

# Iran's 'Unacceptable' Bomb:

## Deterrence and Prevention in the Age of Terror

Jun 29, 2007



In-Depth Reports

**D**uring the forty-year Cold War, a strategy of deterrence protected the United States and its allies from the threat of nuclear-armed adversaries. Although the prospect of nuclear conflict was, at times during that period, much closer than it may seem in retrospect, the underlying logic of deterrence -- that adversaries share a preeminent rational interest in survival -- played a critical role in keeping the peace.

Today, however, just six years after al-Qaeda brought violent, expansionist, radical Islamism to America's shores, Iran's revolutionary leadership seems bent on acquiring nuclear-weapons capability. With its national security policy founded on an ideology that celebrates martyrdom, and a regime that has spoken openly of nuclear exchange, the Islamic Republic poses a profound challenge to deterrence as a strategic concept. President Bush has already declared that a nuclear-armed Iran would be "unacceptable," but what does such a statement mean in practice?

In May 2007, The Washington Institute convened its annual Soref Symposium to address this question. Established in 1988 and named in memory of Helene and Samuel Soref, founding supporters of the Institute, the symposium serves as a vehicle for dialogue and debate on critical issues facing America and its allies in the Middle East. The summaries presented in these proceedings detail discussions among a select group of experts and diplomats who, over the course of the conference, evaluated the challenge posed by Iranian nuclear ambitions, assessed the regime's intentions and capabilities, and addressed potential policy responses -- including the appropriate roles of deterrence and prevention in protecting the United States, its allies, and its interests against one of the most vital threats of the twenty-first century. ❖

Pages: 52

Distributor: WINEP

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