing a reassuring sense of the U.S. nuclear umbrella would most certainly involve changes in current declaratory policy, advances in U.S. defensive capabilities, and possible changes in the U.S. strategic arsenal.

Detering a Nuclear Iran: Problems with Iranian Risk Taking and Behavior

Michael Eisenstadt

ONE OF THE KEY FACTORS influencing U.S. calculations regarding the potential risks and costs of preventive military action and of the viability of a policy of deterrence vis-à-vis a nuclear Iran is the impact that the acquisition of nuclear weapons might have on the risk-taking calculus and foreign policy behavior of Iran's leadership.

There are two schools of thought concerning the impact of the acquisition of nuclear weapons on the behavior of states. The first school argues that the acquisition of nuclear weapons induces prudence and caution, and it adduces the behavior of the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War as proof for this claim. For more than forty years, the United States and the Soviet Union avoided nuclear war by acting through proxies, avoiding infringements of each other's red lines, and implementing confidence-building measures that reduced the potential for accidental conflict.

The second school holds that the acquisition of nuclear weapons is likely to lead to more aggressive behavior, greater risk taking, and a heightened potential for miscalculation. It adduces the behavior of Iraq in the late 1980s and of Pakistan following its May 1998 nuclear weapons test as proof for this claim.

The Lessons of the Cuban Missile Crisis

The glaring exception to the prevailing pattern of nuclear stability during the Cold War was the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. Post-Cold War revelations indicate that the United States and the Soviet Union were far closer to nuclear war than either realized at the time, making the Cold War record

look much less appealing than it did in the past. For instance:

- Unbeknownst to U.S. decisionmakers, Soviet ground forces in Cuba possessed tactical nuclear weapons and had been granted release authority to use them (this authority was subsequently withdrawn at the height of the crisis).
- Cuban president Fidel Castro stated that he would have agreed to Soviet use of nuclear weapons on Cuban soil had the United States launched airstrikes and invaded Cuba, as the joint chiefs had recommended to President Kennedy.
- U.S. vessels enforcing the naval quarantine on Cuba dropped small signaling depth charges on Soviet submarines that, unbeknownst to U.S. forces, were armed with and authorized to use nuclear torpedoes if their hulls were penetrated.
- At the height of the crisis, a U-2 plane on a routine air-sampling mission strayed over the Soviet Union, which scrambled jets to intercept it. U.S. jets armed with nuclear missiles scrambled to protect the U-2, which departed Soviet airspace without incident.¹

The Cuban missile crisis teaches important lessons about the potential for miscalculation and the loss of control of events by decisionmakers during a crisis. To a significant extent, the dangers during that crisis derived from the worldwide deployment of massive numbers of tactical and strategic nuclear weapons by both sides (4,000–8,000 weapons by the Soviet Union, 30,000

1. Concerning the errant U-2 flight, then secretary of defense Robert McNamara feared that the Soviets would mistake the trespassing U-2 for a prestrike reconnaissance mission and would preempt with a nuclear strike. Fortunately, these fears proved unfounded. For more on these and other post-Cold War revelations concerning the crisis, see Robert S. McNamara, "Forty Years after 13 Days," *Arms Control Today*, November 2002, pp. 4–5; The National Security Archive, "The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: Materials from the 40th Anniversary Conference" (available online at www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/conference.htm).

by the United States) and the large number of points of interaction between the armed forces of the two parties in the Caribbean and around the globe.

In contrast, a nuclear-armed Iran would initially have a relatively small number of weapons, and contacts between the armed forces of Iran and those of the United States would likely be limited to the Persian Gulf region. Nevertheless, the small size of the potential theater of operations means that relatively large numbers of nuclear weapons could be deployed in a very small area and that events could unfold very quickly there—given the geographically confined nature of the Gulf—making management or control of developments difficult during a crisis. Moreover, developments in Iraq or Afghanistan, where both the United States and Iran are likely to have a presence for years to come, could complicate crisis decisionmaking in the Gulf. Finally, political factionalism and the politicization of elements of the Iranian armed forces (particularly the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) could complicate efforts to control or manage Iranian forces during a crisis.

In light of such uncertainties, former secretary of defense McNamara's revised verdict on the Cuban missile crisis is worth keeping in mind: "For many years, I considered the Cuban missile crisis to be the best-managed foreign policy crisis of the last half-century.... But I now conclude that... luck also played a significant role in the avoidance of nuclear war by a hair's breadth."²

The Cuban missile crisis contributed to the subsequent decision by the United States and the Soviet Union to implement a series of confidence-building measures to prevent misunderstandings and miscalculation that could lead to a nuclear exchange. Similarly, now would not be too early to consider various confidence-building measures that the United States and Iran could implement in the Gulf not only to reduce current tensions but also to help reduce the possibility of miscalculation in the future.

The Lessons of Iraq and Pakistan

Experience shows that the proliferation of nonconventional weapons (particularly nuclear weapons) has in certain cases been destabilizing. Iraq's maturing chemical and biological weapons capabilities may have emboldened Saddam Hussein to pursue a more aggressive regional policy in 1989–1990, culminating in the invasion of Kuwait, in the belief that Iraq's chemical weapons constituted a counter to Israel's nuclear option and U.S. power projection capabilities in the region.³

Similarly, the confidence that Pakistan's leadership drew from its May 1998 nuclear weapons test may have emboldened it to attempt to seize a portion of Kashmir from India—in the mistaken belief that India would be deterred from responding militarily, leading to the Kargil crisis of May–July 1999.

Reckless indifference, if not blithe overconfidence, may have likewise induced a nuclear Pakistan to overlook the dangers of providing safe haven to anti-Indian terrorist groups, such as the Jaish-e-Muhammad, which attacked the Indian parliament in December 2001, leading to yet another crisis between India and Pakistan. Although there is no evidence that the Pakistani government played a role in the attack on the Indian parliament, this incident, at the very least, indicates the dangers of new nuclear powers playing under the old rules.

So how might the acquisition of nuclear weapons affect the decision calculus of Iran's leadership? Here, the present may hold intimations of the future. A fairly strong case can be made that Iran's success in advancing its nuclear program in the face of weak international opposition has already emboldened it to crack down on domestic critics, seize British sailors and Marines off the coast of Iraq in March 2007, and detain U.S.-Iranian dual nationals in May of that year. Indeed, President Ahmadinezhad has stated that Iran already is a nuclear power and should therefore be treated with the deference that is its due.⁴

2. McNamara, "Forty Years after 13 Days," p. 4.

3. Amatzia Baram, "An Analysis of Iraqi WMD Strategy," *The Nonproliferation Review* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2001), pp. 30–32.

4. Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad, "Today the Iranian People Is the Owner of Nuclear Technology," Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) Special Dispatch No. 1229, August 3, 2006. Available online (<http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP122906>).

Accordingly, it is not unreasonable to assume that the acquisition of nuclear weapons could embolden Tehran to behave more aggressively, to more frequently resort to coercive diplomacy, to ramp up its support for terrorism, or to undertake military adventures, in the belief that its nuclear umbrella would preclude an effective response by its adversaries. For this reason, defining and clarifying existing red lines, as a means of reducing uncertainty and the potential for miscalculation, will be an important part of any effort to deter a nuclear Iran.

A heightened potential for miscalculation. The potential for miscalculation by Tehran is compounded by the fact that Iran's creeping nuclearization is taking place against the background of U.S. and Israeli failure to punish Iran militarily for nearly three decades of state-sponsored terrorism; the diminution of the deterrent image of the United States and Israel as a result of disastrously mishandled wars in Iraq and Lebanon, respectively; and growing Iranian self-confidence, stemming from the overthrow of hostile regimes in Baghdad and Kabul, U.S. troubles in Iraq, high oil prices, and Tehran's success in rebuffing pressures to halt its enrichment activities. This dangerous combination could complicate efforts to create a stable deterrent relationship with Iran. Such overconfidence can be seen in various statements by President Ahmadinezhad, such as a comment reportedly made to Kofi Annan, during the latter's September 2006 visit to the region, that "while America and Britain won the last world war, Iran would win the next one."⁵ The United States, Israel, and the international community must reverse this trend if they are to reduce the prospects for miscalculation by Tehran.

Covert delivery capability. Because Tehran has traditionally attached great importance to preserving deniability, it is likely to seek the ability to deliver nonconventional weapons by covert, nontraditional

means (for example, using trucks, unmanned aircraft, or boats). Because such methods offer the possibility of deniability, they are likely to become important adjuncts to more traditional delivery means, such as missiles, and in situations in which deniability is a critical consideration, they are likely to be the delivery means of choice.

The possibility of deniable, covert delivery of nuclear weapons by Iran could pose a major challenge for deterrence—particularly if the leadership of the Islamic Republic believed that the regime's survival was at stake or that its enemies were vulnerable to a debilitating knockout blow. For this reason, it is vitally important to convince the most senior echelons of the Islamic Republic (not just midlevel technical specialists or policy experts) that U.S. postevent attribution capabilities (i.e., the ability to determine the source of a nuclear device or weapon by analyzing the isotopic signature of its fission products) preclude the possibility of deniable delivery.⁶

Potential for Nuclear Proliferation and a Regional Nuclear Arms Race

Might Iran be tempted to provide dual-use nuclear technology to other states and thereby be a source of additional proliferation concern? Nearly every nuclear program has spawned spin-offs: the United States assisted the United Kingdom and France, and inadvertently (by means of espionage) contributed to the Soviet program; the Soviet Union assisted China; China assisted Pakistan; Pakistan's Abdul Qadir Khan assisted North Korea, Iran, and Libya; and France assisted Israel. In some cases, the proliferator was motivated by a desire to assist an ally, in other cases, by a desire to harm a rival or enemy. As for Iran, it has already stated that it stands ready to help other Muslim states to acquire "peaceful nuclear technology."⁷ Its nuclear technological base is sufficiently mature that it could become a supplier of dual-use civilian nuclear

5. Warren Hoge, "Diatribes and Dialogues in Mideast for Annan," *New York Times*, September 11, 2006, p. A9.

6. For more on the postevent attribution problem, see William Dunlop and Harold Smith, "Who Did It? Using International Forensics to Detect and Deter Nuclear Terrorism," *Arms Control Today*, October 2006, pp. 6–10. Available online (www.armscontrol.org/act/2006_10/CVRForensics.asp).

7. "Ahmadinezhad Says Iran Ready to Transfer Nuclear Technology to Islamic States," Islamic Republic News Agency, September 15, 2005; Ali Akbar Dareini, "Iran Offers to Transfer Nuclear Technology to Its Neighbors," Associated Press Worldstream, December 16, 2006.

technology now—not tomorrow. To deter such a possibility, the UN Security Council should pass a resolution under article 42 of Chapter VII (which would authorize the use of force) prohibiting the transfer by Iran of *any* kind of nuclear technology or know-how to another country or a non-state actor.⁸

The maturation of Tehran's nuclear program, the regime's growing assertiveness, and the belief that a nuclear Iran will be even more difficult to live with have caused many of its neighbors to reevaluate their nuclear options. The goal of this renewed interest in nuclear technology seems to be to deter Tehran from pursuing its nuclear option, to energize diplomacy to halt the Iranian program, and to pave the way for a decision to pursue a nuclear weapons program at some future date. Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council have all indicated within the past year or two that they are either considering the possibility of pursuing civilian nuclear technology or actually doing so.⁹ Iran's nuclear program may already be contributing to a radical transformation of the proliferation landscape in the Middle East that could greatly complicate efforts to prevent a nuclear war someday. To prevent such an eventuality, the United States may need to put together a package of security assurances and conventional arms transfers for its regional friends and allies, as part of an effort to dissuade them from developing a nuclear option.

Conclusion

Experience shows that some proliferators (e.g., the Soviet Union, Iraq, and Pakistan) have been emboldened by their new capabilities to take what appear in retrospect to be imprudent risks. Efforts to create a stable nuclear deterrent relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, and India and Pakistan, were much more risky and difficult than is generally recognized.

This experience raises all kinds of questions with regard to Iran, particularly since the political environment in the Middle East is evolving in ways that could greatly complicate efforts to establish a stable nuclear deterrent relationship with the Islamic Republic.

In particular, a nuclear Iran is prone to be more assertive and aggressive, and to miscalculate; U.S. and Israeli deterrent threats are likely to be of uncertain efficacy; and other regional states are increasingly likely to explore their nuclear options, creating a more complex, and perhaps unstable, regional threat environment.

For these reasons, the emergence of a nuclear Iran is likely to be one of the most serious foreign policy challenges facing the United States in the coming years. This underscores the importance of doing everything possible to ensure that the ongoing nuclear diplomacy with Iran succeeds, and that preventive military action remains an option.

8. At present, UN Security Council Resolution 1737 proscribes the transfer of certain sensitive nuclear materials and technologies, but it was passed under article 41 of Chapter VII, which only authorizes measures *not* involving the use of armed force.

9. William J. Broad and David E. Sanger, "With Eye on Iran, Rivals Also Want Nuclear Power," *New York Times*, April 15, 2007, p. A1.

Attribution and Detering a Nuclear-Armed Iran

Lewis Dunn¹

EFFORTS TO TRACK BACK a nuclear detonation to its source in Iran—**attribution**—would be a key part of any strategy on the part of the United States and its supporters to deter Iran’s leadership from providing nuclear weapons material or a nuclear weapon to terrorists. Attribution also would be central to countering an attempt by Iran to use a nuclear weapon clandestinely while denying any involvement. Such an attribution capability would help provide a strong incentive to the Iranian leadership to take all steps possible to ensure control over any nuclear weapons materials and nuclear weapons. Keeping in mind the various sensitivities and uncertainties inherent in this subject, the following sections pose some questions about attribution.

What Would the United States and Others Know—and How?

Four different pathways could provide information to attribute or track back a nuclear detonation to Iran:

- **Postdetonation** technical nuclear forensics—including analysis of the distance of damage from the shock wave, the size of the resultant crater, the seismic data, and the radioactive debris—would be the first pathway.² Nuclear forensics can be expected to provide information about the estimated yield of the nuclear device, whether it used plutonium or highly enriched uranium (HEU), and its relative sophistication. As William Dunlop and Harold Smith write:

If the isotopic data obtained from the debris could be compared to similar data from plutonium or HEU stockpiles or weapons, it might be possible, under some conditions, to conclude that some of the fissile material did or did not come from a specific arsenal. It might be possible, given enough time and access to

actual weapons designed, to conclude whether a particular type of weapon had been employed.³

- **Intelligence** would be another potential pathway to track back a clandestine nuclear attack. The attacks of September 11, 2001, for example, were tracked back to al-Qaeda using intelligence. Credible intelligence could come from American sources or from friendly foreign intelligence services. After a nuclear detonation, most countries probably would be prepared to share any information available and to reexamine old information. Their readiness presumes that their own intelligence would not in some way indirectly implicate them, for example, by an unknown transit across their territory discovered only after the attack. In some instances, however, disinformation could be a risk to be guarded against.
- **Good police work** also would offer a means of tracking back a nuclear detonation to its source. In this case, attribution would depend on following whatever clues might be available concerning the logistics of moving the device into the United States or other country, the people involved, the equipment used (if not destroyed), and the flows of money. The functional equivalent would be the police work that tracked back the bombing of Pan Am 103 to Libya because of clothing residues found in the suitcase that contained the bomb. Comparable police work could well provide critical information to track back a nuclear attack.
- **Contextual presumption** would be a final, if less precise, means of attribution. Put simply, if a nuclear weapon detonates during the midst of an escalating military conflict between the United States and

1. The views herein are those of the author and not necessarily those of SAIC or any of its sponsoring organizations.

2. The following discussion relies on Dr. William Dunlop and Dr. Harold Smith, “Who Did It? Using International Forensics to Detect and Deter Nuclear Terrorism,” *Arms Control Today*, October 2006. Available online (www.armscontrol.org/act/2006_10/CVRForensics.asp).

3. Ibid.

Iran, a very good starting assumption would be that Iran was behind the attack. (In a multinuclear Middle East, however, this starting assumption could become increasingly problematic.)

How Soon Would the United States Know?

Some information that could contribute to attribution would likely be available within hours. Thus, estimates of the yield of a device based on data from the seismic effect, shock wave, and crater, for example, would be known within hours. Other information would take longer to obtain, including analysis of the isotopic data obtained from the nuclear debris. The availability of intelligence and police data is more uncertain. It might become available very quickly, more slowly, or possibly not all. Within a day, for instance, credible intelligence and police evidence existed to link the September 11 attacks back to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. By contrast, police investigators needed two years to track back the Pan Am 103 bombing to Libya, and more than five years passed before indictments of persons involved linked “elements within the Iranian government” to the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers U.S. military housing complex.

How Much Confidence Would the Results Inspire?

Significant differences could exist in the level of confidence in the results, reflecting the characteristics of the attack, the particular data, and how they were obtained. Experience indicates that virtually any analysis or evidence is likely to be examined skeptically, challenged, contested, and possibly even denied outright by some persons at home and abroad. That said, the credibility of the results could well be increased to the extent that any of the following conditions applied: (a) any U.S. technical analysis, for example, seismic data as well as isotopic analysis, was replicable and replicated by several national entities; (b) international data sources of global nuclear materials samples were relied on, such as

the International Atomic Energy Agency database; (c) one or more foreign intelligence services provided confirming intelligence; (d) police work reflected a clear and evident chain of analysis.

How Important Would High-Confidence Attribution of Iranian Involvement Be?

Confidence in attribution capabilities would affect U.S. policy differently at different times in the deterrence/response process.

For *pre-use deterrence* (or to encourage Iranian officials to ensure the best possible nuclear security and control), the United States clearly would want Iran to conclude that the United States had high confidence in its capabilities to track back a clandestine nuclear detonation to Iran or Iranian elements. This objective reinforces the importance of today’s emphasis on continued improvements in all dimensions of U.S. attribution capabilities—technical, intelligence, and police. In turn, the decision to include global cooperation on attribution as one aspect of the work plan under the new U.S.-Russian Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism is a potentially important step. Other international actions could include building on UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (obligating all states to put in place means to prevent their firms, citizens, or other international entities from assisting in terrorist access to weapons of mass destruction) to seek a follow-up Security Council resolution obligating all states to cooperate in attributing the source of a nuclear attack. As appropriate, bilateral understandings and agreements could be reached between the United States and other governments on the specifics for facilitating attribution after the fact.⁴

For *credible deterrence*, making public as much information as possible about advancing U.S. and international attribution capabilities would be valuable. Public statements, however, would need to be balanced against compromising specific technical means or intelligence sources and methods. One possible approach would be to emphasize the basic commitment to

4. Dunlop and Smith also suggest possible state-to-state agreements.

attribution “no matter how long it takes,” to highlight international cooperation as well as overall advancing capabilities, and to remain silent on sensitive methods. In addition, the United States could make a basic policy statement that the leaders of any country would be held accountable for a nuclear use that tracked back to their nation—and seek international support for that policy.⁵

For *intra-conflict deterrence*, it can be assumed that in a crisis, a full-court press would already be under way to use intelligence, police, and other means to detect and interdict any clandestine nuclear smuggling. These efforts might also be signaled, perhaps by developing a functional equivalent for “clandestine detection” readiness of the Cold War set of Defense Conditions (Defcon) alert levels for U.S. nuclear posture and being prepared to announce increased readiness. In an ongoing escalating military crisis with Iran, drawing on the approach taken by President John Kennedy during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis might also be desirable. In his October 22, 1962, address, President Kennedy stated, “It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union.” In a conflict with Iran, a comparable statement could be made to Iranian officials in regard to any clandestine nuclear detonation in the American homeland or that of friends and allies.

For *post-use response*, the implications of attribution confidence are usefully discussed in terms of three levels of confidence in tracking back:

- Assuming virtual certainty or very high confidence that the clandestine nuclear detonation tracked back to Iran, the most important question almost certainly would be whether to respond in kind with a nuclear weapon. Two bad choices need to be balanced. On the one hand, a decision not to retaliate with a nuclear weapon would signal to adversaries

and allies that a nuclear weapon can be used against the United States without the risk of having nuclear weapons used in return. On the other hand, U.S. nuclear retaliation could send a different bad signal: the decades-long taboo against the use of nuclear weapons would be eroded dramatically. One way to square the circle could be to retaliate with a single, very precise use of a nuclear weapon combined with devastating conventional means.

- In the case of a *strong presumption* that Iran’s officials or elements in Iran were behind a clandestine nuclear detonation, much may depend on the source of that strong presumption. If a nuclear detonation occurs in the midst of an ongoing U.S.-Iranian military conflict, the key question in this context again is likely to be whether to respond in kind—regardless of whether other technical, intelligence, or police evidence confirms attribution. Perhaps more interesting is the case of an out-of-the-blue clandestine nuclear detonation in which some evidence tracks the material back to Iran, but the analysis is not free of doubt. Here, the choice between the two bad signals previously set out is likely to tilt toward retaliating without nuclear weapons.
- If U.S. officials *lack confidence in attribution* and also cannot presume that Iran was behind the attack, top priority clearly would be to continue to do everything possible to track back the attack to whoever had been involved. In addition, declaratory policy could stress that such efforts are under way. U.S. statements also could emphasize that all response options remain open. Retaliation delayed need not be justice denied. In addition, the very shock of this nuclear attack should be leveraged to gain the widest possible international support for cooperation in such attribution efforts. Political-diplomatic efforts should seek, as well, to gain declarations of support by as many nations as possible for a decisive response if a second attack were to occur—and

5. The specifics of “holding accountable” would depend on the particular case and especially on the degree of intentional involvement by those leaders or their supporters.

to be tracked back to Iran in this case. Finally, the shock of a clandestine nuclear attack would provide an opportunity to pursue a wide range of global measures to ensure “never again”—from enhancing security of nuclear materials, to putting in place a global attribution infrastructure, to acting against potential nuclear terrorist groups. Past experience amply shows that after global shocks, other countries become far more prepared to act in concert

and to take difficult measures. Use of a nuclear weapon would be the most dramatic international shock in over six decades.

Even this very limited discussion suggests that how to respond to a terrorist or clandestine nuclear detonation tracked back to Iran—or for that matter any other country—raises tough policy questions. It is none too soon to begin thinking about them.

Command-and-Control Challenges of an Iranian Nuclear Force

Gregory Giles

IN THE EVENT diplomatic efforts fail to persuade Iran to give up its nuclear weapons ambitions, the stability of deterrence in the region will hinge, in part, on the ability of Iran's leaders to control tightly its nuclear weapons capability—and the perception of the international community that it is indeed exercising that control. Nevertheless, ample cause exists to question whether Iran's ruling mullahs can be trusted to keep their nuclear weapons capability out of the hands of extremist elements in the regime's security apparatus, terrorist groups, or other radical states also seeking nuclear weapons. Ironically, the introduction of nuclear weapons in Iran carries the potential for a “nuclear coup d'état,”¹ whereby a faction might seize control of nuclear devices in a bid to change the regime from within. Greater emphasis on the threat of nuclear weapons possession to internal security may have a sobering effect on Iran's mullahs and induce them to stop short of a weaponized or deployed nuclear capability.

Iranian Nuclear Weapons in the Hands of Rogue Elements or Terrorists

The term “rogue” is usually defined as an actor who is no longer obedient or accepted and therefore cannot be controlled. This term is something of a misnomer in the context of Iran, where multiple and competing centers of power exist formally and informally. Against this backdrop, radicals continuously compete with moderates over the direction of Iran's social, economic, political, and foreign policies. Extremist senior clerics have acted as “patrons” of Iran's military-security bodies, providing Islamic justification to engage in behavior that might be repugnant or at least counterproductive to other parts of the system. This behavior might be directed top-down. For example, during the Iran-Iraq

War, Iran's radical Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) undertook many actions, such as launching missile attacks against Kuwait, that were at odds with state policy. These operations were linked to domestic political infighting in Tehran.²

Alternatively, extreme behavior can be self-initiated under the permissive environment created by extremist clerics and regime institutions. Such appears to be the case with the recent acquittal of six Basij paramilitary members who killed five people in central Iran. Overturning lower-court rulings, Iran's Supreme Court reaffirmed that because the militiamen deemed their victims to be morally corrupt, their blood could be spilled.³ Such incidents belie the usual notion of rogues because their extremist behavior is not just accepted in Iran, but it is also often applauded by influential regime clerics and officials. In essence, apart from counter-revolutionaries trying to unseat the mullahs, very few cases of true rogue behavior are likely to exist in Iran.

Accordingly, speaking of the risk that “religious and ideological zealots” could gain access to and control over Iranian nuclear weapons is probably more accurate. Much would depend on how the regime structured a nuclear force and the command-and-control arrangements that would govern it. If Iran's established approach to internal security and nuclear matters provides any guide, a number of organizations are likely to be involved, with the IRGC figuring prominently. Likewise, Iran's supreme leader, currently Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, would presumably be at the top of a nuclear command authority (NCA). Also, the regime would likely seek to recruit the most trustworthy personnel to man its nuclear force.

Upon closer examination, however, reason exists to question each of these elements of command and

1. See Lewis A. Dunn, “Military Politics, Nuclear Proliferation, and the ‘Nuclear Coup d'Etat,’” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 1 (May 1978).
2. Kenneth Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 132–134, 175.
3. Nazila Fathi, “Iran Exonerates Six Who Killed in Islam's Name,” *New York Times*, April 19, 2007.

control in Iran. Although the IRGC is seen as the most politically reliable military arm of the regime, it is also the entity associated with the most extremist senior clerics in the regime, such as Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, and is the leading edge of Iran's terrorism apparatus. The 1980–1988 war with Iraq underscores the politicization of Iran's military chain of command and the ability of factions to manipulate military-security operations to gain domestic political advantage. How could an Iranian NCA resist this strong cultural tendency? Similarly, “trustworthy” can mean many things in Iran. It could mean personnel who strictly adhere to the chain of command in a professional sense, or it could mean dedication to advancing the more extreme interpretations of Shia Islam. In some circumstances, this could be a distinction without a difference. Another question is how Iran's nuclear force operators would respond to religious edicts, or *fatwas*, from their personal spiritual guides that were at odds with orders from the NCA. Where would their overriding loyalties reside?

As to the prospects of Iranian nuclear weapons making their way into the hands of terrorists, here, too, there is cause for concern. Again this year, Iran has topped the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism. At the same time, no public evidence exists of Tehran's ever engaging in terrorism related to weapons of mass destruction (WMD). This absence of involvement in WMD terrorism likely reflects a balance of Iranian political, security, religious, cultural, organizational, and economic factors.⁴ Over time, this balance could shift, not least because of Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons, leading regime extremists to conclude they could engage in more risky behavior with less fear of outside retaliation. Iran might then make available to its terrorist proxies and allies a progression in types of WMD, beginning with chemical agents, then perhaps moving to biological, radiological, and even nuclear weapons. Bureaucratically, the U.S. government would need to remain concerned that the IRGC's nuclear and terrorism roles might somehow conflate. Although no nuclear-armed state is known to have turned a nuclear device over to a non-state actor, there are no eternal rules

in this regard. Indeed, if any state were to prove an exception, it might well be the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In short, Iran is highly unlikely to be able to provide solid assurances that its nuclear weapons were completely protected from misuse by extremist elements of the regime—or at least assurances that would be accepted as such by the United States and its allies and partners.

Will Iran Transfer Nuclear Technology Openly or Clandestinely?

While most attention is naturally focused on preventing Iran from acquiring the means to produce nuclear weapons, Iran is already in a position to transfer sensitive nuclear technology to others, be it through open or clandestine means. Iran has stated numerous times since its covert nuclear activities were exposed in 2002 that it intends to become a nuclear supplier. Undoubtedly, much of this talk is intended to rationalize Iran's unrelenting pursuit of the full nuclear fuel cycle. Nevertheless, Iran's defiant rhetoric about dismantling the current global nuclear order, which it labels as technological “apartheid,” needs to be taken seriously.

In terms of the risk of open nuclear transfers, Iran could:

- Emerge as a very liberal, if not reckless, supplier of nuclear technology, equipment, and services—within the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) but outside of the Zanger Committee and Nuclear Suppliers Group
- Hijack the U.S. Global Nuclear Energy Partnership initiative by building its own “coalition of the willing” around Iranian supply of nuclear fuel services, which could help legitimize a nuclear capability that was developed largely in violation of Iran's NPT obligations
- Disrupt global uranium fuel and heavy water supply markets by undercutting prices, as President Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad has specifically warned

4. See Gregory Giles, “A Framework for Assessing the Threat of Iranian WMD Terrorism against the United States,” Testimony before the House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Prevention of Nuclear and Biological Attack, 109th Cong., 1st sess., September 8, 2005.

The risks of clandestine nuclear transfers include several moves highly destabilizing to legitimate nuclear commerce, if not international security:

- Zealots or profiteers in Iran’s nuclear, scientific, and industrial communities engage in an Abdul Qadir Khan–like black market, supplying technology, components, and materials to states (e.g., North Korea, Syria, and Venezuela) and non-state actors to help them produce their own nuclear devices.
- Iran provides other states and non-state actors with advice on how to procure nuclear technology, equipment, and materials.
- Iran provides a nuclear device to a terrorist proxy or ally and trains it to carry out a specified attack.

U.S. Policy and Intelligence Responses

This sobering appraisal should underscore the utmost importance—not just for the United States but also for the international community—of keeping Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. To buttress that effort, the United States should consider new policies designed to emphasize the very real risks to *internal* security that Iran’s mullahs will be running if they acquire nuclear weapons. The United States should also deprive the regime of the notion that it could “get away with” nuclear strikes if it claims they were carried out by “rogues.” Consider each recommendation in turn.

For a regime that was designed to be “coup-proof,” the introduction of nuclear weapons could undo the balance of power among Iran’s various military and paramilitary branches, as well as overall clerical control of the military, not to mention the balance of power among rival political factions and those actors currently outside the system. By putting the risk in terms the mullahs are most sensitive to—preserving their power—they may possibly be induced to stop their atomic pursuits short of a weaponized or deployed nuclear force. By way of example, more than three decades have passed since India conducted its first nuclear test, and apparently it has yet to put

fully assembled nuclear weapons in the hands of its military.

On the accountability front, the U.S. government should consider if it has been unwittingly setting dangerous precedents with the Islamic Republic that Tehran might seek to exploit in the event it acquires nuclear weapons. Have U.S. responses to the U.S. embassy takeover in 1979, the Khobar Towers bombing in 1996, and the current controversy over Iran’s supply of explosive devices to insurgents in Iraq cumulatively inflated an already dubious notion that sensitive operations in Iran are carried out without approval from the ruling mullahs? To make the rogue operation, nuclear or otherwise, less of an easy out for the Iranian regime, the U.S. government would do well to more explicitly acknowledge the collective nature of Tehran’s ruling apparatus and tailor policies that hold it to collective responsibility for its actions. Internationally, UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and other multilateral measures might play a role in reinforcing the norm of state responsibility and accountability in Iran and elsewhere.

This assessment suggests possible new or deepened U.S. intelligence requirements in the following areas:

- **Nuclear command and control.** How would Iran constitute an NCA; what principles would guide its organization, membership, and function? How would an Iranian nuclear force be structured, involving what organizations with what responsibilities? At what level of readiness would an Iranian nuclear force be maintained during peace, crisis, and conflict? What measures would Iran likely adopt to ensure that nuclear weapons could only be used as authorized by its NCA and to guard against accidental detonations? How would these measures vary if the nuclear force was openly acknowledged by the regime or kept secret?
- **Involvement in WMD terrorism.** What political, security, religious, cultural, organizational, and economic factors have prevented Iran from engaging in WMD terrorism thus far? How can the United States and others reinforce those restraining factors?

What indicators might detect in a timely fashion a shift in these factors in favor of Iranian support for WMD terrorism?

- **Open nuclear trade.** What is the demand function for Iranian nuclear technology and services; especially, what does Iran have to offer in open nuclear trade that cannot be acquired more readily elsewhere? What is the supply function—that is, what role does open nuclear trade play—in Iranian domestic and foreign policy? Who would be Iran’s likely nuclear customers, and how might they be discouraged from engaging in this trade with Iran? What nuclear trade export controls should Iran be encouraged to adopt, without providing Tehran with a new source of negotiating leverage?
- **Clandestine nuclear cooperation.** What would induce the Iranian regime to engage in nuclear weapons–related cooperation with other states?

What indicators of such cooperation might be observable? Is Iran’s clandestine nuclear procurement network suitable for “operating in reverse”?

Conclusion

Iran’s mullahs have constructed a regime wherein the country’s security apparatus and chain of command is heavily politicized, violent extremism in the name of Shiism is encouraged, and deep hostility is officially directed at America and her allies in the region. It follows that a nuclear Iran would pose serious challenges in terms of controlling its nuclear force, the risk of transfer of nuclear technology, and possible support for WMD terror. It is difficult to imagine that deterrence could be easily achieved or sustained in such an environment. To confront these challenges, the United States will have to meet a range of new intelligence requirements and adjust its policy to strengthen deterrence, not least to reduce the possibility of nuclear weapons use by rogue elements in the Islamic Republic.

Deterring a Nuclear Iran: What Role for Europe?

Bruno Tertrais

SINCE 2003, EUROPE has been in the driver's seat in diplomatic attempts to dissuade Iran from going nuclear. But what if Iran was to cross the threshold? Would deterring aggression against Western and other allied interests and deterring the possible use of nuclear weapons require an active European role, or would Washington fulfill this role without Europe? Should Europe expect that it would have to make a significant contribution, not simply a symbolic one, in preventing Tehran from threatening Western interests. This paper offers reasons why an active European role is appropriate and offers some recommendations on how best to manage the European contribution.

Reasons for Europe to Be Involved in the Deterrence of Iran

Europeans have good reasons to be concerned about the consequences of a nuclear-armed Iran. Beyond the damage it would cause to the nonproliferation regime, to which Europeans are particularly attached—and which was a main motivation for Europe's diplomatic involvement—its own interests could be directly threatened.

Iran's Shahab-3 missile can already reach parts of Europe, and its successors will undoubtedly be able to cover, at some point in the next decade, all of the European Union's territory. Given the troubled history of European-Iranian relations since Iran's Islamic Revolution (in particular with France, the United Kingdom, and Germany, for various reasons), a nuclear Iran would be a potential military threat that would allow Tehran to blackmail European capitals.

Moreover, some European countries have made security commitments in the Middle East. France, for example, has long-standing defense agreements with Djibouti (1977), Kuwait (1992), Qatar (1994), and

the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (1995). The content of these agreements varies and has not always been made public. In some instances, public statements have made clear that they involve an explicit commitment to defend the country in case of military aggression. The United Kingdom, for its part, has a major defense agreement with the UAE (1996).

Europe also has a long tradition of military involvement in the region, including contributions to the two wars against Iraq and to peacekeeping in Lebanon since the early 1980s; European forces in the region would be vulnerable, directly or indirectly (through Tehran-sponsored groups such as Hizballah), to Iranian military or terrorism threats. For historical reasons, France, in particular, feels a special responsibility for the integrity and security of Lebanon and has intervened militarily several times in the country. It is currently a leading contributor to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

The mere fact that most European countries are allies of the United States makes them potential targets of Iran in case of an overt confrontation with Washington—especially since their territory is much closer: European territory will be vulnerable to Iranian missiles earlier than U.S. territory. As Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad declared in October 2006: “We have advised the Europeans that the Americans are far away, but you are the neighbors of the nations in this region. . . . We inform you that the nations are like an ocean that is welling up, and if a storm begins, the dimensions will not stay limited to Palestine, and you may get hurt.”¹

Another element to be factored in is the position of Turkey—which is both a NATO ally covered by the Article 5 guarantee and a potential European Union (EU) member—to which Europeans cannot be indiffer-

1. “Iran Warns of Revenge over Israel,” BBC News, October 20, 2006.

ent in the event a nuclear threat materialized at its borders. If Iran were to become nuclear *and* Turkey were to become an EU member, the EU would find itself with two nuclear states at its borders—whereas it had none in the early 2000s, before enlargement to the east.

Moreover, Europe should be aware that a significant risk exists of Ankara's considering a nuclear weapons program if it feels abandoned by its allies. The combination of an overt Iranian nuclear capability and a sense of growing alienation vis-à-vis the rest of the Western community would undoubtedly lead Ankara to raise the question of a nuclear program.² U.S.-Turkish tensions have developed in parallel with growing doubts about the relevance of the NATO security guarantee. In 1991, Turkey was shocked when some Atlantic Alliance members showed reluctance at deploying NATO defenses on Turkish territory as a precautionary measure in case Article 5 had come into play. Immediately before the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, a crisis of confidence developed with NATO because several Alliance members refused to invoke Article 4 of the treaty (consultations in case of a potential threat)—thus repeating, in Turkish eyes, the experience of 1991. Meanwhile, the prospect of Turkish entry into the European Union has become even more uncertain. Growing uncertainties about the direction of the European project, the failure of the constitutional referendum, and the now open opposition to Turkish membership in several mainstream EU political parties have made such membership a distant prospect. The post-September 11 context, as well as growing interrogations in Europe about the place of Islam in the West, has fueled these uncertainties. Given these circumstances, a Turkish nuclear capability is no longer in the realm of far-fetched possibilities.

Benefits of European Involvement

A strong European contribution would add significantly to the overall calculus of how best to deter Iran.

From the beginning of the nuclear crisis in 2002, Iran has tried to drive a wedge between Europe and the United States. This strategy, so far, has failed. But if such a split ever seems possible from Tehran's point of view, then Iran might feel more comfortable in defying the United States. Europe's first and most important contribution would be to collectively declare that a nuclear Iran will be diplomatically and economically isolated.

In addition to rhetoric, Europe can bring a concrete contribution to deterrence by two means. The first is the deployment of military forces in the region in the form of assistance to friendly states and joint exercises. The second is nuclear deterrence. Two EU countries, the United Kingdom and France, are nuclear powers and have stated that their deterrence should cover regional threats involving weapons of mass destruction (WMD) if vital interests are at stake. Paris, in particular, has been quite vocal in this regard since the mid-1990s. (A widely noticed speech by then-president Chirac in January 2006, reaffirming the principles of French nuclear deterrence, and announcing some doctrinal and force posture adjustments, was perceived—rightly or wrongly—as a message to Iran.) The mere existence of these forces may complicate Iran's strategic calculus in a severe crisis.

Finally, an added benefit of a stronger European involvement in the deterrence of Iran would be for the Gulf States to feel more comfortable in their rapprochement with the United States and demand for stronger security guarantees.³

What Europe Needs to Do

The Europeans may need to do several things in coming months and years—ideally not only if and when Iran goes nuclear, but also *beforehand*, to lower the perceived benefits for Iran of crossing the threshold and thus add to the efforts to dissuade Tehran from continuing down that path.

2. "Voices are starting to be heard from within Turkish society promoting the idea of going nuclear, particularly if Iran manages to develop nuclear weapons capability." Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Iran's Nuclear Program May Trigger the Young Turks to Think Nuclear," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 20, 2004.

3. I am indebted to Patrick Clawson on this point.

Because the EU now considers energy security as one of its main strategic priorities, the commission should help study options in case the maritime transit of oil and gas is impeded, notably to increase the flow of pipeline transportation.⁴ Europe should also make clear that beyond existing sanctions—which, by definition, will not have restrained Iran from going nuclear—it is ready to stop all trade with Tehran. This step may require alternative sources of oil for those countries (such as Italy) that import a significant portion of their oil from Iran.

Europeans will need to publicly and collectively reaffirm in various ways the importance for their economic security of the freedom of passage in the Straits of Hormuz, as well as their readiness to defend Turkey in case of aggression. France and the United Kingdom will need to reaffirm their security commitments toward certain countries in the Gulf region. Ideally, those European countries involved in UNIFIL—or in any other future peacekeeping force in the region—would state that they would hold accountable any country that proves to be an accomplice in an attack against their forces.

The three NATO nuclear powers—the United States, the United Kingdom, and France—could consider issuing a joint statement to the effect that they would see any attack by Iran with WMD as “an extremely grave threat to which they would reply by all appropriate means.” While allowing for each country to retain its freedom of action, such a statement should give pause to those Iranian leaders who would be willing and able to think in terms of the possible costs and benefits of WMD use in a crisis.

Europe should be involved, along with the United States and countries in the region, in contingency planning for a showdown in the Gulf. It could plan, for instance, for a rerun of the Western European Union

campaigns of 1987–1988 and 1990–1991, devoted to maritime protection and demining operations.

A NATO-wide agreement on the usefulness of the U.S. missile defense installations in Europe, as well as continued European support for NATO’s own missile defense program, should be sought to help convince Iran that the development of its missile program will not allow for the possibility of blackmailing the Alliance.

European opinion makers need to think more seriously about the costs of letting Iran go nuclear, and they will need to avoid Pavlovian reflexes in case the United States or Israel ends up deciding to strike an Iran on the verge of becoming nuclear. In such an extreme circumstance, good reasons exist to believe there would not be a rerun of the 2002–2003 transatlantic crisis. A clear agreement exists on the evaluation of the program, and a near consensus about the gravity of the threat. The arrival of new leaders in Germany (Angela Merkel) and France (Nicolas Sarkozy) make it unlikely that Berlin and Paris would, again, *actively* oppose a decision to go to war.⁵ And some of the new EU members, such as Poland (which was not a member in 2003), would probably adopt a moderate position. Interestingly, an EU-wide poll taken in March 2007 revealed that a majority of Europeans would support military action against Iran.⁶ In some countries, however, strong public opinion movements might influence leaders in Europe—as well as in Tehran, where some leaders may believe, mistakenly, that a weakened Bush administration would think twice before launching a new war in the Middle East without the support of most of its allies. Whatever position EU leaders may end up taking, they should at least forcefully state that a nuclear Iran would be unacceptable—and explain why to their public opinion leaders.

The question of Turkey’s security should be taken into account in the talks about Ankara’s accession to the EU. Although the possibility of Turkey’s going

4. On this point, see Dagobert Brito and Amy Myers Jaffe, “Reducing Vulnerability of the Straits of Hormuz,” in *Getting Ready for a Nuclear-Armed Iran*, ed. Patrick Clawson and Henry D. Sokolski (Carlisle, Penn.: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), pp. 209–223.

5. France’s new foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, is one of the rare French personalities who publicly refused to oppose the U.S.-led 2003 operation against Iraq. Note that unlike the United Kingdom, France and Germany would not feel “burdened” by previous support for the Iraq War.

6. A majority (52 percent) of EU citizens agreed with the following statement: “We must stop countries like Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, even if that means taking military action.” This figure included 53 percent in France and 51 percent in the United Kingdom. TNS-SOFRES poll for the Open Europe think tank. See “European Poll Findings on Globalization and Foreign Policy: Majority of UK and EU Citizens Would Back Military Action against Iran,” press release, Open Europe, April 4, 2007.

nuclear if left out in the cold is not an argument likely to fly high in European circles, the accession process should take into account the broader strategic perspective. It should not be too much to ask of a group of countries that, after all, aspires to be a global player, considers officially the proliferation of WMD as one of the gravest potential threats for its security, and has made significant efforts to avoid Iran's going nuclear.

In sum, deterring a nuclear Iran will be more easily accomplished if Europe is actively involved, because Europe is well positioned to make important contributions both politically and materially to a deterrent posture. Deterring a nuclear Iran would serve European interests well. The challenge will be to persuade European elites and publics to begin now to plan and to position Europe to take on this role.

Assumptions Underlying the Debate on Deterring Emerging Nuclear States

Jeffrey Lewis

BEGINNING IN 1962, Washington policymakers began debating whether to conduct a military strike on China's nascent nuclear facilities. A central feature of this debate was how a nuclear-armed China might behave and, implicitly, whether the United States might be able to deter it.¹ Writing in the *Saturday Evening Post*, journalist Stewart Alsop warned of the "madness of Mao Tse-tung" and advocated military action to forestall the Chinese bomb.

Although the language in internal deliberations was less strident, President Kennedy and his cabinet earnestly considered military strikes, including the possibility of joint military action with the Soviet Union, to prevent China from developing nuclear weapons. Although Tehran's nuclear intentions are more ambiguous than Beijing's in the early 1960s, the essential outlines of the debate are quite similar.²

The current debate turns—as it did over China's emerging nuclear capabilities in the 1960s—on whether the United States might use a strategy of deterrence to mitigate the dangers of an Iranian nuclear weapons capability sufficiently that such a strategy is preferable to military action.

These debates usually take place on the basis of two major assumptions that deserve careful scrutiny. First is that the object of deterrence is a "nuclear-armed Iran" that is an overt, well-armed nuclear weapons state. The second is that the range of interests at stake is

coextensive with those that can be protected by deterrence. These assumptions, however, are too strong. When relaxed, they reveal both opportunities and challenges for deterrence.

Deconstructing a Nuclear-Armed Iran

No country since China has followed the canonical path of designing, building, testing, and deploying nuclear weapons. India, Israel, Pakistan, North Korea, and South Africa have, at times, adopted various degrees of "opacity" regarding their nuclear deterrents. South Africa and Israel both became nuclear weapons states, apparently, without conducting nuclear tests.

Moreover, the experience of Japan, Sweden, and South Africa suggests alternative postures for potential proliferators such as Iran, well short of a declared nuclear weapons capability:

- Japan's constitution renounces war as a sovereign right, and successive prime ministers have expressed three "no's" related to nuclear weapons—no to building, acquisition, or possession. Nonetheless, Japan is widely believed to possess the capacity to build nuclear weapons on relatively short notice.³
- Sweden "maintained a research program that in many ways was indistinguishable from an effort to produce nuclear weapons" between 1946 and 1972.⁴

1. The descriptions of U.S. deliberations about strikes aimed at curbing China's nascent nuclear capabilities, including the Alsop quote, are drawn from William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson. "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby in the Cradle': The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960–64," *International Security* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2000), pp. 54–99.

2. Other excellent discussions of the challenges associated with deterring a nuclear-armed Iran include Barry R. Posen, *A Nuclear-Armed Iran: A Difficult but Not Impossible Policy Problem* (New York: The Century Foundation, 2006); Judith Yaphé and Charles Lutes, *Reassessing the Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2005); and Jason Zaborski, "Deterring a Nuclear Iran," *Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (Summer 2005), pp. 153–167.

3. A recent study by the Japan Defense Agency, leaked to the press, concluded that Japan could build a small deterrent in three to five years, for approximately \$1.7 billion to \$2.5 billion. See Benjamin L. Self and Jeffrey W. Thompson, eds., *Japan's Nuclear Option: Security, Politics, and Policy in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: The Stimson Center, 2003); and Jeffrey Lewis, "The Sankei Article on Japanese Nukes," December 26, 2006 (available online at www.armscontrolwonk.com/1338/the-sankei-article-on-japanese-nukes).

4. Paul M. Cole, *Atomic Bombast: Nuclear Weapon Decisionmaking in Sweden, 1945–1972*, Stimson Center Occasional Paper 26 (Washington, DC: The Stimson Center, 1996), pp. 21–22.

- South Africa built six gun-type nuclear devices, the first of which was completed in 1979, before renouncing its nuclear weapons program in 1989.⁵ It did not test or openly declare its nuclear capabilities—a posture subsequently adopted by Pakistan until 1998 and North Korea until 2006.

Iran may discover, as have other nuclear-capable states, that opacity—a necessity in the early stages of a clandestine nuclear program—has virtues as the program matures. These virtues for Iran will likely prove to be vices for the United States and others motivated to deter Iran from using or threatening to use the capabilities at its disposal. For instance, if Iran pursues a policy of nuclear opacity, the United States may have difficulty organizing a coalition of the willing to deter and contain a nuclear Iran.

Iranian-U.S. Relations: Not Just about Nukes

Because deterrence is often presented as an alternative to preventive military action, analysts implicitly—and understandably—focus on U.S. interests that might be threatened by Iranian nuclear weapons, and that the United States would seek to secure via deterrence. Even if Iran eventually acquires advanced nuclear weapons capabilities, however, the U.S.-Iranian relationship will not primarily be a nuclear relationship. The United States will continue to have a variety of interests vis-à-vis Iran, including the following:

- Securing Iranian assistance in stabilizing Iraq and Afghanistan
- Discouraging Iran from supporting terrorist groups such as Hizballah and Hamas
- Encouraging Iran to respect the human rights of its citizens and others in Iran

Many of these interests cannot be secured through deterrence; in fact, efforts to deter Iran from some

actions may, in some circumstances, actually complicate efforts to secure these other interests.

Challenges and Opportunities for Deterrence

Relaxing these two assumptions to account for the variety of possible postures beyond Iran's current capability and the variety of U.S. interests vis-à-vis Iran reveals some interesting challenges and opportunities to deter Iran.

Although the United States would prefer that Iran forgo the pursuit of nuclear weapons capabilities altogether, second best would be for Iran to adopt a nuclear posture similar to that of Japan. Should Iran decide to acquire nuclear weapons, it would be better if the devices were kept unassembled. And, if Iran were to assemble its nuclear weapons, they would be better kept in a tightly controlled central stockpile rather than handed over to local commanders.

Under no circumstances would the United States like to see Iran test a nuclear weapon or explicitly declare its possession of nuclear weapons. Nor would Washington want Iran to permit the kind of nuclear “entrepreneurialism” that occurred in the case of Pakistan's Abdul Qadir Khan.

Yet these interests may compete with one another. For example, some would advocate stating clearly to Iran that it would face devastating consequences should any government official transfer a nuclear weapon or nuclear materials to a terrorist group. At this stage, however, establishing such a red line is difficult without simultaneously giving the impression that the United States is establishing ground rules for either Iran's pursuit of nuclear capabilities or its support for terrorism.

Others might reverse this formula, noting that current efforts to discourage Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons preclude a frank dialogue with Iran about custodial arrangements that might greatly reduce the risk of transfer of nuclear materials. Some observers, including Nobel Prize–winner Tom Schelling, have

5. David Albright, “South Africa and the Affordable Bomb,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 50, no. 4 (July/August 1994).

suggested that another nuclear weapons state—perhaps France, China, or India—could “educate” Iranian policymakers about command-and-control arrangements, crisis behavior, and various other measures to preclude the inadvertent use of nuclear weapons.⁶

More broadly, a deterrent relationship between the United States and Iran implies a certain level of mutual acceptance of the political status quo. Most discussions of deterrence emphasize punishment. The Senate Republican Policy Committee, for example, noted, “[D]eterrence depends on the coercive ability of the ‘power to hurt’ as the strategic theorist Thomas Schelling puts it.” But these and other references typically omit the condition that Schelling added: “We have learned the threat of massive destruction deters only if there is a corresponding implicit promise of nondestruction in the event [the adversary] complies. . . .”

Successful deterrence requires reassuring Iran’s leaders that if they refrain from certain actions, they will not be subject to nuclear threats. Although the United States may wish to deter Iran from transferring a nuclear weapon to a group such as Hizballah, for example, it can only do so if Iran believes that refraining from this and other provocative actions will satisfy the United States and end efforts to undermine the Iranian regime. Otherwise, some leaders in Tehran might incorrectly conclude that placing a nuclear weapon in terrorist hands might enhance their ability to deter the United States. Similarly, Iranian leaders that concluded the United States was impossible to satisfy might adopt incorrect views about the causes of American restraint, including a lack of will or capacity to threaten the regime.

Reassuring allies is a third, difficult challenge. The difficulties associated with extending deterrence are well described in the literature elsewhere. Worth noting, however, is that the United States has never before extended deterrence to allies threatened by an opaque proliferator. U.S. allies will face complex decisions

about engaging a nuclear-capable Iran. Coordinating a “one size fits all” strategy to reassure allies may be quite challenging, given that Iran is capable of dissembling about its capabilities, and U.S. allies may inaccurately assess Iran’s capabilities.

Detering a Nuclear Iran

The statement issued by President Lyndon Johnson following the 1964 Chinese nuclear test offers one plausible model of deterrence.⁷ That statement argued that China’s acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability had “been fully taken into account in planning our own defense program and our own nuclear capability”; that the United States “reaffirms its defense commitments in Asia”; and that a nuclear weapons capability “would have no effect upon the readiness of the United States to respond to . . . aggression.”

A precisely equivalent statement is not, of course, possible. As noted in the preceding passage, Iran may have a great deal to gain by keeping its nuclear capabilities opaque. Moreover, China in 1964 was much more isolated than today’s Iran and was pursuing a foreign policy that, in retrospect, appears relatively inward-looking. Nevertheless, the basic outlines of a deterrence strategy can be discerned whose basic elements would not be inconsistent with a robust diplomatic effort to constrain Tehran’s nuclear capabilities.

First, the United States should state clearly and often that the acquisition of limited nuclear weapons capabilities by Iran would not offset the massive conventional and nuclear advantage enjoyed by the United States. Iran’s acquisition of a nuclear weapon or its departure from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty would only increase the dangers to Iran, which would no longer enjoy the protection of U.S. negative security assurances issued in 1979, entailing a pledge not to use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear weapon state.

Second, the United States should discuss specific deterrent threats—such as those related to the use

6. Thomas Schelling, “How Do We Communicate with the Enemy” (remarks to the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs Director’s Luncheon, Cambridge, Mass., October 5, 2006).

7. Lyndon Baines Johnson, “Statement by the President on the First Chinese Nuclear Device” (October 16, 1964). Available online (www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26615).

of chemical or biological weapons or the transfer of nuclear capabilities or weapons—in a global context. This context would avoid implying that the United States would be willing to accept a nuclear-armed Iran provided that Tehran behaved in certain ways. For example, the United States could simply state that in terms of its policy response, it makes no distinction between a terrorist group that acquires or uses a nuclear weapon and the group’s state sponsors.

Third, the United States should regularly reaffirm its defense commitments to U.S. allies that might be subject to nuclear threats from Iran. This affirmation would include stating clearly that the United States would view the use of any nuclear weapon, anywhere in the world, as a threat to its vital national interests.

Fourth, before Iran acquires sufficient fissile material for a nuclear device or weapon, the United States should engage Iran in a serious dialogue about the conditions under which the United States would be willing to live with the Islamic Republic. This process does not, however, require granting legitimacy to the regime. The United States should indicate that it does not intend to forcefully remove the regime, provided that the latter

does not directly challenge vital U.S. interests. Such a guarantee, however, would not constitute a commitment to refrain from criticizing the regime’s human rights record or its support for terrorism.

An idea that requires further exploration is that of establishing a link between state support for terrorism and access to sensitive nuclear fuel-cycle technologies. The United States could work with other responsible states in the international community to establish a norm in which states providing support to terrorist organizations should not be allowed to acquire nuclear-fuel-cycle-related technologies or facilities that could be used to produce nuclear weapons. States like Iran would have to make a choice, and it would be interesting to see if various government factions, either supporting Iran’s involvement in international terrorism or the development of nuclear-fuel-cycle-related facilities, could be set against one another.

Of course, the optimal solution would be a decision by Iran to renounce both evils, as Libya’s Muammar Qadhafi has done, thereby obviating the very need to think about nuclear deterrence with regard to Iran.

Deterrence and Regime Change

Patrick Clawson

DETERRENCE REQUIRES both the credible threat of force if red lines are crossed and the credible assurance force will not be used if red lines are observed. If Iranian leaders fear that the United States is seeking an opportunity to overthrow their regime, they have less reason to cooperate with Washington on nuclear issues because their nuclear disarmament will simplify the task for Washington. In a crisis, they may decide that the threatened or actual use of nuclear force is necessary to deter U.S. military intervention.

It would seem obvious therefore that the United States should renounce “regime change” as an objective. Nevertheless, any such policy recommendation has two serious complications: Iranian leaders would not believe such a U.S. statement no matter what actions the U.S. government takes, and the United States has a strong interest in the cause of democracy in Iran.

Iranian Paranoia about a “Velvet Revolution”

Since early 2006, U.S. leaders have frequently stated that U.S. policy is a change in the Iranian regime’s behavior, not regime change.¹ That formulation has made no appreciable difference in the perception by Iranian leaders that the real U.S. objective is overthrow of their regime. Their concern runs much deeper than U.S. declaratory policy or, for that matter, the allocation of \$75 million to support democracy in Iran.

For more than a decade, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei—the main decisionmaker in Iran—has concentrated much of his attention on the danger of a Western-inspired “velvet revolution.”² That phrase

refers to the 1989 Czechoslovak overthrow of communist rule, in which the seemingly isolated intellectual dissident Vaclav Havel was quickly propelled to power—for which Havel gives much credit to the U.S.-funded Radio Free Liberty/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), the same institution that now runs the Persian-language Radio Farda. The lesson that Khamenei appears to have drawn from the collapse of the Eastern bloc communist governments is that once-revolutionary regimes that appear to be solidly entrenched can be quickly overthrown if they have been undermined by civil society organizations and free media. His concern about this alleged Western strategy was reinforced by the “color” revolutions that led to the replacement of leaders in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan—countries close to Iran’s borders.

Hence his paranoia about nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) dedicated to humanitarian, child welfare, trade union, environmental, and antidrug issues—and his even greater worries about NGOs that promote people-to-people exchange between Iranians and foreigners. The Iranian government has justified the 2007 arrests of Iranian-American journalists, peace activists, pro-democracy reformers, and organizers of people-to-people exchanges by charges of far-reaching conspiracy to overthrow the Islamic Republic. A May 21 statement from Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence explaining the recent arrest of Iranian-Americans said, “This is an American-designed model with an attractive appearance that seeks the soft-toppling of the country.”³ These charges can be understood only in the context of how Khamenei and his allies read the

1. In an interview with the *Financial Times*, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said, “[Regime change] was not the policy of the U.S. government. The policy was to have a change in regime behavior.” Lionel Barber, Guy Dinmore, and Edward Luck, “A Return to Realism? How Rice Has Learnt to Play a Weaker U.S. Hand,” *Financial Times*, April 23, 2007, p. 9. This formulation was not new; the same phrase was used by White House press secretary Scott McClellan on March 14, 2006 (www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/03/20060314-5.html).
2. As analyzed in Mehdi Khalaji, “Bad Veils’ and Arrested Scholars: Iran’s Fear of a Velvet Revolution,” *PolicyWatch* no. 1236 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 24, 2007).
3. Neil MacFarquhar, “Iran Accuses Americans of Revolution Plot,” *New York Times*, May 27, 2007.

experience of the former Eastern bloc. U.S. analysts may think this attitude reflects “paranoia,” in the words of Thomas Friedman, but to Khamenei, such caution is warranted by recent historical experience.⁴ He is not likely to change his view on this matter no matter what the U.S. government says or does.

At the very least, Iranian leaders will remain convinced that the United States is promoting regime change as long as the U.S. government funds broadcasting to Iran and criticizes the Iranian government’s record on a wide range of human rights issues, such as religious freedom, trade union rights, and freedom of the press. The United States is unlikely to cease such activities, which have become a normal part of the functioning of Western government. The activities Khamenei sees as promoting a velvet revolution are all areas in which many Western governments are active. For instance, the Canadian government has been the most active at criticizing Iran’s human rights record ever since the death of a Canadian-Iranian journalist.⁵ Since 2006, Britain, Germany, France, and the Netherlands, among other countries, have substantially increased budgets for Persian-language broadcasting.

Much criticism has been directed at the Bush administration for announcing that it was funding Iranian civil society groups and providing supplemental requests, broadcasting into Iran, promoting democracy, offering scholarships and fellowships, and enhancing communication.⁶ For instance, Muhammad Ali Dadkhah, who is a cofounder of the Center for Human Rights Defenders, told RFE/RL that

“democratic changes should come from inside the country—without outside interference.”⁷ In a recent open letter, Emadeddin Baghi of Iran’s Defending Prisoners’ Rights Society complained that what he called the U.S. government’s “democracy fund” is “new kinds of human rights violations or outright endangerment of human rights activists.” How to best support Iranian civil society raises delicate issues. Some of the U.S.-government activities appear to be less controversial, such as funding university scholarships or people-to-people exchanges; the Iranian government has created no problems for exchanges of physicians, painters, and athletes. More problematic is how to assist groups challenging the government, such as human rights activists and trade unions. Perhaps U.S. involvement in those activities is too radioactive for the health of those assisted.

There is simply no evidence, however, to suggest that ceasing such funding would appreciably affect the Iranian hardliners’ belief that the United States is dedicated to regime change. The complaints are directed not just at U.S. government activities. Consider that the Iranian intelligence ministry issued a statement explaining the arrest of Kian Tajbakhsh, an Iranian-American who had been working in Tehran for the NGO Open Society, which is heavily funded by George Soros, who is not usually thought to coordinate his activities with the Bush administration.⁸ The intelligence ministry’s counterespionage director put forward an even more expansive view of who is plotting against the Iranian government: “Any foreigner

4. Referring to Iran’s arrest of Iranian-American scholar Haleh Esfandiari, Friedman wrote, “This Iranian regime is afraid of its shadow ... Do you know how paranoid you have to be to think that a 67-year-old grandmother visiting her 93-year-old mother can bring down your regime? Now that is insecure.” Thomas Friedman, “Iran Arrests Grandma,” *New York Times*, May 30, 2007, p. A25. By contrast, *Keyhan*, the leading hardline Tehran newspaper, described Esfandiari as “one of the main elements of Mossad in driving a velvet revolution strategy in Iran” (quoted in Katarina Kratovac, “Tehran Confirms Arrest of ‘Spy,’” Associated Press, May 13, 2007, <http://apnews.myway.com/article/20070513/D8P3LIR80.html>).

5. Stefan Smith, “Indignation as Iran Closes Doors on Controversial Kazemi Trial,” *Agence France-Presse*, July 18, 2004. Canada is considering opening its own criminal investigation of Kazemi’s death. “Canada Looks to Turn Heat on Iran,” *Iran Times* (Washington), April 6, 2007, p. 2.

6. In fiscal year 2007, besides \$26 million in capital improvements for broadcast facilities, \$40 million was allocated: \$10 million for additional broadcasting, \$5 million for academic and cultural exchanges, \$5 million for public diplomacy, and \$20 million for grants to aid civil society groups (to quote the State Department, “[C]urrent programs assist those inside Iran who desire basic civil liberties such as freedom of expression, greater rights for women, a more transparent political process, and broader freedom of press”). In early June, the State Department reported it had spent \$20.04 million of that \$40 million. The budget request for fiscal year 2008 is \$28.21 million for broadcasting capital improvements and \$80.5 million for the rest of the democracy promotion activities. “U.S. Spends \$20m on Iran Democracy,” *Iran Times* (Washington), June 8, 2007, p. 2.

7. Golnaz Esfandiari, “Political Activists to Steer Clear of Possible US Funding,” *Iran Report* 9, no. 13, April 10, 2006 (available online at www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2006/04/13-100406.asp); Emadeddin Baghi, “US Fund for Democracy,” *The Human Rights Blog*, May 18, 2007 (available online at www.humanrightsblog.org/archives/cat_iran.html).

8. Quoted in Guy Dinmore and Najmeh Bozorgmehr, “Soros Associate Arrested in Iranian Clampdown,” *Financial Times*, May 23, 2007, p. 4.

who establishes relations is not trustworthy. Through their approaches, they first establish an academic relationship but this soon changes into an intelligence relationship.⁹ And these are not just empty words; university professors are being dismissed because of their contacts with foreigners, and visas for foreigners to attend conferences in Iran are being cancelled.

In a globalized world, U.S.-based civil society groups and universities inevitably will seek contact with Iranians. So long as the Iranian government views such activities as proof of a U.S. plot to recruit spies and to overthrow the regime through a velvet revolution, the U.S. government has no reasonable prospect of persuading Iranian leaders that it is not actively promoting regime change. This situation will be a major problem for constructing a stable deterrent relationship with Iran, because its leaders will remain convinced that the United States is out to overthrow them no matter what they do on the nuclear front.

Practical and Moral Reasons to Support Iranian Democratic Forces

Since September 11, 2001, a broad consensus has existed in the United States that the international community has a strategic interest in giving the region's youth hope that they can bring about change within the framework of their systems. In other words, Middle East democratization is not just a moral value but also a vital national security interest. Washington's reform agenda would suffer a grave additional setback if the United States were perceived to have abandoned Iran's beleaguered pro-democratic forces by making a deal with hardline autocrats to secure U.S. geostrategic interests. Iranian reformers fear just such a deal.¹⁰

But that is not the only problem with agreeing to abandon support for democracy in return for a *modus vivendi*. The *New York Times* has editorialized, "The best hope for avoiding a nuclear-armed Iran lies in encouraging political evolution there over the next decade."¹¹ Although a democratic Iran would almost certainly also be attracted by the perceived advantages of nuclear weapons, it would also be more sensitive to the high cost of the international isolation a nuclear-armed Iran would face—a price that an Iran eager to reintegrate with the world may well not wish to pay. Even in the event that a democratic Iran decides to retain nuclear capabilities, such an Iran would be more sensitive to domestic public opinion than is the current regime, which offers excellent reason to expect that a democratic Iran would be less willing to risk the horrific casualties from a nuclear exchange than is the hardline revolutionary regime. In other words, a democratic Iran would be more likely to share the same strategic rationality as the West, and deterrence would therefore be a surer prospect.

Much as it may hope for change in Iran, the international community would be unwise to base its policy toward Iran on the assumption that the Islamic Republic will soon morph into a more democratic state.¹² When support of reform will bear fruit is entirely unknowable. The regime's grip looks solid so long as it retains a core of supporters willing to kill to stay in power. Nonetheless, the regime is profoundly unpopular with a people who want a free society more open to the outside world, and this pressure makes the regime's hold fragile. Recall that when President Ronald Reagan called in June 1987 for the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, he was widely derided as out of touch with reality, but in less than three years, that wall and, indeed,

9. The official, whose identity was not disclosed, is quoted in Robert Tait, "Talk to Foreigners and We Will View You as a Spy, Iran Warns Academics," *The Guardian* (London), May 31, 2007, p. 15, which also quotes a professor fired for relations with foreigners. On visa cancellations, see Robin Wright, "Tehran Detains 4th Iranian American before Talks," *Washington Post*, May 23, 2007, p. A17.

10. Akbar Ganji, "We believe the government in Tehran is seeking a secret deal with the United States. It is willing to make any concession, provided that the United States promises to remain silent about the regime's repressive measures at home. We don't want war; nor do we favor such a deal. We hope that the regime will not be allowed to suppress its people, foment a crisis in the regime or continue with its nuclear adventurism." "Letter to America," *Washington Post*, September 21, 2006, p. A25. Much the same case is made by Shirin Ebadi (Nobel Peace Prize winner) and Muhammad Sahimi, "Link Human Rights to Iran's Nuclear Ambitions," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2006).

11. Editorial, "Military Fantasies on Iran," *New York Times*, April 11, 2006, p. A20.

12. Timothy Garton Ash, "We Need a European Approach to Supporting Democracy in Iran," *The Guardian* (London), March 9, 2006. Available online (www.guardian.co.uk/print/329430126-111322.00.html).

the entire Soviet empire were gone. U.S. policy should be designed to live with a hostile regime that persists while working to lay the groundwork for change and preparing to take advantage of such an opportunity if it arises.

In short, persuading Iran that observing nuclear red lines will end U.S. regime change activities will not be at all easy. Iranian leaders' fears about regime change encompass the kinds of actions that are inevitable in

a globalized world, from scholarly exchanges to open broadcasting—they even see a U.S. plot in people-to-people programs by American groups unsympathetic to the Bush administration. No possibility exists that the U.S. government will stop broadcasting in Persian or cease criticizing Iran's human rights records. Not only are those normal government functions, but also the United States has an interest in assisting democratic reform in Iran.

Oil or the Atom? The Economic Underpinnings of Iranian Power

Karim Sadjadpour

THE BELIEF THAT the United States will eventually have to adopt a policy of deterrence to deal with the emergence of a nuclear Iran is based on two flawed assumptions: (1) Iran's leadership has already made a decision to acquire nuclear weapons, and (2) this decision cannot be reversed through dialogue and diplomacy.

Still Time for Diplomacy

Although Iranian officials do not publicly discuss the merits of a nuclear weapons program, in private the subject is hotly debated. No doubt some of the Islamic Republic's political elite—particularly hardliners—make a facile distinction between North Korea and Iraq and thus see the added value of nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, many among Iran's political elite recognize that nuclear weapons would not enhance the country's security, but rather heighten its vulnerabilities. They point out the dangers of a nuclear arms race in the Persian Gulf, which—by drawing additional foreign forces into the region—would undermine Iranian conventional military superiority there.

Iran's current policy is to pursue a nuclear weapons capability under the guise of a civilian nuclear energy program and within the confines of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. If diplomatic isolation and economic malaise worsen as a result of such an approach, however, the voices in Tehran who argue for a compromise will likely grow louder. Because most estimates place Iran anywhere from three to ten years away from having the ability to produce a nuclear weapon, there is still time for diplomacy.

Moreover, the best way to contend with a nuclear-armed Iran is not a military buildup in the region but a diminution of U.S. dependence on foreign oil.

Regime survival first. The continued survival of the Islamic Republic is the paramount goal that unites the regime's political elite. Even hardliners in Tehran who would like to export the revolution, who want to transform Iran into the dominant regional power, and who seek Israel's demise, seek—first and foremost—to stay in power.

For this reason, Iran is extremely unlikely to use a nuclear weapon for offensive purposes. Even if Iran had the ability to deliver a nuclear weapon against the United States, the presence of U.S. aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf would give serious pause to any Iranian official contemplating such a suicidal action. Iran would face similar risks if it attempted to transfer a nuclear weapon to one of its client groups in the region. For even the most obdurate of Iranian hardliners, survival is key.

Iran's financial and military support for groups bent on Israel's destruction, coupled with Tehran's own harsh rhetoric against the Jewish state, has caused Israeli decisionmakers to view the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran as an "existential threat." But Israel's arsenal of several hundred nuclear weapons is a significant deterrent against any potential Iranian aggression. As former French president Jacques Chirac let slip last January, "Where will [Iran] drop this bomb? On Israel? It would not have gone off 200 meters into the atmosphere before Tehran would be razed."¹

The U.S. security umbrella. The primary concern of the Sunni Arab states of the Persian Gulf, as well as states like Egypt and Jordan, is not that Iran would actually use an atomic weapon against them (or against anyone else for that matter), but that the nuclear option would further embolden Tehran in its quest for regional domination and support for extremist groups

1. Elaine Sciolino and Katrin Bennhold, "Chirac Unfazed by Nuclear Iran, Then Backtracks," *New York Times*, February 1, 2007

such as Hizballah and Hamas. From the perspective of many Sunni Arabs, Iraq has already fallen under Iranian hegemony; Lebanon is dangerously close to falling under Iran's sway; and with its patronage of Hamas, Iran is trying to eclipse the Arabs for leadership of the Palestinian question. A nuclear bomb would solidify Iran's regional dominance and its attempt to disrupt the status quo in the region. For this reason, these Arab states will continue to seek the military presence of the United States to ensure their security.

The Economic Underpinnings of Iranian Power

Iran's regional influence is less a product of its conventional military prowess and more a product of its unconventional petro-dollar-funded hard and soft power in disenfranchised communities throughout the region, whether its Shiite brethren in Lebanon, Iraq, and the Persian Gulf or Palestinian rejectionist groups in Gaza.

By and large, Iran's foreign policy is more conciliatory when oil prices are low and more confrontational when oil prices are high. During Hashemi Rafsanjani's 1989–1997 presidency, oil prices remained low and the focus was on postwar reconstruction. Then, the money Iran spent on groups like Hamas and Hizballah was a fraction of the hundreds of millions of dollars it is thought to give now. When former president Muhammad Khatami first called for a "Dialogue of Civilizations" in December 1997, oil was priced at \$15 a barrel. When Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad first began calling for Israel to be wiped off the map, oil was four times that price.

Iran's Vulnerability

Iran's moribund economy is highly dependent on its hydrocarbon reserves; currently, 80 percent of Iran's export revenue is derived from its petroleum industry. Gasoline is heavily subsidized (at a cost of over \$10 billion per year), and the country is churning out automobiles at a record pace. Oil production has been gradually decreasing because of a lack of investment in energy infrastructure projects; given the uncertain political and business climate, foreign investment has

dropped precipitously. If this trend of increased consumption and decreased output continues, within a decade Iran could conceivably, remarkably, become a net oil *importer*.

Such a situation will force very painful decisions on Tehran. Either the Iranian government will be compelled to raise gasoline prices—a task that it is attempting now, but one that is highly problematic for a president like Ahmadinezhad, who ran on an economic populist platform—or the leadership will have to alter its foreign policy approach to attract rather than repel outside investment. Most likely it will require a combination of both.

As such, the most effective way to deter Iranian foreign policy adventurism is to constrain Iran's financial ability to support extremist groups. A concerted effort to adopt alternative energy strategies will ultimately be a more effective way to contend with a nuclear-armed Iran's foreign policy adventurism than military buildup in the Persian Gulf. The United States has never had more troops and military hardware in the Persian Gulf than it does now, yet Tehran's regional behavior is currently as brash and assertive as it has been in years.

Conclusion

The presence of U.S. aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf, tens of thousands of U.S. troops in the region, and Israel's robust nuclear arsenal are sufficient reason to dissuade Iran from using a nuclear weapon.

Isolating Iran economically and weaning the United States away from its petroleum dependency will further undermine Iran's ability to wield influence beyond its borders. Realistically, however, fertile ground will continue to exist for Iran's anti-imperialist, anti-status quo worldview in the region for a long time to come, so it will not be possible to eliminate Iranian influence entirely.

But while Iran may find regional sympathy for its policies, ultimately the regime will have to contend with its Achilles heel—its moribund domestic economy—and is likely to learn the same hard lesson as the Soviet Union: states with failing economies can't embrace a better future with nuclear arms.

Apocalyptic Visions and Iran's Security Policy

Mehdi Khalaji

A COMMON PERCEPTION in the West is that Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad is a faithful Shiite worshiper who tries to implement his religious convictions through his political agenda. The most frightening aspect of this perception relates to the Iranian nuclear program. If Ahmadinezhad is an influential decisionmaker with respect to the nuclear program, and if he sees the annihilation of Israel as a necessary first step toward causing chaos in the world and preparing for the return of the Hidden Imam, then Westerners need to be deeply concerned about the motivations behind the Iranian nuclear program.

This perception could be questioned on many levels: Is Ahmadinezhad an influential decisionmaker in security and nuclear policy? Does he hold the power to indicate that the Iranian government has the responsibility to pave the way for the Hidden Imam's return by taking specific security and military measures? In addition to Ahmadinezhad and some people around him in the government, do other influential people inside the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps share the same apocalyptic security and military policy? If a set of apocalyptic visions connects Iranian security policy to a radical Shiite teleology with international consequences, what are they exactly? How are these apocalyptic visions defined by their believers, and how are they planning to implement them?

The political and military influence of President Ahmadinezhad has been exaggerated since he

came to power. Before his election, he was largely an unknown figure, even for the Iranian people, let alone in the West. After he took office, journalists, especially Western journalists, tried to historicize him by finding every detail of his life and looking for greatness in a very banal background of an Islamic Republic middle-ranking official.¹ Regardless of the military and political background of the Iranian president, the final word, especially in terms of diplomacy and security policy, rests with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the commander in chief of the armed forces. From the beginning, the Revolutionary Guards, which is directly under the supreme leader's command, has had special authority over the nuclear program.

The oldest document that is both publicly available and shows Iran's willingness to resume the nuclear program, which was stopped after the revolution, is the one published in the memoirs of Ayatollah Hussein Ali Mostazeri. That document is a letter written by the late Ayatollah Khomeini in which he admits that Iranian armed forces cannot defeat the "enemy" in the Iran-Iraq War unless Iran increases its military capability by various mechanisms, including production of laser and atomic weapons. Because of Iranian military weakness, Khomeini accepted the ceasefire.² Also in the letter, Khomeini mentions that production of lasers and atomic bombs is the suggestion of Mohsen Rezai, then commander in chief of the Revolutionary Guards.

1. Yossi Melman and Meir Javedanfar, *The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the State of Iran* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2007). This book is not an accurate account of Ahmadinezhad's life or of the context from which he comes. Many statements made in this book are not factually true. For instance, the authors claim that before Iran's Islamic Revolution, Ahmadinezhad joined the so-called Office for Strengthening and Unity, which had as its main aim cooperation between university and religious students in activities against the Shah. This statement is not historically correct. The Office for Strengthening Unity (*Daftar-e Tabkim-e Vahdat*), not "strengthening and unity," was created after the revolution to unify Islamic student groups inside the universities; it had nothing to do with fighting the Shah's regime or fostering the relationship between clerics and students. The authors also claim, without providing any source, that Ahmadinezhad's mentor was Ayatollah Muhammad Beheshti, whom they describe as the minister of justice and the founder of the Office for Strengthening Unity not long before the revolution. They also claim that Beheshti believed that Iran needs a nuclear program. This allegation is wrong on several fronts: Beheshti was not the founder of the office, no evidence indicates a special relationship between Beheshti and Ahmadinezhad, and Beheshti is not known to have ever publicly said a word about a nuclear program.
2. Hussein Ali Montazeri, *Khatirat* (Memoirs) (Paris: Entesharat-e Enghelab-e Eslami, 2001), p. 490.

Religiosity of the Revolutionary Guards

Religious diversity and differences exist within the Revolutionary Guards' high-ranking commanders, but above that, a fundamental difference exists between the Revolutionary Guards' religiosity and that of the clerics. Clerics study theology and form their religious view of the world based on a specific conceptual apparatus that allows others to investigate and understand it. But because of the lack of theological training, Revolutionary Guards commanders' religiosity is not based on theological concepts. One cannot comprehend their religiosity by looking at books, because they are neither theoreticians nor theologians. To understand the religious mentality of the commanders, one has to use an anthropological approach and methodology. Although a set of public criteria exists in the theological debates, commanders' differences about religious issues are very arbitrary. They are based on their personal impressions about religion, which are usually unquestionable and unpredictable.³

It is worth mentioning that, unlike the army, the Revolutionary Guards lacks a strict hierarchy. Khamenei as the commander in chief has a direct relationship with many middle-ranking commanders. In competition to represent Islamic and revolutionary ideals, many of the middle-ranking commanders consider themselves authentic representatives of "real" Islam and are critics of their seniors. Therefore, in some cases, the process of decisionmaking can take place at a lower level in accordance with a set of arrangements with some political officials.

Some evidence suggests that certain factions inside the Revolutionary Guards, consisting mostly of mid-ranking commanders, hold apocalyptic visions. Accordingly, they consider themselves "soldiers of the Mahdi" (Hidden Imam) who bear the responsibility of paving the way for his return. These groups are the

heirs of the discourse of "World Islam" and "export of revolution" that was common in the early years after the revolution. They believe a true Shiite cannot merely await the Mahdi without actively engaging in a series of measures to prepare his return. Nevertheless, because of the lack of any public documents, or these adherents' incompetence in writing books or articles, many ambiguities surround their views.

Also unclear is the extent to which President Ahmadinezhad has a relationship with those groups inside the Revolutionary Guards. Although many apocalyptic radical groups inside the Guards support Ahmadinezhad, whether all those groups are connected to him is very hard to determine.

The Supreme Leader's Hidden Imam

Above all, however, it is Khamenei whose religious mentality is the most important to understand. In his sixty-eight years, the Iranian supreme leader has spent much more time in politics than at the seminary. He has been involved in politics for five decades. Therefore, his intellectual formation is mostly nonclerical.⁴ He is hardly recognized as a religious authority in the seminaries.

Another important factor is that, unlike the late Ayatollah Khomeini, who studied in the Qom seminary, the current supreme leader was trained and rose out of the Mashhad seminary. The Qom seminary has always been a center for rational interpretation of the Islamic texts and a place in which philosophy could be taught, whereas Mashhad had an anti-rational approach to the religion. The Mashhad seminary was under the control of anti-philosophy figures. Even a figure like Ali Shariati, an influential anti-Shah intellectual who was not a cleric, was extremely opposed to philosophy—favoring instead less rational approaches to religion—because his religious family and background came from

3. For an account of the historical development of the Revolutionary Guards, see Mohsen Sazegara, "What Was Once a Revolutionary Guard Is Now Just a Mafia." Available online (www.sazegara.net/english/archives/2007/03/what_was_once_a_revolutionary.html).

4. Despite the fact that Khamenei did not study at any university, from his youth, he was deeply interested in literature. The Mashhad seminary has long been famous for having the best teachers of Arabic literature. The Mashhad intellectual climate was dominated by literary men rather than jurists or philosophers. Khamenei became a fan of modern literature through the literary atmosphere of the city. He established personal relationships with Iranian religious and nonreligious intellectuals, such as Ali Shariati and Jalal Al-e Ahmad. His inclination toward modern literature and contemporary intellectuals distinguishes him from other clerics who were isolated from any modern knowledge or figure.

Mashhad. In Mashhad School's theological methodology, the use of reason in the hermeneutics of the sacred texts is prohibited because reason and faith are deemed incompatible—everything the human being needs has been given by god through his sacred texts and representatives (prophet and Imam), while reason is just a demon's tool to distract the human being from god's message.

The Mashhad seminary not only was under the overwhelming influence of literal and exoteric interpretation of the sacred texts, but it was also a place for arcane sciences. In Mashhad, a cleric could easily and acceptably claim that he had direct contact with the Hidden Imam, that he got advice from the Hidden Imam, and that he communicated such advice to his followers. In Qom, in contrast, clerics were extremely suspicious about people making such claims. Sheikh Mahmoud Halabi, the founder of the Hojjatieh Association, whose main aim was to fight Bahais and spread the name of the Hidden Imam, was from Mashhad. There are still many clerics in Mashhad, such as Sayed Hassan Abtahi, who pretend and suggest that they are in direct touch with the Hidden Imam and attract ordinary naïve people. This superstitious religiosity is characteristic of the Mashhad seminary.

Khamenei tends to identify himself with the pious clerics in Mashhad who are masterful in arcane sciences, perform minor miracles, and are in touch with the Hidden Imam. According to many unofficial reports, Khamenei regularly meets “mediators” of the Hidden Imam and receives direction. Also, it has been said that on various occasions for making a political decision, he has opened the Quran and read the first line on the right page, making his decision based on the positive or negative impression he got from the verse. According to some unofficial reports, in his meetings with high-ranking officials, Ayatollah Khamenei ensures them that the country is protected by the Hid-

den Imam, making it impervious to harm. In addition, he is reported to have claimed the country's leader is infallible in his major decisions.

Hence, Ayatollah Khamenei has an ambivalent character that stems from his two different backgrounds: his religious training in Mashhad and his political career in Tehran. While the first pushes him toward a spiritual perception of himself and the world, the latter encourages him to make decisions based on pragmatism and real-world rules. This background makes him a rather unpredictable person. One can never tell in which cases he will make decisions based on arcane arts and in which cases based on pragmatism. An important question is which approach will prevail regarding nuclear issues. There are indications the pragmatic side may prevail. For instance, on November 6, 2003, Khamenei stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran, based on its fundamental religious and legal beliefs, would never resort to the use of weapons of mass destruction. He stated the production, reservation, and usage of nuclear weapons are religiously problematic.⁵

In fact, the religious principles that would apply to the issue of nuclear weapons are unclear. In brief, no principle in Islam applies as practiced in revolutionary Iran. Islamic texts are open to different and even in some cases contradictory interpretations. One can read the Islamic holy texts to support war and violence; conversely, one can use different exegeses and support peace. For many clerics in Qom, nonbelievers' blood, even civilians' blood, is not worthy of religious respect, and if the interest or safeguarding of Islam depends on fighting “enemies” of Islam and killing nonbelievers, the ruling jurist has to do so. In regard to nonbelievers, the distinction between civilians and combatants becomes very complicated in Islam. According to the apocalyptic literatures, when the Mahdi returns, he kills at least one-third of the world's population.⁶ None of the Shiite texts mentions that he kills only

5. Available online (www.leader.ir/langs/FA/index.php?p=bayan&cid=122).

6. In Shiite tradition there is a set of hadiths that explain the apocalyptic features of the end of time and the signs of the return of the Hidden Imam (al-malahim val-fitan), and a set of hadiths that explain the features of the Mahdi's government and how the world will look after his return. According to some hadiths, the Mahdi will not return unless one-third of world population get killed, and one-third die (Ibn-e Tavoos, Sayyed, *al-Malahim val Fetan*, Tarjomeh, Sayyed Mehdi Ayatoollahi, Entesharat-e Jahan ara, Tehran, 1385, p. 159). In some other hadiths that relate to the explanation of the Mahdi's government, there is some indication that he will fulfill God's promise to the prophet Muhammad to make all the world Muslim: “When Ghaim [Mahdi]

combatants. Apparently, in the Mahdi’s view, no difference exists between civilians and combatants.

All Revolutionary Guards members bear a verse of the Quran on their uniform: “You shall prepare for them all the power you can muster, and all the equipment you can mobilize, that you may frighten the enemies of God, your enemies, as well as others who are not known to you; God knows them. Whatever you spend in the cause of God will be repaid to you generously, without the least injustice.”⁷ This verse can easily be used to justify the development of nuclear weapons because nuclear weapons will “frighten the enemies of God.”

The relationship between theology and political decisionmaking in Iran becomes even more complex when the concept of “the guardianship of the jurist” is considered. At first glance, the concept suggests that Iran relies on the Shiite jurists’ willingness to implement

Islamic law. As shown historically, however, this concept allows the Shiite jurist to overrule Islamic law in the name of the “interest of the regime.” In conjunction with the “guardianship of the jurist” theory, the interest of the Islamic government is religiously above Islamic law. Therefore, a Shiite ruling jurist has to be primarily committed to safeguarding the authority of the regime—not implementing Islamic law. Hence, the concept is the religious legitimization of pragmatism.

Perhaps more challenging than the apocalyptic views of some officials or influential commanders, is the schizophrenic nature of the regime itself, the duality between pragmatism and theology, and the blurred boundaries between the will of God and that of the ruling jurist. Finally, it is very difficult to answer the question of whether Iranian leaders are driven by religious beliefs, or whether they just use religious creeds to justify nonreligious attitudes.

returns, no Jews or Christians will remain in the world” and there will be no nonbeliever to god and Imam spared by Mahdi (Tabatabai, Mohamad Hosein, *Tafsir al-Mizan*, Manshoorat Jama’at al-Modarressin fi al-Hazah al-ilmia, Ghom, no date, vol. 9, p. 254). “Gha’im will clean the earth from nonbelievers and deniers [of Islam] ... he continues killing the enemies of God until God is satisfied” (Majlisi, Mohammad Baqer, *Behar al-Anwar*, al-Maktabah al-Islamyah, Tehran, 1372, vol. 52, p. 283). The Mahdi’s apostles are men who invite people to martyrdom and wish to be killed for the sake of God (Ibid., p. 308). In general, in Shiite tradition, all nonbelievers or non-Muslims will be killed or converted to Islam whether before Mahdi’s return or after it. The scene is so bloody that the sixth Imam of Shia says, “If people knew what Gha’em will do, most of them will certainly wish to not see him, because he will kill lots of people... then many people will say he is not from Mohammad’s family; if he was, he would have mercy on people” (Ibid., p. 354).

7. Quran: 10:60. This verse can be used to justify “terror” too. According to this verse, frightening the “enemies” of God is a religious virtue. In his book, which was published a few decades before Iran’s Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini cites the verse and adds that the Islamic government has to use the state budget as much as possible to safeguard the country and frighten “foreigners.” Ruhollah Khomeini, *Kashf Ol-asrar* (Revealing secrets) (Qom: unknown, 1955, p. 244).

Conclusion

FOR REASONS RELATED to the nature of the regime in Tehran, the regional security environment, and the challenges of coalition formation and maintenance, deterring a nuclear Iran is likely to prove particularly challenging and much more difficult than deterrence was during the Cold War. Regime factionalism raises potential command-and-control problems, while the likelihood that Iran's nuclear weapons would be controlled by some of the most radical elements in the regime raises the possibility that Iran might lack restraint in brandishing its nuclear arsenal, and that some of these weapons might find their way into the hands of terrorists.

Moreover, because Tehran has shown a distinct preference for indirection and dissimulation in its foreign policy, the possibility of covert, deniable delivery is particularly acute with the Islamic Republic. For this reason, the development of a credible postevent attribution capability is a vital necessity for the United States and its allies, and it is absolutely critical that decisionmakers in Tehran and elsewhere understand that the United States has such capabilities.

The regional security environment in the Middle East hardly offers promising conditions for stable deterrence. The United States and Israel are still reeling from the impact of wars in Iraq and Lebanon, respectively, that have undermined their deterrent image and emboldened adversaries and enemies such as Syria and Iran. Such circumstances could increase the likelihood of a miscalculation that could spark a crisis between

an increasingly assertive Iran and the United States or Israel, with the attendant possibility of escalation, an exchange of nuclear threats, or worse.

Finally, it is unclear that the international community has the political will to assemble a broad coalition of states to deter a nuclear Iran, or the staying power to maintain such a coalition over a period of years or decades. Europe may not be willing to make a sustained commitment of military forces, absent which declaratory policy may look hollow. Arab countries and Turkey may decide they cannot rely on uncertain international pledges, and so they may pursue dangerous military capabilities or acquiesce to Iranian demands.

For all these reasons, deterring a nuclear Iran is likely to prove risky and difficult. Deterrence is not some easy, low-risk alternative that is obviously preferable to preventive military action. Rather, in the event of an Iranian nuclear breakthrough, all available policy options would pose serious challenges and require hard work. Until more thought is given to fleshing out the implications of all the policy alternatives—such as deterrence, preventive action, and acquiescence—it would be premature to conclude that one is clearly superior to the others.

This survey of the challenges involved demonstrates how vitally important it is to achieve a diplomatic solution to the problem of Iran's nuclear program—including using pressure such as sanctions to back up that diplomacy—and what is at stake if diplomacy fails.

Patrick Clawson and Michael Eisenstadt
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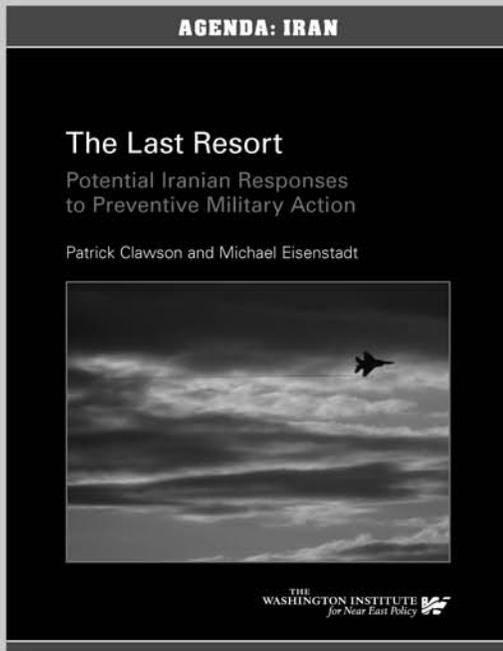
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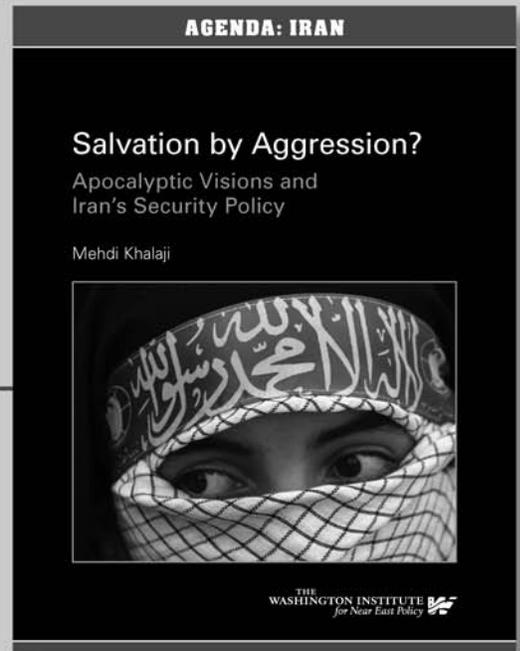
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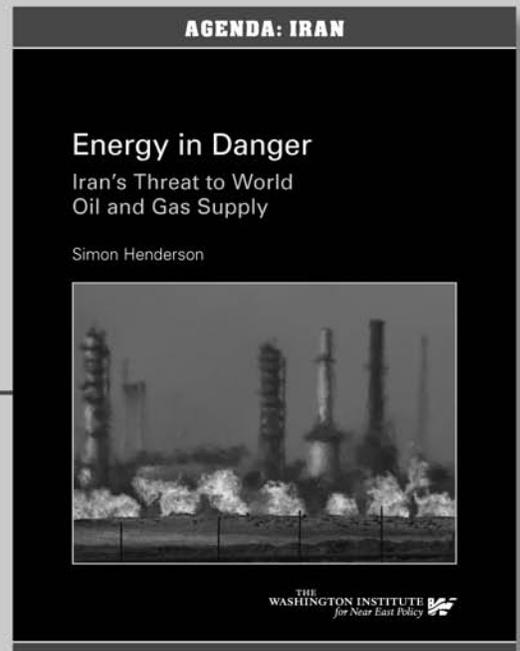
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