

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

AN EXAMINATION OF US POLICY TOWARD IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

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ABSTRACT

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The consequences of Iranian development, declaration, and demonstration of nuclear weapons are too dire to ignore; they are in fact potentially catastrophic. This paper concludes that to date, U.S. policy has been ineffectual in curbing Iranian nuclear proliferation efforts and recommends the development of a new policy that moves away from a primarily confrontational policy model to one which includes direct diplomatic and economic engagement options. Furthermore, the new policy should seek to achieve the following goals: (1) Iran does not acquire, declare, or demonstrate a nuclear weapons capability, (2) Iranian acceptance of, and adherence to, all Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) protocols, and (3) renunciation by Iran of the intent to field the full nuclear fuel cycle, thereby ending Iran's need for an industrial level Iranian uranium enrichment capability. Finally, the paper argues that any new policy must be underwritten by a robust strategic communications plan as well as thorough military deterrent options.

AN EXAMINATION OF US POLICY TOWARD IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

United States' policy has clearly failed to stop the proliferation of nuclear technology and facilities to Iran that could provide the materials required by the Islamic Republic to develop nuclear weapons. Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons for two primary reasons: (1) as a deterrent against intervention by the U.S. or other regional power in Iran's domestic or regional affairs, and (2) to bolster national prestige and expand Iranian influence in the region. The consequences of Iranian development, declaration, and demonstration of nuclear weapons are too dire to ignore; they are in fact potentially catastrophic. Therefore, without ignoring the real and potential threats to U.S. National Security posed by Iranian foreign and nuclear policy, the U.S. must develop and implement a new and less confrontational policy toward Iran and Iranian nuclear proliferation.

After examining the current U.S. policy toward Iran, the efficacy of U.S. policy, Iranian grand strategy, diplomacy and engagement viability, and the ramifications of Iranian nuclear proliferation, this paper recommends that a new U.S. policy toward Iran seek to achieve, at a minimum, the following goals: (1) Iran does not acquire, declare, or demonstrate a nuclear weapons capability, (2) Iranian acceptance of, and adherence to, all Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) protocols, and (3) renunciation by Iran of the intent to field the full nuclear fuel cycle, thereby ending Iran's need for an industrial level Iranian uranium enrichment capability. Furthermore, the paper will recommend that the United States move away from a primarily confrontational policy model to one which employs direct diplomatic and economic engagement options conducted in a civil tone and without preconditions. The new policy should be enacted in a manner which does not discount Iranian security concerns, yet resolutely confronts examples of coercive Iranian policy in the region without the use of confrontational rhetoric or militaristic threats. Further, the policy should be supported by a deliberate and robust strategic communications plan which links planning and actions across all elements of national power. Finally, any new U.S. policy must be underwritten by thorough military planning and preparations as well as timely and effective intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operations that provide accurate and comprehensive intelligence support to U.S. leadership should Iran become an imminent threat to U.S. national security.

Current US Policy toward Iran and Iranian Nuclear Proliferation

A significant challenge associated with defining U.S. policy toward Iran is that there is no comprehensive document or government resource which clearly describes U.S. policy on Iranian nuclear proliferation. Unfortunately, while this may provide maximum flexibility to those

enacting U.S. policy, it also generates substantial opportunities for misinterpretation or miscalculation on the part of both U.S. and Iranian officials. In an effort to more accurately characterize both the content and tenor of U.S. policy on Iran, a review of statements made by the President and other senior government officials, the National Security Strategy (NSS), and the Department of State (DOS) policy toward Iran is in order.

Beginning with the President, during his 2002 State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush named Iran, North Korea, and Cuba as members of the “Axis of Evil.” President Bush proclaimed, “States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger.”¹ He went on to say, “I will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons.”² Elsewhere in the address, President Bush stated, “Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom.”³ Finally, President Bush indicated that while the U.S. would not impose its culture on other nations, it would not sit idly by while repressive governments squelched the non-negotiable demands of human dignity, but instead would support those peoples around the world who advocate for the values of religious freedom, free speech, equal justice, the rule of law, respect for women, and limits on governmental powers. The President’s statements clearly identify Iran as a growing threat to not only the United States, but the region and the citizens of Iran as well. In terms of national strategy, the 2006 National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States of America addresses Iran directly and continues the theme and tenor established by President Bush in his 2002 address. The 2006 NSS defines the Iranian Government as a tyrannical, despotic, authoritarian regime bent on repressing its people and spreading terror and fear throughout the Middle East.⁴ Additionally, after characterizing Iran as tyrannical, the NSS goes on to say, “All tyrannies threaten the world’s interest in freedom’s expansion, and some tyrannies, in their pursuit of weapons of mass destruction or sponsorship of terrorism, threaten our immediate security interests as well.”⁵ With regard to Iranian nuclear proliferation, the NSS concludes that Iran’s true intentions to acquire nuclear weapons are revealed by its refusal to negotiate in good faith, allow unfettered access to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors, or provide unequivocal and verifiable answers to IAEA concerns. As such, the United States has joined with its European allies and Russia to pressure Iran to comply with all protocols of the NPT and to prove its nuclear program is solely limited to civil power production.⁶ However, while the U.S. may have “joined” with its European allies and Russia to pressure Iran, the U.S. currently refuses to

participate in any direct talks or negotiations with Iran until it complies with U.S. demands and all uranium enrichment has been verifiably stopped.

With regard to the Department of State's views on Iran, the DOS website provides a short description of U.S. diplomatic relations with Iran as well as some basic policy tenets and concerns. The United States broke formal diplomatic relations with Iran in 1980 after militant Iranian students occupied the American Embassy and held 452 Americans hostage for 444 days. At present, the Swiss Government represents U.S. interests in Tehran.⁷ The Department of State website also indicates that by Executive Orders and congressional legislation, most trade with Iran is prohibited and that these sanctions were imposed due to Iran's sponsorship of terrorism, nuclear proliferation issues, and human rights abuse concerns. Additionally, despite removal of Iran's greatest security threat – Baathist Iraq – Tehran continues to pursue not only its nuclear weapons program, but a policy which disrupts the Middle East peace process. Furthermore, the DOS website states:

There are serious obstacles to improved relations between the two countries. As a state sponsor of terrorism, Iran remains an impediment to international efforts to locate and prosecute terrorists...The U.S. Government defines its areas of objectionable Iranian behavior as the following:

- Iran's efforts to acquire nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction;
- Its support for and involvement in international terrorism;
- Its support for violent opposition to the Middle East peace process; and
- Its dismal human rights record.⁸

Finally, the Department of State website concludes that resumptions of normalized relations between the U.S. and Iran will likely not be possible until such time as Iran changes its policies.⁹

A review of transcripts from speeches and interviews delivered by the Secretary of State, ambassadors, and other DOS officials provides additional description and amplification of U.S. policy toward Iran. During a September 2006 radio interview, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice commented on U.S. efforts to galvanize international support against Iranian nuclear proliferation:

The first thing is that we have got to get the international community focused on making sure that Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon. And for that, you can use negotiations if the Iranians are prepared to negotiate. If they're not prepared to negotiate, then you have to use sanctions.¹⁰

In a November 2006 presentation, Andrew K. Semmel, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nuclear Nonproliferation Policy and Negotiations, indicated that U.S. policy sought a change in Iranian behavior through unilateral and international diplomatic means as well as

targeted sanctions, but did not rule out the potential requirement to combine sanctions with more coercive means such as the threat of military force.¹¹ Though in a press conference during that same month, Ambassador James F. Jeffrey, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, made it clear, t "...the U.S. is not seeking regime change [in Iran], what we're seeking is a change in behavior across the board and the path to seeking this change is multilateral action primarily in the UN..."¹² Finally, with respect to a definitive statement on U.S. policy toward Iran's right to develop civil nuclear power, in a December 2006 interview, Nicholas Burns, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, stated:

For over a year now, we have been saying... that we would support, as a way to get Iran to drop its nuclear weapons kick, we would support the provision of nuclear power, civil nuclear power, to Iran without Iranian access to the fuel cycle.¹³

To summarize, U.S. policy toward Iran defines the government of the Islamic Republic as tyrannical and despotic: a regime which oppresses its citizens, is an unabashed state sponsor of terrorism, and a threat to its neighbors in the region, as well as to the United States. The United States does not deny the rights of Iran to develop civilian nuclear power so long as it does so in accordance with the protocols of the NPT and under the close and continuous scrutiny of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Furthermore, Iran must agree to the self-imposition of additional limitations not demanded by the NPT with respect to full fuel cycle access. Lastly, prior to the U.S. engaging in any direct negotiations with the government of Iran on nuclear or security issues, Iran must verifiably cease all uranium enrichment activities and allow unhindered access to IAEA inspection teams at all nuclear production and research sites. Until that time, the U.S. will continue to rely on its European allies to conduct direct negotiations with Iran on its nuclear programs while acting in concert with international organizations such as the U.N. and the IAEA, as well as unilaterally to pressure Iran into complying with the protocols of the NPT and U.S. demands to abandon pursuit of uranium enrichment and full fuel cycle access.

Iranian Nuclear Policy and Grand Strategy

Iranian nuclear policy serves as a means to achieve two basic strategic ends. The first relates to Iranian national security concerns and its perceived need for a strong deterrent against potential military intervention by the U.S. or other regional actors against Iran either directly or covertly. The second concerns Iran's nuclear policy which seeks to bolster its national pride thereby supporting regime stability as well as expansion of Iranian political, military, and economic influence throughout the Middle East.

Due to Iran's perception of U.S. policy toward its, as well as its minority status in the Muslim world, the Shiite-dominated Iran believes that it requires a strong deterrent to prevent foreign aggression. Iran also presumes that access to nuclear weapons is the best means to achieve that deterrent capability. Even though Iran's two most prominent threats — Baathist Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan — were removed by the United States, Iran now feels equally, if not more, threatened due to its geographic positioning between the residual and potentially long-term significant American military presence along two of its borders.¹⁴ From the Iranian perspective, its security concerns are understandable in light of the United States' demonstrated willingness to apply the policy pre-emptive force against a perceived, though not necessarily proven, threat to American national security. President Bush's continued adherence to statements that he will not rule out application of that policy option again to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons¹⁵ also heightens Iran's national security concerns and the perceived need for a nuclear deterrent to prevent a tactical strike or attempt at regime change by the U.S.¹⁶

In his book Hidden Iran, Persian Gulf and U.S. policy expert Ray Takeyh argues that Iran's pursuit of the nuclear weapons option is based primarily on national security concerns, and that the recent increase in anti-Israeli and anti-American rhetoric seeks to counter more moderate and pragmatic Iranian political actors in an effort to reassert revolutionary and nationalist convictions within the population as a means for conservatives to maintain control of the Islamic Republic's government and foreign policy rather than plot the course for future Iranian action.¹⁷ Mr. Takeyh writes:

It is often argued that Iran's dangerous and unpredictable neighborhood grants it ample incentive for acquiring nuclear weapons... A more careful examination reveals that Iran's nuclear program has been conditioned by a narrower but more pronounced set of threats. Historically, the need to negate the American and Iraqi threats has been the primary motivation for Iran's policy-makers. In more recent times, the simmering concerns regarding the stability of a nuclear-armed Pakistan have similarly enhanced the value of such weapons to Iran's planners.¹⁸

Mr. Takeyh also argues that Iranian nuclear policy is also influenced by issues of national prestige and a desire to confront the apparent double standard with which the international community, most notably the United States and other Western powers, treat the nuclear programs of Iran and Israel. He points out that Iran feels it is perennially criticized for its nuclear programs, yet the West remains strangely silent when it comes to Israel's reportedly formidable depository of atomic bombs.¹⁹ In congressional testimony, Mr. Takeyh pointed to another commonly cited explanation for this strategic goal: the widely held cultural and nationalistic

belief that Iran is one of the world's historic great cultures and should rightfully return to a position of central leadership in the region.²⁰

Other regional and security policy experts, such as James Phillips and Henry Sokolski, prescribe a more sinister end game to Iranian grand strategy and nuclear policy. Writing for the Heritage Foundation, Mr. Phillips concludes that the election of President Ahmadinejad and the return to a Khomeini-like radical Islamist rhetoric, combined with Iran's increased sponsorship of terrorism in the region, are dangerous signs that can't be ignored. "This long and deep involvement in terrorism, continued hostility to the United States, and repeated threats to destroy Israel, provide a strong warning against the dangers of allowing such a radical regime to develop nuclear weapons."²¹ Mr. Sokolski opines that Iran continues to pursue nuclear weapons capabilities as a deterrent to Western intervention in its regional foreign policy efforts. Once nuclear weapons are attained, Iran can be expected to become an even more active supporter of terrorist organizations aimed at undermining U.S. interests in the region, the new Iraqi government, and Israeli security.²² Sokolski also argues that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons to support an increase in Iranian assistance to groups willing to risk striking the United States, as well as step up terrorist activities focused against the governments of Libya and Saudi Arabia.²³

Although interpretations of the ultimate aim of Iranian grand strategy differ among regional experts, nearly all experts agree that Iran's current leadership is attempting to take every advantage of perceived American weakness, both in the region and the international diplomatic arena, to advance its nuclear programs and expand Iranian influence within the region.²⁴ In light of this, an effective U.S. policy toward Iran must take these observations into account and provide a means to address them in a manner which provides viable opportunities for the Iranian leadership to move closer to American policy goals without losing face either domestically or regionally.

Efficacy of US Policy

Given the confrontational and punitive nature of U.S. – Iran policy and its reliance on unenthusiastic international partners such as Russia and China, failure of that policy is not a surprise. To date, U.S. policy has failed to stop the proliferation of nuclear technology to Iran or block the construction of new nuclear research, fuel cycle, or power production facilities and reactors. U.S. diplomats have also failed to garner support from key Security Council members such as Russia and China for the kind of stringent and punitive sanctions that would be required

to force Iranian compliance with the NPT protocols as well as agree to discontinue pursuit of full nuclear fuel cycle access.

Perhaps the most telling description and confirmation of U.S. nuclear non-proliferation policy failure was delivered by the United States' own Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nuclear Nonproliferation Policy and Negotiations, Andrew K. Semmel, during his remarks at the International Institute for Strategic Studies Workshop in New York City on 28 November 2006. "We know that, for two decades, Iran pursued a secret program to acquire the capability to produce fissile material. Iran systematically violated its IAEA safeguards and NPT obligations by concealing its nuclear fuel cycle activities."²⁵ He went on to outline how Iran has successfully enriched small amounts of uranium at its Natanz facility and has declared its intention to increase the number of centrifuges used to produce the enriched uranium from 328 to 3000 centrifuges in the coming year. Iran continues to aggressively mine and refine domestic uranium ore to produce large quantities of uranium hexafluoride gas at its facilities in Isfahan to feed the Natanz centrifuges. Iran has already produced 120 tons of uranium hexafluoride gas and is undertaking conversion of an additional 160 tons of uranium ore.²⁶ If successfully enriched, experts believe Iran would have enough highly enriched uranium to produce up to 40 nuclear weapons.²⁷ Additionally, Mr. Semmel reported that Iran, in violation of the NPT and IAEA demands, produced small amounts of plutonium at its test reactor in Tehran and is continuing construction of a heavy water reactor at Arak capable of producing fuel for light water reactors as well as weapons grade plutonium.²⁸ Construction on the heavy water reactor at Arak is scheduled to be complete as soon as 2009,²⁹ and the Carnegie Institute reports that the reactor could produce up to 8-10 kilograms of plutonium annually, enough for the production of two high-yield nuclear weapons each year.³⁰ These results are clearly not what one would associate with an effective nuclear non-proliferation policy.

The United States has also been unsuccessful in building a strong international coalition to oppose Iranian nuclear proliferation efforts. Despite pushing through two UN Security Council Resolutions addressing Iranian failures to comply with the NPT, there has been no change in Iranian nuclear policy. On 31 July 2006, the UN Security Council passed UNSCR 1696 which demanded that Iran suspend all uranium enrichment activities, to be confirmed by the IAEA Board of Governors, or face possible economic or diplomatic sanctions.³¹ When Iran did not comply, the UN Security Council passed UNSCR 1737 on 23 December 2006, which imposed some very limited sanctions on Iran for failing to comply with the previous Security Council Resolution.³² An example of the limited nature of sanctions agreed upon by the Security Council in UNSCR 1737 is the fact that Russian contractors were allowed to continue work on

construction of the light water nuclear reactor facility at Bushehr.³³ The resolution called for Iran to comply by 21 February 2007 or face possible additional sanctions.³⁴ To date, Iran has not complied with either resolution, and there are no credible indications that it intends to comply anytime in the near future.

Unfortunately, and despite significant efforts on the part of U.S. diplomats and political leaders, it does not appear likely that the U.S. will gain the support of either Russia or China for U.S. policy goals nor the kind of severe sanctions that would be required to change Iranian behavior. Stephen Blank, the Strategic Studies Institute's resident expert on Russian affairs, notes that Russia has attempted to use this issue to improve its stature and influence in the region by supporting both the West and Iran, playing to both sides politically while positioning itself as an independent mediator which cannot be excluded by the United States from any final solution.³⁵ "Moscow has backed Iran's legal right to enrichment while cautioning that it would be best not to exercise it and simultaneously reassuring the West that it too is opposed to a nuclear-armed Iran."³⁶ Russian economic interests, consisting of both military sales and commercial construction of the light water reactor at Bushehr (and up to six others in the coming years), impact its willingness to support the kind of harsh sanctions required to change Iranian behavior.³⁷ It is therefore not surprising that Russia has worked ardently to minimize the punitive nature of UNSCR 1737 and is likely to continue to oppose harsh sanctions despite the continued failure of Iran to comply with either UN Security Council Resolution.³⁸

China is similarly supportive of Iran and remains reluctant to back the implementation of significant sanctions. China's relationship with Iran is not new because it was a principal nuclear technology supplier to Iran in the early 1990s.³⁹ As Iran's top oil export market China has signed several multi-billion dollar energy deals with Tehran.⁴⁰ The Chinese government does view its political relationship with the U.S. as vital, but finds it discomforting to side with the United States against a third-world country demanding equal treatment under the NPT, and therefore seeks to balance the two interests.⁴¹ These observations and the months of painstaking negotiations within the Security Council required to produce the patently ineffective UNSCRs 1696 and 1737 make the prospects of U.S. policy securing stringent International sanctions against Iran in response to NPT and UNSCR violations problematic and time-consuming at best.

The evidence is clear, that U.S. policy has failed to stop or even slow down Iranian nuclear proliferation efforts. It has also failed to garner the support of key Security Council members to oppose Iranian nuclear proliferation initiatives. Consequently, despite strong U.S. objection and attempts to align international opposition against it, Iran continues to enrich

uranium, acquire nuclear technology, and build the facilities required to complete the nuclear fuel cycle. When operational, these facilities will provide Iran with access to produce the fissile materials required to manufacture nuclear weapons without outside assistance should they choose to weaponize. Unless a policy change is made, not only will Iranian attempts to gain access to the nuclear weapons succeed, Iran's effort to expand its influence throughout the Middle East will likely be backed by nuclear weapons.

Diplomacy & Negotiation and the Islamic Republic of Iran

There is perhaps no greater polarity among regional experts than that associated with the arguments surrounding the ability to negotiate a settlement on nuclear proliferation with the Islamic Republic of Iran. In one camp are those who argue that Iran is a monolithic, intractable regime not only bent on forcing the U.S. from the region, but willing to risk the regime's very existence to expand its diplomatic, military, and economic influences to hegemonic levels throughout the Middle East and Islamic world. So, from their perspective, Iran will not be amenable to negotiations. In the other camp are those who argue that Iran is a multi-factional, complex nation with a rational foreign policy which uses information operations and confrontation with the U.S. as a means to advance its position and agenda in the region. From this viewpoint, Iran is, therefore, receptive to negotiated settlements, diplomatic solutions, and deterrence if they recognize the potential results to be in their national interest.

Kenneth Timmerman, director of the Foundation for Democracy in Iran, provides a persuasive summation of the argument against negotiating with Iran. He argues that Iran will not give up its nuclear capabilities through negotiation. Moreover, once acquired, Iran will more aggressively use terror and subversion against their neighbors to expand its influence and become the predominate power in the region.⁴² James Phillips also supports this basic position, arguing, "[President] Ahmadinejad is a true believer in Khomeini's radical vision of Iran's role as the vanguard of global Islamic revolution."⁴³ He claims that Iran truly views the U.S. as a failing power, evidenced by Iran's more overt and aggressive support of insurgents in Iraq, as well as continued assistance and direction to Hezbollah and Hamas.⁴⁴ Overall, the "non-negotiable" camp believes that Iran will continue to employ its strategic communications campaign to paint itself as the latest Muslim target of a U.S. policy based on double standards and at the same time leverage Russia and China against U.S. policy aims.⁴⁵ Additionally, Iran will continue to try and drive a wedge between the U.S. and its European allies to further undermine U.S. policy.⁴⁶

The "negotiable" camp argues that there is at least an opportunity to negotiate with Iran and seek a settlement that does not end in military strikes or confrontation. Shlomo Brom, a

retired Israeli Defense Force Brigadier General and Deputy to the Israeli National Security Adviser, attests that the Israeli foreign intelligence community considers Iran to be a complex entity whose policy is influenced by many factors, including preservation of the regime, ideological considerations, and other typical national interests.⁴⁷ Other students of the region such as Dr. Abbas Milani, Ray Takeyh, and Richard Haass hold similar opinions. Milani argues, "President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is neither the most powerful official in Iran nor is he loved by the Iranian people."⁴⁸ Ahmadinejad has failed to address the economic and government corruption issues upon which he campaigned and is paying the price politically because he is now opposed by "...a loose coalition united by their disdain for Ahmadinejad's gross economic mismanagement and reckless hubris."⁴⁹ Abbas contends that the real power rests with the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, whose failing health will likely result in the appointment of a new Supreme Leader by the Council of Experts, is now headed by the pragmatic former President, Hashemi Rafsanjani.⁵⁰

The results of the December 2006 elections held in Iran are evidence that the Iranian society and political establishment are not supporters of a monolithic and radical Islamic agenda. The elections held to select local council members and members of the Council of Experts has demonstrated public dissatisfaction with President Ahmadinejad, the hard line clerics, and conservative party representatives. Ahmadinejad's supporters lost all but two seats on Tehran's 15-seat city council and suffered significant setbacks on other councils nationwide.⁵¹ Rafsanjani's victory to head the Council of Experts was overwhelming, and his supporters won at least 65 of the 88 seats on that council, making it a near certainty that a more moderate and pragmatic cleric will be chosen to succeed Ayatollah Khamenei as Iran's Supreme Leader,⁵² perhaps Rafsanjani himself.

The Iranian election results combined with a closer look at the *real* power structure and ongoing power struggles within the Iranian government provide sufficient argument to support at least trying a more civil and diplomatic approach which includes engagement and negotiations as principle tenets for a new policy. Therefore, while the arguments for and against negotiations and diplomatic engagement with Iran are both compelling, the abject failure of the United States' current confrontational, "no negotiations" policy toward Iran leads one to conclude that a new U.S.-Iran policy is required.

The Criticality of Getting US – Iranian Policy Right

It is critical for the U.S. to get its policy toward Iran *right* because failure to do so could result in a regional nuclear arms race, or potentially worse yet, unilateral Israeli military action

against Iran. First, if Iran successfully constructs the nuclear infrastructure required to produce nuclear weapons and then demonstrates that nuclear weapons capability, most regional experts agree that this would likely instigate a quick progression of nuclear proliferation to a number of other countries in the region.⁵³ Next this “nuclear arms race” would certainly create significantly more tension and instability in the region, provide more opportunities for terrorist organizations to obtain access to nuclear weapons or materials, and significantly increase the chances that strategic miscalculation could result in a nuclear event or confrontation.⁵⁴ Lastly, any Israeli decision to act militarily in response to an Iranian declaration of nuclear weapons capability or indication that weaponization were imminent, could be catastrophic. Massive Iranian retaliation is all but certain, and conflict would likely escalate, embroiling the entire Middle East, as well as the West, in conflict.

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy Deputy Director for Research, Patrick Clawson, hypothesizes that in response to Iranian declaration of a nuclear weapon, we should expect that at a minimum Saudi Arabia and Egypt would definitely proliferate, while Turkey would at least strongly consider or attempt to acquire nuclear weapons as a counter deterrent to Iran. Saudi Arabia could “go nuclear” rather quickly by leasing nuclear warheads from Pakistan and installing them on Chinese CSS-2 missiles that the Saudis acquired in the late 1980s. This course of action is considered plausible based on the “widespread” impression in the West and South Asia that Saudi Arabia provided much of the finance for the Pakistani nuclear program in return for a rumored Pakistani commitment to provide Saudi Arabia nuclear warheads if needed.⁵⁵ Egypt, in an effort to maintain its positioning as a regional power equal to both Saudi Arabia and Iran, would also seek to acquire nuclear weapons. It is likely that the Egyptian population would strongly support Egyptian nuclear proliferation because of the added prestige and benefit of addressing its current nuclear imbalance with Israel.⁵⁶ Turkey, on the other hand, would look initially to NATO for security guarantees, but based on its recent frustrations concerning European backpedaling about Turkey’s entry into the European Union and a less than certain response from all members of NATO about Turkish security concerns regarding a potentially emboldened Iran, Turkey could decide that proliferation best supports its national security interests.⁵⁷ James Phillips concludes that in addition to severely undermining the NPT, “...each new nuclear power would multiply the risks and uncertainties in an already volatile region.”⁵⁸

Nuclear proliferation throughout the Middle East would be bad enough, but perhaps the most dangerous reaction to an Iranian declaration of nuclear weapons capability or indications that weaponization were imminent, would be that of Israel. While Israel continues to look to the

U.S. and international community to check Iranian nuclear ambitions, Israeli political and defense establishment leaders have asserted that Israel would use all means at its disposal to prevent Iranians from acquiring a nuclear weapons potential.⁵⁹ Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz is quoted as saying, “Under no circumstances would Israel be able to tolerate nuclear weapons in Iranian possession.”⁶⁰ Writing for the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom’s Conflict Studies Reach Center, Eugene Kogan reports “[Israeli Prime Minister] Ehud Olmert hinted that he was willing to take extraordinary measures in order to stop the Iranian nuclear programme.”⁶¹ Regional experts, as well as Israel officials, recognize that the prospects of Israel conducting a successful attack against Iranian nuclear facilities are extremely unlikely. While these experts continue to look to the West for diplomatic solution, the Israeli government refuses to rule out the use of force as a last resort should diplomacy fail.⁶²

Regardless of the level of probability ascribed to unilateral Israeli military action against Iranian nuclear facilities, one must consider the potential ramifications of such an act. Shlomo Brom states, “The cost is certain, because an Iranian violent reaction is almost a certainty.”⁶³ Eugene Kogan writes, “There is a deep understanding within the Israeli defence establishment that should there be a pre-emptive strike against Iran, it will respond with all its military might, including using proxy forces such as Hezbollah...”⁶⁴ Mr. Brom adds that in the case of a pre-emptive strike prior to Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, Iran could respond with chemical weapons — a clear violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention — which could lead to a further escalation of the conflict and the requirement for an international response to settle the dispute.⁶⁵

Undoubtedly, this is a scenario which must be avoided as it would plunge the region into chaos. The International Crisis Group’s report on the Iranian nuclear impasse stated that, “Terrorist attacks orchestrated by Iran could wreak havoc throughout the Middle East, and extend to the West itself.”⁶⁶ Such events would threaten access to the world’s major oil reserves, causing oil prices to skyrocket and unimaginable damage to the world economy. While there might be countless other potentially disastrous outcomes one could ascribe to successful Iranian nuclear proliferation, the two scenarios discussed above provide ample argument to conclude that Iran must be deterred from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability.

Recommendations for a New US Policy

The implications of failing to develop an effective and comprehensive policy toward Iran are clearly too significant to ignore. The United States must therefore engage its leading diplomats, interagency experts, experts on nuclear proliferation issues, regional scholars,

security sector analysts, and economic and energy sector experts to craft a new, holistic policy toward Iran and Iranian nuclear proliferation efforts. This new policy should seek to achieve, in priority order, the following goals: (1) Iran does not acquire, declare, or demonstrate a nuclear weapons capability, (2) Iranian acceptance of, and adherence to, all Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty protocols, and ultimately (3) renunciation by Iran of the intent to field the full nuclear fuel cycle, thereby ending Iran's need for an industrial level uranium enrichment capability.

Additionally, for this new policy to be successful, current and future administrations will need to develop and sustain a comprehensive and focused strategic communications strategy to harmonize the efforts of all U.S. government agencies involved in policy implementation.

Clearly, the most dangerous consequences associated with continued failure of U.S. - Iran policy would be the eventual development, declaration, and demonstration of a nuclear weapons capability by Iran. Any new U.S. policy must therefore seek to prevent that from occurring. This goal should be the primary U.S. focus of all direct negotiations with Iran. The second policy goal, full compliance with all NPT protocols, supports attainment of the primary U.S. policy aim of preventing Iranian nuclear weapons acquisition by injecting transparency into the Iranian nuclear program. Pursuit of this goal also provides a venue for the U.S. to work with international partners and organizations toward Iranian compliance with international treaties and nuclear protocols. Placing this goal as second in the order of priority also allows the U.S. to work in the margins with other nations rather than attempt to forcefully lead them in that effort. Lastly, though allowable within the confines of the NPT, the third goal of renunciation of nuclear fuel cycle aspirations by Iran would further assuage regional and international concerns that Iran could quickly produce nuclear weapons in the future should it so choose. This goal can be pursued over a substantial timeline, and even the effect of delaying acquisition and activation of the facilities could be considered as initial success.

While pursuing these three primary goals concerning Iranian nuclear proliferation, the new U.S. policy should seek to directly engage the Iranian government simultaneously in discussion of wider, more coercive Iranian policies in the region. The diplomatic engagement should be focused on establishing the kinds of mutual security, diplomatic, and economic arrangements or incentives that will lead the Iranian regime to conclude that it is in its best interest to change the course of its nuclear policies. These negotiations should attempt to provide the kind of "diplomatic maneuver space" required for the Iranian regime to enact policy changes without appearing to have capitulated to U.S. diplomatic or military pressure.

While the U.S. may seek to engage in direct negotiations with Iran on nuclear policy, the Iranian government must clearly understand that the U.S. will not back away from its interests

and commitments in the region nor leverage U.S. national security. Therefore, the new U.S. policy must also capitalize on all opportunities to confront examples of direct or indirect Iranian support to terror organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah, Iraqi militias, or other regional insurgents. The tone in which U.S. officials confront and expose these examples of coercive Iranian policy should be as civil and diplomatic as possible. By refraining from use of the confrontational rhetoric that both nations have used - to no positive effect - over the past 25 years, the U.S. can allow others to lead assaults on Iran and its destabilizing policy. In this way the U.S. can be seen as a regional watchdog supporting collective regional security rather than a global hegemon seeking to enforce its will on Iran. Implementing U.S. policy in this manner facilitates the United States' ability to spotlight the destabilizing and negative effect that Iran's coercive policies cause in terms of increased regional instability, death, destruction, and unrealized economic development in order to galvanize regional and domestic opinion against the policies of the current Iranian regime. This is not to say that U.S. policy should preclude it from seeking redress in appropriate forums. It simply speaks to a need to reduce to the lowest possible level the combative nature of the U.S.-Iranian relationship and capitalize on techniques that could place U.S. policy and presence in the region in a more positive and regionally acceptable light.

This approach would work over time to position the U.S. as the more positive, patient, reasonable, and cooperative regional partner, while at the same time focusing negative regional and international attention on Iranian policy and policy goals rather than those of the United States. This would then have the effect of forcing the Iranian regime to the information operations defensive and keep it at a disadvantage in terms of strategic communications. It is also clear that for the new policy to be successful, a comprehensive and well-coordinated strategic communications strategy must support it. As the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communications reported, "Policies and strategic communication cannot be separated."⁶⁷ Strategic communication is vital to America's national security and foreign policy. It is an invaluable function which helps shape the context in which our policies are viewed by others, as well as builds the relationships which help our policies achieve political, economic, and military objectives.⁶⁸ An effective and comprehensive strategic communications strategy is also considered indispensable because this would likely not be a short battle, but rather a long campaign requiring the exercise of political patience and effective interagency coordination to bring all relevant elements of national power to bear on the problem. Therefore, as recommended by the Task Force on Strategic Communications, the President should establish a strategic communications structure within the National Security Council (NSC) and direct it to

coordinate all components of strategic communications related to the implementation of a new U.S. policy toward Iran and Iranian nuclear proliferation.

The U.S. administration and policy makers should also recognize that America is the de facto hegemonic power in this duel and should therefore not be overly concerned about a potential short-term loss in stature which many hawks argue would result from calling for such negotiations. The U.S. should take the lead in calling for direct negotiations in order to gain and maintain the moral high ground, and as so, not appear overly conciliatory to Iranian demands.

Finally, a willingness to pursue a policy which includes diplomacy and direct negotiation with Iran cannot be misconstrued by Iran or other potential adversaries as weakness or fear on the part of the U.S. Therefore, this new U.S. policy must be underwritten by thorough military planning and preparation as well as timely and effective intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operations that provide accurate and comprehensive intelligence support to U.S. leadership should Iran be at the center of emerging threat scenarios which present clear and present danger to U.S. national security, the security of her allies, or regional stability. Additionally, the fact that a full array of resourced and executable military options are available and that the U.S. leadership is willing to employ them should our national security be clearly threatened should be privately communicated to the Iranian regime.

Conclusion

In conclusion, an examination of the current U.S.-Iran policy and its failures, Iranian grand strategy and nuclear policy, and the ramifications of continuing on the confrontational and dangerous path the two nations are currently traveling, leads to the inescapable conclusion that a new and less confrontational policy is required. That policy should be structured around three primary goals: (1) Iran does not acquire, declare, or demonstrate a nuclear weapons capability, (2) Iranian acceptance of, and adherence to, all Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty protocols, and ultimately (3) renunciation by Iran of the intent to field the full nuclear fuel cycle. This policy must be supported by a strategic communications strategy that focuses and harmonizes interagency implementation of that policy. Additionally, U.S. leadership must acknowledge Iranian security concerns and employ direct negotiations to achieve the policy goals, while at the same time remaining prepared to act militarily if U.S. national security or regional stability is clearly threatened. In short, the United States must act patiently and bring *all* elements of national power and prestige to bear in appropriate measure within a transparent and sustained effort to prevent Iranian nuclear proliferation.

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