

## Preventing a Cascade of Instability: U.S. Engagement to Check Iranian Nuclear Progress

Mar 4, 2009



### PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCES

With the Middle East as a focal point of U.S. foreign policymaking, a complex array of regional issues now compete for the urgent attention of America's leaders. In preparation for the first presidential succession of the twenty-first century, The Washington Institute has assembled three independent Presidential Task Forces. Each is composed of its own bipartisan, blue-ribbon group of experts and practitioners, and each is charged with addressing a discrete issue high on the U.S. Middle East policy agenda.

### About This Report

On March 4, 2009, The Washington Institute held a special policy forum to mark the publication of this report. [Watch \(templateC07.php?CID=446\)](#) the event or [download \(templateC07.php?CID=446\)](#) complete audio of the discussion.

Preventing a Cascade of Instability: U.S. Engagement to Check Iranian Nuclear Progress is the final report of The Washington Institute's Presidential Task Force on Iranian Proliferation, Regional Security, and U.S. Policy, a bipartisan, blue-ribbon commission of diplomats, legislators, strategists, scholars, and experts. The task force recommends that the Obama administration act urgently to prevent Iran's nuclear progress from triggering a cascade of instability throughout the Middle East, as such a development could threaten U.S. interests in both regional security and global nonproliferation efforts. Task force participants included key Obama administration officials such as Robert Einhorn, widely expected to serve as a senior advisor on nonproliferation, and Dennis Ross, the administration's point man on Iran and the Gulf.

The task force warns that without strong U.S. leadership, countries in the Middle East may accommodate Iran, attack it, or try to match its new capabilities. The way forward, the report argues, is for Washington to engage Tehran while at the same time increasing diplomatic leverage on the Iranian leadership, including incentives. This would involve closer consultation and coordination with allies, as well as reinforced security measures and tougher international sanctions.

According to the report, now is the time for the United States to promote a policy of "resist and deter" rather than "acquiesce and deter" within the international community. Assertive action now to build U.S. leverage is more likely to prevent Iran's emergence as a military nuclear power. But time is short if diplomatic engagement is to have a chance of success and military confrontation avoided. Iran continues to produce enriched uranium, of which it already has a sufficient amount -- if processed further -- for a bomb.

The Middle East is looking for strong U.S. leadership and reenergized relationships. Vigorous steps to bolster regional defense cooperation could enhance stability and serve to check regional perceptions that U.S. influence is weakening. As part of the solution to the impasse, Washington could propose measures that would also serve to shore up the global nonproliferation system.

Preventing a Cascade of Instability is endorsed by a distinguished group of policy practitioners: member of Congress Gary Ackerman (D-NY); U.S. senator Evan Bayh (D-IN); former CSIS International Security Program senior advisor Robert Einhorn; Washington Institute [Military and Security Studies Program \(templateI02.php?SID=2&newActiveSubNav=Military%20and%20Security%20Studies%20Program&activeSubNavLink=templateI02.php%3FSID%3D2&newActiveNav=researchPrograms\)](#) director [Michael Eisenstadt \(templateC10.php?CID=4\)](#); former U.S. Strategic Command commander in chief Gen. (Ret.) Eugene Habiger; Washington Institute [Gulf and Energy Policy Program \(templateI02.php?SID=23&newActiveSubNav=Gulf%20and%20Energy%20Policy%20Program&activeSubNavLink=templateI02.php%3FSID%3D23&newActiveNav=researchPrograms\)](#) director [Simon Henderson \(templateC10.php?CID=18\)](#); Duke University professor of public policy Bruce Jentleson; National Institute for Public Policy senior scholar Robert Joseph; American Enterprise Institute vice president for foreign and defense policy studies Danielle Pletka; former assistant secretary of state Stephen Rademaker; former special Middle East envoy and Washington Institute Ziegler distinguished fellow Dennis Ross; Defense Science Board chairman William Schneider, Jr.; former National Security Council senior director for Middle East affairs Michael Singh; U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Nancy Soderberg; and James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies deputy director Leonard Spector.

Washington Institute executive director [Robert Satloff \(templateC10.php?CID=11\)](#) and deputy director [Patrick Clawson \(templateC10.php?CID=10\)](#) convened the task force.



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Robert Satloff

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May 4, 2024

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