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# The S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue

The 21st century harbors global changes which entail hopes as well as threats to world peace. Dozens of armed conflicts still prevail at this time around the world which pose a threat to the well-being of various societies. Stabilizing these conflicts is the most pressing challenge of our time.

Given today's security concerns, leaders and national policy makers require more than ever a practical dialogue with experts and academics, in order to arrive at the proper decisions. Several think tanks around the world that deal with theoretical approaches to conflict resolution face two major problems: 1. How to transform theory into practical approaches in policy-making? 2. How to establish dialogue between experts and policy-makers. Furthermore, the principal challenge facing world leaders today concerns ways to transform theoretical research into solution-oriented policies and actions.

## Goals of the Center

The S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue at Netanya Academic College is a think-tank and action group comprised of scholars and leaders from a variety of fields. The Center is a unique institution in the Middle East, engaging in both academic pursuits and on-the-ground efforts toward conflict resolution. The International Management of the Center is comprised of former President of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev and HRH Crown Prince Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan. The current of the Center is Dr. Ephraim Sneh, former Deputy Defense Minister, Transportation Minister, and Health Minister. The Board of Governors includes academic, political, business and community leaders from nations around the globe (please see the end of this statement for a full listing of the members of the Board of Governors).

The S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue has become pivotal in the establishment of substantive position papers and suggestions for conflict resolution in the region and beyond. The Center represents a much-needed approach to the problems of worldwide conflict, offering solution-driven initiatives based on practical experience and realistic goals. Its multi-faceted method provides a combination of political, security, academic and economic responses through the dispatching of teams of former politicians, community leaders, security experts, distinguished academics and prominent international business people, offering powerful mediation services in regional disputes based on the experience and expertise in their respective fields. The Center also organizes opportunities for academics and world leaders to gather together in order to address pressing global issues via international conferences, round table discussions, and workshops.

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# Introduction

Ephraim Sneh

The conference held on the subject of Iran sparked considerable interest both due to the subject itself as well as the high quality of the lecturers who accepted our invitation to speak.

The title given to the conference was a true reflection the essence of the issue at hand: Iran's Ambitions for Regional Hegemony. The main subject was neither the nuclear issue, nor terrorism, nor Iranian subversive activities in many states. These are after all the means, secondary goals on the way to attaining Iran's strategic goal - to become a superpower. In the long term, say the leaders of this regime, Iran will become a global power, the leader of a billion and a quarter Muslims in the world. In the immediate range, it is striving to attain hegemony over the greater Middle East. Iran's most urgent goal is to take control over Iraq after the American troops have finally withdrawn, giving it full territorial contiguity from the Mediterranean (after all, Lebanon is, for all intents and purposes under Iran's control) to full domination of the Iraqi oil industry.

Iran's ballistic missiles currently cover Delhi, Moscow and Athens in their range. Within another year or two, Paris and Brussels will also come under the range of Iranian rockets. Anyone trying to understand the pretensions and ambitions of the Iranian regime needs no more than to decrypt the range of its ballistic missiles. Their reach goes far, far beyond Israel. The installation of nuclear warheads on these missiles would bring Iran all the closer to attaining its strategic goals.

As noted, our conference hosted some of the finest experts who presented a variety of views, often quite different from one another. The guests from Europe presented a softer approach toward the Iranian regime and its aspirations, one that shies away from and expresses doubts regarding the imposition of severe sanctions, and certainly regarding military action. In my comments, I represented a different point of view. A nuclear Iran will lead to the nuclear arming of Saudi Arabia and Egypt within just a few years. The strategic balance in the region will tilt dangerously away from Israel. Immigration to Israel will be halted and foreign investments will dwindle. This is a reality that Israel cannot afford to allow to occur. The military option as I see it is the last recourse, but it must be prepared with great seriousness.

The economic sanctions on Iran have not yet run their course and legislation in the American Congress, which was completed only in the early summer of this year, should be able to make them quite effective.

At this opportunity, I would like once again to thank the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Israel office for sharing its considerable experience with us and for doing so much to assist us in making this important conference a success.

I hope that we will be able to conduct yet another conference in 2011, under the title of **A secular Iran - Where to?**



# Iran's Regional Policy - The Race to Middle East Hegemony

Uzi Rabi



Iran's Ambitions for Regional Hegemony

Iran's mounting influence in the Middle East has become one of the salient features of the regional geopolitical map at the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Generally, Iran's aspiration for regional hegemony and international recognition stems from its large size, big population, important geographical location, central position in the Shi'ite-Muslim world, and its past history as a regional power.

The leaders of the Islamic Republic operate under the assumption that the exertion of power through economic, military, and political strength will give them a dominant voice in determining the regional and international agenda. Above all, their strategy aims at enhancing the country's security and the legitimacy of its leadership as paramount objectives. Since its inception, the Islamic Republic has felt threatened, adopting a survivalist policy toward the United States and its allies - countries which seek to bring about its collapse. Iranian leaders do not take lightly what is known in Foggy Bottom parlance as 'Regime Change', especially in view of the fact that they are flanked by two countries that have already experienced it at the hands of the Americans and have undergone a regime change. The incumbent regime views holding sway in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf arena, as well as exerting influence in Central Asia, as providing insurance against the fate that befell its neighbors to the west (Iraq) and east (Afghanistan).

Upheavals and instability in international politics - the fall of the USSR in 1991, rising oil prices, and tensions between the United States, China and Russia - have served the Iranian strategy well. Very astutely, Iran has exploited the complexities of international rivalries and interests to secure for itself advantageous agreements with countries in Asia, Africa, Latin

America and - most significantly - with Russia and China, which are the most significant competitors of the United States on the world stage. In the Middle East, Iran's striving for leadership coincided with regional developments in recent decades - namely the decline of Arab power centers, the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in April 2003 and the Second Lebanon War (July-August 2006) - that reinforced Iran's increasing prominence.

Adopting an implacably hostile stance vis-à-vis Israel served as an important means of solidifying Iran's regional standing. On the basis of this hostility and a commitment to waging an uncompromising struggle against Israel, the Islamic Republic became the linchpin of a network of countries and organizations dedicated to "resistance" (*Muqawama*) against Israel, the West, and the moderate Arab regimes perceived as their collaborators. This network helped Iran to push an Islamic agenda and be at its forefront. This policy also helped Teheran to win broad support on the Arab street, while lashing out at the Arab leaderships that have forsaken the struggle against Israel.

The Arab regimes regard Iran's emergence in a leadership role as ominous. Tehran's intervention in the domestic affairs of neighboring Arab countries, as well as nations more distant, has become a source of grave concern to the moderate Arab regimes, which include Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the Gulf countries. These concerns became fully apparent during the Second Lebanon War and in its aftermath, exacerbating the already charged relations between Persians and Arabs, as well as Sunni and Shi'ites. This reflected the transformations taking place in the Middle East at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The religious (Sunni/Shi'ite) and ethnic (Arab/Persian) tensions that have



swept the Middle East since the April 2003 overthrow of Saddam Hussein have created a new dynamic, a prominent feature of which has been the significant strengthening of non-Arab players (Iran and also, to a great extent, Turkey) at the expense of Arab countries. The alarm with which the Arab nations have viewed the advance of a 'Shi'ite Crescent' is indicative of the growing strain between Iran and the Arab states. The latter have a growing concern about deepening Iranian involvement in their countries, accompanied by efforts to promote the '*Shiitization*' of Sunni communities. Nonetheless, as might be expected, these renewed tensions between the two great Islamic traditions were more closely linked to geopolitical developments than to matter coup d'états of the faith.

Since their founding, nation states in the Middle East have been characterized by Sunni dominance and the marginalization of Shi'ites. Notwithstanding the nationalist and pan-Arab rhetoric of the political leadership, there has been no effort to bridge the socio-economic gaps between the middle and upper classes and the poorer ones, consisting predominantly of Shi'ites. This reality has been most marked in Iraq, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia, but Shi'ite inferiority is ubiquitous. The role of the nation states of the Middle East and beyond has been to help consolidate that inferiority.

In the Arab world, the Shi'a were to learn the bitter lesson that changes in secular regimes and prevailing ideologies would leave Sunni dominance intact. Arab nationalism did not embrace the Shi'a and was prejudiced against it. Thus, although mother tongue of Shi'ites might be Arabic, they were not equal members of the Arab nation. Sectarian rifts going back centuries were too strong to be forgotten, and Sunni mistrust of their Shi'ite brethren - often referred to as "second class Arabs" - remained unchanged. Even fervent Shi'ite supporters of the various manifestation of Arab nationalism - whether Nasserism, the Ba'ath party or the Palestinian cause - found that although their support was readily accepted by the dominant Sunnis, there was no change in basic attitudes toward them. And because of systematic institutional discrimination, Shi'ites never had appropriate representation in the bureaucracies and the militaries of the Arab states, instead filling lower-caste roles. In Saudi Arabia, for example, most of the workers in the oil industry are Shi'ites. And while many Iraqi Shi'ites served

in Saddam Hussein's army, they did so mostly in lesser ranks, thus ensuring that the army would not be an engine of social mobility.

In addition to the rise of modern nationalism in the Middle East during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, regional and international politics added another dimension to the ethno-religious friction between Arabs and Iranians. For example, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the global duel between East and West manifested itself in the Arab-Iranian schism. Concerned about the Soviet threat, Iran joined the western camp, becoming part of the 'Baghdad Pact'. Iran's choice to ally itself with the West, while Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria and later Libya came under the aegis of the Soviet Union, was one of the hallmarks of the Arab-Iranian rivalry at the time.

In the 1950s, the collaboration between Iran and the Iraqi monarchy, within the framework of the 'Baghdad Pact', was principally aimed at containing Egypt. Qassim's *coup d'état* and the abolition of the monarchy carried the winds of the Arab revolution very close to Iran's borders, highlighting the imminent dangers. The importance of the clear-cut West-East division in determining the Iran-Arab relationship waned. Regional factors were to continue to grow in importance, and starting in the early 1970s, became predominant in shaping the character of the Arab-Iranian relationship. In the 1960s and 1970s, Iran was an integral part of a western defense alliance against radical elements in the region. As a result, Tehran was seen by radical Arab regimes as an enemy, and a target for aggression. At the same time, however, Tehran fostered relations with more moderate and pro-Western Arab countries.

The Islamic Revolution was a watershed in the history of modern-day Iran. A complete discussion of the manifold ramifications of the revolution and its ideology on the entire Middle East is beyond the scope of this paper. For Iran - either monarchic or republic - the Persian Gulf and the Middle East have been of paramount importance owing to Tehran's vested economic and ideological interests in those regions. Tehran's revolutionary policy in the Middle East greatly accelerated and sharpened the Sunni-Shi'ite conflict. Shi'ite militants inspired by Iran have taken to denouncing both the monarchical regimes of the Persian Gulf and secular Arab

regimes in the Middle East that they regard as being "atheistic".

The Middle East has thus become a crucible of the conflict between Iran's proxies and regimes more congenial to the moderate Arab camp. Egypt, the largest Arab country, has been regularly issuing stern warnings about the Iranian buildup. Both the print and electronic press scathingly denounce Iranian attempts to infiltrate and influence "vulnerable" Middle Eastern countries. And Egyptian leaders have viewed with concern Iran's mounting influence in post-Saddam Iraq, and the systematic assistance given by the Islamic Republic to Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The April 2009 discovery of a Hezbollah cell in Egypt - whose far-reaching objectives included, according to detainee interrogations, the toppling of the Mubarak regime - served as unassailable confirmation to the Egyptian leadership of Iran's aggressive intent. A highly significant Egyptian move that reflected Cairo's wariness of Iran was its decision to build a steel wall on 'Philadelphia Road,' sealing off the Egyptian-Gazan border. This action astounded many in the Arab world, but none more than Hamas. The organization understood that if the construction of the wall were completed, its routes for the smuggling of weaponry would be severely affected, thereby compromising its military buildup and obstructing the delivery of aid from Iran. The Hamas leadership conducted a media campaign against Egypt, organizing rallies at the Rafah crossing, which on one occasion led to the outbreak of gunfire. But attempts to appeal to Egyptian sentiment by invoking Arab solidarity and Palestinian suffering, as well as the publication of *fatwās* against the construction, did not dissuade Cairo from continuing construction. Instead, the quasi-official Egyptian media directed fierce denunciations at Iran for its subversive actions. Abdel-Moneim Said, one of *al-Ahram's* chief editors, published a lengthy article entitled "Defending Egypt". Although the Iranians have made some effort to mollify Egyptian anger, sending the speaker of their parliament, Ali Larijani, to meet with President Mubarak, it has been a case of too little, too late. The fact remains that Egypt regards Iran as a dangerous enemy.

It is against this backdrop that Iran's nuclear buildup seems more foreboding than ever. The Iranian nuclear issue has become the central

focus of Arab discourse. Under the headline "Iran revives the dream of the Persian Empire", *Asharq Alawsat* claimed in January 2006 that the nuclear capability Iran is striving for is not aimed at attacking Israel, but rather is intended to facilitate Iranian dominance in the Middle East. What Arab leaders are deeply concerned about is a dramatic change in the power equation in the region once Iran becomes a nuclear state. From the standpoint of most Arab countries, a nuclear Iran will solidify its status as a regional power, thereby encouraging further intervention in their internal affairs. If this were to occur, the influence of the Arab countries in the Middle East would decline further.

Even more apprehensive are Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf countries - Iran's neighbors - which will stand to lose the most from a nuclear Iran. The monarchic regimes in the Gulf - which are both Sunni and Arab - regard the "Shi'ite bomb" as a tool to ensure Iranian dominance, making the geographic *Persian* Gulf into a literal Persian Gulf. Their hopes for diplomacy and irenic conciliation - by saying, for example, that Iran has the right to have civilian nuclear energy - have not met the test of reality.

Doubting America's continued commitment to their security, these countries foresee a real and concrete scenario in which they will be left to their own devices in dealing with a nuclear Iran. As a consequence, increasingly outspoken statements have started coming out of the capitals of those countries. Bahrain's Foreign Minister, for example, called Iran's nuclear program the "greatest threat to the region". And in a February 15, 2010 statement that perhaps best encapsulates the prevalent feeling in the Persian Gulf countries, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal, told Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during her visit to Riyadh that "sanctions are a long-term solution, but we see the issue in the shorter term maybe because we are closer to the threat... We need immediate resolution."

The growing Arab-Iranian rivalry of recent years has thus assumed a more urgent aspect because of the nuclear issue. Both the constant criticism by the Riyadh leadership of Iranian involvement in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, and the vitriolic articles in the Saudi press stressing its dangers, are at least in part intended to sound the alarm about a nuclear Iran. "If this is how Iran meddles in the region before it has gone nuclear," the Saudi warning





says, "just image the extent of its interference once it has the bomb."

Concurrently, an anti-Saudi media campaign backed by high ranking clerics was inaugurated in Iran, directing blistering criticism at Riyadh. An Iranian-based, Arab-language television channel, *Alalam*, played a central role in the anti-Saudi propaganda. Also prominent was Hossein Shariatmadari, editor of the *Kayhan Daily*, which is aligned with the country's spiritual leader Ali Khamenei. Shariatmadar lambasted Saudi Arabia, arguing it is an absolutist dictatorship having nothing to do with Islam. "At the height of the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip and the suffering of the Palestinian people there," Shariatmadari charged, "the Saudi king participated in an interfaith dialogue in New York and shook the hand of the Israeli president, exchanging friendly words with him."<sup>1</sup> A recurring guest on *Alalam* television network was Mohammed al-Massari, a London-based Saudi dissident. And as if this were not enough, the Iranians also accused the Saudis of involvement in terror attacks in Iraq and trying to create chaos there. Hassan Hanizadeh, editor of the conservative news agency *Mehr*, claimed categorically that Saudi Arabia was behind the Iraqi terror attacks.<sup>2</sup>

A new front in the propaganda war between Iran and Saudi Arabia opened in August 2009, which also included the case of Yemen, when a cease fire was broken by a renewed offensive against security forces by Shi'ite rebels. Not surprisingly, Saudi sources claimed the rebels were backed by Iran. In turn, the Iranian media was filled with assertions that Saudi Arabia was waging an all-out war against the Shi'ite rebels and the regime in Sana'a. The *Alalam* television channel devoted many hours to the situation in Yemen, conducting interviews with rebel leaders who blamed Saudi Arabia for the situation.<sup>3</sup> The clergy also cast blame on Iran, with Ayatollah Shirazi accusing Saudi Arabia of "hoisting the flag of hypocrisy" and having "hands stained with the blood of massacred Yemeni Shi'ites".<sup>4</sup>

The Saudi press responded vehemently to these attacks against the monarchy. Always

1 *Alalam*, September 23, 2009.

2 *Mehr*, August 11, 2009; Jomhour-i-e Eslami, August 26, 2009.

3 *Alalam*, August 15-20, 2009; *Abna* (Iran) August 14, 2009.

4 *Iran*, (Iran), September 28, 2009.

quick to link Iran with arch-enemy al-Qaeda, the Saudi media reiterated the charge that the organization – although Sunni – was nonetheless an Iranian front dedicated to promoting Tehran's interests in the region. Columnist Sulaiman Al-Aqili contended that Iran's involvement in the abortive assassination of Prince Muhammad, son of Emir Naif, should be looked into.<sup>5</sup> Consistent with this theme, the Saudi press attributed the situation in Yemen to an Iranian plot. Thus, *Al-Jazeera* magazine claimed that Iran sought to turn Yemen into a bridgehead for its terrorist operations in the Arabian Peninsula:

There is a pact between al-Qaeda, al-Houthi (Shi'ite rebels) and the separatists (the 'South Yemen Movement')... The Shi'ite rebels receive matériel, as well as military and logistical assistance from Iran. They aspire to establish their own mini-state modeled after the Hezbollah in south Lebanon. The al-Houthi are coordinated with al-Qaeda in Yemen. This coordination takes place mainly through officers from Quds Force (the special forces of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard), whose main objective is to seize control over Yemen...under Iranian directive.<sup>6</sup>

The editor-in-chief of the Saudi daily *al-Riyadh*, Turki Al-Sudairi, wrote of Iran's true intention to threaten the Gulf countries:

Who is Iran trying to acquire nuclear weapons against, and why is the world poised to oppose that plan? Is it not because of the desire to defend the stability and independence of the geographic region that affects global economies? After all, this is the truth. What prompts Iran to go nuclear is its desire to instill terror.<sup>7</sup>

The columnist further outlined Iranian involvement in Middle Eastern countries, contrasting it with Saudi foreign policy:

We (Saudi Arabia) are not competing with Iran's well-known efforts to smuggle

5 Muhammad bin Naif is the son of the Saudi Minister of the Interior who oversaw the combat of Saudi security forces against al-Qaeda. At the end of September 2009 he was spared from an assassination attempt by a suicide bomber who entered his home as a guest of the Open House day to Saudi citizens which the Prince had declared.

6 *Al-Jazeera*, (Saudi Arabia), September 3, 2009.

7 *Al-Riyadh*, August 22, 2009.

weapons to fractured societies such as the ones in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. Moreover, King Abdullah is the one who strived for understanding and agreements between the Arab countries in the summit meetings in Kuwait and Doha [Qatar]... Nor does Saudi Arabia strive to become a nuclear state while sacrificing its annual budget to this end. Saudi strategy is productive and not aggressive, not to mention that having nuclear weapons is self-destructive.

Tariq Alhomayed, editor-in-chief of the Saudi daily, *Asharq Alawsat*, warned of the danger posed to the Middle East by Tehran's deceitful maneuvering in its negotiations with the West. Iran is seeking to gain control over Iraq - he claimed - and intends to use Hezbollah and Hamas to stage provocations that would lead to a regional bloodbath. In Alhomayed's grim forecast, Iran's adventurism and efforts to ward off foreign and domestic pressures would hurl the region into bloody turmoil.

Iran took full advantage of the events in the Middle East to promote its standing and objectives. At the same time, divisions between and within Western governments well served its purpose of advancing its nuclear arms development program. The web of agreements Iran had hatched over the years with Russia, India and other countries in its struggle against American attempts to impose sanctions or diplomatic moves against it have been effective in achieving those ends. By contrast, the measures taken to date by the United States and its allies have proven to be ineffective. The Obama administration has sought to avoid being confronted with the choice of either accepting a nuclear Iran or using military force to destroy its nuclear installations. It appears that the administration has come to the conclusion that the most it can accomplish through diplomacy is to slow down Iran's advance to becoming a nuclear power. The administration ratcheted up pressure on Iran in 2010, imposing a freeze on assets of companies and individuals that are involved in Iran's missile and nuclear programs. Five 'front companies' were singled out, which the administration claims acted through the Iranian shipping company to evade sanctions, as well as four agencies operating on behalf of the Revolutionary Guard and more than twenty government-owned oil and energy companies. The new sanctions endeavor to prevent Tehran

from having access to petroleum distillates such as gasoline and jet fuel.

In July 2010, the foreign ministers of the European Union approved new sanctions in a bid to pressure Tehran to change policy and curb its nuclear program. This European action was a follow-up to the Security Council's Resolution 1929 of early June, which imposed a series of sanctions on Tehran, including a ban on arms sale, travel restrictions, the freezing of assets of senior officials from companies connected to the missile and nuclear program, and heightened oversight of cargo shipments to Tehran. The aim of the new package was to prevent further investments in the gas and oil industries, as well as in areas of trade, finance and transportation. The sanctions blacklisted Iranian shipping and airline companies, denied entry visas, and froze assets of Revolutionary Guard members. "They are all aimed at increasing pressure on the Iranian regime, so they finally start serious negotiations on the core issue of their nuclear program," the UK Foreign Minister William Hague explained. "And I hope Iran takes the message from that - that the European nations are open to negotiation about the nuclear program, but if they do not respond, we will intensify the pressure."

Iran was quick to denounce the EU actions before they were even adopted. "If the European Union follows in the footsteps of the United States to impose more sanctions on the country, the Islamic Republic will reconsider its cooperation with the member-nations," said the head of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, Aladdin Boroujerdi. At the same time, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad escalated his rhetoric, and made a point of showing off Iranian nuclear progress whenever international action against Iran was in the offing.

In the eyes of the Arab countries, Iran's conduct was both a continuation of Iran's policy of aggression and served to reveal American weakness. The Arab countries hoped that the Washington conference on nuclear proliferation in April 2010 would result in an international consensus that Iran could find acceptable, but they did not have high expectations. A military strike against Iran's nuclear installations - either by Israel or the United States - is an option the Arab countries would not necessarily oppose (some may actually hope for one), but the Gulf countries are acutely aware of the threats Iran





has made on several occasions to attack oil installations and other strategic objectives in the Gulf if they assist an American offensive.

Moderate Arab countries feel caught between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea. Their working premise is that Iran will become a nuclear power either in the short or intermediate term, thereby compelling many countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey to consider following suit. Indeed, those countries have already declared on several occasions that they are resolved to develop nuclear capabilities.

The regional perspective of these states will also have to evolve in light of the change wrought on the Middle East by Iran's nuclear advance. The mounting tension between Iran and the Arab countries has the potential of creating new constellations of shared interests in the region. For example, promoting regional peace was not the only objective when the Arab League decided on July 29, 2010 to give its blessing to the Palestinian Authority for a resumption of the diplomatic process with Israel. In addition- and perhaps primarily - the aim was to check radical elements - namely, Iran and its proxies - from determining the pace of events in the Middle East. A regional peace process between Israel and the Palestinians (perhaps also including Syria) would undermine the cohesiveness of the pro-Iranian bloc, thereby bolstering the standing of countries like Saudi Arabia as leaders in the Arab world.

In July 2010, there was speculation about a secret meeting between Mossad director Meir Dagan and senior Saudi officials. Needless to say, details from that meeting, if it ever took place, were not disclosed, but it would most likely have revolved around Iran's nuclear program. It is believed that Dagan was probing the possibility that Riyadh would turn a blind eye to Israeli overflight in its territory in the event of an attack on Iran, thereby giving Israel's jet fighters an air corridor to their objective. Many weeks prior to that, rumors started spreading that IDF equipment was being unloaded in Saudi Arabia. There was even speculation that a secret Israel base would be built in Saudi Arabia in preparation for a possible Israeli attack on Iran.

It was not the first time that such speculation was entertained in regional and international media outlets. In December 2009, a senior Egyptian

official considered it likely that intelligence cooperation between Israel and Saudi Arabia regarding Iran's nuclear program had been going on for some time. Saudi Arabia does not have diplomatic relations with Israel, but it belongs to the moderate Sunni camp (together with Egypt, Jordan and the Gulf Emirates), which feels threatened by Shi'ite Iran. A nuclear Iran would eclipse Saudi standing as a key player in the Middle East.

The announcement by the United Arab Emirates that it would join the sanctions on Iran proves that Arab countries in the Middle East are changing course, publicly expressing concern about the prospects of a nuclear Iran. The ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to the United States, Yousef Al Otaiba, went so far as to publicly endorse the idea of an American military strike in Iran, saying that "we cannot come to terms with a nuclear Iran."

For quite some time there was either the hope or illusion in Israel that it would not have to face the ultimate dilemma, because the socio-political dynamics in Iran would result in an upheaval before Tehran completed its nuclear armament process. Israel was one of the more vocal countries about the Iranian threat. The frequent use of the term '*existential threat*' raised the level of public anxiety in Israel, portraying the country's future existence as open to question. Obviously, the conjunction of radical ideology and weapons of mass destruction is a dangerous brew that threatens stability in the region. Yet it remains uncertain whether Israel's best interests are actually served by portraying it as having the will and capacity to spearhead military action. Iran poses as much a problem to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan as it does to Israel.

In the interim, some very interesting geopolitical changes have taken place in the Middle East. At the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, new interest groupings seem to have emerged in the region. Concurrent with the emergence of Iran as a regional hegemonic power, another non-Arab player, Turkey, has taken some meaningful steps toward the forefront. Until 2007, Iran appeared to be the dominant player in the Middle East, and no country seemed to be able to challenge its supremacy. The growing significance of Turkey in the region was welcomed by the moderate Arab regimes that saw Turkey's rising power as a necessary counterweight to Iran's broadening



influence. However, before long it dawned on these countries that the music being played in Ankara, as conducted by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdoğan, was very similar to what had been heard from Tehran for many years.

The six-vessel "Gaza flotilla" sailing out of Turkey with hundreds of passengers on board, with the purported aim of bringing humanitarian aid to the residents of the Gaza Strip, was a striking example of the way the Turks wish to acquire regional prominence. It appeared as if Turkey was taking on Iran's role, fanning the flames of the Israeli-Arab conflict to promote Ankara's interests and turn Turkey into a powerful presence in the regional firmament. The Arab media had mixed feelings about Turkey's moves. Certainly the moderate Arab regimes were not pleased. Engaged in erecting a steel wall on the 'Philadelphi Route and imposing, for all intents and purposes, a joint blockade with Israel on Gaza, Egypt had for months been tackling hundreds of so-called peace activists who came from all corners of the world to protest the Egyptian security wall, and borne the brunt of condemnation and vitriolic attack from Iran and Syria. The flotilla events embarrassed Egypt, and its strong stand on security matters was, for the time being, replaced by the renewed opening of the Rafah crossing.

Further proof of Turkey's ascent to prominence was the reaction of Arab publics. In the best tradition of *Le Roi est mort, vive le Roi!*, the portraits of Nassrallah and Ahmadinejad were removed and replaced by ones of Erdoğan, a sure sign of the mindset on the Arab street. Erdoğan instantly became a star and the "new Sultan of the Middle East", as one newspaper dubbed him.

The Arab media conducted an elaborate discussion regarding Turkey's objectives. One of the prominent Arab commentators on *Al-Jazeera's* web site, Abdul Rahman al-Rashed, focused on an interesting question: Is Turkey part of the Iranian axis or is it an important element in reducing Iran's influence and marginalizing it? It seemed that a disconcerting 'triad' (Iran-Turkey-Syria) was emerging at the expense of the one that the moderate Saudi and Egyptian leaders were trying to foster with Syria. Such a tripartite axis consisting of Iran, Turkey and Syria could drive the region into conflict and destabilize the moderate Arab regimes. Other assessments suggested that Turkey was trying

to gather influence in the international arena so as to serve as a regional broker in any future diplomatic initiative. The quasi-official Egyptian media contended that "Turkey does not want to help the Palestinians, but to use the Palestinian card to advance its objectives." (Abdullah Kama, *Rosa-elyosif*).

Indeed, Turkey holds some important bargaining chips, apparently more potent than Iran's. Turkey is situated as a bridge between continents - and neighbors the Balkans, Eurasia, and the Middle East - and conducts a multifaceted diplomacy that provides it with the possibility of having a dialog with Iran and Syria, the moderate Arab states, and Russia, China and the United States as well. In the mostly Sunni Middle East, Turkey is more at ease than Iran. Turkey is also financially more robust than the Islamic Republic (ranking 18th in the world in terms of GDP, even though it is not an oil or gas exporter). In other words, Turkey has the attributes of a regional power, and to a great extent it has tried to encroach on many areas targeted by Iran as objectives for the exertion of its influence. In the process, Turkey has appropriated some of Iran's regional prestige. In striving for a dominant position in the Middle East, Turkey relies on an aura compounded of its historic greatness and its newer efforts to portray itself as Palestinian savior and Israeli antagonist.

The flotilla affair triggered an angry reaction from Iranian leaders who quickly condemned "the barbarian murder perpetrated by the Zionist regime." Surprisingly though, this event - which had immense potential to serve as the occasion for classic anti-Israeli and anti-American rallies in Tehran (as indeed it did from Istanbul to London and Paris) - was met by dead silence on the Iranian street, despite the Palestinian issue having been one of the main items on the Iranian regional agenda since 1979.

In dispatching the flotilla, Erdoğan seemed to have stolen Iran's thunder with the implicit challenge to "put your money where your mouth is". Presumably, the Arab countries, and all the more so Iran, could not have exerted such pressure on Israel. The flotilla drew regional and international attention to Turkey, proving that both resonance with Muslim publics and regional prestige can be achieved by means other than those used by Iran. This, indeed, is shown by the fact that Ahmadinejad



and his revolutionary Guard toyed with the idea of sending their own flotilla, which might have diverted attention from the fourth round of international sanctions recently imposed on Iran. However, the idea to send a Gaza-bound flotilla was shelved quickly, possibly due to the fact that it could have become a Pyrrhic victory, paling next to the Turkish initiative.

To add to Iran's discomfort, it was forced to thank Turkey for having voted against the fourth round of sanctions and having joined with Brazil in a proposal to further enrich some of Iran's uranium abroad, as an alternative to a more stringent international proposal, and in the hope of avoiding further sanctions. Turkey thus effectively tied Iran's hands. At the same time as Turkey snatched the Palestinian portfolio from Tehran, it embraced its rival by coming to its aid on the nuclear issue. This was a 'bear hug' that allowed Turkey to dethrone Shi'ite Iran as the defender of the Palestinian cause and leader of the region, and pass the crown to Ankara.

Unquestionably, the Middle East has seen significant geopolitical transformations in recent years. While many questions remain unanswered, it is indisputable that the rules of the game in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are markedly different from those of the 20<sup>th</sup>.

The global recession and the precipitous drop in oil prices in the last two years have intensified the economic crisis in Iran. Growing unemployment rates and clear signs of recession have become the hallmarks of the Iranian economy. New austerity measures, slashing or ending subsidies for the purchase of gasoline, natural gas, electricity, water and bread will lead to a sharp rise in the price of those staples in coming years. This, in turn, will put further pressure on the regime to conduct a balanced policy.

The fact that Iran imports about a third of its fuel products, and the consequent necessity of setting quotas for each household's consumption, pose a significant threat to stability - as seen by the riots that have accompanied such measures, including the torching of fifteen gas stations near Tehran. Demographic data

showing that a third of the population is under 35, coupled with the government's inability to create employment opportunities for the nearly one million people who join the ranks of the unemployed each year, are further signs of crisis. An unemployment rate of about 20% for people 30 or under (the authorities claim a figure of 12%), and a particularly high inflation rate (22.5% for 2007-8), highlight serious structural problems in the economy and society. The plight of young couples seeking homes amidst rising housing prices in city centers also adds to public unrest. And all of this takes place with the background of the unprecedented political crisis following the recent elections. The growing public distress poses another challenge to the regime's ability to contain growing protest, with the young generation being one of the key agents of rising discontent.

The West, including Israel, hopes for regime change in Iran and that the arrival of a new leadership with different priorities will alleviate regional and global tensions. Such new leadership - so it is thought - would be more attentive to the outside world, setting Iran on a different path. The June 2009 elections and the subsequent events bolstered these hopes, but it appears that the incumbent regime was successful in repressing the wave of opposition. Nonetheless, it is hard to discount the growing frustration of Iran's citizens with the revolutionary regime. After all, the revolution was supposed to advance Iranian society, but so far has had the opposite effect.

The Iranian public is uncommonly astute politically compared to other Middle East populations. Although Iran has undergone various revolutions in the last two centuries, it is of course not inevitable that another one will occur, either within years or decades. Still, the greater the economic difficulties, the greater the protest will become, expanding beyond the political sphere and an effort to overturn the rigged 2009 June elections, to embrace economic and social concerns. It is hard to predict if and when internal change in Iran will occur, but clearly on the 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the revolution, the Islamic Republic faces daunting challenges.

# Iran's Post-Revolution Foreign Policy

Meir Jevedanfar

## Introduction

نه شرقی نه غربی جمهوری اسلامی.

"No to the West, No to the East, Yes to the Islamic Republic" reads the entrance sign to Iran's Foreign Ministry building in Tehran's Imam Khomeini Street.

The concept of staying independent from the East (Communism), and the West (Capitalism) was the linchpins of Iran's foreign policy at the beginning of the revolution.

This was due to several reasons. First and foremost, the revolution's founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini wanted to design a political version of Islam (an Islamic Republic), which would be a viable alternative to both capitalism and communism, offered by the USA and the USSR respectively.

More importantly, he viewed both the USA and the USSR as the enemy of Islam. The USA, whom he labeled as "The Great Satan" was seen as the oppressor of the Muslim people in the Middle East, and a staunch ally of Israel. Khomeini also held the US responsible for what he called "pillaging" of Iran's natural resources for decades, and a supporter of the "corrupt" Shah. His animosity towards American president Jimmy Carter was especially strong. This is one of the reasons behind the takeover of the American embassy in Tehran. With US presidential elections around the corner, he wanted to make Carter look weak in front of the American voter so that they vote against him and force him out of the White House. He achieved this goal successfully.

At the same time, he also viewed the USSR and communism with much contempt. First and foremost, he viewed Communism's atheism as completely contradictory to Islamic belief, which believes in God. In fact, he saw this as the USSR's biggest disadvantage, and he even said this directly in a letter which Khomeini penned

to Gorbachev in 1988<sup>1</sup>. He also held Russia responsible for oppression of Muslims in places such as Afghanistan. This is in addition to the fact that he, alongside many Iranian believed that Russia had territorial desires on Iran. The wars of 1722, 1796, 1804, and 1826 between the two sides, and subsequent treaties of Golestan<sup>2</sup> and Torkmanchai<sup>3</sup> upon which Iran lost thousands of kilometers of its territory to Russia served as a valid foundation of such beliefs.

Initially, Khomeini's model of the Islamic Republic received positive attention, especially in the Middle East, and amongst Shiites in particular. So much so that the Saudi government feared an uprising amongst its own Shiite population<sup>4</sup>, whom it had been oppressing for many years. The fact that many Saudi Shiites reside in areas which are oil rich made this a threat which the Saudi rulers could not ignore.

The same was true with Iraqi Shiites. Khomeini's calls for the rise of the *Mostazafeen* (the oppressed) against the *Mostakbareen* (the oppressors) resonated well with many Iraqi Shiites who had been brutally persecuted by Saddam's government for many years. Khomeini even went as far as calling for an uprising against Saddam. Such a threat, compiled with Saddam's territorial desires on Iran gave him

- <sup>1</sup> "Entire text of letter of Imam Khomeini to Mikhail Gorbachev" Center for the documentation of the Islamic Republic <http://www.irdc.ir/fa/content/4875/default.aspx>.
- <sup>2</sup> "Golestan Treaty" The Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies (CAIS), London University, School of African and Oriental Studies <http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Iran/golestan.htm>.
- <sup>3</sup> "Torkmanchai Treaty" The Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies (CAIS), London University, School of African and Oriental Studies <http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Iran/torkmanchai.htm>.
- <sup>4</sup> "Reflection of the Islamic revolution on Saudi Arabia" *Aftab News* (Tehran) November 23, 2007, [http://www.aftab.ir/articles/politics/world/c1c1195813833\\_enghelab\\_islamic\\_p1.php](http://www.aftab.ir/articles/politics/world/c1c1195813833_enghelab_islamic_p1.php).





the pretext he was looking for to invade Iraq in 1980. The fact that Khomeini had managed to scare his other Arab neighbors meant that he wasn't short of sponsors and backers for his invasion.

The war against Iraq put the validity and effectiveness Khomeini's foreign policy to test. As Supreme Leader, he and later on his replacement Ali Khamenei placed the presidents in charge of carrying out their vision.

## Khamenei Presidency (1981-1989): Combative Islam

Seyyed Ali Khamenei was elected to the post of presidency, after his predecessor, Mohammad Ali Rajai was assassinated by a massive bomb on 31st of August 1981. Rajai's predecessor Abol Hassan Bani Sadr fled Iran after he fell out with Khomeini over the role of the clergy in government, in June 1981.<sup>5</sup>

Although Khomeini had the final say on important foreign policy matters, and Ali Akbar Velayati, a messianic technocrat was the Foreign Minister, Ali Khamenei who was then president involved himself in many foreign policy decision making forums.

Khamenei's foreign policy approach, much like Khomeini, was very combative. He saw both the West<sup>6</sup> and the East as enemy of Islamic Republic and he was adamant that Iran should play no part in rapprochement with either of them. For some more moderate members of the regime, such as Rafsanjani, such a policy was viewed as being too costly. Rafsanjani's argument was that in the face of Iraq's overwhelming military equipment superiority, Iran had to do something. This is especially true when it came to the battle for the skies. Iran's air force was operating US made aircraft, many of which did not have spare parts, due to absence of relations between the two sides.<sup>7</sup> This meant that many of them were

grounded. And those which flew suffered from inferiority in areas such as electronic warfare. The other area was Tanks. Iraq was offered the latest and the most sophisticated Tanks which the USSR could offer<sup>8</sup>, while Iran operated US and British Tanks (such as the Sherman) which also suffered from lack of spare parts.

Initially, such factors did not move Khamenei and Khomeini. Their argument was that what Iran lacked in military equipment, it could make up in its superiority of number of soldiers. Instead of buying the latest mine clearing equipment, soldiers were taught that walking on mines and becoming martyrs for the revolution would ensure them a life time in paradise.<sup>9</sup>

Things took a turn for the worst for the isolationists when Khomeini, backed by Khamenei decided to go after the Tudeh party of Iran (party of masses of Iran). A communist party, the Tudeh initially backed Khomeini in the 1979 revolution against the Shah. This was done as part of a power sharing agreement with Khomeini whereupon after victory against the Shah, the party would receive a slice of power. The same arrangement was worked out with the Mojahedeen Khalgh Movement (MKM). A Marxist - Islamist movement, the organization was run by Masoud Rajavi. Many of his fighters trained with the PLO in Lebanon in the 1970s, and upon joining Khomeini's coalition, the Supreme Leader put their military skills to use against the Shah's forces. Things turned sour after Khomeini broke his agreement with the MKM. After gaining power, instead of sharing power, he turned against them. Bloody battles broke out all over Tehran. Khomeini wanted the MKM out and soon many of its members were either driven out, arrested, or killed. The same did not apply to members of the Tudeh party, for a while at least. It is believed that Khomeini was initially hesitant because he did not want to raise the ire of the Soviets. However this did not last long. In 1982, the full wrath of the regime was turned against the Tudeh party.<sup>10</sup> And with

5 Dieter Farwick, "Iran's Ex-President Banisadr: "People want Regime Change" 08/03/2010 World Security Network [http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/showArticle3.cfm?article\\_id=18215&topicID=44](http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/showArticle3.cfm?article_id=18215&topicID=44).

6 "The west is looking to create hostility between world's Shiites and Sunnis" *Shia Online*, Tehran, May 15, 2010, <http://shia-online.ir/article.asp?id=11421>.

7 Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, Yale University Press; Updated edition, August 1, 2006, P. 258.

8 Said Aburish, "Saddam: Secrets of his life and leadership" Interview with *PBS* <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saddam/interviews/aburish.html>.

9 Mathius Kuntzel, "Ahmadinejad's Demons" *The New Republic*, April 24, 2006, <http://www.matthiaskuntzel.de/contents/ahmadinejads-demons>.

10 Raju Samghabadi, Pico Iyer, "Iran: Hatred Without Discrimination Khomeini finds a new scapegoat" *TIME Magazine*, May 16, 1983, <http://www>.



this, Iran lost the chance of receiving some kind of Soviet assistance, even if it was going to be in form of weapons only.

What is perhaps impressive is that during the ensuing domestic chaos and a full fledged war, Khomeini did not lose sight of his ambition to export the revolution to the region, starting with Lebanon. The ensuing chaos there as well as the oppressed Shiite population offered a not to be missed opportunity. The Shiites had suffered many years from discrimination from their Sunni and Maronite compatriots. This was followed by the Palestinians who after Black September of 1970 moved to Lebanon in great numbers, and started to abuse the hospitality of the local Shiite population of southern Lebanon by using their territory to attack Israel, whereupon they had to suffer the military retaliations and pay the price. This was followed by Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Initially the Shiite population of Lebanon welcomed the Israeli Defense Forces as their liberator against the Palestinians. However, they soon turned their anger against them, because they saw them as the occupier.

To gain the support of Lebanese Shiites, Khomeini first dispatched Mostafa Chamran, a revolutionary figure<sup>11</sup>, who had moved back to Iran after obtaining his PhD from Berkeley University in the United States. He tried with the Amal movement and failed. They were not willing to recognize Ayatollah Khomeini as Valiye Faghih (source of emulation). However, where Chamran failed, Ali Akbar Mohtashamipour succeeded.<sup>12</sup> The then Iranian ambassador to Syria, he managed to find enough support amongst local Shiites, especially more religious figures to create the movement which we now know as Hezbollah.

During Khamenei's term Hezbollah helped to serve Iran's interest. Not only did the organization allow Iran to extend its reach near the Mediterranean, it also helped strengthen its relationship with Syria. More important than that was Iran's ability to use Hezbollah to

pressure the West. Through its hostage taking activities, Iran managed to elevate its status in the West as an important actor. Perhaps Iran's biggest achievement from Hezbollah was the Iran Gate affair. Through Hezbollah's hostage taking operations, Iran managed to work out a deal to receive advanced Western weaponry, in exchange for the release of US hostages. The weapons which were supplied by Israel (through US mediation) were instrumental in ensuring that Iran did not lose the war against Iraq. In a strange twist of fate, weapons from a country whose destruction was repeatedly called for by Iran saved the regime from defeat by Saddam Hussein.

## Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution of Iraq (SCIRI)

Iran's other success in exporting the revolution during the reign of the revolution was the formations of Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution of Iraq (SCIRI). It was founded in 1982 by Mohammad Baqir Al Hakim, who was the son of Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim,<sup>13</sup> a prominent Iraqi Shiite clergy who for many years had been combating Saddam's forces. He had to flee Iraq, as attacks against Shiites continued by Saddam after the start of the Iraq - Iran War. It must be noted that the Shiites also antagonized Saddam prior to the war by taking part in subversive activities against his regime.

It must be noted that before SCIRI was formed, the majority of militant attacks by Iraqi Shiites against Saddam Hussein were carried out by the Dawa party, which was originally established in 1967. According to the eminent Shiite theologian Vali Nasr, the aim of the organization was to "promote Islamic values and ethics, political awareness, combat secularism, and create an Islamic state in Iraq". However back then, the Sunnis were reluctant to hand over power to Shiites as many of them viewed the Shiites as heretics. Furthermore, at that time, just after the Six Day War, Arab secular nationalism was far more popular. Religious ideologies such as those presented by Dawa were shunned upon.<sup>14</sup>

time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,925941,00.html#ixzz0u1WCCCKON.

<sup>11</sup> "Chamran a figure in image of Lebanese resistance" *Hamshahri Online*, Tehran, August 26, 2009, <http://www.hamshahronline.ir/News/?id=81748>.

<sup>12</sup> Ali Mohtadi, "Is Hezbollah the commander or soldier?" *Tehran Review*, August 12, 2009, <http://tehranreview.net/articles/619>.

<sup>13</sup> "Who's who in Iraq: Sciri" *BBC News*, June 17, 2004, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3769991.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3769991.stm).

<sup>14</sup> Roger Shanahan, "The Islamic Da'wa Party: Past Development and Future Prospects", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 8, No. 2, June, 2004.



This is despite the fact that Dawa's founder Mohammad Baqir Al Sadr relied on the idea of Wilayat Al Umma (Governance of the people), meaning public participation and leadership in the political system. This is in direct contrast to Wilayat Al Ulama (Governance of Islamic scholars). This still did not manage to sway the critics in Iraq.

After the Iranian revolution, the Dawa party's Governance of the people system put it at odds with the regime.<sup>15</sup> Initially, its system of relying on people's rule, rather than the rule of the clergy (which is the case for Iran) made it difficult for the Iranian government to view it as a spiritual and ideological partner. However, this did not stop its members from fleeing to Iran.

As time went by and members of the Dawa party realized that they wouldn't be returning to Iraq, those who stayed in Iran accepted Iran's version of Governance by Clergy, which eventually led to the creation of SCIRI. This served SCIRI's ultimate goal of acting as an umbrella group for all Iraqi Shiite groups.<sup>16</sup>

This organization, which included many members of Dawa were instrumental in Iran's efforts to undermine Saddam and his supporters in the Persian Gulf states. Attacks in 1983 against military and commercial targets in Kuwait were attributed to Dawa members, acting on Iran's behalf<sup>17</sup>. Meanwhile, SCIRI's membership increased as more Iraqi Shiites soldiers defected from the Iraqi army and joined Iranian forces. So much so that entire brigades of Iraqi soldiers were set up, called the Badr brigade.

As the war against Iraq continued, Iran's foreign policy relations with the West and the rest of the international community deteriorated. And Khomeini was aware of this. In a meeting with Iran's ambassadors at his Jamaran residence, he told them "I can count Iran's friends on one hand". This continued until his death,

<sup>15</sup> Aaron Glantz, "Shia Party Rises From the Ashes", Inter Press Service, <http://www.antiwar.com/glantz/?articleid=5002>.

<sup>16</sup> Faleh A Jabar, "Clerics, Tribes, Ideologues & Urban Dwellers in the South of Iraq: The Potential for Rebellion", *Iraq at the Crossroads* (eds. Toby Dodge & Steven Simon), Adelphi Papers 354, IISS 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizb'allah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1997, p.117.

which coincided with the end of Khamenei's presidency.

However, the exact opposite trend occurred regarding Iran's ambitions to increase its influence in the region. While Iran became weaker in the west, between 1980- 1989, it was sowing the seeds of a very strong and successful regional alliance in Iraq and Lebanon.

## Rafsanjani Presidency (1989-1997): Constructive Islam

Rafsanjani started his presidency soon after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and the end of the bloody war against Iraq. He presided over a country which had just lost 500,000 soldiers, more than a million injured, and had suffered somewhere \$300 - \$500 billion of economic damage.<sup>18</sup>

The priority of the regime at that time was the reconstruction of the country. It had little other choice. With millions of displaced and unemployed people, for the sake of its own stability and future, it needed to repair the massive damages which the country had suffered.

This however, did not mean that it had given up on its regional ambitions. In fact, the opposite was true.

It is far more important to note the fact that their similar regional ambitions were one of the few goals that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Rafsanjani had in common, in what was and still is<sup>19</sup> a very rocky relationship, which almost imploded in later years. During the years of Rafsanjani's presidency, they clashed over many issues. These included Rafsanjani's plans to privatize the economy, and control of the Bonyads (charitable foundations). One of their biggest bones of contention was the role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC). Rafsanjani had a very rocky relationship with this organization. In fact, this is one of the main reasons (amongst others) why Khomeini

<sup>18</sup> "Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)", *Global Security*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/iran-iraq.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> "Differences over Azad University were resolved after Khamenei's ruling" *Al Arabiya* (Persian), April 7, 2010, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/07/04/113009.html>.



did not chose him for the post of Supreme Leader. In fact as soon as Rafsanjani took the post of presidency, he took away the seat of the head of the IRGC's intelligence branch from the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC). Instead, he handed over many of its responsibilities the Ministry of Information and Security, which was in charge of Iran's main intelligence agency, known as VAVAK.<sup>20</sup> This created much resentment against him, and is one of the reasons why Ahmadinejad received such solid support from the IRGC in the 2005 and 2009 presidential elections.<sup>21</sup>

There was also the issue of rapprochement with the West. Rafsanjani saw it as a necessity for the reconstruction of the country. He saw the conservative's ideological animosity towards the West as detrimental to the *maslehat* (interests) of the regime. He also saw it as dangerous. Back then, the USSR had just collapsed, while America had successfully invaded Kuwait. As much as Khamenei disagreed, Rafsanjani saw the United States as a new unchallenged power in the world. Its forces decimated Saddam's mighty army in Kuwait, while the world cheered on and was very happy to assist. Iran fought Saddam and could not beat him in eight years, while diplomatically, in exact contrast to the US, Iran was criticized for defending itself against what was a full invasion of its sovereign territory by a foreign army.

This realization had a profound impact on Iran's regional ambitions. This was in fact why Hezbollah turned its focus away from the US, towards Israel. It is by no accident that the militant Shiite organization started to target Israel exclusively and no longer kidnapped Americans. This was primarily due to new calculations which were worked out in Tehran. The fact that Israel's occupation of south Lebanon continued unabated also added more validity to such thinking. By occupying Lebanese land, Israel provided Hezbollah and Tehran with the reason it was looking for to justify its anti-Israel policies to millions of Muslims, especially Shiites.

<sup>20</sup> Meir Javedanfar, "PSI Handbook of Global Security and Intelligence: National Approaches (Intelligence and the Quest for Security)", Praeger Security International, London, 2006, pp.201-208.

<sup>21</sup> Kambiz Forouhar, "Iran Revolutionary Guards Amass Power While Backing Ahmadinejad" Bloomberg News, June 28, 2009, <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=a6btiOq7DxNY>.

With Saddam becoming increasingly weakened from UN sanctions, the UN imposed no fly zones, as well as massive defeat in Kuwait; when it came to Iraq, the Iranian regime decided to bide its time. Instead it focused on nurturing the Iraqi Shiites who had fled to Iran. They were housed, their children were educated, and they received government subsidized health care. Meanwhile many of the former members of the Badr brigade were absorbed and trained by the IRGC<sup>22</sup>. The thinking in Iran was that at worst, if there is no revolution in Iran, these new Iraqis would become defenders of the regime in Tehran. And at best, if one day there is revolution in Iraq, they would be sent back as allies and operatives of Iran.

When it came to Hezbollah, Iran decided to go on the offensive. It saw its members as dedicated to Khamenei's Velayat Faghih system, and as a disciplined force that was willing to fight Israel. Its members were much more focused and religious than other anti-Israeli groups of their time.

Therefore the Iranian government decided to use Hezbollah to strike at Israel and at its enemies. While investing heavily in Hezbollah's social and military infrastructure, it used Hezbollah members to track down and kill members of the opposition abroad. This was demonstrated to the international community on 17th of September 1992, when Iran was caught using Lebanese Shiites in the assassination of four Kurdish Iranian opposition figures at the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin.<sup>23</sup>

There were also the attacks against the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires in 1992, which was followed by another massive attack in the same city against the Israel - Argentine Mutual Association (Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina) building in 1994. The first attack is thought to be in revenge for the killing of Sheikh Mousavi in February 1992. According to the US investigative reporter Gareth Porter, the Iranians had another reason to be angry with Israel. Iran had just secured an agreement for the supply of enriched Uranium (or reactor) xxx from Argentina for its nuclear reactors, only to

<sup>22</sup> "50 percent of Badr brigade were former Iraqi POWs in Iran" *Jahan News*, Tehran, January, 1, 2009 <http://www.jahannews.com/prtb9sba.rhbf8piuur.html>.

<sup>23</sup> "Germany Releases 'Mykonos' Assassins" *Der Spiegel*, November 12, 2007, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,522584,00.html>.



find the deal torpedoed by the United States, and what the Iranians viewed as Israel's invisible hand.

What was interesting and considered as a major achievement by Rafsanjani was that he managed to use Hezbollah to fulfill Iran's regional goals, while at the same time, making concrete steps in order to improve Iran's relations with the West, especially Europe. This is why Rafsanjani's term is deemed as a constructive period in Iran's foreign policy.

## Khatami Presidency (1997-2005): Reformist Islam

The underlying principal of Khatami's presidency was the reform of the Islamic Republic. The reforms which he was calling for were for issues such as human rights, democracy, freedom of speech and better relations with the West.

This contrasted to what Khamenei stood for. In fact, the relationship between the two was always rocky. Many of Khamenei's supporters, especially those in the IRGC saw Khatami as someone who had deviated from the path of the revolution.<sup>24</sup> Even Rafsanjani did not like Khatami and saw him as too pro-Western and too pro-democracy - so much so that in 1993 he fired him from the post of Ministry of Islamic Guidance, and replaced him with Ali Larijani, who is now the speaker of the Majles.

So why did Khamenei allow Khatami to run for elections in the first place? And why did he not allow cheatings in the favor of his competitor Ali Akbar Nategh Nouri, who was much more conservative and in line with Khamenei's thinking?

The answer to this question is related to a very important global event - the Asian economic crisis, and the global recession which preceded and followed it. These events caused oil prices to hover around the \$10-\$15 per barrel.<sup>25</sup> This is the lowest price the Islamic Republic had dealt with since the start of the revolution. And for a country which earns more than 80% of its

income from the sale of oil, it was a process that could not be ignored.

This weakened the hands of the Conservatives. Khamenei was under severe economic pressure. The war damaged areas were still not rehabilitated, and to top it all Rafsanjani had used many of the state enterprises to line his own pockets.<sup>26</sup> The Islamic Republic had no choice but to get closer to the West, for the sake of its own economy.

This is why during Khatami's presidency, we saw numerous trips by the smiling Iranian president to numerous European capitals, such as Rome, Madrid and Paris. His dialogue of civilizations had many supporters and listeners in European capitals. Even the Americans decided to try their luck with the new administration. First was the American wrestling delegation which visited Iran in 2001. This was the first visit by an American sports team since the start of the revolution. The American wrestler who beat his Iranian counter part and won the gold medal was given a picture of Khomeini to hold. As a sign of respect, he not only held it in his arms, he also lifted it above his head. This was a momentous occasion. The wrestler's country had been labeled as "The Great Satan", yet as a guest, he paid respect to his hosts. There was also the case of US Secretary of State Madeline Albright apologizing for the CIA's role in the 1953 Mousadeq coup.<sup>27</sup>

Because of Khamenei's opposition, Khatami was unable to use such gestures mend fences with Washington. Despite that, the period of his presidency coincided with the most successful period for Iran's foreign policy. This was due to a number of important factors:

First and foremost, the international community, especially the European Union, favored a reformist Iran. This led to significant investments in Iran's economy, as well as closer relations between the two. This was further boosted by the American invasion of Afghanistan, which was followed by the invasion of Iraq, which served as a massive boost for Iran's Iraq policy. The United States removed Iran's

<sup>24</sup> "Islam News: serious differences between Iran's leaders" *Rianovosty* (Russia), May 30, 2010, <http://pe.rian.ru/articles/20090819/122758154.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Henry Liu, "The real problems with \$50 oil", *Asia Times*, May 26, 2005, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Global\\_Economy/GE26Dj02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Global_Economy/GE26Dj02.html).

<sup>26</sup> "Does Mr Rafsanjani agree with corruption?" *Ansar News*, Tehran, May 20, 2009, <http://www.ansarnews.com/news/1843/>.

<sup>27</sup> Lionel Behner, "Timeline: U.S.-Iran Contacts" Council on Foreign Relations, March 9, 2007, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/12806/timeline.html>.



biggest regional enemy. Furthermore, after years of investing in Iraqi refugees, it was payback time. The overthrow of Saddam by Western coalition forces allowed Iran to flood Iraq with its Shiite allies. Nouri Al Maliki, as well as Ayatollah Sistani, were just a few. Rank and file of bureaucrats, politicians and intelligence people cooperated with Tehran. Iran not only started to take over Iraqi politics, it started taking over the Iraqi economy as well. Iranians started buying up property in Shiite cities such as Najaf and Karbala. Iranian operated hotels sprang up soon after the fall of Saddam. Iranian made products started flooding the Iraqi market. Iranian made bricks soon replaced Iraqi ones in Iraq's booming construction market.<sup>28</sup> The results were apparent to all – Iraq started to become an Iranian satellite

The same happened to Iran's relations with Hezbollah. The fact that Western oriented reformists sat in the presidential office did not hinder Iran's relations with Hezbollah. In fact, the opposite was true. Ali Akbar Mohtashamipour, the Iranian man who started Hezbollah in Lebanon was in fact an ardent reformist. He is still is a reformist to this day. So much so that Ahmadinejad's supporters even threatened him after the elections<sup>29</sup>, and later on, he was removed from the important post of committee for the "assistance for the Palestinian Intifadah".<sup>30</sup> The fact that he had set up Hezbollah did not help him. However to all those who do remember him, they eulogize him for his massive impact on strengthening Iran's economic and military leverage during Khatami's reign. The fact that Lebanon witnessed Israel's withdrawal, followed by a massive construction boom, gave Iran the vacuum it needed to improve its position there.

Last but not least was Iran's nuclear program. Khatami, just like Khamenei wanted a nuclear bomb. In fact, the majority of Iranians, even those opposed to this regime, want a nuclear bomb. However unlike the conservatives such

as Ahmadinejad, the reformists who preceded them turned it into an important foreign policy leveraging tool. They used it to bring the European Union closer, and to extract concessions from its. Through protracted negotiations, they had the European Union knocking on their door. Jack Straw, the then British Foreign Secretary traveled to Tehran no less than 16 times. The fact that the man in charge of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) was Hassan Rowhani, who was another reformist also helped Khatami convince Khamenei that it was worth courting the Europeans. Khamenei listened to Rowhani. The fact that Khatami managed to convince Khamenei to agree to a temporary suspension<sup>31</sup> of Uranium enrichment was a major achievement for the reformists. What Khamenei asked for return was for a package of economic incentives, which included spare parts for commercial aircraft. The European Union, represented by Germany, Britain and France was ready for this. However, the United States did not agree. This cost Khatami his leverage and his argument that rapprochement with the West was in Iran's interest. Had America accepted, the job of weakening the conservatives in Iran would have been much easier, in 2005. The fact that the US had to wait till 2009 until it came up with the Obama nuclear swap offer to weaken them, meant that Khamenei was given four years to continue with the nuclear program, at a very low economic and political cost.

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## Ahmadinejad's Presidency (2005–Present): Principalist Islam

The presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad ushered in a period in which Khamenei finally decided to do what he could not do since he had entered politics: to implement the principals of the Islamic revolution of 1979 into Iranian foreign policy. Khamenei was the commander who, until Ahmadinejad's election, had always had soldiers who had been insubordinate, in one way or another. Since he assumed the captaincy of the ship of the Islamic republic in 1989, he always faced some kind of resistance from his presidents. Rafsanjani and Khatami did ultimately listen to him, but they were no "yes men". They always tried to polish, change or in

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28 Gina Chon, "Iran's Cheap Goods Stifle Iraq Economy" *Wall Street Journal*, March 18, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123732669334561799.html>.

29 "Unexpected conversation with Mohtashamipour" Center for documentation of the Islamic Republic October, 2009, <http://www.irdc.ir/fa/content/8014/default.aspx>.

30 "Mohtashamipour is removed by Larijani's ruling" *Aftab News*, March, 2010, <http://www.aftabnews.ir/vdcgny9y.ak9374pprra.html>.

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31 "Iran firm on nuclear resumption", *BBC News*, July 27, 2005 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4720649.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4720649.stm).



some cases cast away his ideas. This stopped when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was placed into the presidential office in 2005<sup>32</sup> and in 2009<sup>33</sup> through fixing election results. He was the soldier who Khamenei was always looking for. In fact, one could even go as far saying that he is the son that Khamenei always wanted.

Ahmadinejad himself has very little say on Iran's foreign policy. Therefore, when it comes to Iran's foreign policy, what Ahmadinejad sees and says is in accordance to Khamenei's wishes.

## Regional Ambitions

During Ahmadinejad's first term between 2005-2009, Iran's regional standing improved significantly. This was due to a number of reasons. First and foremost, President Bush was the present that Khamenei had always wanted. He was an unpopular man in the international community, who had a terrible standing with the Islamic world due to his invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. More importantly, Bush gave Khamenei what he always wanted: threat of war and regime change. To conservatives in Iran, this is like Oxygen. They need it to justify their domestic and foreign policies. They despise the exact opposite. Or to put it another way, the sound of Israeli or American war planes over Iran's nuclear installations would be viewed as a threat to Iran's nuclear program. However, the sound of US Air Force One approaching Tehran's Imam Khomeini airport for a state visit would be considered as a threat against the regime's very existence. Rapprochement with the United States could destroy the regime. It would dissolve the anti - US glue, one of the last factors keeping it together.

There was also the question of legitimacy. During Ahmadinejad's first term, the regime had legitimacy, as limited as it may have been. Many Arabs, especially Shiites saw its political system as much more democratic and efficient than those of other regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Not only was Iran able to strengthen its relations with Nouri Al Maliki in Iraq, Moqtada

<sup>32</sup> "Iran official alleges election fraud", *CNN*, June 25, 2005, <http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/06/25/iran.claim/index.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Juan Cole, "Stealing the Iranian Election" *Informed Comment*, June 13, 2009, <http://www.juancole.com/2009/06/stealing-iranian-election.html>.

Al Sadr, after his initial hostility,<sup>34</sup> was brought in as an ally. At the same time, Iran, despite Hezbollah's heavy military losses in the 2006 war, managed to use the weakness of the Sunnis and the pro- American camp to strengthen it to the point where it managed to achieve the veto vote which it was looking for many years in Lebanon's cabinet. At the same time, Iran started cooperating with Al Qaeda in Afghanistan,<sup>35</sup> against NATO forces.

However two factors weakened Iran's regional standing in the region since then. First and foremost, Ahmadinejad's controversial reelection in 2009 and the ensuing demonstrations caused serious damage to the regime's credibility, in Iran and in the region. The second was Obama's election in 2008. His outreach to the Iranian government and his efforts to improve relations with the Islamic world stood at odds against Iran's interests. His peaceful overtures seriously undermined Iran's efforts to portray the United States as the 'Great Satan'. Last but not least, Iran's nuclear policies which led to sanctions actually worsened Iran's position, as sanctions damage Iran's economic standing, meaning less economic aid being available for allies. There was also the ensuing isolation, which led to emergence of new competitors in the region, in the form of Turkey. The very fact that Erdogan has managed to emerge as a new figure in the Islamic world is testimony to Iran's failure in the region.

## Conclusion

The Islamic Republic of Iran has regional ambitions. However, such ambitions are not exclusive to Iran's current clerical rulers. The Shah had regional ambitions, as did many of Iran's rulers stretching back thousands of years.

The only difference with the current regime is the fact that it is trying to use its version of Islam in order to spread its influence.

However, much like its predecessors, the current regime will find that its impact will be limited. Iranians are and always will be viewed

<sup>34</sup> Meir Jevedanfar, "Sadr Rages Against Iran" *Pajamas Media*, March 31, 2008, <http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/sadr-rages-against-iran/>.

<sup>35</sup> Tom Coghlan, "Tehran accused of arming Taleban with weapons and explosives", *London Times*, March 18, 2009.

as a minority in the Middle East. Thus they will always find it a challenge to spread their influence. Therefore, Iran's policy planners have to be prudent in who they choose as allies, as any overt exercise in trying to exert regional control could backfire.

Ultimately, the success of Iran's foreign policy depends on stability and legitimacy at home.

The longer the current differences at senior levels of Iran's leadership continue, the more its standing could be hurt, even amongst its allies. The fact that these days, Hamas is more comfortable waving Turkish instead of Iranian flags is not due to Turkish money - it is because of the Turkish government's legitimacy at home and abroad.



# Iran's Ambitions for Regional Hegemony



# Ethnic Politics in Iran: Post 2009 Presidential Elections

Brenda Shaffer

Iran is a multi-ethnic country. Approximately half of Iran's population is comprised of non-Persian minorities, including Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Turkmen, Arab and Baluch. The ethnic minorities live in concentrations in the border areas, and most of the minority groups share ties with co-ethnics in bordering states (Azerbaijan, Iraq, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan).

Most mainstream publications in Iranian studies underplay the role of ethnic minorities in Iran's politics, claiming that most of the ethnic minorities identify strongly with Iran after many generations of mutual statehood and sharing of a common Shi'i identity. However, the modern history of Iran shows that at each juncture when central power has significantly eroded in Iran, the ethnic minorities have attempted to advance independence or autonomy. Examples include the last period of the Qajar dynasty, during World War Two, and during the first year after of the Islamic Revolution. In addition, identity relations are dynamic and historical ties do not necessary guarantee continued mutual identity. Moreover, expanded access to media and information in recent years has increased the ties and interconnectivity between many representatives of the ethnic minorities in Iran and co-ethnics abroad and subsequently influenced their sense shared identity.

This article examines the role of Iran's ethnic minorities in political developments in Iran in the post-2009 presidential election period. The article makes a number of main points.

First, in the post-2009 election period the ethnic minorities have not played a meaningful role in the demonstrations and activities and most likely will not be a sphere head in the movement for regime change in Iran at this juncture. However, they may play a tipping role in the event of the emergence of a major struggle in Iran.

Second, one of the main reasons that the minorities have not been active in the post-

elections dissent is that they do not see this struggle as having any impact on the policies toward ethnic minorities. Moreover, a key factor in their lack of cooperation with the reform movement is that most of this camp, while articulating support for democracy in Iran, does not support granting language and cultural rights to the ethnic minorities.

Third, while the minorities have not played a prominent role in the post-election demonstrations, the frequency and intensity of violent attacks against institutions and representatives of the state in the provinces that are comprised primarily of ethnic minorities, have increased in 2009-2010 and has become a major policy challenge for the ruling regime.

## Background on Iran's Ethnic Minorities

While commonly referred to as Persia and the inhabitants as Persians, Iran is a multi-ethnic polity. Most of the published statistics on Iran's ethnic makeup are quite politicized: the regime tends to underreport the numbers of the ethnic minorities, while activists of the ethnic minorities, especially advocates living abroad, tend to inflate their figures. Iran does not include primary language or identity in surveys, nor can independent researchers conduct surveys in Iran and expect to receive uninhibited answers. Thus, all data on the size of different ethnic groups are estimates.

The Azerbaijanis, Iran's largest ethnic minority, are Shi'a who speak a Turkic language very similar to that spoken in Turkey. They number over twenty million – approximately one third of Iran's total population. Most of Iran's Azerbaijani minority is clustered in Iran's northwestern provinces that border on the Republic of Azerbaijan (Ardebil, East Azerbaijan, and West Azerbaijan provinces). Iranian Kurds are the next largest minority, numbering eight million, and



they live primarily in the northwestern provinces that border Turkey and Iraq. Developments among the Kurds in the neighboring states affect activities and identity trends of the Kurds in Iran. In addition, the Iranian Kurds are supported by a very active Diaspora political organization in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Arabs,<sup>1</sup> Turkmen, and Baluch each count approximately two million members, with the Arab minority concentrated in the southwestern province of Khuzestan which neighbors Iraq, the Turkmen inhabiting the northeastern province of Khorasan which is adjacent to Turkmenistan, and the Baluch are located in southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan which border both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Many of the Kurds, Turkmen, and Baluch endure double differentiation in Iran because they are also Sunni Muslims.

The question of ethnic politics in Iran overlaps with a number main policy issues in Iran including center-periphery relations, relations between the regime and the non-Shi'i groups, economic development policies and foreign policy. Tehran is a multi-ethnic metropolis with a large presence of all of Iran's ethnic groups, many of whom are highly assimilated into the dominant Persian culture. Ethnic minorities, however, are the majority in Iran's underdeveloped provinces and are not nearly as assimilated. Being concentrated near Iran's borders compounds their identity challenges with economic disadvantages. In the last decade, ethnic minorities in Iran's provinces have attempted to elevate themselves economically by using their native languages to develop direct trade with neighboring states, which is often facilitated by co-ethnic and family ties. The presence of relatively large groups of ethnic minorities situated directly across the border from co-ethnic majorities in neighboring states creates a security challenge for the regime and significantly affects Tehran's bilateral relations with its neighbors.

Despite its Islamic ideology that in theory does not differentiate among Muslims along ethnic lines, the Islamic Republic systematically discriminates against the minority languages and cultures. Formally, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran grants language rights to ethnic minorities for education and for print and broadcast media. In reality, Iran has not

allowed its ethnic minorities to teach or study in their own languages in schools, and the non-Persian language press and publications have been very limited. Throughout Iran's provinces where ethnic minority-language speakers dominate, teachers and government officials are obligated to conduct business with their own co-ethnics in Persian, the official language of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In his report on Iran, Maurice Copithorne, the Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights stated that "there can be no doubt that the treatment of minorities in Iran does not meet the norms set out in the Declaration on Minorities or in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."<sup>2</sup> While Iran prohibits collective language and cultural rights to the ethnic minorities, individual members of the ethnic minorities that do to promote ethnic based culture or rights, are allowed access to positions of power in the regime and a number of the pinnacles of power in the political system, military, and religious circles are held by ethnic minorities.

There is great variation in the level of identification and relationship with the regime among member of Iran's ethnic minorities. For instance, among the largest ethnic minority, the Azerbaijanis, one can identify large numbers for whom their primary collective identity is Iranian, and the Azerbaijani element is confined to the realm of folklore and family culture. Approximately one third of the ruling clerical elite are ethnically Azerbaijani and many identify strongly as Muslims and Iranians.<sup>3</sup> For instance, Ayatollah 'Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme leader, is of Azerbaijani origin as is Mir Hossein Mousavi, leader of Iran's oppositionist Green Movement. Some Azerbaijanis strive for language and cultural rights, but desire neither self-rule nor union with the Republic of Azerbaijan. In contrast, Azerbaijanis who see their Azerbaijani identity as primary and have a separatist agenda are also active.<sup>4</sup> In Iran, most

2 **Report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran**, prepared by the Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights, Mr. Maurice Danby Copithorne, pursuant to Commission resolution 2001/17, Commission on Human Rights, Fifty-eighth session, January 16, 2002 <[http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridocda.nsf/0/40FC68CD8A9A97F9C1256B8100525F97/\\$File/G0210126.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridocda.nsf/0/40FC68CD8A9A97F9C1256B8100525F97/$File/G0210126.pdf?OpenElement)>.

3 Michael Fischer, **Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution**, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1980, p. 78.

4 For more on identity trends among Azerbaijanis in Iran, see Brenda Shaffer, **Borders and Brethren: Iran**

1 The Iranian Arabs are often referred to as Ahwazi Arabs.



ethnic groups seeking expansion of their cultural rights view themselves as Iranian citizens and seek to change Tehran's policies, not Iran's borders. However, identity trends are dynamic and affected by opportunities, government policies and the general situation in Iran.

Since the early 1990s, identity trends have been influenced by Iranian citizen's access to television programming broadcast from abroad on a regular basis via satellite transmission. Iran's ethnic minorities tend to watch television broadcasts from abroad in their native languages. For example, Iran's Azerbaijanis overwhelmingly tend to watch Turkish television, and many Kurds view Kurdish-language broadcasts from Europe. These broadcasts have helped cement ties with co-ethnics abroad and reinforce native language knowledge and use among Iran's ethnic minorities. For some, it has also reinforced their particular ethnic identity and divided the entertainment and the cultural environment of many of Iran's citizens. In order to counteract this phenomenon, the regime has promulgated a number of campaigns to confiscate satellite receivers. During the summer of 2006, Tehran intensified the efforts to eliminate the satellite receivers, especially in Iran's Kurdish-populated provinces.

Tehran has redrawn the borders of Iran's provinces a number of times to prevent ethnic minorities from attaining a majority population in any specific province. Tehran has also broken up a number of provinces into smaller units, in order to weaken the power of ethnic-majority provinces, such as East Azerbaijan which was divided in 1993 into two provinces. The new province of Ardebil does not carry the name Azerbaijan in its title, despite the fact that ethnic Azerbaijanis still constitute the majority in that province.

One of the additional contending issues between Tehran and Iran's ethnic minorities is the appointment of non-native governors to ethnic-majority provinces. Since governors are appointed to the provinces by the central government and not elected, Iran's provinces are frequently ruled by non-native governors who are not versed in the local language or custom, and these appointments have often spurred protests.

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*and the Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2002.

Ethnic politics can be found in activities of a number of the states' institutions, especially the parliament. In the Iranian parliament, unofficial ethnic-based caucuses are functioning and vocal, impacting policies relating to the Iranian provinces where their co-ethnics form a majority, and on foreign policy issues affecting the states where their co-ethnics are the majority, such as the Republic of Azerbaijan. These caucuses are comprised of members of ethnic groups from a variety of regions, including Tehran. In a number of instances, members of the ethnic-based caucuses have addressed the Iranian parliament in their own languages, especially Kurdish, and have been ordered to end their oratories.

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## Post 2009 Presidential Elections: Less Public Demonstrations, but More Acts of Violence

During the 2009 election campaign, candidates attempted to court the vote of the ethnic minorities. During the campaign for the 1997 presidential elections and 2005 elections, candidates also attempted to appeal to the ethnic minorities and court their vote by committing to expand language and cultural rights of the ethnic minorities. On the eve of the 2009 elections, Mousavi's *Kalameh Sebz* (Green Word) published editorials in the Turkmen and Kurdish languages declaring Mousavi's promised policy of treating all ethnic groups in Iran with respect.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, Mousavi has not called for any change to improve the status of the minority languages, a central issue of concern to the ethnic minority activists in Iran. The fact that candidates made these campaign promises indicates that Iran's politicians assess that the ethnic minorities desire expansion of rights; thus, it has become a salient political issue.

The contested June 2009 presidential elections in Iran served as a catalyst for open, mass demonstrations by large segments of the Iranian public against the policies of the ruling regime in Iran. The demonstrations reignited a number of times in the year following the faulted elections and encompassed a wide range of sectors in Iranian society: labor organizations, women,

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<sup>5</sup> Press TV (Tehran), May 28, 2009.



reformists, economically disenfranchised and more. The ethnic minorities were conspicuously insubstantial in the post-election activity in Iran. In comparison to other periods of public contention with the ruling regime in the Islamic Republic, the post-election demonstrations were centered in cities which have clear Persian majorities. This contrasts with periods such as the student demonstrations in 1999, when anti-regime activity was quite prominent in the ethnic majority cities, such as Tabriz, the capital of the East Azerbaijan province.

A main factor contributing to the lack of political mobilization for the ethnic minorities to the post-election protests is that the central actors in the protest movement do not support most of the goals of the ethnic political movements. The main ethnic political organizations view the policies of the main figures in the Green Movement, such as Mir Hossein Mousavi, as similar to those of the ruling regime toward the ethnic minorities. In addition, the main nucleus of the veteran reformists, while supporting emergence of democracy in Iran, apparently does not support extending minority and cultural rights to the ethnic minorities. Consequently, there is little cooperation between the main opposition forces and the ethnic political movements in Iran. At the same time, in response to the July 2010 twin suicide bombing in Zahedan, reportedly opposition forces condemned the regime's policies of dismissing the legitimate ethnic demands and heavy handling of the minorities that in the end encourages them to conduct terrorist activities.<sup>6</sup> This perhaps signals a willingness among the opposition movement to form new policies towards Iran's ethnic minorities.

In contrast to the decline in open political protests, following the 2009 presidential elections, significant violent activity has been conducted in the provinces comprised primarily of ethnic minorities against institutions and representatives of the regime, especially towards the Revolutionary Guards. This round of ethnic-based violent attacks emerged in 2006, especially in the Baluch, Kurdish and Arab populated areas. The trend of violent attacks seems to have intensified in 2010. In the post-elections crackdown, a large number of ethnic minorities, especially Kurds, have been

executed. In addition, journalists attempting to publish in the ethnic languages have received harsh prison sentences. The following is an examination of the main ethnic based protests and violent activity in Iran during the post- 2009 presidential elections in Iran.

## Baluch

For close to a decade, Iran has been battling an insurgency in the Sistan-Baluchistan province, the center of the population of the Baluch minority in Iran. The Sistan-Baluchistan province is one of Iran's most impoverished and underdeveloped, and possesses one of the highest rates of unemployment in Iran. The province borders on Pakistan and Afghanistan, sharing ties to co-ethnic group members in both these two states. In the Baluch populated province in neighboring Pakistan, Baluchistan, insurgency has raged since 2004.

In recent years, Iranian soldiers and Revolutionary Guards have undergone a large number of attacks in this province and the regime does not maintain effective control in the region. A major outlawed extremist group, Jundallah (God's Soldiers), operates in the Baluch province. Since its emergence in 2003, Jundallah has taken credit for scores of kidnappings and killings and approximately 15 major terror attacks. For instance, on the eve of the elections in May 2009, the Jundallah attacked President Ahmadinejad's head campaign office in Zahedan. The Jundallah escalated its activities in December 2008, when it introduced suicide bombing to its activities and has conducted a number of major suicide bombings in the province in the 2009-2010 period. On the eve of the elections, Jundallah conducted a suicide bombing attack in a Shiite mosque in the province, killing 25 people.

The Jundallah has targeted its attacks at Revolution Guard members. For instance, in October 2009 the organization took responsibility for the killing of five high ranking Revolutionary Guards in the province. Among the most dramatic attacks in the period of 2009-2010 were the twin suicide bombings on July 15, 2010 at the Jameh mosque in the city of Zahedan. This attack left 27 people dead and more than 300 injured. Among the dead, were 15 members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards. The attacks took place on the Iranian national Day of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and also the birthday of Imam Hussein, the third Shiite imam and the attack

<sup>6</sup> "Resurgence of 'crushed' extremists in Iran", *The National*, July 15, 2010.



targeted the Revolutionary Guards on this symbolic day of their unit. In response to the July 2010 suicide bombing in the Zahedan mosque, Iranian officials have threatened that they will consider entering neighboring Pakistan in order to pursue terrorists. Iranian officials claimed that the Jundallah is supported by Washington and stated that the "US would pay" for the attacks. This striking attack followed the execution of the leader of Jundallah, Abdolmalek Rigi, which took place in June 2010 following his capture in February 2010.<sup>7</sup> The July 2010 double suicide bombing close to a month after Rigi's execution signified that the organization is still vibrant and active, despite losing its leader. At the same time, it is not clear how much popular support among Iran's Baluch the organization commands or Baluch identification with its goals.

## Kurds

In the post-election period, the Kurdish provinces have been a center of an anti-regime insurgency. The insurgency began in 2007 and has evidently intensified in 2010. The Iranian press has reported on confrontations with Kurdish armed groups throughout this period. In the post-election period, the Kurdish rebels succeeded to assassinate in September 2009 a number of high ranking officials of the Iranian Kurdistan province. In April 2010, rebels killed the Chief Prosecutor of the province.

Since September 2007, in attempting to combat the rebels, Iranian forces have unintentionally conducted scores of attacks of Kurdish villages in Iraq. The Iraqi government in Baghdad and the Erbil semi-autonomous provincial government have registered a number of complaints to the Iranian authorities on these cross-border attacks on Kurds in Iraq.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Iranian and Turkish officials have together publically admitted to the insurgency and their cooperation in thwarting it. Turkish and Iranian officials have disclosed publically that their militaries have conducted coordinated attacks against Kurdish targets.<sup>9</sup>

7 An interesting twist of the execution is that on the official website of the Iranian television authority's report of the hanging, some of the responses were posted praising Rigi and promoting Baluch nationalism. <<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=128242&sectionid=351020101>>.

8 For instance, "Iraq condemns Iranian shelling of Kurd villages," *Reuters*, May 5, 2009.

9 "Turkey and Iran Unite to Attack Kurdish Rebels,"

In the post-election crackdowns, a large number of the executions conducted by the regime have been of Kurdish activists. Among the executions, five Kurdish activists were hanged in May 2010. The authorities refused to allow the families to receive the bodies, evidently fearing that the funerals would generate mass demonstrations and more violence. On the eve of the executions, Member of Parliament Abdoljabar Karami, who represents Sanandaj, the capital of Kurdistan Province, was threatened by the governor when he tried to stop the executions. Karami also tried to secure the release of the bodies with no success.<sup>10</sup> His activities illustrate the existence of a rift even with the Kurds that form a part of the institutions of the ruling regime.

## Azerbaijanis

In contrast to the Kurdish and Baluch groups, ethnic Azerbaijani based political and violent activity seems to have decreased in the post-election period. During 2006–2007, the Azerbaijani provinces quaked with demonstrations and protests, many leading to death and maiming of demonstrations.<sup>11</sup> Scores of ethnic Azerbaijani activists were arrested and incarcerated in this period, thus reducing the capability of the opposition movement in the Azerbaijani populated provinces prior to the 2009 presidential elections. In addition, despite Mousavi's Azerbaijani origin and his open use of the Azerbaijani language in his speeches at rallies held in Iran's Azerbaijani provinces, he and his camp are considered by many Azerbaijani activists as completely unsupportive to their agenda. This image was reinforced by the ethnic Azerbaijani slur voiced by former President Mohammed Khatami in May 2009, while he was campaigning on Mousavi's behalf in the 2009 presidential elections, which was caught on film and placed on websites, such as

*New York Times*, June 6, 2008.

10 "Relatives of Kurds Executed in Iran Are Denied the Remains, and 2 Are Arrested," *New York Times*, May 11, 2010.

11 Triggered by publication of a cartoon in an official Iranian newspaper Iranian Azerbaijanis rioted and protested in May 2006. The cartoon published in an official government newspaper depicted the Azerbaijani minority as a cockroach and instructed people to starve it until it learns to speak Persian. This testifies to the undercurrent of dissatisfaction and alienation that exists and may again erupt. The mass demonstrations appeared again in May 2007 on the anniversary of the cockroach publication.



YouTube. Following the airing of the Khatami slur, Azerbaijani activists held a number of demonstrations, including in Urmiya, Tabriz and Tehran.

The crackdown on Azerbaijani activists in 2006–2007 in Iran also contributed to the weakening of the traditional Azerbaijani gatherings in June at the Babek Castle in northwest Iran. The Iranian Azerbaijanis have adopted a hero from the ninth century, Babek Khorramdin, as a symbol and gather each June to commemorate his birth. Babek led a revolt against foreign rule and refused to accept the culture of his conquerors. Iranian Azerbaijanis often utilize this social and cultural gathering for airing of calls for Azerbaijani language and culture rights. In contrast to previous years, beginning with the June 2006 gathering, Tehran has taken strong measures to prevent the assemblies.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to their insignificant showing of post-election protests and the diminution of the Babek castle events, Iranian Azerbaijanis have voiced anti-regime views on two issues: Iran's pro-Armenian stance on the Nagorno–Karabagh conflict and the environmental damage to Lake Urmiya. In 2010, activists have held a number of protests against the regime's policies that they claim have caused significant environmental damage to Lake Urmiya, which is a major nature site often visited by Azerbaijanis that possesses symbolic meaning. Often in non-democratic regimes, nationalist movements take up environmental issues as a "safe" issue to confront the regime with and also to mobilize their co-ethnics to a political issue. Environmental issues were among the first raised by nationalist movements in the Soviet Union in the beginning of the *glasnost* period. In response to petitions against the government's policies, the head the Department of Environment under President Ahmadinejad, Fatemeh Vaez Javadi, blamed the United States and China for Lake Urmiya drying up, saying that these two countries were the main emitters of greenhouse gases,<sup>13</sup> instead of addressing Tehran's role in the environmental damage.

<sup>12</sup> "Iran: Authorities should exercise restraint in policing Babek," Castle gathering and address human rights violations against Iranian Azeri Turks, Public Statement, Amnesty International (AI Index: MDE 13/074/2006).

<sup>13</sup> *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, April 26, 2010.

Iranian Azerbaijanis have also continued to protest over Tehran's cooperation with Armenia, despite its occupation of territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Since the emergence of the war between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1992 over the disputed region of Nagorno–Karabagh, Iranian Azerbaijanis, including officials, have expressed dissent with Tehran's policy of close cooperation with Armenia. Among their issues that in the current period that are contested is Iran's decision to allow Armenia to open a consulate in the Azerbaijani populated city of Tabriz in northwest Iran. The opening of the Armenian consulate was discussed during a visit of President Ahmadinejad to Yerevan in 2008.

## Arabs

As with the Azerbaijanis, there has been a significant reduction, in contrast to proceeding years, in anti-regime activity in the post-election period among the Arab population of Iran. During 2005–6, the Arab populated regions of Iran experienced a large number of terrorist attacks, centered in the city of Ahvaz and committed in the name of organizations promoting the rights of the Arabs in Iran. In response, throughout this period and 2007, the government has arrested and killed scores of citizens in the region. Evidently, these actions weakened the organizational capability of the Arab organizations in Iran. According to the London based opposition organization, the British Ahwazi Friendship society that campaigns for rights of the Iranian Arab population, Iranian authorities reportedly have also conducted cyber attacks on their website.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

In the post-election period, a shift has occurred in the activities of the ethnic minorities in Iran—less open political activity, and more violent attacks against the regime. It is not clear the extent of the grassroots support for the violent activity and thus whether it indicates a radicalization of some of the ethnic minorities or merely of some of the fringe groups. The ruling regime has related in the media to the attacks on a number of instances and clearly it presents an additional challenge to its rule. While the ethnic minorities are not playing a meaningful role in the post-elections protest, it seems

<sup>14</sup> <<http://www.unpo.org/article/4204>>.



that if a major challenge to the ruling regime were to develop, a number of the opposition organizations among the ethnic minorities would join the struggle and could fulfill a tipping role of the direction of the struggle.

In response to all the ethnic-based challenges, Tehran has blamed outside influences and has attempted to delegitimize the demands for language and cultural rights by Iranian ethnic minorities by depicting them as tools of foreign countries, primarily the United Kingdom, the

United States, and Israel. The regime is doing little to address the issues of interest to the ethnic minority organizations, aside from harsh clamping down on the activists. In the short run, this severe policy seems to have paid off, decapitating a number of the movements, such as the Azerbaijanis and the Arabs. However, in the long-run this policy can lead to the alienation of more members of the ethnic minorities, thus widening their activists and their subsequent radicalization.

# The Islamic Revolution in Iran: In the Throes of Factional Rivalry

David Menashri\*



The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran put an end to the Pahlavi regime that had ruled the country for over three decades, thereby eradicating the 2,500-year-old Iranian monarchy and establishing a singular Islamic Republic in a new Middle East. The Islamic revolution has had profound consequences for Iranian society and ramifications reaching far beyond its borders - for the Middle East, the Islamic world in general and indeed the entire world. The Islamic Revolution is thus not only a critical turning point in the history of present-day Iran,<sup>1</sup> but one of the pivotal events shaping the Middle East at the turn of the twentieth century.

Led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, this revolution represents a new model of an insurrectionary movement in the modern Middle East. Previously, the coups occurring in this region and generally in the Third World - chiefly taking place since the middle of the twentieth century - were typically staged by small groups lacking grassroots support. It was only after seizing power that they sought to broaden support of their regime and command loyalty to their new ideology. Conversely, while the revolution in Iran was led by the clergy (*Ulama*), the grassroots support they enjoyed was a prerequisite, rather than a result, of their seizure of power. The "new" ideology embodied by the revolution was nothing short of a return to the glorious legacy of early Islam.

During the first three decades of its rule, the Islamic government focused on two primary objectives: stabilizing and consolidating the regime, and fulfilling the revolutionary ideology by establishing an exemplary Islamic society that would remedy pervasive social, economic and political ills. Despite those daunting challenges, the rule of the clerics seemed stable, at least for the time being. The revolution, however, has yet to prove that its slogan - "Islam is the Solution" (*Al-Islam huwa al-hal*) - constitutes an effective formula for societal advancement.

Following the initial shocks of the first two years of the revolution, the regime's institutions did demonstrate remarkable robustness. The "Supreme Leader" (Ayatollah Khomeini), the President (Ali Khamenei), the Prime Minister (Mir-Hossein Mousavi) and the Speaker of the Parliament (Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani) all served continuously from 1981 through 1989. Despite the trauma of Khomeini's death in 1989, stability in the country was nonetheless maintained. Khamenei was designated as Khomeini's successor, becoming the Supreme Leader, and Rafsanjani was named President. After Rafsanjani served two consecutive terms as president, a highly unusual change occurred as Mohammad Khatami - the candidate of the reform movement - was elected in the 1997 presidential elections, defeating the representative of the governing elite, Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri. Khatami was elected for a second term in 2001. Another significant change took place in 2005, when Khatami - the iconic symbol of reform - was replaced by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the most radical candidate, who was reelected in 2009, albeit in elections whose results remain controversial. Over those years, the elections to the Majlis, the Iranian Parliament, as well as to local governments and the 'Assembly of Experts' were held regularly.

\* I would like to thank Mr. Brandon Friedman and Ms. Danielle Digli, research students at the Center for Iranian Studies (CIS) at Tel Aviv University, for their help in gathering material for this paper.

<sup>1</sup> On Iranian policy since the revolution see: David Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution*, New York, 1990; Holmes and Meier "Analysis of developments since Khomeini's death"; David Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion and Power*, London, Prank Cass, 2001.



Notwithstanding the significant changes within the governmental establishment, the regime itself has remained secure.

Yet revolutions do not transpire solely in order to replace one regime with another, but rather for the purpose of improving society and the life of people. In this way, they validate their ideology, proving it can remedy social ills. For the leaders of the "New Iran", the "Islamic Revolution" was not a mere designation for their movement, and seizing power was not the goal in and of itself. For them, realizing the revolutionary ideals was the way to solve society's problems on set up an Islamic-founded state. They wanted to show that their revolutionary principles were the embodiment of the ideal Islamic life that other Muslim societies should emulate, which would require a **revolution** in all spheres of existence and be **Islamic** in terms of values and *modus operandi*. Thirty one years later, a significant change in the two key areas which prompted the Iranian people to embrace the revolution has yet to occur: the social inequities and economic hardships have remained unchanged, and there is no greater freedom in present day Iran than what prevailed during the Shah's regime.

Seizing power and establishing the authority of the clergy proved easier than implementing the revolutionary doctrine and solving the problems plaguing society. With the revolution's triumph, the new regime was called upon to implement its doctrine and prove that it had solutions to the ills that afflicted Iran, and which were at the heart of the unrest from which the revolution was born. Soon enough, however, it became apparent that, as has been the case with many other ideological movements, the transition from opposition to power compelled the Islamic government to adapt its doctrine in search of practical solutions to the problems with which it found itself confronted.

There were, however, disagreements about the scope, pace and depth of change. Substantial dissension about the policies that should be applied was evident even among Khomeini's most staunch and ardent loyalists. The controversies emerged at the very inception of the revolution, becoming more pronounced in recent years. They reached new heights with the election of Khatami as president and, even more so, with the election of Ahmadinejad. The 2009 elections turned into an open, violent confrontation between opposing camps.

Throughout this period, the Iranian ship of state continued to pitch in a turbulent squall, while a balance was sought between fidelity to the revolution and the demands for pragmatism and efficiency in running the country. Equally, there was a need to strike a balance between religion and state; between Islam and the West.

This paper sets out to analyze the different approaches in the revolutionary camp and examine the relative strength of the various factions. Although the focal point of discussion is the 2009 presidential elections, an attempt will be made to review the evolution, outlook and relative strength of the various groups within the framework of the revolution.

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## Idealism versus Pragmatism in the Revolutionary Policy

Although the revolution is known as the "Islamic Revolution" (*Enghelābe Eslāmi*), and the regime in Iran is known as the "Islamic Regime", (*Hukumat-i Eslāmi*) or "Islamic Republic" (*Jomhuri-ye Eslāmi*), a good starting point for discussion is the extent to which the revolution is truly Islamic in terms of its roots and the objectives of its proponents (a question that may also be raised about other Islamist movements in the region).

Fundamentally, Islam (like Judaism, but unlike Christianity) is a total religion that draws no distinction between religion and politics; religion and science; religion and social or economic policies. The conduct of the regime is derived from faith; the economic policy is dictated by Islam; and the social order and its cultural values reflect those principles. The same is true of daily life, which is also governed by religious tradition. According to this broad theory, the Islamist movements can be deemed religious since their philosophy was indeed all-encompassing and comprehensive. But from the standpoint of an observer who draws a distinction between religion, on the one hand, and politics, economics, and societal structure, on the other, the factors animating the revolution cannot be confined solely to the "religious" sphere. People responded to the revolutionary message for a variety of reasons: hope for political freedom, improved financial standing, better provision of social services, displeasure with "cultural aggression" by the West, resentment of growing foreign influence in the country and the decline



of religious values. Rising in opposition to the existing order, the citizens of Iran saw in Islam an answer to society's afflictions - an answer that promised a better future, if not for them, at least for their children. The "return to Islam" offered a remedy to all society's ills. The revolutionary slogan encapsulates the movement's main message: 'Islam is the Solution' (*Al-Islam huwa al-hal*). This is a message that any Muslim can easily relate to and understand, while giving it his own specific meanings. It can therefore be argued that the 1979 revolution was "Islamic" not so much in its motivations as in its results: that is, it gave rise to an Islamic regime. With this as a premise, it can also be argued that the key to the regime's stability over time lies not in its realization of an Islamic ideal, but rather in its ability to resolve the problems facing Iran's citizens.

The second question is: to what degree were the teachings of the revolutionary movement faithful to Islamic tradition? In the wake of the revolution in Iran, people were inclined to see Khomeini's ideas as representative of Islamic philosophy - at least of Shi'ite Islam. In fact, much like Judaism and Christianity, Islam offers a wealth of knowledge, and the faith's tenets have undergone transformations over many generations. It would be hard to name one philosophy as being the dominant expression of *Islam*. In terms of religious doctrine, no one exegesis overrides the others.

The world of Islam has a certain degree of ideological pluralism. The greatest Islamic jurists (*maraji*) in Iran were often in disagreement in their interpretation. For example, at the start of the revolution, Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari, the most senior cleric in Iran of the day, was opposed to Khomeini and was kept under house arrest until his death in 1986. Later, another prominent opponent of the revolutionary policy was Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri (whom Khomeini had initially designated to be his successor) and who was denied freedom of expression from 1989 until his passing last year. Even the most eminent Shi'ite figure in Iraq today, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani (of Iranian descent) is at loggerheads with Khamenei - for example on the question of religion and state. Their conflict is being currently underscored by popular defiance of the interpretation dictated by the leaders of the conservative regime. An outspoken advocate for these views is one of Iran's illustrious intellectuals, Prof. Abdolkarim

Soroush, who has repeatedly argued that there is no single and superseding interpretation of Islam. Moreover, he contends that there can be no *official* interpretation of Islam, thus contradicting a basic premise of the Islamic regime.

Beyond these general negations of a single valid interpretation of "Islam", it is clear that not only did the ideology of the 1979 revolution not represent "Islam" or "Shi'ite Islam" but it also did not reflect mainstream philosophy in recent generations, or indeed the views among the leaders of the Iranian *Ulama* on the eve of the revolution. Moreover, the revolutionary ideology is even at odds with the philosophy expressed by Khomeini himself before the 1970's. Khomeini has actually succeeded in elevating marginal Shi'a views to the center of religious thought, making them the mainstays of his revolutionary platform and the doctrine of the Islamic regime. There is no trace of many of Khomeini's pre-revolutionary views or his own previous writings<sup>2</sup> or in the new Shi'ite philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Thus, to as great an extent as the revolution was Islamic in its teachings, its teachings revolutionized the underlying concepts pervasive in the Islamic world of the day.

The third question is to what extent the policy of the Islamic regime is in keeping with the ideology that brought the clergy to power. Reviewing revolutions throughout history reveals the great gaps between the ideas of the revolution prior to seizing power and the actual conduct of the revolutionaries after taking control of the government. While in opposition, one can strictly adhere to a theoretical doctrine; when in power, its ideal constructs cannot always be implemented, and theory must be adapted to meet changing reality. Almost invariably, when there is a collision between ideology and necessity, the latter will prevail.

The major controversy in Iran, therefore, revolves around the degree of pragmatism

2 Compare his views expressed in his book *Kashf al-Asrar* [Unveiling the Secrets] written in the early 1940's and his book *Velayat-e Faqih* [The Rule of the Jurisprudent] written circa 1970.

3 Nikki Keddie "Iran: Change in Islam, Islam is Change", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, II (1980), p.532; Hava Lazraus-Yafeh, 'Ha-Shi'a be-torato ha-politit shel Khomein' [Shi'ism in Khomeini's Political Thought], *Ha-Mizrah Ha-Hadash*, Vol. 30, pp.99-106.



that is required, the pace at which it should be introduced, and the persons who may authorize departure from doctrine. Two main groups are pitted against each other in connection with this internal debate: pragmatists or reformists, on the one hand, and radical conservatives on the other. This is a struggle between two power groups with different outlooks. It is also a personal struggle between the founding generation and the children of the revolution, as well as between civil society and government institutions.

In its search for practical ways in which its revolutionary doctrine could be implemented, the Islamic regime - much like other ideological movements that move from opposition to power - had to adapt doctrine to reality. In opposition, they could conceive a theoretical and revolutionary vision of an ideal regime. But once they rose to power, it became clear that they could not solve the problems that plagued Iranian society by revolutionary slogans only. Very quickly - and often - they had to compromise with reality. This trend was not necessarily the result of doctrinal preference; rather, harsh reality forced adjustments in dogma. Such doctrinal distancing was evident in many spheres, and has been part of revolutionary policy from the start. This trend has been gradually reinforced since the death of Khomeini in June 1989. Accordingly, the national interest has gradually supplanted the revolutionary ideal.

In fact, whenever the two collided, interests overcame dogma. For example, although the notion of nationalism was - ideologically speaking - foreign to the spirit of Islam, the new regime could not ignore national considerations, and had to take into account Iran's particular interests in formulating its policy. How else, after all, could Iran's constitutional stipulation that only a Shi'ite of Iranian descent could serve as the country's president be reconciled with the Islamic concept of unity of the *umma*? How could the contradiction between the Islamic supra-national ideal and Khomeini's insistence on calling the Gulf the '*Persian Gulf*' be resolved? How could the gap between pan-Islamic thought and Iran's close ties with secular and Ba'athist-ruled Syria - for which Arab nationalism is a fundamental pillar - be bridged?

Khomeini also supplied the doctrinal basis for putting interests before dogma. Addressing the issue of government authority in an Islamic state,

he ruled in 1989 that national interest would override revolutionary ideology. He further stated that the government has the right to demolish a mosque or suspend the fulfillment of one of Islam's fundamental edicts if the state's interest (*Selah-e Keshvar*) so requires.<sup>4</sup> Khomeini's legacy was an unapologetic disavowal of the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih*. Thus, although both Khomeini and the 1979 constitution held that the Supreme Leader (*Rahbare*) must be the most erudite and pious cleric (*A'lam va-Asdaq*), none of Khomeini's theologians could adhere to this dogma and none of his loyal disciples had a sufficient standing as a jurist to succeed him. The designation of Khomeini as the successor of the Supreme Leader, though he clearly lacked the necessary scholarly credentials, provided further proof that pragmatism reigned supreme over ideology. Justifying Khomeini's nomination by arguing that he was highly experienced after two presidential terms made a mockery of doctrine. If that were the criterion for ascension to power, why couldn't Saddam Hussein, Hosni Mubarak and even the Shah - who were all anathema to the Islamic regime - become rulers?

Nonetheless, there were substantial disputes in the revolutionary camp regarding the acceptable extent of pragmatism, areas of reform, and the pace of change. The varying opinions reflected not only conceptual differences but also political rivalry and personal enmity. There are two blocs that have been vying in recent years to chart the revolution's course, yet there are many other groups and subgroups. On one side of the barricades are the pragmatists, reformers or moderates, and on the other side the radicals and extremists. Both blocs have fought strongly to determine the revolutionary path.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Kiyan* (Tehran), January 7, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Any attempt to accurately describe the two camps would be misplaced. Factional associations are not categorical, and have undergone changes and transformation over the years. Some of Khomeini's staunchest followers at the start of the revolution subsequently posed the greatest challenge to his teachings (e.g. Montazeri and Soroush). Some of the leading radicals of the initial upheaval are today's leading pragmatists (e.g. former Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi, former Majlis Speaker Ayatollah Mehdi Karubi, Ali-Akbar Mohtashami, and Sadegh Khalkhali). Furthermore, none of these camps is homogenous or cohesive, and there are subgroups and diverse movements in each one of them.



Although the adherents of these camps all started as followers of Khomeini's teachings, they parted ways in a dispute over the interpretation of his philosophy and the application of practical policy. While the reformists celebrate the principle of political freedom, economic openness, social change and rapprochement with the non-Muslim world, the conservatives champion utmost adherence to Khomeini's teachings. The two sides are engaged in a philosophical debate on matters such as religion and state, ideology versus interest, isolationism versus globalization, and the appropriate attitude to take toward the outside world. A more in-depth view suggests that this is a conflict between the 1979 principles and the new spirit of change. It is a struggle between the establishment and civic society, as well as between the old guard and the generation known as "children of the revolution". This duality is interestingly addressed in an insightful paper by an Iranian student. Responding to an editorial by *Hojjat ul-Islam*, which called on youth not to overstep the proper bounds of Islam, the student wrote: "You ask that we stay faithful to the real Islam, but perhaps you should tell us how many types of Islam there are? And who gets to decide which one is the real deal?" "The problem," the student went on, "is not that youth cross some red lines that no one has ever defined, but that in a one-way street, you - the people in power - are driving down the wrong way."<sup>6</sup>

The clerics and former loyalists who voiced doubts about the path taken by the Islamic regime were joined also by several critical intellectuals, students and other groups who were initially among the revolution's supporters and advocates. Their standard bearers included, among others, Soroush, Mohsen Kadivar, and Mohammad Mojtahed Shabastari. These individuals opposed the notion that a small group of people could monopolistically appropriate the right to define the correct interpretation of Islam. Moreover, they argued that if the seventh-century leaders of Islam were to govern in contemporary times, there could be no certainty that they would have followed the very same path they had set 1,400 years earlier. In like manner, they maintained, if Khomeini were still alive he would probably have changed some of his teachings. What would have happened, after all, if Khomeini had not accepted the cease-fire with Iraq contrary to his pledge to pursue "war,

war until victory"? Would we have continued the war for eternity?

Khatami had become the outstanding representative of this trend. By Iranian standards, Khatami was indeed a liberal. Viewed as someone standing apart from the establishment, he was regarded as the leader of liberalism and an advocate of openness and reform. Clearly, he did not disavow the revolution. Rather, he wanted to get it back on the right track, thereby not only serving the Islamic republic but also saving it. His emphasis on "interest" and "proper governance" also suggested an inclination toward pragmatism. Khatami spoke in favor of openness in connection with domestic affairs, and thought that foreign influence was not only unavoidable but also desirable, provided that Iran was able to maintain its identity and independence. As was the case with Khomeini in 1979, Khatami became the symbol of change and hope for a better life in 1997.<sup>7</sup> The victories of the reformists in the presidential elections in 1997 and 2001, and the elections for local governments and the Majlis in 1991 and 2000, respectively, expressed a yearning for change. They were also an indication of the influence reformist circles had on the Iranian street.

This new philosophy found fertile ground among the nation's students. Campuses became a hotbed of scathing criticism of the reality of revolutionary Iran and the dead-end policies of the conservative leadership. Heshmatollah Tabarzadi, one of the student leaders in 1999, lamented that the vision of the Islamic Republic - as guaranteeing the people's sovereignty, freedom and justice - had failed to materialize. The ideal of an Islamic republic, he added, had gradually turned into "the rule of the religious sage", then the "absolute rule of the religious sage", and finally the "absolute rule of the religious sage concentrated in the hands of one person". He wondered whether all the bloodshed of the revolution had been for the

<sup>7</sup> See his books and collection of articles: *Zamineha-ye Khizesh Mashroote*, [The Rise of Constitutionalism] Tehran; Paya; *Bim-e Mouj* [Fear of the Wave], Tehran, Sima-e Javan, 1995 (first published in 1993); *Az Donya-e 'Shahr' ta Shahr-e 'Donya* [From the World of the City to the City of the World], Tehran, Nashr-e Ney, 1997; *Motalla'at fil-Din wal-Islam wal-'Asr* [Studies on Religion, Islam and the Time], Beirut, Dar al-Jadid, 1988;

*Hope and Challenge: The Iranian President Speaks*, Binghamton, State University of New York Press, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> *Jama'a*, May 19, 1988



sole purpose of taking revenge on the Shah, and then seeing someone else seize power and assume even greater authority. He concluded that the absolute rule of one man, which had characterized the conservative leadership, led to a "monocracy" which, because no society would willingly accept it, left the government with no choice but "to impose it with the edge of the sword, flagellation, Revolutionary Guard, [or] the special tribunal of the clergy".<sup>8</sup> Reflecting these views, and in open defiance of the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih*, protesting students in 1999 decried the lack of freedom by chanting: "Khemenei, shame on you! (*haya kon*) let go of leadership (*raha kon*)."

By regional standards, such slogans could be perceived as indicative of a certain degree of freedom of expression, however limited and constrained. And although the regime did shut down roughly one hundred liberal newspapers over a five-year period beginning in 2000 - with many of the writers and editors being prosecuted - the fact that one hundred newspapers supporting reform remained open is not insignificant. They have featured unreserved criticism, addressing topics that hitherto were deemed taboo: criticism of the "clerical rule", support of relations with the United States, and occasionally even queries about the wisdom of the leadership's anti-Israel tirades.

Kadivar went even further, writing in an article published in 1999 that "Iran's main problem is clerical [rule]".<sup>9</sup> In his defiantly-titled book, *Fascist Interpretation of Religion and State*, Akbar Ganji argued that the regime in Iran is fascist. (Both Kadivar and Ganji were sentenced to prison). These rumblings of discontent and the electoral support garnered by the reformist camp did not, however, bring about real change. In the face of an unbending conservative establishment, the euphoria that characterized Iranian politics in the wake of Khatami's election in 1997 was short-lived.

Thus the expression in various newspapers of the desire of students and intellectuals to

<sup>8</sup> *Jahan-e Islam*, February 14, 1999; "Nagofteh-haye Enqelab: Rah-e Halli bara-ye Sakhtar-e Ayandeh-e Iran", *Mehregan* (a periodical of the Teacher Association, published in the US), Vol. 8 No.1, Spring 1999; Internet edition; see also my book: David Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran*, pp. 144-146.

<sup>9</sup> *Ruzegar-e Now*, No. 205 (February-March 1999), pp. 31-33.

see reform and freedom only hardened the determination of the conservative rulers to keep a tight grip on the reins of power and dictate their policy. On July 23, 1999, during a Friday sermon, the Ayatollah Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi - considered the spiritual mentor of Ahmadinejad - proclaimed that anyone who contended that Islam does not advocate violence understands nothing about Islam. Not only does Islam recommend the use of violence, he asserted, but it also deems its use mandatory against those that rise up against it. He preached that the "jagged sword" must be used to cut off the heads of the heretics and those who oppose the regime or its policy, proclaiming that "our religion compels us to stamp out the weeds."<sup>10</sup>

Simultaneously, 24 senior commanders from the Revolutionary Guard demanded in no uncertain terms that the President take action against what they called an imminent danger. Decrying the supposed complacency and leniency with which the President had handled the riots, they warned him that unless immediate action were taken to fulfill his Islamic and national duty, "tomorrow might be too late".<sup>11</sup> If this were not clear enough, they reminded him that they had the capability of putting an end to dangerous turbulence and that - while they were still acting with restraint - their patience was wearing thin. In like vein, the former head of the Revolutionary Guard, Yahya Rahim-Safavi, added that his forces were ready to behead and cut off the tongues of political opponents.<sup>12</sup> The combination of religious proclamations of the legitimacy of violence and threats from the security forces effectively squelched the protests of the youths who had taken to the streets.

The conservatives enjoy several important sources of power that have so far used to good advantage. First, they assert that their policy represents the true Islam. In their own eyes, they represent divine truth, and since they believe that the fate of Islam and the Islamic revolution are one and the same, the blood of those who are opposed to the regime and its policies can rightly be spilt. Equally important, they enjoy massive backing from the security establishment (the Revolutionary Guard, the military, as well as extra-governmental bodies). Additionally, they

<sup>10</sup> *Nashat*, July 24, 1999; *Iran Daily*, July 24, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> *Jumhuriy-e Islami*, July 19, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> *Kayhan* (Tehran), May 28, June 1, 1998.

are determined to preserve their rule, even at the cost of violently suppressing the opposition. They mean to stay at the helm and prevent their opponents from doing to them what they did to the Shah in 1979. This was starkly evident in the aftermath of the 2009 presidential elections.

## Domestic Struggle Reaches New Climax after Presidential Elections

The struggle between the two camps reached a climax during the June 2009 presidential elections, culminating in mass riots throughout Iran, which far surpassed in severity anything that had taken place since the start of the revolution. The immediate *cause célèbre* for the unrest was the claims of electoral fraud. The demonstrators' main slogan was "Where is my vote?" However, the roots of the movement ran much deeper, going back to disappointment with the outcome of the revolution.

Upon the election of Ahmadinejad as president in 2005, the already emboldened conservative camp was invigorated by new confidence, which in turn significantly bolstered its strength. Furthermore, increasing oil revenues and the difficulties being experienced by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan were additional factors instilling greater confidence among the conservatives. The support Ahmadinejad received from the Supreme Leader on the one hand and the Revolutionary Guard on the other lent further momentum to the conservative ideology championed by the president-elect. From his personal standpoint, making inflammatory statements not only enhanced his standing - both in Iran and beyond - but also served his goal of becoming a central figure in the local arena and the Islamic world at large.

The views of the opposing ideological camps, which were forged prior to the elections, are dramatically illustrated by comparing the outlooks of Iran's last two presidents, Khatami and Ahmadinejad. One side in the struggle is led by the President and the Supreme Leader, backed by the Revolutionary Guard, while the other is led by the presidential candidate and former Prime Minister Mousavi, together with former President Khatami, and Karubi, the former Speaker of the Majlis. Each of these movements is a coalition comprising diverse forces.

Generally known since the elections as the "Green Movement", the reformist camp encompasses a wide spectrum of views, ranging from a desire for reform in certain revolutionary institutions to seeking (either implicitly or explicitly) across-the-board regime change. The reformers are characterized by disappointment with post-revolution reality, and share the objective of bringing about a more thoroughgoing pragmatism. (For their world views, see above).

The conservatives (*Usulgarayan*, literally, adherents of principles or *principalists*), are now divided into three factions, all of which support the regime, yet are split on how to promote their shared ideas.

The first of the three - the "traditional conservatives" - is represented by Speaker of the Majlis Ali Larijani, former Speaker of the Majlis Gholam Ali Haddad-Adel, and the Supreme Leader's International Affairs advisor Ali Velayati. They are personally faithful to the Supreme Leader Khomeini and the fundamental principle of rule by the religious sage. They are opposed to Ahmadinejad's theatrical gestures and provocative utterances, wanting to avoid confrontation with the West insofar as possible. Recently, they also voiced displeasure with the violent suppression of the "Greens". For example, in an interview with the magazine *Khabar* - which is associated with Larijani - a lecturer from the University of Teheran, Dr. Daud Farhi, argued that the *Usulgarayan's* most difficult challenge is to eliminate their rivals ("The Greens") as an effective political force without driving them to underground resistance by totally suppressing all political activity and parties<sup>13</sup>.

The second group, "the pragmatic conservatives", includes, among others, former head of the Revolutionary Guard Mohsen Razi and former mayor of Tehran Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf. This group supports economic privatization as a means of integrating Iran in the global economy.

The third group - "the radicals" - is the most powerful one today, comprised of Ahmadinejad's coterie and supported by such clerical figures as Ayatollah Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi and Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati. These figures oppose a world order predicated on the dominance of the West and see themselves as the authentic

<sup>13</sup> *Khabar*, August 15, 2010.





followers of Ayatollah Khomeini. It is for this reason that they are occasionally known as "Neoconservatives".

Pitted against each other in a bitter election campaign, these two camps - the reformists and the conservatives - lashed out at each other ruthlessly. The largest and most violent demonstrations seen in Iran since the early days of the Islamic regime followed in the election's wake.

Beyond the anger of the reformists stemming from their belief that the conservatives had stolen the elections, two fundamental factors were at the heart of the outburst of protest. The first one was public disgruntlement at the revolution's failure, after thirty-one years, to meet its expectations. The second may be termed the "Obama effect" - consisting of Washington's support of the public's awakening, Obama's meteoric rise to the presidency, his decision to embark on a dialog with Iran, and his conciliatory tone vis-à-vis the Muslim world.

The first factor arises from cumulative public indignation at the revolution's failure to realize its primary objectives. For the last 120 years or so, the Iranian people have been embroiled in ongoing struggles for two goals: welfare and freedom, bread and freedom. These objectives were also the underlying tenets of the revolution. Three decades after the revolution triumphed, Iranians do not enjoy greater freedom compared to the days of the Shah, who himself was no democrat. Back then, speaking against the Shah was a crime; today, speaking against the Islamic regime is a sin. Even the social gaps have not been significantly bridged, and the situation of the "oppressed people" (*mustazafin*) - the very social strata whose standing Khomeini had pledged to improve - has not been ameliorated. Surely, the expectations from the revolution were much higher compared to the stark reality thirty-one years after its victory.

Obama's meteoric ascent to the presidency of the world's most powerful nation inspired potential leaders in numerous countries, who sought to model themselves after him. His election ushered in hope that it is possible to rise from the bottom and bring about change. His elections slogan - *Yes We Can* - sounded appealing. In fact it was reminiscent of Ahmadinejad's 2005 elections campaign slogan: "It's possible and we can do it" (*Mishavad va-*

*Mitavanim*). In the aftermath of the riots, both the international and local press touched on the "Obama effect" in Iran's elections. Newspapers from the *New York Times* to the Iranian conservative publication *Javan* (associated with Ahmadinejad) all remarked on the colorful campaign and the Green movement's cutting-edge technology, intimating that Mousavi's campaign was inspired by that of the American president.<sup>14</sup> In fact, his name in Farsi *U-Ba-Ma*, which means "he is with us", has natural appeal to speakers of the language.

Two elements in Obama's policy were particularly attractive to the Iranian people in general, and to the reform movement in particular. The first one was his initiative to have a dialog with Iran and his initial statements right after getting elected. The second had to do with the fact that Obama raised the issue of human and civil rights and made them his priority. This energized the militants of the Iranian opposition to embark on a struggle, believing they would enjoy American backing.

Inspiration is obviously hard to assess, and there is no way of proving the emotional impact of Obama's rise to power on Iranian voters. Unquestionably, however, his conciliatory demeanor towards Iran and Islam heartened the reformist circles. His address to the Iranian people on the occasion of the New Year (March 2009), his direct appeal to the "Islamic Republic of Iran" (which was construed as being a sign of recognizing the Islamic regime), and his call for Iran to take its rightful place among the nations (gratefulness to Iran's legacy) expressed not only a new approach vis-à-vis the Iranian people, but also vis-à-vis the regime. This was a marked change compared to the long-standing approach since the revolution, and it was greatly welcomed by Iran's reformists. The radicals, however, thought it to be perilous, correctly assessing the inherent threat of a dialogue. For them, Obama's policy was not one of sticks and carrots. They were concerned that the dialog was a "poisoned carrot" that might appeal to the youths in Iran, which apparently it did.

Whether or not the American administration deliberately sought to give Iranian youths hope as means of facilitating internal change in Iran, once the mass riots broke out the administration was faced with a serious dilemma. In 1953, the United States intervened in Iran's domestic

<sup>14</sup> *Javan*, July 5, 2009; *New York Times*, June 20, 2009.



affairs, and Iranian rage has not subsided since. In 1979, President Carter chose not to get involved in Iran's domestic affairs, and was thus perceived as having helped the revolution to triumph. To be or not to be involved - and if so, to what extent - was the question the White House was grappling with during those times. An American intervention would have contradicted the president-elect's policy of dialog and non-intervention. Nor was there any certainty that such intervention would in fact help the reform movement. Initially, Obama chose not to address the events in Iran directly, and it was only after ten agonizing days that he expressed direct support of political freedom and human rights. By then, however, the fate of the Green movement had already been sealed. It was for good reason that demonstrators asked: "Obama, are you with us or with them [the government]?" Others complained: *U-Ba-Ma-Nist* ["He is not with us"]. But even this cautious policy did not stop the conservatives from grumbling at what they perceived to be gross American interference in their domestic affairs. Ahmadinejad's campaign manager, Mojtaba Samara Hashemi, accused Obama of abandoning his conciliatory policy toward Iran due to the pressure of the Zionist and neoconservative lobby on Capitol Hill.<sup>15</sup>

The conservatives had never imagined a resistance movement of the magnitude that erupted after the election, and they were determined to eradicate it. At a Friday sermon in Tehran, Hujjat al-Islam Muhammad Khatami said that "unauthorized demonstrations are against [state] law and contradict Shari'a [religious law]," thus making it permissible to employ any means against the demonstrators. Driving home the message, he called the demonstrators the enemies of Allah on earth (*Mohareb*), decreeing that anyone found guilty of war on God or anyone taking up arms - even so much as a knife - was a *Mohareb*, subject to Islam's most severe punishment.<sup>16</sup> These and similar statements supplied the government with religious justification to act violently against the demonstrators, and indeed this was vigorously and brutally carried out. The regime wanted to simultaneously convey a message to its opponents and supporters alike. On the one hand it wanted to show its resolve against the demonstrators, while at the same time assuring

its followers that things had not spiraled out of control and that the regime maintained a firm grip on the situation. They had indeed learned their lesson from their uprising against the Shah and sought to prevent their opponents from turning the tables on yesterday's victors. Believing in the complete identity of their own rule and the future of the Islamic republic - and indeed the fate of Islam itself - they were determined not to relinquish power. In this they undoubtedly succeeded, at least for the short run.

While the dissidents were suppressed by the ruthlessness of the security forces, the opposition had its own failings. It lacked charismatic leadership and a shared alternative ideology that could unite all the government's varied opponents. Moreover, in addition to being disorganized, the opposition lacked a clear and easily comprehensible and catchy message capable of rousing the masses. In contrast, Khomeini's message was uncomplicated, compelling and commanding: "The Shah Must Go", "Islam is the Solution". The current movement has no similar slogans. It is hard to mobilize millions in support of effecting partial change - that is, modifying some aspects of the economic policy, adopting some electoral amendments, or liberalizing some social policies. Furthermore, it is hard for a movement focused only on the ideal of freedom to develop mass support, however great the intrinsic value of that ideal. In the past, revolutions in Iran stood on two pillars: the social-economic pillar on the one hand, and the political pillar on the other - bread and freedom. (During the French revolution the calls for *liberté et égalité* went hand in hand; similarly, in the American revolution, taxation and political representation were bound together.) To mobilize millions, the call for freedom should have been coupled with tangible social-economic goals. In addition to the question "Where is my vote?" what they should have also asked was "Where is my oil money?"

In the year since the elections, the conservatives have further consolidated their grip on power. The outbreaks of resistance that occasionally flared up in subsequent months have subsided in the face of iron-fisted repression by the security forces. Below the surface, however, the volcano remains active, waiting to erupt under the proper conditions. Equally ominous for the regime is the rage directed not only at Ahmadinejad, but also at the Supreme Leader

<sup>15</sup> *Press TV*, June 30, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> *BBC World Monitoring Service*, June 26, 2009.



himself. Khomeini's unwavering support for Ahmadinejad and his immediate endorsement of the election results positioned him squarely in the conservatives' camp. A YouTube video during a procession on the *Day of Ashura* (27 December 2009) shows demonstrators ripping up photos of Khomeini and chanting "Death to the dictator".<sup>17</sup> In public places, "Death to Khomeini" graffiti were sprayed on the walls.<sup>18</sup> Lacking both leadership qualities and charisma, and being generally unable to fill Khomeini's shoes, Khomeini's prestige was compromised. Unlike Khomeini who always stood above the clashing camps, Khomeini chose to openly side with one group, consequently devaluing his status and becoming a regular player in the political arena instead of the exalted "Supreme Leader". Furthermore, if until that point the struggle between the two camps could be said to be a "family feud" between factions that still saw themselves as part of the revolutionary movement, the gap between the sides looks much deeper and bigger today. Worse, the revolutionary principle of *Velayat-e Faqih* - the revolution's historic achievement - was dealt a serious blow. And finally, the legitimacy of the Iranian regime has been diminished in the eyes of many throughout Iran. Having sought power on the premises of ideology, ethics and religion, the current regime seems to rely primarily on the Revolutionary Guard and the security forces,

<sup>17</sup> *New York Times*, December 28, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, August 18, 2009.

all of which will undoubtedly have important political ramifications in the future.

The conservatives had the upper hand in this round, but it seems that the struggle over revolutionary Iran has not been decided. The Iranian public - experienced with political struggles - has yet to say the final word. It is hard to say if and when another upheaval will occur.

More than any other nation in the Middle East, the Iranian people have an impressive tradition of anti-establishment grassroots activity. The Iranians took to the streets to call for change. The Shi'ites were also never indifferent to the struggle against a usurping regime. In fact, in many respects this was the mainstay of the Shi'a. Accordingly, memories from the past and the experience of the last year should serve as a warning to the incumbent Islamic regime. Popular movements always spring up suddenly. They are never predictable, nor do they send off any early-warning signs. Historians do not have the ability to foresee a sudden public change. If and when the public adds its full weight to the scales, its position will not depend on the success of the religious sages in realizing a return to true Islam, but rather on the degree to which the revolutionary regime has met the expectations that originally fueled rebellion - namely the promise for a better life and greater freedom for all the people of Iran. This is the main challenge of the Islamic regime three decades after its formation.

# Iran's Nuclear Policy

Ephraim Kam

The Iranian threat, at the center of which is Iran's conduct regarding its nuclearization, has been a major issue in the Middle East and international geopolitics for the past two decades, and will continue to remain the focus of attention in the coming years. The possibility that Iran will acquire nuclear arms in the foreseeable future is perceived as a serious threat in the eyes of many governments, representing a constant source of concern among many in the international arena. Numerous components of Iran's nuclear program have been revealed in recent years by the Western intelligence community and by inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Iran, too, was forced, against its will, to reveal certain aspects of its nuclear program in order to prevent their exposure by other parties, although it continues to conceal other aspects of the program at the same time.

Despite the intense attention focused on the Iranian nuclear program and the information that has been revealed about it, hardly anything at all is known about Iran's current and future nuclear policy. No hard data are available on the aims of the programs, the considerations that guide it, or the use that Iran plans to make of its nuclear weapons, should it obtain them. The reason for this information gap is clear: The Iranians deny that they intend to develop nuclear arms, and of course have said nothing about any plans to use them in the future. For the approximately twenty years that the issue has been on the agenda, the Iranian leadership has consistently exercised extreme caution in regard to any statement or hint that it is striving to acquire nuclear arms. The Iranians claim that they have no intention to or interest in developing nuclear weaponry, and that its nuclear program is aimed exclusively at peaceful needs. They claim that they seek only to build nuclear power reactors in order to generate energy because Iran's oil and natural gas reserves are not unlimited. To that end, they are building an entire nuclear fuel cycle out of a desire to attain energy independence.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See for example "The Organization for Iran's Nuclear Energy: Programs and plans," *Ettela'at* (Teheran), March 3, 1993; April 9, 1993 93-067 NES-FBIS; interview with Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to ABC on

In the absence of any direct information about Iran's nuclear policy, this analysis of its policy will be based on an effort to understand Iran's defense doctrine, on its behavior in the context of nuclearization, and on an examination of the relevant considerations facing its leadership in the context of Iran's nuclear program. This entails that this analysis will contain a relatively small component that is based on hard data and a major component that is based on assessments, and consequently, its conclusions will contain a number of question marks, doubts and the possibility of errors.

## The Goals of Iran's Nuclear Program

The first question that needs to be explored in this context is whether Iran is indeed striving to attain nuclear weapons. The answer to this question today appears to be self-evident, but this was not always the case. Iran has persistently maintained that it has no plans to develop nuclear arms because it does not need them. During the early years following the Islamic revolution, there was indeed some truth to this claim. During the rule of the Shah, some modest steps were taken to advance a nuclear program, but in 1979, after the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini gave orders to halt the program because of his view that nuclear power came from the devil. Only in 1987, after the lessons of the war with Iraq had been learned, did the regime resume the development of its nuclear program.

Moreover, up until a few years ago, governments, the intelligence community and experts hotly debated whether Iran indeed intended to acquire nuclear weapons and whether it was even capable of doing so. Many accepted Iran's claim that it had no interest in nuclear weapons, or believed that even if it was planning to acquire them, it did not have the capability to do so. It is only in recent years that this debate

May 24, 1993; remarks by Iranian Foreign Minister Kamel Harazi, *Haaretz*, October 7, 1997; remarks by Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani in *Asharq Al-Awsat*, February 5, 2002, FBIS-NES-2002-0205.





has for the most part died out. The reason for this is the vast amount of information that has accumulated regarding Iran's nuclear program, no longer leaving any room for doubt that Iran has indeed embarked upon the path of nuclearization, and on a fairly short timetable. The fact that the governments of Russia and China - which in the past accepted Iran's positions - have four times supported the imposition of sanctions on Iran by the UN Security Council is indicative of the fact that they no longer believe Iran. The government of Russia has even stated this explicitly. Even the IAEA, which has always tended to take a cautious political approach on the matter of the Iranian bomb, has now raised suspicions regarding the possibility that Iran is striving to attain nuclear weapons, even if it has not stated this categorically.<sup>2</sup> The point of departure for the investigation of the Iranian nuclear policy is that Iran is in fact striving to build up nuclear weapons capability and that it is already at an advanced stage on its way to doing so.

Why does Iran want to acquire nuclear weapons? Three main reasons may be suggested. The original and fundamental reason for Iran's efforts to acquire nuclear weapons is that in its view, it needs a strategic weapon for reasons of defense and deterrence, especially on the background of the terrible trauma and defeat it suffered in its war with Iraq. Iran's nuclear program was launched in 1987 just as the Iran-Iraq war was drawing to a close, after it had become clear to the Iranians that Iraq was once again making efforts to acquire nuclear weaponry, and that it already possessed chemical and biological weapons and a stockpile of ballistic missiles. However, Iraq was significantly weakened as a result of the First Gulf War, losing its arsenal of strategic weaponry. Furthermore, since Iraq's occupation by the U.S.-led coalition forces, it has disappeared off the map as a military actor. However, the Iraqi threat has been replaced by a far more serious one - the threat posed by the United States. For the past ten years, Iran has taken the view that the United States has plans to carry out a broad-ranged military campaign against it - just as it did in Iraq and Afghanistan - or a limited offensive against its nuclear sites.

<sup>2</sup> IAEA, Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008) and 1835 (2008) in the Islamic Republic of Iran, GOV/2010/28, May 31, 2010.

In light of this threat, Iran apparently believes that the only way to deter a superpower from attacking it is by acquiring nuclear weapons.

The second reason for Iran's interest in nuclear weapons is its aspiration to attain regional hegemony over the Persian Gulf and the entire Middle East. This is not a new ambition. The regime of the Shah also sought to build Iran up as a regional superpower able to impact the principal processes in the area. The current regime added an Islamic-religious consideration to the strategic ones behind the desire to attain hegemony. The regime's apparent expectation is that the acquisition of nuclear weapons, with all the attendant prestige, would become a central element in building Iran's hegemony, in particular when Iran is already surrounded by countries that possess nuclear weapons capabilities, such as Russia, Pakistan, India and - based on the prevalent assumptions - Israel, too.

The third reason is related to internal considerations. The Islamic regime is sensitive to its standing at home and finds itself in a constant state of fear that internal and external elements might undermine the regime and try to topple it. The regime's leaders are apparently convinced that acquiring nuclear weapons would bolster the regime by giving it internal prestige, rallying the nation around it.

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## The Current Stage of Iran's Nuclear Policy

Iran's nuclear policy touches on two periods of time: the current period, during which Iran is striving to acquire nuclear weapons and is building up its ability to do so, but does not yet possess nuclear arms; and the future period, when Iran may indeed succeed in stockpiling nuclear weapons if the efforts to halt the process fail.

In the current situation, in which Iran does not yet possess nuclear weapons, it faces a twofold question: whether to actually develop a nuclear bomb, or to make do with building the capability to create a nuclear device and to halt at the brink, a few months away from actually manufacturing it. And if Iran decides the manufacture the weapon - what is the right time, in its eyes, to break through to nuclear arms?

The working assumption is that when Iran decides to manufacture a nuclear device, it will



not make do with just one or two bombs, but will seek to build up a stockpile of eight to ten devices at the very least, with varied launch capabilities. Although Iran will be viewed as a nuclear country from the moment it possesses its first bomb, one or two bombs are not sufficiently effective for operational needs, i.e. if Iran considers actually employing the nuclear arms. A state does not mount a nuclear attack when it has only one or two bombs, unless it has no choice but to attack – and that is an uncommon scenario. It would require a stockpile of a number of additional bombs in case its attack fails or encounters a technical mishap, but also to maintain second-strike capability. What this means is that the nuclearization of Iran will be a gradual process, which from its start until it has succeeded in building up a sufficiently large stockpile of weapons, will take a number of years.

But the indications in the hands of the Western intelligence community point to the fact that Iran is not rushing full speed ahead in the direction of its first bomb.<sup>3</sup> Instead, it is building a variety of nuclear capabilities – mainly involving the enrichment of uranium, but also plutonium production. At the focus of these efforts, Iran seeks to manufacture a large amount of uranium enriched to a low grade that will enable it to produce uranium enriched to a high grade – i.e. fissile material – in an amount sufficient for it to manufacture a number of bombs. Already today, Iran has amassed uranium enriched to a low grade in an amount sufficient for two bombs, if enriched to a high grade. In addition, the following Iranian steps were uncovered in 2009–2010:

The secret construction of a relatively small facility for the enrichment of uranium near the city of Qom, which is clearly not intended for civilian needs, and may be designated for the enrichment of uranium to a high grade.

- The enrichment of uranium to a grade of 20 percent, which is not considered a military grade, but which shortens the timetable for the production of fissile material. In July 2010, Iran announced that it had enriched 20 kilograms of uranium to a grade of 20 percent so far.

<sup>3</sup> Lecture of Chief of IDF Military Intelligence, Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin, at the annual conference of the Institute for National Security Studies, Dec. 15, 2009.

- At the same time, Iran also announced that it plans in the near future to build a number of additional facilities to enrich uranium.
- Furthermore, Iran is concurrently advancing its development of ballistic missiles as a possible delivery system for nuclear weapons, and is improving their range and precision. Unlike its nuclear program, whose military aspects the Iranians take great pains to conceal and deny, they openly and prominently display the products of their missile program and its advanced missile development.

From this it follows that the most important stage in Iran's current nuclear policy is the political decision if and when to break through the nuclear barrier – and it is not yet clear if that decision has already been made, and if it has not, when it will be made. Such a decision could be dependent on a number of considerations. The main one is related to Iran's fundamental nuclear policy: Will it prefer to remain a threshold state – i.e. a state that has decided to develop the capability to build nuclear weapons but for the meantime, will not build the weapon itself – or will it decide to go all the way and actually manufacture the bomb? The advantage of remaining a threshold state is that Iran would be able to continue to claim – and technically without lying – that it does not possess nuclear arms and that it has no intention of developing them, thereby keeping the price that it would be required to pay in the international arena, due to its development of a bomb, to a minimum. It is possible that in the framework of this scenario, Iran would also refrain from withdrawing from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and would continue to insist that it is meeting all its international commitments. Moreover, in this scenario, Iran would be able to benefit from some – albeit not all – of the advantages that result from the acquisition of nuclear arms and in particular achieve partial strategic deterrence in the face of any possibility of attack on it, even if that deterrence would not be immediate, until it actually possessed a nuclear bomb.<sup>4</sup>

A number of further factors may be added to these fundamental considerations:<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For more on this subject, see: Ephraim Kam and Ephraim Asculai, "A timetable for the Iranian bomb," *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 12, Issue 4, January 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



- What would be the optimal timing in political terms to break through the nuclear barrier, if Iran were to decide to start to manufacture? In other words, when, in Iran's assessment, would the lowest price be exacted from it for manufacturing the bomb, including further sanctions, which may be assumed would be imposed on it, after it became apparent that Iran was manufacturing nuclear arms?
- Will the circumstances come about that might require Iran to step up its timetable and build the bomb more quickly - for example, if it were to conclude that it was about to be attacked by the United States or Israel, requiring it to build nuclear arms for the purpose of immediate deterrence?
- Will the regime conclude that urgently acquiring the bomb could strengthen it internally, for example should a severe internal crisis develop?

From all this, it appears that even if the consensus among the Western intelligence community is that Iran has the technical knowhow to manufacture a first nuclear bomb by 2010-2011, it doesn't necessarily follow that Iran will indeed do so within that time frame. The key to it taking that step would be based on a political decision: What policy will Iran decide to adopt and what will its timetable be?

Even if Iran decides to stop at the threshold of nuclear capability, this scenario will create a difficult problem for Israel and other relevant countries. There is no assurance that in this scenario, precise and timely intelligence can be obtained regarding the state of the Iranian nuclear program, and especially regarding the stage when Iran might move from being a threshold state to becoming fully nuclear. Because this is a critical question and Israel cannot assume in advance that it will indeed know exactly when Iran will manufacture a nuclear bomb, it will have to work from a strict-case assumption, i.e. that Iran has gone nuclear from the moment, based on assessments, that it has a sufficient amount of fissile material for a first bomb.

## The Nuclear Policy and the Future of Iran

The second scenario, according to which Iran will decide at some stage to manufacture nuclear weapons, raises two important questions: What

public policy will Iran adopt in regard to its possession of nuclear arms? And what use will it make of these arms?

If Iran decides not to stop at the threshold and to manufacture nuclear weapons, it will be able to do so in one of two ways. It can withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and end the supervision of the IAEA, enabling it to move quickly ahead to the acquisition of nuclear weapons. Alternately, it could try to conduct secret nuclear activity in undeclared facilities - including the production of fissile material and the construction of a nuclear device - in the hope that it will not be found out; if it is exposed, the hope is that by then it will have done most of the work necessary to attain a bomb. It is reasonable to assume that Iran will be forced to pay a heavy price in the form of sanctions, perhaps very serious ones, whichever of the two paths it chooses. But it must be taken into consideration that these sanctions will not deter it and that Iran will be willing to pay the price in the hope that the sanctions will not be excessively prohibitive and that they will be eased over time - as happened with India and Pakistan following the nuclear tests they conducted in 1998. In any event, it may be assumed that after Iran has acquired nuclear weapons, the possibility of convincing it to turn the clock back and dismantle its nuclear weapons is even less likely than before it has acquired them.

Today, the factual basis is insufficient to determine what Iran's future policy will be after it has acquired nuclear weapons. It has already been noted that Iran has not given any indication as to what its future policy might be, and it is entirely possible that Iran itself has not yet decided, and that it will do so only when it has reached the bridge. In a scenario in which Iran breaks through the nuclear barrier, it will be able to choose one of two paths: to adopt a policy of ambiguity, i.e. not to admit that it has nuclear arms; or alternately, to send out clear signals that it has acquired nuclear weapons, to announce that it possesses such weapons, or to openly conduct a nuclear test.

**The first option** is that Iran adopts a policy of nuclear ambiguity, i.e. it does not announce that it possesses a bomb, and may even deny that this is the case. However, the assessment in Israel and the West - on a level of certainty or high probability - will be that Iran has succeeded in



building a nuclear weapon. In such a situation, while Iran may be suspected of having a bomb, its situation will be easier, in view of the absence of conclusive proof that this is so, and because it has refrained from admitting that it does. It may be assumed that in such a case, Iran will try to find support among various countries that accept its position, claiming that no irrefutable evidence exists to prove that Iran is manufacturing nuclear arms.

This policy would give Iran a number of advantages:

- The credibility of its deterrence vis-à-vis the United States or Israel would be higher than in a scenario in which it remains a threshold state, because those countries would have to assume that Iran already has readily available nuclear weapons that it can activate without delay.
- Concealing the very existence of its bomb will help Iran build up an increasingly larger nuclear stockpile more easily and with less pressure.
- Denying the existence of the bomb could reduce the constraints among other Middle Eastern countries to join in a nuclear arms race, which Iran has no interest in encouraging either. The damage to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and Iran's responsibility for causing that damage would be mitigated.
- While it is true that some of the regional and internal advantages that Iran hopes to gain from the acquisition of nuclear arms will be more modest if it pursues a policy of ambiguity, because there will always remain some doubt as to whether it really does possess such weapons, such advantages will be attained gradually, the closer Iran gets to the situation that Israel is in: i.e. it will not admit that it possesses nuclear arms, but everyone will believe that it does.

**The second option** is for Iran to pursue a declared nuclear policy - that is, Iran will announce that it possesses a nuclear weapon and may perhaps even conduct a declared nuclear test. There is a certain difference between the two options: A test would leave no room for doubt that Iran indeed possesses nuclear weapons. On the other hand, a declaration on the part of Iran that it possesses nuclear arms will require Israel and other countries to accept

that declaration as credible, but will leave a certain amount of room for at least temporary doubt that Iran may be lying - for example, for the purpose of immediate deterrence - while bearing in mind that Iran has a history of using lies and subterfuge. As far as Iran is concerned, a declared nuclear policy has both advantages and disadvantages. One disadvantage is that it will most certainly lead to further and more serious sanctions and another is that it is likely to convince other Middle Eastern countries to take the nuclear track. As for the advantages, this policy will create credible deterrence, will conclusively put an end to the possibility of a military option against Iran and will provide Iran with both regional and internal achievements. And this policy has yet another advantage: It will enable dialogue with other parties - for example with European countries, including Turkey or Russia - regarding the rules of the game and the red lines, which will minimize the danger of a nuclear confrontation as a result of a misunderstanding or mistake in judgment - something that Iran is not interested in.

Will Iran choose a policy of ambiguity or of declared nuclearization? The decision will be made by Iran after it weighs two main considerations against one another: the weight of the international pressure to be exerted on Iran and its assessment of the price it will have to pay, on the one hand, and how much it needs immediate and credible deterrence in light of its fear of being attacked, on the other. From among these two considerations, there is a greater likelihood that Iran will opt for a policy of ambiguity, at least at the first stage. This could provide it with optimal results: It would achieve a reasonable level of deterrence, while milking most of the regional and internal advantages, keeping the international price that it will have to pay to a minimum, especially if it knows what it is in advance. The choice of a policy of ambiguity has yet another advantage: It allows some flexibility. If Iran becomes convinced that the policy of ambiguity no longer provides it with a sufficient advantage, it can always move over to a declared policy. On the other hand, there is no way back from a declared policy to one of ambiguity. It was for these reasons that India and Pakistan waited for years from the time they had acquired nuclear weapons until they conducted their declared nuclear tests in 1998.



At this point, the most important question needs to be explored: How will Iran use its nuclear weapons? Will it leave them on the shelf only to be used in the worst-case scenario, for example, if its most important interests come under real threat, or will it view them as an offensive strike weapon? This question is especially critical where Israel is concerned, because it is the only country that will have to weigh the danger of Iran attacking it with nuclear arms and take that option into account in its considerations.

The answer to this question is neither simple nor conclusive. It can be claimed that if Iran behaves rationally, if it weighs the advantages against the disadvantages, the dangers against the opportunities that lie in its actions, it is reasonable to assume that it will not initiate the use of nuclear arms - neither against Israel nor any other country. This hypothesis is based on three main factors:

- To the extent that it is possible to judge, Iran is developing nuclear weapons first and foremost for purposes of defense and deterrence. In other words, it views this weaponry as a strategic safety net in the case of an extreme military crisis. While it has expressly declared its desire to eradicate the State of Israel, that is not its main motivation for its development of nuclear weapons, and in Iran's eyes, the destruction of Israel is not a supreme interest, one whose achievement would justify the use of nuclear weapons at any price. While Israel represents a limited military threat to Iran, it is not one that requires nuclear weapons to neutralize it. As far as Iran is concerned, initiating the use of nuclear weapons against Israel would harm their original and fundamental designation: to be saved for an extreme and dire situation in which there is no other alternative.
- Iran believes - to the extent that everyone else does - that Israel has a large stockpile of nuclear arms, and that it apparently has second-strike capability. On the basis of this assumption, it would need to take into account that a nuclear strike on Israel would necessarily lead to a response involving a harsh nuclear strike by Israel on it. With 14 million people living in Teheran, a nuclear strike on it and on other cities would kill millions of Iranians and cause serious devastation to the country's infrastructures; it might even undermine and topple the

regime. It is reasonable to assume that even an extremist fundamentalist government such as the Islamic regime in Teheran would be unwilling to pay that high a price for a nuclear attack on Israel.

- The special relationship between the United States and Israel is evident to the Iranian regime, which is aware that every American administration is committed to the existence and security of Israel. Consequently, the Iranian regime would have to take into account - especially if the American administration explicitly spells this out - that an Iranian nuclear attack on Israel would be met by an American nuclear strike against Iran, and once again, the outcome would be catastrophic and devastating for it.

Even if we conclude that based on a rational analysis, Iran is unlikely to attack Israel with nuclear arms, three important reservations to this conclusion should be noted:

- This conclusion is no more than an assessment, and it is in the nature of strategic assessments that they may be wrong, even if based on data. This is all the more so in the case of Iran. It has already been noted here that Iran's future nuclear policy is an unknown. Consequently, any conclusion in regard to Iran's willingness or lack thereof to use its nuclear arms is no more than an assessment based neither on hard data nor on clear indications, making the danger that it might be wrong even greater.
- The Iranian regime is quite unique in nature, because it is headed by neither a politician nor a military officer, but by a cleric, and consequently religious motivations play a major role in decision-making in this regime. For this reason, it is difficult to conclusively determine what the role of the Islamic-fundamentalist motivation will be in the aggregate of considerations and the decision-making system of the Iranian leadership. The history of the Islamic regime in Iran has seen cases of rational and judicious decision-making on its part, but also cases in which the regime's decisions have been driven by Islamic ideology that goes beyond rationality, such as Iran's treatment of the United States and the disconnect between the two countries. In other words, the question mark is: Should the possibility be considered that the Iranian leadership may

decide to order a nuclear strike on Israel in the name of a divine injunction from Allah, and damn the consequences?

- There is no dialogue or communication of any kind between Israel and Iran. The only messages that are exchanged between them are public ones coming from senior officials - generally of an extreme and inflammatory nature. If a situation comes about in which there are two nuclear states in the region - Iran in the future, and based on prevalent notions, Israel already today - which do not share communications, agreed-upon rules of the game and red lines in a nuclear environment, the danger of an unintentional nuclear confrontation could develop as a result of a misunderstanding or misjudgment, for example due to a misinterpretation of steps taken by the other side or a genuine fear on the part of one of the sides of a nuclear attack initiated by the other.

This applies to Israel. The probability of Iran launching an offensive nuclear strike on any other country is almost nonexistent. Iran will not under any circumstances initiate a nuclear strike on the principal country threatening it, the United States, because it would be suicidal to attack a superpower that has a huge arsenal of nuclear and other weapons at its disposal. Iran would not carry out a nuclear offensive on any of its Muslim neighbors either, under most circumstances, because that would kill millions of Muslims. The only scenario in which this is feasible, albeit at a low level of likelihood, is under circumstances of a prolonged and difficult war between Iran and one of its neighbors - such as, for example, its war with Iraq in the 1980s - and if Iran were to find itself at the point of no return, convinced that it has no alternative other than to use its nuclear weapons.

Even if it becomes apparent over time that Iran will not initiate a first nuclear offensive strike against Israel, the possibility that it could use its nuclear weapons to attack Israel in response to an attack on it should be explored. In theory, Iran could decide to respond with a defensive nuclear attack in the context of two possible scenarios: in the case of an attack on Iran itself or on one of its allies.

An attack on Iran could be carried out only by the United States or Israel, because they are the only two states that would consider such

a strike, particularly on Iran's nuclear facilities. There are no other countries weighing this option or willing to participate in such a strike. However, the probability of such a strike on Iran would be very low after Iran has acquired nuclear weapons - both due to the nuclear deterrence capability that Iran would possess by then, and also because after Iran has acquired nuclear arms, it would be very difficult to assure one-hundred-percent success in an attack on nuclear sites, because Iran would be able to conceal its nuclear weapons in secret sites outside the known nuclear facilities. If nevertheless, such a strike were to be carried out, and Iran retained second-strike nuclear capability, the possibility of an Iranian nuclear strike on Israel cannot be completely ruled out. The probability of such a strike would arise if the attack were to cause the loss of many lives in Iran as well as considerable material and infrastructural damage, and/or pose a danger to the stability and survival of the regime, requiring it to respond with a nuclear strike. In any event, it is highly unlikely that Iran would launch a nuclear strike against the United States even in wake of an American attack on it.

In a scenario involving an attack on an ally of Iran - in particular Syria or Hezbollah - the probability of an Iranian nuclear response would be low. In the past, when Syria was attacked by Israel in the First Lebanon War, and when Hezbollah was attacked in the Second Lebanon War, Iran refrained from any real involvement to protect its allies. However, the absence of a response in the past is no guarantee that Iran would refrain from responding in the future too, after it has acquired nuclear weapons. But it is reasonable to assume that in the future Iran would also prefer not to get involved in a direct confrontation with Israel, and especially not a nuclear one. Nevertheless, Iran could signal to its allies that it would be willing to help them using all means at its disposal - implying that this includes nuclear weapons - in order to create a state of uncertainty in regard to the nature of its response and thereby to deter Israel from further intensifying the harm being caused to its ally. In a more serious scenario, the possibility that Iran might promise Syria a "nuclear umbrella" in case of a severe military crisis involving Israel should be taken into consideration.

However, Iran could also provide its allies with nuclear assistance outside the context of a





military confrontation. It has been suggested that Iran could transfer nuclear weapons or technology to states or organizations affiliated with it. The possibility that Iran might help Syria with its nuclear program is not to be ignored either. Syria has been asking in recent years for help in advancing its nuclear program and Iran might try to assist by transferring nuclear technology in the hope that this help would not leak out. On the other hand, the possibility that Iran might transfer nuclear weapons to Syria or Hezbollah appears slim. If it becomes necessary to back up Syria or Hezbollah vis-à-vis Israel, or to deter Israel, it may be assumed that Iran would prefer to do so itself and retain control of its nuclear weapons rather than to let them out of its control. Where Hezbollah is concerned, there are other reasons not to hand over nuclear weapons to it: It is doubtful whether the organization could deploy a nuclear weapon; Iran would find itself in an uncomfortable position if it were discovered that Hezbollah, which has been defined as a terror organization, possessed nuclear arms because it would be obvious that the source was Iran. It is not unlikely that Syria would be reluctant to allow an organization active in its own backyard, in Lebanon, to acquire a nuclear device that would strengthen it relative to Syria, and more importantly, that could draw it into a confrontation with Israel.

An important question is whether Iran's nuclear policy will change if and when there is a change in the nature of the regime in Iran. The possibility of a regime change is not insignificant. The internal unrest that erupted in June 2009 is indicative that a large part of the Iranian public has had enough of the government and wants to replace it. So far, the regime has managed to suppress the reformist camp using force, thereby maintaining stability; however, the internal rift between a large proportion of the people and the regime, and within the regime leadership itself, is profound; when the camp that seeks change manages to produce charismatic leadership that can rally and organize the camp and navigate the unrest with resolve, regime change will follow. It is clear that it is impossible to determine when this change will occur and if Iran will already possess nuclear capability when it does.

The impact of internal change, if and when such change should occur, on Iran's nuclear policy is hardly a certainty. At present, there is no single

major camp or party in Iran that is opposed to the continued development of the nuclear program. All the heads of the reformist camp were partners to the advancement of the nuclear program: It was launched when Mir-Hossein Mousavi was prime minister; it was further advanced when Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was president. According to numerous testimonies, the majority of the Iranian public, including all its various currents and movements, supports the continuation of the program because it believes that it is Iran's right – although the public does not distinguish between the civilian and military nuclear program, and it is unclear whether its support relates to the development of nuclear weapons.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, there is a far greater chance that a more moderate Iranian regime would agree to engage significantly with the American administration with an eye to improving the relations between the two countries. A dialogue of this kind, were it to develop, could have a greater chance of leading to a suspension of the nuclear program – although this is far from a sure thing. In any case, even if Iran were to acquire nuclear arms by that time, their possession by a moderate Iranian regime would markedly reduce the dangers involved, and under a regime of this kind, the entire nature of the Iranian threat would be quite different.

Finally, would changes in the nature of the Israeli-Arab conflict, especially progress in the peace negotiations between Israel and Syria and/or the Palestinian Authority, impact Iran's nuclear policy? This type of influence would certainly be neither direct nor immediate. Iran is vehemently opposed to any peace process, whether between Israel and Syria or between Israel and the Palestinians, and will do whatever it can to disrupt and halt the process. If a peace settlement is reached between Israel and either the Syrians or Palestinians, Iran would not become part of the

<sup>6</sup> A survey conducted in Iran in August 2007 found that 77 percent of the respondents want the Iranian government to continue enriching uranium: [www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/iranians\\_want\\_to\\_keep\\_nuclear\\_program](http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/iranians_want_to_keep_nuclear_program);

A survey conducted a month earlier showed that 33 percent of the respondents strongly favored Iran acquiring nuclear arms, and another 19 percent somewhat favored this goal.

[http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/1315/iranians\\_divided\\_on\\_building\\_nuclear\\_weapon/](http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/1315/iranians_divided_on_building_nuclear_weapon/)

peace process, at least as long as the radical regime remains in power. Consequently, its fundamental approach towards Israel would remain unchanged. However, developments in the peace process that alter the relationship between Israel and the Arab world and

that could perhaps drive a wedge between Syria and Iran would mitigate Iran's militant influence on the region. In such circumstances, even if engagement between Israel and Iran did not develop, it would be harder for Iran to threaten Israel with nuclear arms.



## Iran's Ambitions for Regional Hegemony



# A Nuclear Iran - To Strike or Not to Strike - That is the Question

Reuven Pedatzur

An investigative report by Jeffrey Goldberg in the September edition of the *Atlantic* magazine (which was posted on the web site in early August) to the effect that there is more than a fifty percent chance that Israel will strike Iran in 2011, unless Tehran changes its policy, or the Obama administration convinces the Israeli leadership it is prepared to use force if necessary to check Iran's nuclear program, has provoked widespread reaction<sup>1</sup>. Goldberg's says his conclusions are largely based on dozens of interviews he conducted with Israeli, American and Arab policy-makers.

In his hypothetical scenario Goldberg postulates:

One day next spring, the Israeli national-security adviser, Uzi Arad, and the Israeli defense minister, Ehud Barak, will simultaneously telephone their counterparts at the White House and the Pentagon, to inform them that their prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has just ordered roughly one hundred F-15Es, F-16Is, F-16Cs, and other aircraft of the Israeli air force to fly east toward Iran—possibly by crossing Saudi Arabia, possibly by threading the border between Syria and Turkey, and possibly by traveling directly through Iraq's airspace, though it is crowded with American aircraft.

In Goldberg's assessment, the strike could include the bombing of the installations at Natanz, Kom, Esfahan, and possibly also the Russian-built reactor in Bushehr. He also writes that Israel might dispatch Special Forces to

provide proof to the Israeli people that the Iranians were planning an "Auschwitz" - a second Holocaust - and that the operation was therefore well worth the price.

In Goldberg's view, the ramifications and costs of such an operation are uncertain, notwithstanding several simulations and countless discussions. The Americans believe that bombing the installations would - at best - delay Iran's nuclear program by just a few years. But among Israelis, who experienced the destruction of the nuclear reactors in Iraq and Syria, Goldberg found a more optimistic outlook. To his mind, the Israeli aircraft will have to return to base quickly because Hezbollah would most likely launch an immediate onslaught from the north.

Goldberg is further convinced that Israel's red lines are clear, and that December 2010 is the cutoff date for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to exhaust "non-military" means for stopping Iran. "If the choice is between allowing Iran to go nuclear, or trying for ourselves what Obama won't try, then we probably have to try," a senior Israeli official told the *Atlantic*. "If the Israelis reach the firm conclusion that Obama will not, under any circumstances, launch a strike on Iran, then the countdown will begin for a unilateral Israeli attack," Goldberg asserts.

In other words, Goldberg's conclusion is unequivocal. War will break out, and the only remaining question is whether it will be Israel, or the United States, that will strike Iran's nuclear installations.

In response to this article, Trita Parsi writes that the starting point for Goldberg's analysis and conclusion is that Israeli policy makers perceive Iran to be an irrational and undeterrable rival, uninfluenced by cost-benefit considerations. In

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, "Point of no return" *Atlantic*, September, 2010.  
<<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/print/2010/09/the-point-of-no-return/8186/>>



this view, if Iran is seen as an existential threat to Israel, a preemptive military strike on its nuclear program becomes the only viable and rational option.<sup>2</sup>

Taking account of the Israeli psyche, Alon Ben-Meir opines that the modern history of the Jewish people and the Jewish state gives rise to a heightened sense of threat and an obsession about national security, which remain unmitigated by sixty years of independence and Israel's renowned military prowess. The fear of annihilation is still fully engrained in Israel's collective consciousness. "No Israeli leader takes Israel's ability to defend itself for granted, regardless of the proven military superiority of the Israeli defense forces," says Ben-Meir. "Even a minimal risk of Iranian attack would not be accepted by a country that still lives in the shadows of the Holocaust, which claimed the lives of more than six million Jews. Many Israelis feel that dismissing the Iranian threat would come at their peril, as Iran has directly and repeatedly threatened Israel's existence."<sup>3</sup>

The extent to which the Iranian nuclear program is perceived by Israelis as a menacing threat requiring response is reflected in some of the statements made by the country's top policy makers:

"It is not just Israel that cannot accept a nuclear-armed Iran, and we are making all necessary preparations to brace for such an eventuality," declared the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on November 29, 2005 at the annual press conference of the Editors Committee.<sup>4</sup>

On January 17, 2006, Ehud Olmert, then acting prime minister for the incapacitated Ariel Sharon, declared that Israel could not tolerate a nuclear-armed Iran.<sup>5</sup>

Top military echelons have also made clear they regard the possibility of Iran's acquiring nuclear weapons as a significant threat to Israel.

2 Trita Parsi, "A campaign for war with Iran begins," *Salon* <[http://www.salon.com/author/trita\\_parsi/index.html](http://www.salon.com/author/trita_parsi/index.html)>.

3 Alon Ben-Meir, "An Iranian Bombshell," *Harvard International Review*, Spring, 2010, pp. 12-17

4 Aluf Benn, "Sharon: Israel Won't Come to Terms with a Nuclear Iran", [Sharon: lo nashlim im gari'n irani], *Ha'aretz*, December 2, 2005.

5 Yoel Marcus, "Jumping the Gun" [ma hem koftsim], *Ha'aretz*, January 19, 2006

Talking to military correspondents on January 7, 2006, for example, Chief of Staff Dan Halutz noted that given Iranian development of ballistic missiles capable of reaching targets well beyond Israel, "Israel shouldn't be the only one that's worried."<sup>6</sup>

Addressing the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee in February 2006, Director of Military Intelligence Major-General Amos Yadlin stressed that "Iran poses an existential threat to Israel."<sup>7</sup>

The view that Iran poses an existential threat to Israel - and could indeed ignite the entire Middle East - was also expressed in the comprehensive report on Israel's defense doctrine submitted to Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz in April 2006, and which was prepared over eighteen months by a committee chaired by Dan Meridor, who is considered to be one of the leading political experts on defense issues.<sup>8</sup>

In November 2006, then the opposition leader, Benjamin Netanyahu gave a talk in Los Angeles, in which he compared the existential peril posed by Iran to the threat of Nazi Germany, "This year is 1938, and Iran is Germany."<sup>9</sup>

Addressing a conference of the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute in July 2007, then chairman of the opposition Benjamin Netanyahu warned that Iran was an existential threat: "Every day the Iranian President promises to annihilate our state. We have to act in the time remaining."<sup>10</sup>

6 Hanan Greenberg, "Halutz: Dealing with Qassam Rockets requires crossing 'ethical constraints'" [Halutz: tipul ba-kasam matsrich hatsayat 'ilutsim erkieem"], *YNET*, January 8, 2006 <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3197675,00.htm>.

7 Gideon Alon, "Amos Yadlin: Iran Poses Existential Threat to Israel" [Amos Yadlin: Iran me-hava i-yum kiyumi al Israel], *Ha'aretz*, 14 February 2006.

8 "Meridor Commission Report: Fear that Other Middle Eastern Countries Will Go Nuclear in Iran's Footsteps," [Dokh Merdior: hashash she-medinet mizrach-tichoniyot yitstaydu be-garin be-ikvot iran] *Ha'aretz*, 24 April 2006.

9 Aluf Benn, "Churchill and His Disciple", [Churchill ve-talmido] *Ha'aretz*, 7 October 2009 <<http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/spages/1119316.html>>.

10 Yaakov Lappin, "Netanyahu: Iran Existential Threat; Action Must be Taken" [Netanyahu: Iran i-yum kiyumi, hayavim lif'ol] *YNET*, 11 July 2007.



At a meeting with the General Staff Forum in February 2009, the incumbent Defense Minister Ehud Barak asserted, "Undoubtedly, nuclear weapons in Iranian hands are a major threat to any possible world order, opening the door to massive nuclearization of the entire Middle East, which - if it were to happen - could be conducive to an existential threat to Israel."<sup>11</sup>

Speaking at the Herzliya Conference in February 2010, the Minister for Strategic Affairs, Moshe Yaalon also stressed, "To understand the implications, we must bear in mind that one of the important objectives the radical leadership in Iran is trying to accomplish by acquiring nuclear weapons is to create an existential threat to Israel. The radical spokespeople of the regime have already stated in the past that they believe that Israel should be obliterated from the map. And As Rafsanjani said in December 2003, one atom bomb would be enough to annihilate Israel, whereas Iran could not be annihilated even with two bombs."<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, Israeli policy makers use the radical statements made by senior Iranian officials to highlight the existential threat inherent in Iran's nuclear program, and Iran's ostensible insusceptibility to deterrence. Israelis, or at least some of Israel's policy makers, contend that since the Iranian regime is predicated on martyrdom to sanctify Allah, it cannot be deterred. To drive the point home, they cite Ayatollah Khomeini's 1980 declaration that: "We do not worship Iran, we worship Allah." And such statements are not confined to the revolutionary regime's distant past. Even Iran's incumbent leader Ali Khamenei declared that Israel is "God's enemy." The Iranian regime, many of whose leaders proclaim that the Holocaust never happened, appointed an ambassador to Poland who in 2006 sought to take the measurements of the ovens in Auschwitz to prove that they were inadequate to perpetrate the genocide that took place there.

<sup>11</sup> IDF Spokesman web site <[http://dover.idf.il/IDF/News\\_Channels/today/09/02/1602.htm](http://dover.idf.il/IDF/News_Channels/today/09/02/1602.htm)>.

<sup>12</sup> Likud Party web blog <[Even those deemed moderate in the Iranian leadership make similar statements. Former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, for example, called Israel a "one atom bomb state" \(i.e., it would take only one atom bomb to destroy it\).<sup>13</sup>](http://www.netanyahu.org.il/blog/2010/02/%D7%94%D7%A9%D7%A8-%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%94-%D7%91%D7%95%D7%92%D7%99-%D7%99%D7%A2%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%9F-%D7%90%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9F-%D7%92%D7%A8%D7%A2%D7%99%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%AA-%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%9E%D7%A2%</a></a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

Analysis of the emerging geostrategic reality in the Middle East suggests that in the wake of the eradication of the Eastern Front to Israel due to the the American occupation of Iraq, the decision of Libyan President Muammar al-Gaddafi to do away with his WMD program, and the deterioration of the Syrian military to the point that it does not pose a real military threat to Israel, Iran's nuclear program is the only remaining strategic threat to Israel. Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons would bring about a strategic change in the Middle East, followed by corresponding changes in Israel's national defense doctrine, both generally and with regard to its nuclear policy in particular.

This paper sets out to review and analyze the military option - namely an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear installations, with the aim of destroying its nuclear program or at least delaying it for an extended period of time.<sup>14</sup>

One of the problematic aspects of dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue is the weaponry development timetable. To all appearances, western intelligence agencies lack sufficient information to credibly assess the status of the Iranian nuclear program and the date by which it will have acquired such military capacity. The varying estimates as to when Iran could actually acquire nuclear weapons reflect the lack of consensus among experts and intelligence officials on this issue.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> George F. Will, "Netanyahu's warning," *Washington Post*, August 15, 2010 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/13/AR2010081304474.html>.

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that these are not all the relevant options and six others can be added: 1. Adherence to the nuclear ambiguity policy; 2. Passive defense; 3. Active defense; 4. Dialog and oversight agreements with Iran; 5. Reliance on American nuclear umbrella; 6. An Israeli nuclear deterrence. For a detailed analysis of these options see, Reuven Pedatzur, "The Iranian Nuclear Threat and the Israeli Options," *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol.28, No.3 (December 2007), pp.513-541.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed analysis of the difficulties of assessing the progress of Iran's nuclear program see: Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan, *Iranian*



The question of time is undoubtedly of paramount importance. Policy makers in Israel and the United States were at loggerheads in the past regarding the urgency of taking action vis-à-vis Iran. While the Israelis stressed the short period of time left to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, the Americans were inclined to believe there was sufficient time for diplomacy and other options.<sup>16</sup> Recently, those differences between the Israeli and American estimates have narrowed.

A review of some of the Israeli estimates over the past few years reveals their inconsistency and variations.<sup>17</sup>

On 13 May 2003, then Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, noting that there was no longer any question as to Iran's intent to acquire nuclear weapons, declared that it would take the Iranians six to nine months to fully acquire the know-how to build a weapon.

On January 24, 2005, Mossad director Meir Dagan told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that the Iranian nuclear program had reached "the point of no return," adding that if Iran were to enrich uranium in 2005, it would take it two or three years to acquire nuclear weapons.

In August 2004, Director of Military Intelligence Major General Aharon Zeevi Farkash opined that once the Iranians enriched a sufficient amount of uranium, they "would be able to assemble a bomb within two years, that is to say at the end of 2006 or early 2007." In January 2005 he updated his estimate, asserting that Iran would acquire nuclear weapons between 2007 and 2009.

In August 2005, a then-current intelligence estimate was leaked to the press that Iran would "probably" have nuclear weapons by 2010.

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***Nuclear Weapons? The Uncertain Nature of Iran's Nuclear Programs***, Washington DC, Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 12, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> David Albright and Corey Hinderstein, "Iran: Countdown to showdown," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, vol. 60, no. 6, November/December, 2004 pp. 67-72.

<sup>17</sup> Analysis of the Israeli estimates from: Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan, *Iranian Nuclear Weapons? The Uncertain Nature of Iran's Nuclear Programs*, p. 78.

In the wake of the publication of the American National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) in November 2007, stating that it would take Iran ten years to complete the development of nuclear weapons, Major General Zeevi Farkash said that "unless some unexpected delay were to occur, Iran will have nuclear capability by 2008, and not in ten years' time."

In early 2010, two Israeli researchers summarized the then-prevailing intelligence estimate as follows: <sup>18</sup>

In 2008 Iran had fully mastered the uranium enrichment technology. In 2009, it enriched low-grade uranium, and the quantity - once enriched to higher grade - will be sufficient to make the first bomb. Simultaneously, Iran improved its nuclear detonation devices and completed the development of ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. Once Iran makes the decision to enrich uranium to a higher grade, it will be able to accumulate enough fissionable material needed for one bomb within several months up to one year. Accordingly, the Intelligence Directorate does not explicitly determine the date Iran will acquire nuclear weapons because it depends on its decision to move to the final stage of building a bomb, which is yet to be made.<sup>19</sup>

In August 2010, Ephraim Asculai observed that Israeli and American intelligence estimates had changed since October 2009 with the differences between them narrowing when it became apparent that Iran continued to enrich uranium from 3.5% to 20%, bringing it much closer to weapons grade.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, following the strong international reaction to the progress Iran had made in

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<sup>18</sup> Based on the address of Director of Military Intelligence Major General Amos Yadlin at the INSS annual conference on 15 December 2009; Yadlin's appearance at the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, *Ha'aretz*, 25 March 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Ephraim Kam and Ephraim Asculai "Timetable for the Iranian Bomb" [luach zmanim shel haptatsa ha-iranit], *Strategic Update*, Vol. 12 No.4, January 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Ephraim Asculai "Ten Questions to the Negotiators with Iran" [esser she'elot lanosi'im ve-notnim im Iran], *INSS Insight*, Vol. 198, 10 August 2010; also Amir Oren: "Take Note, December 2009, Iran Goes Nuclear" [rsihmu lifnechem: December 2009, iran gari'nit], *Ha'aretz*, 14 November 2008.



enriching uranium, the American intelligence community in recent months has also embraced the estimate that Tehran would require about a year or two to complete the development of its nuclear weapons. CIA director Leon Panetta said on June 27, 2010 that Iran most probably has enough low-enriched uranium to make two nuclear bombs, but they would need two more years to build them should they choose to do so.<sup>21</sup>

Recently American officials expressed further views, suggesting that it would take a year or longer for Iran to complete the development of nuclear weapons. This estimate was voiced by Gary Samore, President Obama's top advisor on nuclear issues.<sup>22</sup>

Alongside these American assessments, an extraordinary statement by Mossad director Meir Dagan to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee caused further uncertainty. Dagan told the committee that, absent technical difficulties, Iran would have the capability to launch its first nuclear bomb at the end of 2014.<sup>23</sup>

## Israeli Preparations vis-à-vis a Nuclear Iran

Nuclear weapons in Iranian hands would mandate a fundamental change in Israel's national security policy. A nuclear threat from a hostile country should be deemed to be one of existential dimensions; as such, Israel must respond to it differently, from an operational standpoint and, equally important, from a conceptual one too. The introduction of such doctrinal changes appears to be - or should be - imminent. Of the options facing Israeli decision-makers, the military option would be

<sup>21</sup> Ephraim Asculai and Emily Landau "Iran: The End of the Race" [Iran likrat sof merotz] *INSS Insight*, Vol. 193, 20 July 2010. <http://www.inss.org.il/heb/research.php?cat=79&incat=&read=4255>

<sup>22</sup> Mark Mazzetti and David E. Sanger, "U.S. Assures Israel That Iran Threat Is Not Imminent," *New York Times*, August 19, 2010; JJ. Gould, "Monday Round-Up: How Fast Is This Clock Ticking?" *Atlantic*, August 24, 2010; Mark Hosenball, "Talk About Iran Attack Seems Very Overheated," *Newsweek*, August 16, 2010. <<http://www.newsweek.com/blogs/declassified/2010/08/16/talk-about-iran-attack-seems-very-overheated.html>>

<sup>23</sup> *Ha'aretz*, June 16, 2009.

feasible as long as Iran has not gone nuclear yet. There is a consensus among experts that attacking the nuclear installations of a country that already has nuclear weapons is inadvisable. Accordingly, if a decision is to be taken to launch a military strike against Iran's nuclear installations, it must be made within the next few months.

## Military Action

Proponents of a military option advocate a preemptive strike on Iranian nuclear installations before the process of developing nuclear weapons is completed. Israel is believed at this point to have made no decision to strike Iran, and there appear to be disputes among senior politicians and top IDF officers. However, Israeli policy makers repeatedly emphasize that a strike on Iran is inevitable. This might be a kind of psychological warfare aimed at exerting pressure on the international community - and especially on the United States - to take effective action to halt Iran's march to nuclear capability. Yet such belligerent statements sometimes have their own dynamic and could lead to escalation.

"If Iran pursues its nuclear weapons program, we will attack it," declared Shaul Mofaz, former chief of staff and defense minister, in June 2008.<sup>24</sup> On the eve of the last elections in Israel that resulted in his becoming prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu declared that he did not rule out a military option against Iran's nuclear installations.<sup>25</sup>

In May 2010, the Minister for Strategic Affairs and Vice Prime Minister Moshe Yaalon warned Iran that "Israel has the capability to strike."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Reuters: "US about Attack on Iran: Diplomacy First", *YNET*, 7 June 2008.

Donald Macintyre, "Israel's dry run 'attack on Iran' with 100 jet fighters," *The Independent*, June 21, 2008. <<http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3552786,00.html>>

<sup>25</sup> IdanYossef, "Netanyahu doesn't rule out Israeli strike in Iran" [Netanyahu lo posel tkifa be-iran], *News 1*, January 31, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Moshe Yaalon: "Israel Capable of Striking Iran" [le-Israel yekholet tkifa be-iran], *Walla*, May 10, 2010.



Additionally, the IDF has been carrying out much hyped and publicized exercises simulating strikes against objectives in Iran.<sup>27</sup>

The model that the proponents of a military strike advocate is similar to the June 1981 attack on Iraq's Osirak reactor. They note that the destruction of the reactor near Baghdad stopped the Iraqi nuclear program for an extended period, and believe the same objective could be accomplished in the case of Iran.<sup>28</sup>

However, there is a fundamental difference between the Iraqi case and the Iranian one. The Iranians have learned the lessons of Osirak, and thus deployed their nuclear installations to numerous locations throughout their country. Unlike the Iraqi case, where all the development efforts were concentrated in one place, the Iranians have diversified their methods and decentralized their facilities.<sup>29</sup>

To enrich uranium, the Iranians use centrifuges at a facility that was secretly built in Natanz. In Arak, they set up a heavy water plant. Under the guise of a watch manufacturing plant, they also built secret laboratories at the "Nuclear Research Center" in the outskirts of Tehran, as well as a uranium enrichment facility near Kom. Many of these installations are below ground, and fortified against air strikes. In addition to those mentioned, Iran's comprehensive nuclear program includes many other installations, numbering dozens according to Western intelligence sources.<sup>30</sup>

Another problem Israel would have to face stems from the fact that some of the nuclear installations are located in densely populated areas, and destroying them could inflict many

civilian casualties. The scathing criticism that this would draw will also have to be taken into account by Israeli policy makers.<sup>31</sup>

A dearth of intelligence is also a major stumbling block to a military operation. It remains unclear whether Israeli intelligence has information about all of the Iranian installations that are relevant to pursuing the development of nuclear weapons. It should be borne in mind that western intelligence agencies were unaware of the installations in Natanz and Arak until their existence was revealed by information provided by Iranian exiles.<sup>32</sup>

In order to accomplish the objectives of the strike, namely setting back the Iranian nuclear program by a substantial number of years, the target list would have to be inclusive. Ballistic missile sites, plants, research centers, and even facilities inside university campuses would have to be hit, so as to force Iran to rebuild those facilities were it to choose to revive its weapons program.<sup>33</sup>

It seems Israel does not have a sufficient number of aircraft to successfully destroy all the objectives connected to Iran's nuclear program. This problem is further complicated by the fact that that Israel would likely be able to carry out only one sortie - maybe two - due to international pressure to halt the attacks. In any event, Israel will not be able to carry out continuous attacks for an extended period of time, which is the only way the relevant objectives, or at least most of them, could be destroyed.<sup>34</sup> Another obstacle to a successful Israeli strike is that some of the nuclear installations, particularly the crucial ones, are located well below ground level and covered

27 Orr Heler and Reuters: "Report: Israel carries out exercises simulating strike in Iran" [Israel arkha targil ha-medameh tkifa be-iran], *Nana 10*, 21 June 2008. <<http://news.nana10.co.il/Article/?ArticleID=560677>>

28 Ephraim Inbar, "The Imperative to Use Force Against Iranian Nuclearization," *BESA Center Perspectives*, No. 12, December 15, 2005. <<http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/perspectives12.html>>

29 Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Iran Attack Plan," *Wall Street Journal*, September 25, 2009. <[http://online.wsj.com/article/NA\\_WSJ\\_PUB:SB10001424052970204518504574418813806271306.html](http://online.wsj.com/article/NA_WSJ_PUB:SB10001424052970204518504574418813806271306.html)>

30 Iran's key nuclear sites," *BBC web site*, September 25, 2009. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle-east/4617398.stm>>; "Target Iran - Air Strikes," *GlobalSecurity.org*. <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iran-strikes.htm>>

31 Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Iran Attack Plan," *Wall Street Journal*, September 25, 2009. <[http://online.wsj.com/article/NA\\_WSJ\\_PUB:SB10001424052970204518504574418813806271306.html](http://online.wsj.com/article/NA_WSJ_PUB:SB10001424052970204518504574418813806271306.html)>

32 Michael Crowley, "The Bomb Squad," *The New Republic*, April 21, 2010.

33 Paul Rogers, *Military Action Against Iran: Impact and Effects*, Oxford Research Group Briefing Paper, July 2010, p.1.

34 David Albright, Paul Brannan, and Jacqueline Shire, "Can military strikes destroy Iran's gas centrifuge program? Probably not," *ISIS REPORT*, August 7, 2008; Dan Murphy, *Christian Science Monitor*, August 12, 2010 <<http://www.topix.net/content/csm/2010/08/repercussions-of-an-israeli-attack-on-iran>>; Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Iran Attack Plan".



by reinforced concrete. It would be difficult, if not virtually impossible, to destroy them.

In September 2004, Israel announced that it had procured some 5,000 highly accurate "smart bombs" from the United States, including 500 "bunker busters" equipped with 900-kg BLU-109 warheads. Later Israel was authorized to procure the 2,300-kg. BLU-113 bombs.<sup>35</sup>

The problem, however, is that while these bombs can penetrate 10 meters of concrete and 30 meters of earth, some of the Iranian installations are buried sixty meters below ground. Satellite photos of the uranium enrichment facility in Natanz indicate that it is buried 23 meters below ground under layers of reinforced concrete and earth, well beyond the penetration capability of the American bombs.<sup>36</sup>

Iranian air defenses are another impediment that the Israeli air force would have to overcome. The Iranian military has invested heavily in developing an air defense system, which is partly mobile. They have also built decentralized systems that allow some units to operate autonomously, thereby providing them with operational flexibility.

A few years ago, the Iranians procured from Russia the TOR M1 9M330,<sup>37</sup> an advanced air defense system that could cause problems for the Israeli air force.

Recent reports also indicate that, despite Russia's refusal to sell the weaponry system to Tehran, Iran has procured four S-300 air defense missile batteries from Belarus.<sup>38</sup> This is an air defense system with the best performance ever developed in Russia. Not only will Iran's

<sup>35</sup> Raas and Long, "Osirak Redux? Assessing Israeli Capabilities to Destroy Iranian Nuclear Facilities," *International Security*, volume 31, issue 4, Spring 2007, pp. 7-33.

<sup>36</sup> Douglas Davis, "Israel Will Do Whatever it Takes," *Spectator*, January 6, 2007.

<sup>37</sup> "Iranian Air Defence No Match for US Attack," *Jane's Press Release*, March 9, 2007, <<http://jid.janes.com/public/jid/index.shtml>>; Michel Chossudovsky, "Planned US-Israeli Attack on Iran," *Global Reach*, <<http://globalresearch.ca/articles/CHO505A.html>>; "Russia Fills Tor M1 9M330 Air Defense System," *Defense Update*. <<http://www.defense-update.com/products/t/tor.htm>>

<sup>38</sup> Sensations from Iran: There's no smoke without fire," *Voice of Russia*, August 5, 2010. <<http://english.ruvr.ru/2010/08/05/14688111.html>>

having such a system further complicate an Israeli strike, it could exact a heavy toll from the attacking force.<sup>39</sup>

The deployment of these air defense systems in the proximity of nuclear installations would compel the Israeli air force to allocate forces to neutralize the defensive array by attacking command and control centers, radar systems and launchers.<sup>40</sup>

Major General (res.) Giora Eiland, former head of the National Security Council, contends that Israel is unable to destroy Iran's nuclear program or delay it significantly. Addressing an INSS conference in December 2008 in Tel Aviv, he said, "Unfortunately Israel does not have the military capability to destroy the Iranian nuclear capacity beyond rehabilitation. At most, what Israel can achieve is obstruction or delay of Tehran's nuclear program." Of course, Eiland added, the "\$64,000 question" remains how long that delay would be. "An Israeli strike cannot force Iran to either capitulate or renounce its efforts to develop nuclear weapons," he concluded.<sup>41</sup>

## The Iranian Reaction

In addition to the difficulties of a military operation, Israel must weigh the price and the implications of a strike on other countries in the region, on the United States and on developments in the Middle East:

- a Israel would pay a diplomatic price. Attacking a sovereign country that has not declared war on Israel and which has not launched acts of aggression could lead to international pressure and even the application of sanctions.
- b Iran could react militarily, either by launching Shahab-3 missiles at Israeli targets or by employing Hezbollah and Hamas to fire

<sup>39</sup> <<http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/airdef/s-300pmu.htm>>

<sup>40</sup> For an analysis of Israel's possible plan of attack cf: Abdullah Toukan and Anthony H. Cordesman, *Study on a Possible Israeli Strike on Iran's Nuclear Development Facilities*, Washington, DC, Center for strategic and International Studies, March 14, 2009.

<[http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090316\\_israel-istrikeitiran.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090316_israel-istrikeitiran.pdf)>

<sup>41</sup> Dudi Cohen, "Former general: Israel can't defeat Iran," *YNET*, December 18, 2008. <<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3641005,00.html>>

thousands of rockets into Israel's heartland. Hezbollah has more than 50,000 rockets, some of which are capable of striking Tel Aviv. Hamas has thousands of rockets, some of which have a 40-kilometer range.

- c The Iranians could use terror cells around the world to attack Israeli (e.g. embassies) and Jewish targets.
- d To punish the United States for what they would perceive as acquiescence in or even assistance to the Israeli strike, the Iranians would likely attack American targets in the Persian Gulf. The Iranians could also step up cooperation with the Taliban in Afghanistan and help it to operate against American forces.<sup>42</sup>
- e It is also more likely than not that Iran would launch attacks on targets in the Gulf countries and in Saudi Arabia, since Tehran would assume that Riyadh cooperated with Jerusalem by allowing its aircraft to fly through its airspace.<sup>43</sup>
- f The Iranians might hinder maritime movement of oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz, thereby causing a drastic oil price hike.
- g Revolutionary Guard forces could carry out incursions into Iraq, fomenting unrest and collaborating with the insurgents battling the government. This could compel the United States to allocate large forces to deal with the invading Iranians.
- h Iranian commandos could sabotage oil installations in the Gulf countries, thereby causing an additional oil price spike.
- i An Israeli attack on Iran could cause the sanctions and the pressure of the international community on Iran to completely collapse,

42 Bruce Riedel, "If Israel Attacks," The *National Interest*, August 24, 2010. <<http://nationalinterest.org/article/israel-attacks-3907>>

43 Charles Recknagel, "Iran: Tehran Threatens to Retaliate if Israel Strikes Nuclear Facilities," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, 24 Aug. 2004; "Tehran: We Shall Retaliate with Missiles if We are Attacked," *Ha'aretz*, January 26, 2006; James Fallows, "Will Iran Be Next?" *Atlantic*, December 2004. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2004/12/will-iran-be-next/3599/>>; Judith Miller, "More Than 5 Reasons Why Israel Won't Strike Iran Anytime Soon," *Fox News*, August 19, 2010. <<http://www.judithmiller.com/7860/israel-wont-strike-iran>>

thereby enabling Tehran to pursue its nuclear program uninterruptedly.

- j An Israeli strike would probably result in Iran's withdrawal from the NPT.
- k In the aftermath of such an attack, Tehran would likely step up its efforts to develop nuclear weapons, building more sites and pursuing other means of development in order to have redundancies in its nuclear program should it be attacked again.<sup>44</sup>
- l It is quite possible that following such an attack, the international community would address the issue of Israel's nuclear weapons and pressure it to join the NPT or agree to oversight of its arsenal.<sup>45</sup>

In view of this analysis, it seems that an Israeli strike would result in a prolonged conflict in the region and fail to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Such a strike would further destabilize the Middle East and have far-reaching adverse consequences for the region and the world.<sup>46</sup>

One must hope that Israeli suggestions of a possible strike against Iran are intended to spur continued American pressure on Tehran, rather than being indicative of actual intent. This of course would not rule out the possibility of conducting covert operations against Iran's program and supply routes. The 1981 destruction of the Osirak reactor in Baghdad by the Israeli air force embodied what came to be known as the "Begin Doctrine", which held that Israel would not allow a hostile country in the region to acquire nuclear weapons. The problem, however, is that what was possible to accomplish in Iraq nearly three decades ago is no longer possible with respect to Iran.

Demonizing Iran and portraying it to the Israeli public as an enemy that is waiting for the

44 Paul Rogers, *Iran: Consequences Of A War*, Briefing Paper, Oxford Research Group, February 2006, p.11; Reuel Marc Gerecht, "Should Israel Bomb Iran?" *Weekly Standard*, July 26, 2010, Vol. 15, No. 42. <<http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/should-israel-bomb-iran>>; Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Difficulty of Launching a Successful Iran Strike," *Atlantic*, August 2010. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/08/the-difficulty-of-launching-a-successful-iran-strike/61680/>>.

45 Zeev Maoz, "The Morning After a Strike in Iran" [haboker sh-akhrei ha-tkifa be-iran], *Ha'aretz*, August 12, 2010.

46 Paul Rogers, *Iran: Consequences Of A War*, p.14





opportunity to destroy Zionism could lead both sides to take unwarranted measures. While magnifying the Iranian threat serves domestic political needs in Israel and supports calls for increased defense spending, its ramifications could be dangerous in view of Iran's anticipated further progress in ballistic missile development. Israel cannot ignore Iran's capacity to strike it, and Jerusalem must formulate a policy that will defuse the threat.<sup>47</sup>

## American Military Action

This analysis does not exclude, needless to say, the possibility of American military action. Unlike Israel, the United States does have the capability of carrying out repeated bombings of installations throughout Iran, thereby allowing for much better results than the one-sortie strike that is probably Israel's only option.<sup>48</sup>

Ultimately, an American decision to strike Iran will be a political one made by President Obama. At this juncture, it is difficult to assess whether the American president will decide to attack Iran. Clearly, however, there are voices in the United States that favor such a decision, and the US military is drawing up plans that would implement it.

Recently (July, 2010), a senior member of the American intelligence community and former CIA director Michael Hayden argued that it is "necessary" for the United States to attack Iran's nuclear installations. In his opinion, the diplomatic approach has failed, and the Iranians continue to skillfully play the United States and the international community while vigorously pursuing the development of nuclear weapons.<sup>49</sup>

Hayden was preceded in that view by former Senators Daniel Coats and Charles Robb, and

<sup>47</sup> Reuven Pedatzur, "Document: "Here's how Israel would destroy Iran's nuclear program", [mismakh: kach bediyuk ti-raeh ha-hatkafa ha-israelit al mitkanei hagari'n shel iran] *Ha'aretz*, 15 May 2009.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Crowley, "The Bomb Squad," *The New Republic*, April 21, 2010; Elliott Abrams Obama Bombing Iran? Don't Be Surprised," *Atlantic*, August, 2010. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/08/obama-bombing-iran-dont-be-surprised/61578/>>; Paul Rogers, *Iran: Consequences Of A War*.

<sup>49</sup> Steven Simon and Ray Takeyh, "If Iran came close to getting a nuclear weapon, would Obama use force?" *Washington Times*, August 1, 2010.

General Charles Wald, former Deputy Commander of the United States European Command. In September 2009, the three collaborated on an article calling for a tougher stance toward Iran. If dialogue failed, they argued, the United States should abandon negotiations, make military preparations in the Persian Gulf, consider a maritime blockade on Iran, and - as a last resort - consider a military strike. They view such an operation as being feasible despite the risks.<sup>50</sup>

At a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee held on April 14 of this year, committee chairman Carl Levin pressured a DOD official, Undersecretary Michele Flournoy, to say that the American military option "remains on the table". She assured him that this was the case. During the same hearing, Senator Joe Lieberman warned that "If sanctions do not work, then we have to be prepared to use military force to stop the unacceptable from happening."<sup>51</sup>

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, declared that "an Iran armed with nuclear weapons would lead to great instability." CNN has reported that Admiral Mullen recently directed the military to update plans to strike Iran.<sup>52</sup>

Elliott Abrams, a deputy national security adviser in George Bush's administration, also maintains that the United States should strike Iran. In his opinion, the United States cannot afford a nuclear Iran during Obama's term, because it could lead to the collapse of the entire non-proliferation regime and the end of the NPT. These are two subjects on which President Obama has placed great emphasis and has his political career riding on. If the President means what he repeatedly has said about world affairs, to allow Iran to go nuclear would leave a legacy of disaster. American policy toward Iran will also determine whether the United States remains the most important power in the Middle East or cedes to Tehran some form of regional hegemony.

Abrams also claims that an American military action against Iran would help Obama

<sup>50</sup> Ephraim Kam, "Military Option Back on the Table?" ["ha-optsia ha-tsava-it khozeret la-shulhan?"], *INSS Insight*, Vo. 197, 5 August 2010

<sup>51</sup> Michael Crowley, "The Bomb Squad."

<sup>52</sup> Barbara Starr, "U.S. military plans against Iran being updated," *CNN*, April 19, 2010. <<http://edition.cnn.com/2010/POLITICS/04/18/us.iran/index.html>>



domestically. "If Iran acquires nuclear weapons during his tenure, the Republicans would have a strong case that the President has compromised US national security." In contrast, if Obama orders a strike against Iran and brings about the destruction of its nuclear program, he will become a much stronger candidate in the 2012 elections. Indeed, he would most probably be unbeatable.<sup>53</sup>

Martin Indyk, who served twice as the United States ambassador to Israel, and also served as adviser on the Middle East to several administrations, believes that the United States is more likely to bomb Iran than Israel:

President Obama came into office determined not to use force against Iran - partly because he faced two other wars in the Middle East, but mostly because he was determined to engage Iran and saber-rattling would have been inconsistent with that approach. By the end of his first year, however, he reached the conclusion that engagement had failed and that it was time to put force back on the table. In January he began to do so. That's when [Secretary of Defense] Gates traveled to the Gulf and delivered a message from the President to the leaders there: 'The President is determined to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.'<sup>54</sup>

The Obama administration will soon have to make the decision whether or not to strike Iran. It is hard to predict what the decision will be, but it should be abundantly clear that without an American strike, the likelihood that Iran will complete the development of nuclear weapons is very high. At the moment, the official position of the American administration is that the sanctions will continue, concurrent with efforts at dialog, yet at the same time "all options remain on the table".

In an interview with Israel's Channel 2 News in July 2010, President Obama alluded to the continued viability of a military option, explaining

53 Elliott Abrams, "Obama Bombing Iran? Don't Be Surprised," *Atlantic*, August 2010. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/08/obama-bombing-iran-dont-be-surprised/61578/>> Jeffrey

54 Jeffrey Goldberg, "Indyk: U.S. More Likely Than Israel to Bomb Iran," *Atlantic*, August 16, 2010. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/08/indyk-us-more-likely-than-israel-to-bomb-iran/61508/>>

that his administration "will continue to keep the door open to a diplomatic solution... but I can guarantee you [said to the interviewer] that I have not taken any options off the table."<sup>55</sup>

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also said in an interview with The New York Times that all options are still "on the table."<sup>56</sup>

In other words, the military option still exists. The US military has operational plans, and experts are analyzing possible military modus operandi.<sup>57</sup>

## Open Nuclear Deterrence

In the final analysis, Israel cannot base its policy on the assumption that the United States will strike Iran. Consequently, the starting point for Israeli policy makers must be the assumption that Iran will acquire nuclear weapons before long. With that as a premise, it appears that an express policy of nuclear deterrence is the most reasonable and effective option for Israel to adopt toward a nuclear Iran. Just as the two superpowers came to recognize that only mutual, open, and credible deterrence would prevent the use of nuclear weapons, Israel, too, will have to adopt such an approach.

The most effective way of deterring Iranian policy makers from using nuclear weapons would be the unambiguous and credible statement of the catastrophic consequences that Iran would suffer should it fire missiles at Israel.

To this end, Israel will have to give up its policy of nuclear ambiguity and move to a posture of open deterrence, in which the rules of the game are completely clear. Such deterrence should consist of clear red lines, which - if crossed - will open Iran to an Israeli nuclear response. For example, it should be stated clearly that any missile fired from Iran at Israel would be assumed to be nuclear. Israel will therefore not wait to see if the missile hits and whether it

55 For the full interview: <<http://technorati.com/videos/youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3Dgx0pqxmysLM>>

56 US Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, "INTERVIEW Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton With David Sanger and Mark Landler of The New York Times," August 6, 2010.

57 Paul Rogers, *Iran: Consequences Of A War*; Karim Sadjadpour, "Attacking Iran: The Last Thing the U.S. Administration Wants to Do," *Atlantic*, August 2010.



is equipped with a nuclear warhead. Nor will Israel attempt to intercept it. Instead, Israel will automatically fire nuclear missiles at key targets in Iran, including Tehran, Tabriz, Kom, Esfahan, and other targets.

Such a clear stance would force the Iranians to decide whether killing several hundred thousand Israelis is worth the destruction of modern Iran, its return to the Middle Ages, and the loss of life of millions of its citizens. It is highly doubtful that killing the citizens of the 'Little Satan' would ultimately be thought to be worth this kind of price.

Additionally, Israel will have to demonstrate reliable second-strike capability in order to dissuade the Iranians from the thought of launching a surprise nuclear attack that would prevent it from striking back. A second-strike capability can be maintained by storing ballistic missiles in protected shelters that would not be destroyed by a nuclear impact, and by ensuring that planes equipped with nuclear weapons remain constantly airborne and therefore impervious to an enemy attack.

The third and most effective option is having submarines equipped with nuclear weapons, which the enemy cannot locate and strike. According to foreign publications, Israel has already started establishing second-strike capabilities with its Dolphin submarines built in a German shipyard. All in all, Israel will have five such submarines.<sup>58</sup>

In the absence of any public discussion of the subject in Israel, this academic treatment of the development of a nuclear deterrence model for the Middle East is at its beginning stage. In any event, a detailed discussion of this topic is well beyond the scope and objectives of this paper.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Oliver Bloom, *GSN Report on Israeli Submarines*, Washington DC, Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 29, 2010. <http://csis.org/blog/gsn-report-israeli-submarines>; Walter Pincus, "Israel Has Sub-Based Atomic Arms Capability," *The Washington Post*, June 15, 2002.

<sup>59</sup> For a detailed discussion of mutual nuclear deterrence between Iran and Israel, cf: Reuven Pedatzur, "The Iranian Nuclear Threat and the Israeli Options," *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol.28, No.3 (December 2007), pp.513-541.

# Can the Iran Sanctions Succeed?

Ephraim Asculai

The fourth round of sanctions that was imposed on Iran by the United Nations Security Council, on June 9, 2010, was by itself an admission that the three previous rounds have failed. Although many hailed this new round as an achievement, others saw it much as “more of the same” that came too late and would accomplish little. This latest round is being followed, however, by several national and regional sanctions and seems to at least attract the attention of Iran. Whether an admission of fact, or a clever political move, Iran’s admission that the sanctions could be slowing the nuclear project is evidence of that.

In order to assess the prospects of success, i.e. stopping the Iranian nuclear project, by the sanctions imposed on it, a look into the characteristics of sanctions, the criteria for these and success assessments of past sanctions is needed. In addition, the possible achievements of the fourth round of sanctions and their accompanying additional sanctions should be appraised. This comes in spite of the fact that Iranian officials are stating that the nuclear project will continue and more and more US high-level officials are stating, at the end of June 2010, that the international sanctions have little chance of achieving the desired outcome – the indefinite suspension of Iran’s nuclear weapons acquisition program.

The following deals mainly with international sanctions, as far as Iran is concerned, and less with those imposed by a single country or a group of “like-minded” countries. While the latter have more limited scope of employment, they could be much stronger than international ones, since they are not a result of severe compromises that, on the international scale, will usually lead to weaker results. The general issue of sanctions will be discussed first, and the Iran sanctions will be next discussed.

## Part A: General

### The Purpose of Sanctions

Sanctions are the act of a country or a group of countries against a country or a group of countries for the purpose of achieving an eventual defined aim.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of sanctions is mainly of coercion/persuasion or prevention. Rarely do sanctions have a punitive purpose, although this is usually inferred from the way the sanctions are defined and then applied. Persuasive sanctions are imposed on countries in order to change, stop or backtrack on a behavioral mode. Preventive sanctions are applied for the purpose of stopping, by technical or political means, a country from achieving its aims. These sanctions can include embargoes on categories of supplies, travel bans etc. Persuasive and preventive sanctions can be applied simultaneously without a clear distinction between them.

### A Short and Partial Review of Past Experience

It is quite impossible to assess, beforehand, the results of sanctions. They could act directly, and influence an outcome, or they could act as a catalyst, not being involved directly in processes, but make possible or more plausible, a desired change of events. They could also bring about an undesired turn of events and unforeseen negative results. At times, they are initiated as a last resort, when all other efforts, short of military action, have failed. It is almost impossible to review the multitude of studies related to the topic of sanctions, and the many instances of the imposition of sanctions.<sup>2</sup> Most

<sup>1</sup> One of the many definitions of the term “sanctions” is defined in the context of **International Law**: action by one or more states toward another state calculated to force it to comply with legal obligations (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sanctions>).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., G.C. Hufbauer, J.J. Schott and K.A. Elliot, **Eco-**





of these studies discuss the success or failure of sanctions, the reasons for these and the side effects that the imposition of sanctions had, both on the target country/ies and on others that were affected by the sanctions. The following is a sample of the many instances of sanctions, some of which worked, some that did not. These are but a minute representation of the many cases, but a lesson can be learned from each one.

## Abyssinia

Following Italy's invasion, in 1935, of Abyssinia (today's Ethiopia), the League of Nations imposed sanctions on Italy.<sup>3</sup> These were ineffective for two main reasons: they did not include sanctions on oil, and the US, not a member of the League of Nations, collaborated very little with the others.

## US-Japan

Following Japan's invasion of Manchuria (China) in 1931, the US began imposing sanctions on Japan, in an ever-increasing severity. In 1940, US exports of certain metals were restricted, and in July 1941 came the severest of all, including an oil embargo on Japan and a freeze on Japanese assets in the US. In the assessment of some, this was the direct cause of the initiation of the war between Japan and the US.<sup>4</sup>

## Libya

Pan-Am flight 103 exploded over Scotland in late 1988, causing 270 fatalities. Investigations later discovered that two terrorists carried out the attack by planting explosives on board the aircraft. These later found shelter in Libya. Four years later, following the refusal of Libya, the UN Security Council adopted a series of resolutions, calling for the extradition of the two terrorists who planted the bomb in the aircraft, and for compensation to those affected by the destruction of flight 103.<sup>5</sup> These were very severe sanctions that included, inter alia, confiscation of bank accounts, flights embargo, prohibition of investments in the energy industry etc. Some

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*conomic Sanctions Reconsidered, History and Current Policy*, Institute for International Economics, Washington, D.C., 1990.

3 <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/aby1.htm>.

4 <http://www.independent.org/newsroom/article.asp?id=1930>.

5 United Nations Security Council Resolution 731 and 748 (1992), and 883 (1993).

eight years later the two were extradited, and later tried, and later compensation was paid. The sanctions were suspended in 1998. No doubt the sanctions were, in the opinions of many, much too severe, and caused the population of Libya hardships. However, they worked, and the issue was resolved.

## Iraq

Following the first Gulf War, the Security Council imposed severe restrictions on Iraq, perhaps the most severe ever imposed by an international body. These were to serve a dual purpose: to make Iraq reveal its WMD and missile programs and to prevent it from renewing its efforts in these areas. In a "Food for Oil" arrangement, Iran was permitted to use oil revenues for the sole purpose of purchasing food and medicines for its populations. Sometime later, world opinion started reacting to the sanctions that were hurting the population, and causing a significant increase in baby and child mortality. According to some researchers, Saddam Hussein, Iraq's dictator, withheld these from the population, in order to visibly increase their suffering, and cause the removal or at least the considerable easing of the sanctions. In parallel, he managed to smuggle out oil (with the amazing help of Iran - its enemy) and filling his coffers with the proceeds from this act. In the end, he lost it all in the second Gulf War.

## South Africa & Rhodesia

The cases of South Africa and Rhodesia are cited as examples of the failure of economic sanctions. The following is excerpted from a report on economic sanctions.<sup>6</sup>

The UN arms embargo on South Africa was imposed in the early 1960s, when South Africa was 60 percent dependent on foreign arms. In the mid-1980's it became 90 percent self-sufficient, in many cases producing weapons under license from such countries as France and Israel. Similarly, South Africa has dealt with the embargo on oil exports by developing a synthetic-fuels industry that manufactures oil and gas from abundant supplies of available coal.

Moreover, just because the United States honored an embargo did not mean that other countries did so. As a 1984 US Commerce

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6 See Bruce Bartlett, "What's Wrong With Trade Sanctions" <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa064.html>.



Department report pointed out, past U.S. sanctions against South Africa led Europe and Japan to increase their marketing effort there, turning U.S. restrictions into strong selling points for their own manufacturers. The report also noted that U.S. controls have furthered South Africa's determination to achieve economic self-sufficiency and independence from any one foreign supplier. A significant overall reduction in imports made South Africa less vulnerable to foreign trade embargoes. The fact that South Africa rescinded its Apartheid policies is, in the view of many, clearly disconnected to the sanctions.

Another example of the failure of trade sanctions is the case of Rhodesia, the case that most closely corresponds to the South African situation. On November 11, 1965, Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith issued a unilateral declaration of independence from Great Britain. Great Britain imposed sanctions on Rhodesia, and this was followed by UN recommendations on the imposition of sanctions. In 1968 UN resolution was adopted requiring mandatory sanctions against Rhodesia. Notwithstanding the sanctions, the value of exports more than doubled between 1968 and 1974 and continued to rise afterward, although much more slowly. Although the Smith regime was ultimately thrown out in 1979, it does not appear that the economic sanctions contributed much to that result.

## Iran

The issue if the Iran sanctions will be discussed extensively later. Suffice it to say here that the first three rounds of sanctions, the first of which was imposed in 2006, failed in their express purpose of forcing Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment program and adhere to the Additional Protocol (AP), of the NPT (Non Proliferation Treaty), for the enhanced safeguards inspections. The efficacy of the fourth round, imposed in June 2010 is yet to be seen.

## Principles and Criteria for Imposing Sanctions

Sanctions have been imposed on countries in many situations. These include, inter alia, human rights issues, economic and commerce issues, military issues and so on. To generalize on all issues is outside the scope of this work.

Therefore, while some of the following can be applied in many general cases, the ensuing discussion, although not so explicitly stated, is nuclear oriented.

Several attempts were made to define the criteria for imposing sanctions.<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to find a common denominator between all authors. The sixteen policy recommendations, presented by, by James A. Paul,<sup>8</sup> are very comprehensive, but almost every one of them is debatable. Other criteria have been proposed, but they are usually indicative of their authors' personal view and not on objective criteria. Objective criteria would be base on the assessment of the empirical data from past experience, but even that is hard to assess. Opinions are greatly divided on the assessment of successes. While failures are very easy to observe, successes are usually attributed to many factors, not all connected to sanctions. The cases of Rhodesia and South Africa are quoted by both sides, those attributing the toppling of the Whites' regimes in these countries to the economic sanctions imposed on them, and those assessing that these sanctions had, at most, a contributing factor to the demise of Ian Smith's rule in Rhodesia and to the end of Apartheid and nuclear disarmament in South Africa.

What emerges from many studies, however, is that economic sanctions, on their own, work in less than half the cases. There are, of course, also opposite views, that they are a useful tool in international affairs.<sup>9</sup> The problem with many of the published criteria is that they deal with the "don'ts" of the imposition of sanctions and not with their characteristics, which are aimed at achieving their targets. The following is a suggested, if partial, list of steps and requirements for sanctions to work:

1. An overall strategy should be devised to deal with the issue at hand.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/War+by+other+means:+criteria+for+the+use+of+economic+sanctions.-a019277988>

<sup>8</sup> James A. Paul, "Sixteen Policy Recommendations on Sanctions", *Global Policy Forum* <http://www.global-policy.org/component/content/article/202/42334.html>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.northeastern.edu/nepssa/journal/archives/the\\_new\\_england3/documents/The\\_Efficacy\\_of\\_Economic\\_Sanctions.pdf](http://www.northeastern.edu/nepssa/journal/archives/the_new_england3/documents/The_Efficacy_of_Economic_Sanctions.pdf)



2. Aim at the vulnerabilities of the target country (or group of countries); these include both practical issues and intangibles.
3. In order for the sanctions to work, they should be an "overkill"; they should be more serious than seems proper for the achievement of their purpose.
4. Sanctions must be timely.
5. If the issue at hand is important enough, time is of an essence and the sanctions are not imposed "pro forma", a backup/contingency plan should be ready in case the strategy did not work within a pre-determined time frame.
6. Although the removal of the sanctions could be a reward in itself, proposals, made simultaneously with the sanctions, must pave the way for the offending country to retreat, honorably, from their entrenched position. The incentives for doing so must be considerable, but still dependent on the retreat.

At the same time, there are things that the imposition of sanctions should avoid:

7. Efforts to target only specific groups of people, organizations and any other specified entities that are associated with the objective of the sanctions, for the imposition of these, as opposed to general sanctions, may be counter-productive, especially if these targets are of low vulnerability.
8. Hardships of food, medicines and humanitarian aid.
9. Sanctions should not be weakened because of political considerations; Multilateralism is always the preferred way of action. However, this has its drawbacks, when the plan of action is watered-down because of the need for action. Strong leadership is essential if the pressure is to be maintained. The experience with the SC (UN Security Council) shows that action taken by this body is usually the weakest possible.

These requirements are discussed in the following.

The target of any plan and the basis for any strategy must be well defined. **There must be an overall strategy to achieve the target.** Sanctions should be a part of a resultant overall plan to achieve a political target. Other parts could include the support of dissident groups for the

overthrow of the regime, a concerted public diplomacy effort to discredit the country, visible evidence of military preparedness for offensive action should sanctions fail, etc.

**Any person, entity or country has its vulnerabilities.** These could include, e.g. certain supplies of raw materials and commodities, dependence on international commerce, and national values and pride. A country will always have, in varying degrees, its threat assessment, its ambitions, its internal religious, social and political problems to mention but a few. It would be foolish to target factors to which a country is not vulnerable. To prohibit, e.g., imports of products and commodities where the country is self-reliant is counterproductive and the effort would be wasted, since the country would not be affected by these sanctions, and its resilience visibly enhanced.

**Sanctions cannot be a stand-alone action.** They must come as a result of defining an overall strategy, and not as a result of an assessment as to what can be done. Political pressure, political isolation, on the one hand, and tangible proof of the next upscale stage in activities against the country in question have to be manifested, in order to increase the pressure on the country. Almost any country will present a defiant front when confronted with such actions. Moreover, the country will devise ways and means to lessen this pressure. These must be assessed and taken into account when devising the complete plan of action. In devising a plan for dealing with a country the psychological characteristics of the country, and its propensity for caving in, on the one hand, and for misleading the others in their interaction with the outside world must be taken into account. The "rationale" of the country must be taken into account. The logic and values underlying its behavior in the international arena have to be taken into account. These differ from country to country, and disregarding them has led to many a failure in the past. The past record of adherence to a country's international obligations could be a factor in considering international action.

The plan should include the following main topics:

- Introduction: The intermediate and ultimate aims of the plan, including optimum timelines.

- Details of the overall strategy of dealing with the problem.
- Definition of the areas of vulnerability that should be tackled.
- The ways and means of tackling each area: Sanctions, diplomatic actions, covert actions etc.
- Incentives, as an alternative and as an aid to the above activities.
- Backup and alternate/contingency plans.

One of the ways to achieve political aims, when everything else seems to have failed, is the change of the regime. This has historical precedents, including in the nuclear arena. A change that will not alter the underlying codes of a regime will not necessarily change the behavioral mode of its leadership. A change of the regime, where this change has not previously assured the change of the political stance of the new government, could make it more difficult to achieve a change of policies in the future.

The end result of all actions is not absolutely predictable. A country could cave in, but a country could also take extreme action, so as to firm its stance, and to close the door on any possible retreat from its position. This is the reason why the "or else" option must be on the table and visible to the country against which the action is taken.

**Weak actions "immunize" countries** against more severe actions in the future. They tend to stiffen the resistance to acquiescing to the international demands and firm the resilience of both the government and the population. These also buy time for the country to adjust its plans and its actions to the new situation. Although weak actions have the benefit of announcing the joint position and intentions of the international community, they rarely achieve anything on their own. In the end, if the country accedes to wishes of the international community the price for doing so could be much higher than would have been achieved in the first place, if no regime change has taken place.

There is no doubt that the sanctions must be applied in a timely manner. Procrastination in applying sanctions will almost always be counter-productive. One of the assumptions that must be made is that additional damage by the offending country will have been done, as time goes by, and that there is little chance

for a "rollback" once a country has achieved a technical milestone. A country will try to cling to its achievements, at almost any cost. Moreover, the potential will remain there, enabling the country to resume its efforts at a later stage, even if it has suffered a serious setback.

The policies of the country against which actions are taken are usually well-entrenched. They are also backed by declarations and deeds that make it harder, as time goes by, to achieve the political aims. If the sanctions are very harsh, removing them could be a reward in itself. In the case that removing the sanctions is not reward enough, **the incentives for the ruling regime for doing so must be serious**, tangible and, if not against basic principles, to at least seem to be giving-in to some of the demands of the other side. This is not an easy thing to accept. Moreover, it poses a serious moral problem. Although not generally discussed, the Libya affair is a case in point. In this case, Libya embarked on a nuclear weapons development project, contrary to its international obligations under the NPT. After it has been caught out, it was not punished in any way for its misdeeds. On the contrary, once it has come clean, it has immediately returned to the international community as a member in good standing. This is the price the international community had to pay for arriving at a nuclear weapons free Libya. And this is not the only case.

Criteria 7-9 deal with **actions that should be avoided**. Dealing and targeting specific groups and entities that are involved in specific activities will usually fail in the attempt to convince the regime to change its ways. Countries have a way in dealing with these actions. The most common non-compliance events in the nuclear arena are the sales of prohibited dual-use equipment by many countries to those developing nuclear capabilities.<sup>10</sup> This is in direct contradiction of the obligations of the NPT. When commercial restrictions exist, countries and entities have found a way to circumvent them. The commercial interest is usually much stronger than the actions of government officials. Imposing sanctions on such entities will do little to hinder the development of proscribed activities in the target country since the horse has usually escaped the barn, i.e. the program

<sup>10</sup> For an extensive review of illicit trade see, David Albright, "Peddling Peril: How the Secret Nuclear Trade Arms America's Enemies", *Free Press*, 2010.





has far advanced for the prohibitions to have a serious effect on it. Moreover, there usually are alternate sources for the supplies, in countries that chose to disregard the international norms, for the sake of commercial interests.

## The Application of Sanctions

Sanctions can be divided roughly into several categories: Economic, military, diplomatic and travel isolation, sanctions against the population and sanctions against specific sectors and activities. There are of course, those sanctions that combine one or more categories. The thing common to all is that in order to be effective they have to be well-applied. Sanctions that leave large loopholes are usually ineffective. Half-heartedly applied sanctions will achieve very little, since they can be bypassed.

## Part B: The Iran Sanctions

### The Situation in Iran

Although the Iranian nuclear project had its roots during the rule of the Shah, it was revived as a result of the Iran-Iraq war, and given a serious boost in the early 2000's. The main reasons for having a military nuclear capability are:

1. Iran's threat perception.
2. Iran's ambitions for regional hegemony, and being considered to be a world-class power.
3. Ensuring the stability of the regime, since the nuclear project seems to be the main uniting factor of Iran's citizenship.
4. Acquisition of the prestige of having the most powerful weapon.

If we go to these basic hypotheses concerning Iran, we arrive at the following characteristics that determine its behavioral patterns:

- Iran's threat perception is real.
- Notwithstanding, Iran sees itself as a regional power, and wants to firm this situation. National pride plays a strong role in this ambition.
- Nuclear weapons will help establish hegemony in the region.
- The rule of the present regime is not stable.

- Iran must have a nuclear weapons capability if it wants to firm the survival of the regime and the accomplishment of its national aims.

Iran's nuclear program has been described extensively in the literature.<sup>11</sup> In short, however, it can be said that Iran proceeds on two parallel routes towards production of fissile materials, the materials needed for the core of a nuclear explosive device: High enriched uranium (HEU), and plutonium (Pu). The first route is the more advanced of the two, and by mid-2010 Iran had already accumulated a sufficient quantity of low enriched uranium (LEU) that would enable it, if the decision were taken, to further enrich it to HEU and produce two cores of nuclear explosive devices. Iran managed to acquire the technologies it needed for this program, the equipment and materials from external sources, although this was and is prohibited by the NPT, and strict rules on the transfers are employed by many governments, some of whom, however, turned a blind eye on the very profitable illicit commerce. Although Iran had agreed, on two separate occasions, to suspend its uranium enrichment program, it then went back on its word and resumed enrichment. Iran had also agreed to abide by the IAEA safeguards' Additional Protocol, but later stopped this cooperation. These two matters were the formal basis for the ensuing Security Council sanctions resolutions.

### The UN Sanctions Resolutions

The IAEA took its time in transferring the matter to the Security Council. It finally did so in late 2005. It took more than a year for the Security Council to adopt the first sanctions resolution in December 2006.<sup>12</sup> The main target of this and the ensuing sanctions resolutions was the Iranian nuclear program, its suppliers and supply routes, some of the Iranian entities and a few of the personnel involved in the project.

The next sanctions resolution was adopted just a few months later, in March 2007, and differed from the first in two significant areas:<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Ephraim Kam and Ephraim Asculai, "Count-down to the Iranian Bomb", *Strategic Assessment*, Volume 12, No. 4, Institute for National Security Studies, February, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/IaeaIran/unsc\\_res1737-2006.pdf](http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/IaeaIran/unsc_res1737-2006.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/IaeaIran/unsc\\_res1747-2007.pdf](http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/IaeaIran/unsc_res1747-2007.pdf).



It targeted, in addition to the nuclear arena, the sales to Iran of certain military equipment, albeit in an advisory, not compulsory, manner, and called "not to enter into new commitments for grants, financial assistance, and concessional loans, to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, except for humanitarian and developmental purposes."<sup>14</sup> An important addition was the call for the government of Iran to enter into negotiations with the international community, repeating the offer "... for a long-term comprehensive agreement which would allow for the development of relations and cooperation with Iran based on mutual respect and the establishment of international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme..."

## Evaluating the Sanctions Resolutions

The basis for the evaluation the four Iran sanctions will be the above defined criteria. At the outset, one could mention that **there is no apparent overall strategy for dealing with the issue of Iran's nuclear project**. Although this could be just a false impression, the fact that the recurrent failure of declared timetables by the US administration gives one the feeling that the administration "plays it by ear" and tries to utilize opportunities, as they arise. Unfortunately, in this case, this has not been a successful strategy.

**What are Iran's apparent vulnerabilities?** One study defines the following areas that find Iran vulnerable: Iran's economic situation in general and the oil issue in particular; internal stability; the nuclear program; military capabilities; and, political vulnerability.<sup>15</sup> To these issues one could add the Iranian national sense of pride and its hegemonic ambitions. Iran's economy is vulnerable since its imports are considerable, its rate of inflation is relatively high, its subsidies considerable and the rate of unemployment is more than 10%.<sup>16</sup>

The oil issue is perhaps the most vulnerable one, since Iran's economy depends to a large extent on oil exports. In addition, Iran depends, considerably, on oil distillates (gasoline) imports, since it does not have a sufficient refining

capacity.<sup>17</sup> These oil distillates are sold to the public at very low and subsidized prices. The oil industry suffers because of the old age of existing oil wells, the lack of sufficient investment needed for the maintenance of the old fields, and for the development of new ones. Having said that, Iran is investing a big effort in putting up additional refining capacity and, according to its own statements, will close the gaps within a few years. It must be also mentioned, however, that preventing or limiting oil exports could have detrimental effects on world economy. Unless the world achieves the ability to exist without Iranian oil, Iran will have a stranglehold over the international economy.<sup>18</sup> Prevention of oil distillates imports to Iran, without halting exports, could have a considerable effect inside Iran, and to a lesser extent on the outside world. The direct use of oil-related sanctions against Iran was not included in the SC sanctions resolutions.<sup>19</sup> In the most recent SC resolution (1929) some financial institutions were targeted, because of their affiliation with financing Iran's nuclear program. Yet, no general restrictions on Iranian financial transactions were imposed. The US recognized that the UN sanctions were, by themselves, not the most efficient ones, and augmented them by enacting further sanctions on the issue of oil distillates at the beginning of July 2010.<sup>20</sup> The EU followed suite later in July.<sup>21</sup> Although Iran, almost immediately, agreed to return to talks, it is doubtful that these will be very effective.

One of Iran's leadership main fears is that civil unrest could bring about the change of the regime. This is apparent from the repression of those advocating a change of the regime, and came to a head in June 2009, following the general elections that were generally acknowledged to have been rigged, which culminated in the brutal quelling of major unrest. This could have been used by the west to encourage and support the unrest, but this opportunity came and went causing suffering and disappointment in the population.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.eia.doe.gov/cabs/Iran/Oil.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Iran produces approximately 5% of the global crude oil production. See: <http://www.eia.doe.gov/cabs/Iran/Oil.html>.

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/IaeaIran/sc\\_resolutions.shtml](http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/IaeaIran/sc_resolutions.shtml).

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.opencongress.org/bill/111-h2194/show>.

<sup>21</sup> EU tightens sanctions over Iran nuclear programme (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-10758328>).

<sup>14</sup> The reference to developmental purposes left, of course, much to the imagination of all concerned.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.jcpa.org/text/iranian-vulnerabilities.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.indexmundi.com/iran/inflation\\_rate\\_\(consumer\\_prices\).html](http://www.indexmundi.com/iran/inflation_rate_(consumer_prices).html).



The nuclear area is, indeed, vulnerable, and the SC sanctions target mainly the activities in this area. However, it is much less vulnerable than it was a few years ago. Iran has long passed the basic planning and construction stages, and is now at the stage where its enrichment program is operational, albeit at a very basic layout, equipment and rate of production. The plutonium route is under construction, but it can be assessed that Iran has already purchased most of the equipment and materiel for both routes of its nuclear project. Moreover, Iran managed in the past, and probably manages at present to get all it needs from suppliers, through clandestine purchasing networks, suppliers and transshipment routes. In any case, Iran's nuclear program is very well advanced, and will probably continue to operate and advance, even if somewhat hindered by the sanctions.

Iran's threat perception is probably quite acute, since it is surrounded, at present, by US forces from almost all points of the compass, and it is also aware that Iraq has the potential to regain its military power in the future. Thus, Iran feels itself, for all its bravado, quite vulnerable. Iran's military capabilities are probably not as well advanced as it would like them to be.<sup>22</sup> With the exception of their missile capabilities, their offensive capacity is limited, the air force outdated and their ability to launch a naval offensive is not very impressive. The ability of Iran to withstand a land offensive is much better, with a sizeable military force.<sup>23</sup> This cannot be said for an air attack, and they have little withstanding power against stand-off weapons.

Iran's repressive regime reacts very strongly to any indication of civil unrest and in this it takes little notice of international reaction, since the survival of the regime is paramount. In its international relations it carries an air of superiority, and appears to take little notice of international reactions to its deeds and misdeeds. Appearances may be deceiving in this case, as demonstrated in immediate and strong reaction to any slight or action that does not tally with Iran's position. Thus, when Russia and China voted, in June 2010, in support of the SC sanctions, Iran immediately reacted with strong statements and implied (or real) threats.

<sup>22</sup> See [http://www.inss.org.il/upload/\(FILE\)1275907735.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/upload/(FILE)1275907735.pdf) for a summary of Iran's military capabilities.

<sup>23</sup> This includes the Army, the Revolutionary Guards and the irregulars.

This shows vulnerability rather than political savoir-faire. Iran is actively seeking friends in the international scene, since it does not want to be or appear to be isolated.

Iran wants to present itself as a regional power. It wants to assume the role of the regional hegemon. This can be done in a peaceful manner only when it has good relations with its neighbors or on the other hand when it holds a real threat over them. At present, Iran's neighbors, the Gulf States are wary of Iran, and most have not succumbed to Iran's wish to be their leader in regional and world affairs.

### **Taking all the above into consideration an overall strategy and a resultant plan should be devised**

for dealing with Iran. The plan should take into account all the above detailed vulnerabilities. The plan must include strong measures that could assure success in achieving the aims of the overall strategy. The plan must take into account the timelines of the activities against which it is devised.

### **Defining a Strategy**

The fundamental assumptions for the development of a strategy are as follows:

- Undertaking: Iran must be bereft of the possibility to produce nuclear weapons. Specifically: all enrichment and reprocessing facilities must be verifiably dismantled. The IAEA Additional Protocol must be ratified and irreversibly employed. Iran must ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and commit to not oppose a proposed Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty.
- The theocratic regime of Iran must not have a nuclear fuel cycle, which would give it the option to produce military-grade fissile materials.
- The regional instability that could ensue should Iran gain a military nuclear capability will be severe, its form and details very difficult to forecast, and will be almost impossible to contain.
- Unless fierce sanctions and political pressures and isolation are applied, coupled with a severe military threat, the theocratic regime will not give up the military nuclear option, even if a regime change brings the reformists back.

- Time is running short since the Iranians are close to achieving their target, and the chances for a roll-back are negligible.
- A change to a secular democratic regime has the potential for abandoning military nuclear ambitions. However, it is difficult to predict if and when such a change would take place.
- If the Iranians, following the acquiescence to international demands, persist in their quest for a civil nuclear power program, the nuclear fuel will have to be supplied from abroad, and will have to be removed from Iran, following its irradiation. Iran must abide by the safeguards' Additional Protocol (AP).
- The USA is the most important player in this field. Unless its agreement to these assumptions is secured, any plan to avoid an Iranian nuclear capability will probably fail.
- Because Russian and Chinese interests are orthogonal to those of the west, and since they do not appear to view the Iranian nuclear project with the same severity that the west sees it, the main preventive action will have to be taken outside the purview of the Security Council.

### Principles for a Plan

Because of the shortage of time, the plan must work on several areas in parallel:

- Severe sanctions hitting mainly the economy of Iran, including the oil industry.
- Diplomatic and practical isolation of Iran, including cutting off trade with Gulf states.

- Mediatory, track II and parallel secret talks with Iran.
- Covert activities aimed at bringing about a regime change in Iran to a secular democratic regime.
- Overt preparation for military action against nuclear facilities and missile developing and launching capabilities.

### A Look into the Future

In today's (July 2010) situation there is very little chance that Iran will abandon its military nuclear ambitions. The four rounds of sanctions on their own will have proven ineffective in the attempt to achieve this aim. In addition, President Obama's approval of the latest US Congress actions and the ensuing EU sanctions may have come too late to take full effect. Iran may be achieving self-reliance on petroleum distillates in the very near future, thereby negating the most effective weapon in the sanctions arsenal. Although Iran has stated that the sanctions are affecting the nuclear project, it is possible that this came as a neutralizing weapon more than a statement of fact. The fact that the US does not come out and state that a military option is on the table paves the way for Iran to go as far as it wants on the route to a military nuclear capability. The results of the present inaction will be most difficult to manage in the future.

Only an acceptance, by the US and its like-minded allies of an agreed strategic stance, based on the ultimate aim of preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear state, and carrying out a plan formed along its lines stands a chance of a successful outcome.





# Sanctions on Iran: Overcoming Conceptual and Political Constraints

Emily B. Landau

## Introduction

When the international community faces an individual state's aggressive break with international standards of behavior, or blatant non-compliance with international obligations, the tools at its disposal to express its dissatisfaction – to punish and/or try to compel the state back into compliance and normative behavior – are quite limited. They basically boil down to two broad sets of punitive action: economic sanctions or military force. An interim option is the threat – as opposed to the actual execution – of military force. Because states normally relate to a resort to military force (and often even the clear threat of military force) as a last option, sanctions are the much more commonly used strategy to forcefully respond to a state that breaks the rules; sanctions have become the favored tool of the UN Security Council to express its dissatisfaction in such cases. A move from sanctions to military force would be considered crossing the line from the broad realm of diplomatic strategies for dealing with international problems to the military arena. In this sense, sanctions stand at the nexus between diplomacy and military force: they are the strongest stick in the non-military toolbox, and are often regarded as the final step before contemplating the actual use of force.

And yet, despite the quite widespread and prevalent use of sanctions, their effectiveness as a means of compelling states to change their ways is not well understood in international relations. Empirically, the use of sanctions has at best a mixed record. For every supporter of the potential effectiveness of sanctions, there will be someone that discounts their ability to influence state behavior. The use of sanctions is widespread not because they have a proven track record of success, but rather because the

international community has nothing better to offer. They are the default measure to express displeasure, short of going to war.

Empirical assessments of the usefulness of sanctions are rendered difficult due to the significant span of time that is required for them to take effect. Even in those instances where a case can be made that sanctions did influence state behavior, there are invariably other factors that came into play in the interim that can be cited as the “true” reason for any change induced, with sanctions relegated at best to a supportive role. An additional problem that complicates efforts to gain better understanding of the effectiveness of these measures is the absence in many cases of clear operational definitions for their successful implementation. It is often not specified what impact the international community is seeking to have on the offender through its use of sanctions, or how it expects change to come about. This means that different experts and policymakers might be expressing their common support for “sanctions” while at the same time referring to different goals and processes. This in turn can have quite negative implications for broader policy-making efforts vis-à-vis the misbehaving state. A final complicating factor is that when sanctions don't bring about any change in the approach or behavior of the offender, it's not always clear why: whether it was because sanctions were too harsh, having the effect of hardening the regime's resolve to hold its ground, or on the contrary, whether they were perhaps too weak to bring about the desired effect.

With these questions in mind, the purpose of the present article is to understand how sanctions have figured into the overall effort to curb Iran's military nuclear ambitions since 2006,



with an eye to how things might be done more effectively in the future. The first step will be a critical analysis of the sanctions debate itself, in order to clarify the different expectations that are being raised and discussed, and to suggest what can realistically be expected from these measures. After mapping out the different approaches, the next section will include an attempt to tease out the array of political, economic, and strategic factors that have come into play regarding decisions on sanctions vis-à-vis Iran. This will be followed by an assessment of how and to what degree sanctions have been conceptually integrated into an overall political/diplomatic strategy for confronting this determined proliferator, and what might prove more effective down the line.

A major theme underlying the analysis is that while sanctions are primarily an economic tool, their success critically hinges on dynamics of international politics, as well as the role they are assigned in carefully thought-out diplomatic strategies. So while there is a tendency to focus on the economic dimension of these measures, it is the political context that should be placed at the forefront of analysis.

## Introducing Conceptual Clarity to the Sanctions Debate

The first order of business is to understand the different and sometimes cross-cutting agendas that have been and continue to be put forth in the framework of the sanctions debate on Iran over the past half decade.

### 1) Sanctions against Iran's nuclear program

The sanctions debate with regard to Iran generally makes reference to two main categories of sanctions. The first category comprises sanctions that were initially put in place by the US back in 1979 in response to the hostage-taking crisis at the time of the revolution. These sanctions have been updated over the years with varying degrees of intensity, in accordance with developments in bilateral US-Iranian relations and regional dynamics. The second category - our focus of interest here - is the "nuclear prong" of sanctions. This refers primarily to a series of UN Security Council resolutions and US financial sanctions that have been put in place against Iran over the past several years, beginning with resolutions passed by the Security Council in 2006. The four

rounds of UN sanctions - decided in December 2006, March 2007, March 2008, and June 2010 - are the international community's response to IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) declarations of Iran's lack of compliance with its NPT (nuclear non proliferation treaty) safeguards obligations, and its ongoing defiance in the nuclear realm.

While the first category of sanctions is grounded in the nature of US-Iranian relations, the nuclear-based sanctions specifically target Iran's nuclear ambitions - a global (non-proliferation) concern, with severe regional implications. International action that has been taken in this regard reflects deep concern not only with Iran's breach of its NPT commitments, but its harsh and threatening rhetoric directed towards other states in the Middle East, which heightens the threat to security and stability in this region, with particular implications for Israel's security conception.

In theory, the UN Security Council sanctions should not really be a matter of broad political debate; in fact, their implementation should be fairly straight-forward because they constitute a direct response to indications that Iran is cheating on its NPT obligations. In other words, the purpose of these sanctions is to send a message to Iran - and to any other country contemplating a breach of its commitment according to an international treaty that it joined of its own free will - that there are consequences for not upholding international commitments. So when states are told: "you must comply with this or that treaty, or else there will be consequences", the international community has a responsibility to follow through and demonstrate that it will indeed punish the offender. Otherwise, it would be a dangerous precedent as far as the ability to ensure continued treaty compliance.

But at the UN level there is no viable mechanism for following up on a sanctions decision with a broader process for confronting Iran's nuclear ambitions. This international organization as such is not equipped to negotiate or otherwise influence Iran's - or any other proliferator's - future course in the nuclear realm. This is the job of strong international actors like the US and the EU that have taken it upon themselves to lead the process that is unfolding vis-à-vis Iran. These actors have the ability to negotiate with Iran on the nuclear issue, and they can and should be thinking about sanctions beyond



their role as punishment for non-compliance. If they are serious about assuming the role of "NPT enforcers", these states must be prepared to devote the necessary time and energy to devising an overall strategy for pursuing the goal of fundamentally changing Iran's behavior in the nuclear realm, within which sanctions would play a role.

## 2) What are the expectations from sanctions?

Turning now to the sanctions debate on Iran, there is quite a bit of confusion with regard to the expected role of sanctions in the broader process of confronting Iran's nuclear ambitions. Different expectations are expressed by different international actors at different times and with reference to different aspects of Iran's behavior. This confusing mix is reflected also in media and journal discussions that are carried out by informed experts. It is important to clarify the quite different approaches and emphases that are being discussed because they are often glossed over in the conflated sanctions debate, but decision-makers need to be very clear about the goals they are pursuing.

Within this debate, sanctions are most often referred to per their role as punishment, and in these cases normally little additional thought is given to how changes in Iran's behavior will actually come about. The most commonly expressed (but least realistic) expectation is that sanctions will somehow have a direct impact on the nature of Iran's nuclear program. American and European officials often issue superficial statements in this vein, reflecting the naïve hope and expectation that sanctions will induce Iran to change course in the nuclear realm, without further elaboration.

Interestingly, president Obama, in the space of six months, assigned two different roles to the same set of sanctions that were on the agenda, and finally agreed upon in mid-2010. Initially, in January 2010, when Obama first clarified that he had decided to promote harsher sanctions, he spoke of them as the next stage in the attempt to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions, after Iran had shunned his diplomatic outreach of 2009. He portrayed diplomacy and sanctions as basically parallel routes for reaching the same goal of stopping Iran's nuclear program. In other words, after the failure of the first route, a different, more severe one would be attempted. But by July 2010, just after the US added its own

unilateral sanctions to the measures that were finally decided upon by the Security Council in early June, Obama was attributing a new role to sanctions: now his expectation was that they would be the precursor to a new - and hopefully more serious - round of negotiations. According to this revised account, sanctions were presented as a link in a broader diplomatic strategy, rather than as an alternative to failed negotiations.

When more serious attempts are made to think about how sanctions might actually cause Iran to alter its behavior in the nuclear realm, focus turns to the possible mechanisms by which economic and political pressure can translate into changed behavior. It is in this regard that one finds the greatest divergence in the approaches being discussed, primarily within the debate conducted at the level of experts. Some focus on how change can be induced in the current regime. There are two variants debated: either change will come as a direct result of pressure on the regime and its growing isolation, or it will come indirectly, via the population. A major point of contention with regard to the latter option is whether economic hardship for the population will enhance their opposition to the regime, or, conversely, cause them to rally around the regime. Another option debated with regard to the current regime is pressure that does not necessarily cause it to directly change course, but rather induces it to adopt a more serious attitude toward negotiations with the West (rather than using these negotiations tactically - as a way to play for time).

Since the bloody repression of public protests in Iran following the June 2009 elections, more and more analysts are reflecting the view that there is little to no chance of inducing change in the current regime; for these experts, the pressure that is sought through sanctions should be geared to hastening the day when a new regime comes to power in Iran.<sup>1</sup>

In still other instances it is the US-Iranian relationship - rather than the nuclear issue per se - that has been the focus of statements, with sanctions evaluated on the basis of their

<sup>1</sup> For articles in this vein see Jonathan Paris, "Iran Options: Sanctions and Strikes" *Atlantic Council*, February 17, 2010; Michael Rubin, "Iran: The Case for 'Regime Change'", *Commentary*, April, 2010; and Emanuele Ottolenghi, "Setting the Sanctions Agenda" *The Journal of International Security Affairs*, no. 18, Spring, 2010.



ability to influence this relationship. Indeed, Obama himself started out in early 2009 with a diplomatic initiative toward Iran that seemed focused more on repairing US-Iran relations than confronting Iran's nuclear ambitions. Former State Department Iran expert John Limbert recently related to the mid-2010 UN and US sanctions imposed against Iran in this context. On the eve of his resignation in July 2010, Limbert noted that "sanctions were never supposed to become an end in themselves but unfortunately they can easily become so, because they are something we know how to do. Changing relations with Iran is much harder [than imposing sanctions]..."<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, these different approaches and emphases with regard to sanctions have very different policy implications. International actors that decide upon sanctions cannot afford to treat them merely as punishment, or to superficially assume that they will somehow directly cause Iran to have a change of heart in the nuclear realm. These actors must be thinking very seriously about how to devise an overall policy for confronting Iran's nuclear ambitions, and for this they need to be very clear about what kind of influence they would like to have on Iran, and - more importantly - what kind of influence they can realistically have on this state.

## The Logic of Sanctions: Embedded in Political Context

This section will highlight the importance of focusing on political context in the sanctions debate by examining two different political dimensions that can influence the successful use of these measures. The first is the question of international political will to decide on sanctions, and the second is the importance of integrating sanctions into a broader political process for confronting Iran.

### 1) UN Sanctions: the missing political will

The obvious and essential precondition for the successful implementation of sanctions is to first secure agreement on measures that are deemed strong enough to have a chance of pressuring the offending state in a significant manner. While determining what is a sufficient degree of strength is no easy task, what we do know

for sure is that the four rounds of sanctions decided upon by the UN Security Council since 2006 were purposely watered down in order to garner the support of all five permanent members for the resolutions. The US, France and Britain normally favored stronger sanctions (although not consistently to the same degree), and Russia and China were the traditional holdouts. And the reasons cited by Russia and China for favoring less stringent measures were not that they thought that weaker sanctions would be sufficient to elicit the desired effect, but rather that they did not think harsher pressure on Iran was warranted - either because they were not wholly convinced that Iran was going down the military route (Russia up until summer 2010), or because they believed that diplomacy should be pursued without pressure (China). In reality, however, these two states' objections to sanctions were driven by an array of political, strategic and economic interests that simply did not sit well with support for stricter sanctions on Iran.

What emerged over and over both within the context of the UN Security Council, as well as outside that framework, was that sanctions decisions were dictated by state interests that were unconnected to the goal of stopping Iran. Indeed, the interests of states in resisting the imposition of severe and comprehensive sanctions proved stronger than their interests in favor of sanctions application, despite Iran's incremental advance toward a military nuclear capability. While in theory UN Security Council sanctions should not have been held hostage to these calculations, but rather should have been an almost automatic response to Iran's breach of its international obligations, in practice the Security Council is not an objective global policeman, but rather a group of 15 states, with all the resulting political implications.

What interests were driving these states? For Russia, the overriding interest is maintaining economic ties with Iran; Russia is loath to give up this lucrative market. Beyond that, Russia has important strategic interests vis-à-vis the US that are not served by being perceived as jumping onboard a US-led drive to sanction Iran. Russia feels a need to maintain a certain distance from the US because even when bilateral relations improve, the two remain strategic rivals. Over the past 3-4 years in particular, Russian policy has dictated frequent swings between the West and Iran - giving a concession to one, and then

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Slavin, "Hostage to Events", *Foreignpolicy.com*, 27 July 2010.



quickly making a move to reassure the other. While the West agonizes over how to get Russia more securely on board its sanctions agenda, it resists accepting the uncomfortable reality that Russia's interest is actually best served by this back and forth movement. The noncommittal approach allows Russia much room for political and strategic maneuvering. It is able to exact concessions from both sides, and maintain effective levers of pressure to be used at will. So, even though Russia surely has no interest in seeing neighboring Iran become a military nuclear power, as long as it doesn't believe that nuclear weapons acquisition is imminent, in the interim period other interests come into play for Russia in a more prominent manner.

China too is driven by a mix of economic and political/strategic interests vis-à-vis Iran, the Middle East, and the broader international community. China does not feel particularly threatened by the scenario of Iran becoming a nuclear state, and it wants to assert itself both regionally and globally. Until 2009, the common wisdom was that China would follow Russia's lead on sanctions, as it would not like to be perceived as the only state blocking a Security Council resolution. Over the past year, however, that tendency has changed, and in the dynamic leading up to the fourth round of sanctions, it was China that was taking the lead in sanctions-resistant behavior.<sup>3</sup>

While it is certainly convenient for the US and Europe to blame Russia and China for the absence of stricter UN-based sanctions, the truth is that, had they so desired, European states could have done much more to pressure Iran economically outside the framework of the Security Council and in concert with the US, well before 2010. But here too the economic interest in continued trade with Iran, together with the assessment that if they backed out of deals with Iran, Russia and China would immediately rush in to take their place, led European countries not only to resist curtailing their economic ties with Iran, but in some cases actually to enhance them. And while overall it seems that Europe has been moving steadily toward greater implementation of sanctions – with some companies even going further than required – periodic reports in the media still relate

3 For an interesting assessment of China's calculations, see Yoram Evron, "Iran, China and the Israeli Stick", *INSS Insight*, no. 150, December 22, 2009.

how this or that European financial institution continues to carry out problematic business ties with Iran.<sup>4</sup> The negative role of Austria in particular was highlighted due to its record of business in Iran over the course of 2009. While all other European states were trying to decrease trade with Iran, Austrian exports to Iran increased 6 percent in 2009, including the suspicion that some of the Austrian companies involved in trade with Iran were dealing with front companies of the Revolutionary Guards.<sup>5</sup>

June 2010 ushered in a new and unprecedented sanctions dynamic.<sup>6</sup> More than 2 years after the previous UN sanctions resolution in March 2008, and after 6 months of haggling to gain the support of all five permanent members of the Security Council (and as many non-permanent members as possible), on June 9th the fourth round of UN sanctions was passed. While not the "biting" sanctions that the Obama administration had hoped for, the new sanctions went further than the previous rounds. The resolution expanded previous personal and institutional sanctions, included embargos on conventional weapons sales, and banned all activities related to ballistic missiles that could carry nuclear weapons. In addition, it set up a framework for inspecting suspicious cargo on ships and planes, and increased restrictions on Iranian banking. The resolution also included provisions for dealing with problems of states' compliance with measures previously decided upon.

The concession to Russia and China was to omit any measures targeting Iran's energy sector, including foreign investments. However, the separate US, and then EU decisions on sanctions that came on the heels of the UN resolution did target this sector, and they are stronger than anything that has come before. Another unprecedented recent development was the announcement by the UAE that it would comply with the June 2010 UN sanctions; it immediately shut down over 40 companies that were involved in the proliferation of

4 For a recent example see Peter Fritsch and David Crawford, "Small Bank in Germany Tied to Iran Nuclear Effort", *Wall Street Journal*, July 18, 2010.

5 Yossi Melman, "The Austrian Gate to Iran", *Haaretz*, April 29, 2010.

6 For one summary see Greg Bruno, "The Lengthening List of Iran Sanctions", *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 28, 2010.

dual-use and dangerous materials banned by UN resolutions. UAE compliance is especially significant due to the long-term use of Dubai in order to circumvent sanctions and get goods into Iran.

In sum, up until summer of 2010, the “nuclear prong” of the sanctions story was primarily a story of international politics, and the lower priority that some of the strong international actors accorded to confronting nuclear proliferation in comparison with the full range of economic, political, and strategic interests that they sought to bring to bear. As such, the primary constraint to the effective use of sanctions was the lack of political will to agree upon them in the first place, compounded by constraints regarding their implementation – including ensuring wider global compliance – with unity of purpose and with determination. In a very real sense, the sanctions debate became a reflection of international economics and the balance of power among these states.

The new set of sanctions introduced in recent months reflects greater concern with Iran's continuing activities and a surprising European determination to go much further in terms of non-UN sanctions. However, Russia and China are still not on board in a significant manner, and if the US continues to insist on the centrality of this multilateral framework, it will continue to hamper efforts to confront Iran effectively.

## 2) Sanctions: part of a political process

As discussed, the first three rounds of sanctions were not strong or comprehensive enough to even conduct a debate over their economic effectiveness: to ask how, if at all, economic pressure at the domestic level translates into changed policy in the nuclear realm, and what economic steps might be most conducive for that purpose. Only since the June-July 2010 decisions is there a chance of seeing a more significant economic impact that can be then utilized further. Indeed there are indications that the Iranian regime is beginning to feel the heat.

Still, when the argument is made that “so far sanctions have not worked”, the problem is not only that the sanctions until very recently have been too weak in economic terms to be expected to have any real effect (coming nowhere near what could be termed “crippling” or “biting” sanctions), but as raised earlier, the

question is what exactly is the “effect” that they are expected to induce.

Can sanctions live up to expectations that they will bring Iran to the point that it will simply reverse its program? The short answer is almost certainly – no; especially at this rather late stage in the game. For sanctions to have an effect, they must be integrated into an overall strategy for dealing with Iran that goes beyond sanctions per se. Political context is central for understanding the potential effectiveness of sanctions. Indeed, ultimately, the test of sanctions on Iran is the manner by which they are used by strong states in the framework of an overall strategy for ensuring that Iran does not become a nuclear state.

However, so far the overwhelming tendency has been to relate to sanctions as one of three escalating approaches to Iran: the move is generally thought to be from diplomacy to sanctions to military force. According to this view – and as reflected in Obama's initial portrayal of sanctions in early 2010 – the implication is that each strategy is an independent, parallel, and increasingly severe route that can be chosen in the pursuit of the same goal: namely, getting Iran to reverse its nuclear ambitions.

But this logic is seriously flawed. In fact, the different strategies should be viewed as complementary, rather than alternative approaches. In this view, sanctions and military force (the threat or actual execution) are better viewed as essential means of pressuring Iran that should precede – not follow – negotiations, as implied by Obama in his later references. But, in contrast to the shifting messages coming from Obama, this logic needs to be firmly established as the guiding principle for strategic thinking on the Iranian issue. If the ultimate goal is to reach a negotiated deal with Iran, every step taken vis-à-vis Iran must be integrated into a strategy that best serves that goal. If a new sanctions momentum has been established, it must be capitalized upon, with an eye to carving out a clever negotiations strategy vis-à-vis Iran, which is no doubt a determined and skilled opponent.

Within this context, whoever leads negotiations must make a clear decision about whether they seek to influence the present regime or whether their true desire is to help bring about regime change. These are two very different goals,





that require different overall strategies, and a decision must be made on this issue in order to follow through more effectively. Similarly, the US must decide whether it is focused primarily on US-Iranian relations or whether its first order of business is the nuclear issue as such. Again, the dynamics are different and priorities must be set.

### 3) Who will lead?

The next essential question is who will lead this process. In the initial stage (2003-2006) the EU-3 and the US stepped up to the plate to deal with Iran. But once the sanctions process involving the five permanent members of the Security Council began in 2006, and especially since Obama became president, with his insistence on a multilateral framework for negotiating with Iran, the group of states that has evolved for this purpose is the P5+1: the five permanent members of the Security Council, with the addition of Germany due to its historic role in the EU-3 framework. It is this multilateral group that negotiated with Iran in October 2009 over the fuel deal.

While the P5 is the relevant group of states for discussions of UN sanctions, this is not the proper format for negotiating with Iran. As much as Obama is enamored with the idea of multilateralism, for the purpose of conducting focused negotiations with a determined party like Iran, multilateralism is more of a liability than an asset. Even in the case of sanctions, the latest round has clearly demonstrated that the most effective measures were the ones decided upon unilaterally, by the US and the EU. Without these states adopting strong independent positions, we would have been left only with the fourth round of UN sanctions that, while going beyond the previous round, still fell well short of what was needed, due to the political constraints of gaining multilateral support.

For negotiations with Iran, the US is surely the most suitable candidate for assuming the leading role, but this would require a US decision to accept leadership. This means not only choosing leadership over multilateralism, but replacing platitudes such as "diplomacy" and "engagement" with focused bargaining strategies. Effective negotiations with Iran will be a tough dynamic that actually has very little to do with confidence-building, and everything to do with driving forward a hard deal. The administration will have to quickly learn and begin implementing basic negotiations strategies, such as projecting strength in order to gain the upper hand in a bargaining process - to be the party that determines the pace and content of discussions, rather than allowing Iran to do so.

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## Conclusion

Confronting Iran's nuclear ambitions is a political process within which sanctions have a role to play. The political nature of the overall process is evident every step of the way, and must be dealt with as such. Otherwise, the political constraints that arise will have the ability to seriously hamper prospects for success.

This paper has attempted to clear up some of the conceptual confusion about the role of sanctions within the broader process, while highlighting important political dimensions of this process that must be taken into account and addressed. Particular attention was devoted to the question of the necessary political will to agree to sanctions, and the goals of the international actors that employ them.

A heavy responsibility lies on the shoulders of the strong powers that have taken it upon themselves to stop Iran from acquiring a military nuclear capability. To achieve this goal without resort to force means taking this political process very seriously.

# Contributors

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## Iran's Aspirations for Regional Hegemony - Conference Summary

On 14 June 2010, the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue at the Netanya Academic College hosted a conference on Iran's aspirations for regional hegemony, its ramifications, and possible responses.

In his opening remarks, the President of Netanya Academic College, **Prof. Zvi Arad**, said that in addition to addressing Iran's aspirations for hegemony, its illustrious history should also be examined. Following the conquests of Cyrus the Great, Iran became one of the largest empires ever, sprawling from India to Asia Minor to Africa, and lasting 900 years. With the rise of Khomeini and the radicals to power, the dream of reinstating the empire was revived. Prof. Arad further noted that many wars stem from an atavistic longing to restore a glorious national past, adding, however, that Real Politik constrains such dreams. The Jewish people were welcome in Iran for 2,800 years, he observed, expressing hope that that would be the case again once the current conflicts are resolved.

**Dr. Ephraim Sneh**, Chair of the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue, explained that the conference's title was not a random selection. What guides Iranian strategy today, he opined, is the aspiration to achieve regional hegemony and subsequent world domination. In his view, only a country with such global aspirations develops long-range rockets and missiles that pose a far-flung threat.

**Dr. Ralf Hexel**, Director of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Israel office, which collaborated with the Center for Strategic Dialogue in organizing the conference, said:

"Unquestionably, Iran is the principal issue facing Israel's foreign policy. In fact, Iran's nuclear program and radical leadership are seen as a threat by the international community as a whole. The sanctions approved by the Security

Council on 9.6.2010 are good news for Israel, showing that it is not alone and that the international community is serious and ready to act."

He also expressed hope that the conference would raise recommendations for effective diplomatic actions to be taken by Israel's leaders so as to avoid a resort to force.

### First Panel - Iran's Regional Foreign Policy

**Prof. Uzi Rabi**, Head of the Department of Middle Eastern and African History at Tel Aviv University, stressed that Iran has been taking "potshots" at the world since 1979. The regime has waged an uncompromising struggle against Israel and the world, adopting a policy that was diametrically opposed to that of the Shah's regime. In particular, heaping vituperation at Israel has helped Iran to advance its strategy in the Middle East. One of the important hallmarks of this regime is its intrusive involvement in the affairs of Arab countries. Iran has been devoting great attention to those countries that have a Shi'ite population. This policy intensified with the rise of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power. The fall of Saddam Hussein in April 2003 paved the way for territorial contiguity in the west, which is why Tehran infiltrated some three million Shi'ites to Iraq, exerting influence through culture and religion. In light of the historic tension between Arabs and Persian, and between Sunni and Shi'a, the Iranian issue has preoccupied Arab discourse with the following concerns:

- The Arab regimes are concerned by Tehran's attempts to export Shi'a to the Middle East and "Iranianize" the region.
- The possible emergence of a Shi'ite Crescent, stretching through Iraq to Lebanon and Syria, with the potential of tearing the

fabric of the Middle East, has caused great apprehension.

- A nuclear Iran revives the Persian Empire – the wars in Lebanon and Gaza were the first time that there was no unified Arab position against Israel. Claims were made that Hamas and Hezbollah – with Iran’s backing – are responsible for provoking Israel.

Remarking on developments in Turkey, Dr. Rabi observed that under Erdogan’s leadership, Turkey has appropriated some of Iran’s cachet. Economically, it is stronger than Iran and also has a rich history. Ankara has also eclipsed Tehran in venomous rhetoric directed at Israel. At the present rate, Tehran might need a “tie-breaker”. Meanwhile, Turkey’s emergence as Israel’s chief detractor has influenced the “Arab street”, where the atmosphere appears to reflect the feeling that “The King is dead, long live the new King”.

**Prof. Lutz Metz** from the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the Free University in Berlin noted that in addition to being a social scientist, he has considerable background in industry and nuclear energy. Consequently, his perspective is different.

Prof. Metz explained that the strategy of Iran’s foreign policy is to create a buffer zone from the Middle East to the Hindu-Kush mountain range. Given the fact that the area is only accessible by Iran’s permission, so long as Iraq and Afghanistan are unstable, Iran stands to gain from controlling it.

He then listed the countries with vested interests in the region:

1. Russia – Iran is a thriving market for Russian-made weapons. Russia also serves as counterweight to the United States in the Middle East. Iran’s nuclear aspirations encourage other countries in the region to increase their military capabilities, which, in turn, helps to expand the market for Russian weapons. Both Russia and Iran would like to see the United States phase out its involvement in the region. And because this is a shared interest, these two countries foster positive relations.
2. The United States – In contrast to the past, there is now some covert cooperation between the United States and Iran, aimed at accomplishing short-term goals in Iraq

and Afghanistan. This naturally does affect their conflict over Tehran’s nuclear policy and support of terrorist organizations.

3. Soviet breakaway states – The now-independent nations of the former Soviet Union see economic development as their primary political interest, while Iran looks for support by blunting opposition to its nuclear program. This explains their opposition to the UN sanctions on Iran. Tehran has successfully garnered their support by investing in those countries, selling them energy products, and extending aid to the poorer countries.
4. Venezuela – Iran and Venezuela share many joint projects. For example, they manufacture a ‘non-imperialistic’ vehicle. Iran has set up oil production platforms in Venezuela and built housing projects for the poor. It has also dispatched military consultants. Recently the two countries signed cooperation agreements in tourism and agriculture. Similar types of cooperation exist with other South American countries, e.g. Bolivia and Nicaragua.
5. China – Since 2008, Iran has become China’s most important export market. The trade between the two countries has risen dramatically to an estimated three billion dollars annually. China attaches importance to Iran because it is the only country from which it can import oil by land. China is important to Iran because it is a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Like Russia, China plays a double game in its Iranian policy. On the one hand it votes in favor of the sanctions, while at the same time negating their effect through trade and economic cooperation with Tehran.
6. Africa – In a bid to secure support in the face of opposition to its nuclear program, including the UN sanctions, Iran offers African countries such as Sudan, Mali, Mauritania and others economic aid and energy.

In conclusion, Prof. Metz opined that Iran’s map of interests reveals that Israel constitutes only a small fraction of its foreign policy.

**Meir Javedanfar**, an Iran analyst and the director of Middle East Economic and Political Analysis (MEEPAS), said in his opening remarks that the upheavals and unrest experienced since June 2009 have weakened the Iranian regime. Controversy reigns, and even some





of the president's followers have distanced themselves - an unmistakable sign of the regime's vulnerability. Mr. Javedanfar cited an interview in the Guardian with two defectors from the Revolutionary Guard who testified that members of the al-Quds force who carried out orders to fire at demonstrators were either Palestinian or Lebanese since Iranians would never shoot at their fellow citizens. This supports the conclusion that the Iranian regime relies on foreign troops, doubting the loyalty of its own soldiers, an additional factor that makes its foreign policy of such paramount importance.

Touching on relations with Turkey, Mr. Javedanfar observed that despite Tehran's financial aid to the Gaza Strip, Turkish rather than Iranian flags are seen on the streets. This kind of display reinforces Iran's concern of losing its regional hegemony to Turkey. The Iran-Turkey alliance is a temporary one, and rivalry between the two is growing. Acquiring a nuclear bomb and strengthening Hezbollah would reinforce Iran's primacy.

Mr. Javedanfar concluded his talk by suggesting that the current regime in Iran would likely not last very long. Given internal rifts and bad management, he believes the regime will collapse even if it acquires nuclear capability. He is convinced that, like the Soviet Union, the weight of its internal failures will bring about its downfall. An atomic bomb is not an insurance policy that will guarantee the continuation of the regime.

**Ms. Michal Raviv**, a doctoral student in the Department of Political Studies at Bar Ilan University, presented the constraints and tensions that affect Saudi policy vis-à-vis Iran.

These include:

- Saudi Arabia's role as guardian of Islam's holiest places and leader of the Muslim world
- The rivalry between Sunni and Shi'ites
- The rivalry between Persians and Arabs
- Concerns about its own survival

Since its foundation, Saudi Arabia has been striving for regional stability that will help it protect its own interests. That is why it favors the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and strives for peace. From the Saudi perspective,

the Iranian nuclear program destroys any chance for peace.

Ms. Raviv cited the following reasons as to why the Saudis are opposed to Iran's nuclear program and its implications:

- Fear of an arms race and destabilization of the region
- Fear of growing American military presence
- A reluctance to increase its defense spending
- Fear of exacerbated confrontation with the Shi'ites
- Fear of a nuclear accident
- Fear that Iran will direct its nuclear weapons at the Gulf states and Saudi Arabia

Ms. Raviv continued to outline the Saudi options, as follows:

- Requesting American support; this, however, would trigger criticism in the Arab world and destabilize the regime
- Establishing a strategic alliance consisting of Arab and western countries
- Developing its own nuclear capabilities; the Saudis have already explored the option of acquiring missiles from Russia or deploying Pakistani missiles in the country
- Allying itself with Iran as a means of averting an attack
- Establishing a strategic alliance with Middle Eastern and Gulf countries
- Engaging in diplomatic efforts to ward off introduction of nuclear weapons into the Middle East

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## Second Panel - The Sanctions and their Efficacy

In the opening remarks of the second panel, the chairman, **Dr. David Altman**, Vice-Chair of the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue and Senior Vice President of Netanya Academic College, said that in order to ensure the efficacy of the sanctions, a stable coalition must be formed. He explained that such sanctions failed during the Cold War because not all countries cooperated.



In an attempt to assess the effectiveness of the current sanctions on Iran, **Dr. Ephraim Ascolai**, Senior Research Associate at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), reviewed past instances where such penalties were attempted. The sanctions imposed on Italy in the 1930s following its attack on Ethiopia failed due to lack of cooperation from the United States, which was not a member of the League of Nations. Many historians believe that the severe sanctions the United States imposed on Japan following its conquest of Manchuria prompted the Japanese attack on the United States. The sanctions that were employed against Iraq in order to prevent it from developing weapons of mass destruction were considered extremely harsh, and concern about their effect on the Iraqi people had a negative impact on world public opinion. Dr. Ascolai maintains that the sanctions imposed on Libya in the wake of the Lockerbie tragedy were serious and disproportionate, although Libya ultimately capitulated to demands for the extradition of terrorists and the payment of reparations.

Dr. Ascolai then outlined the principles he believes are necessary to ensure the effectiveness of sanctions:

1. Sanctions have to be part of a strategy and should never stand alone.
2. Sanctions should be applied to the country's vulnerable points.
3. Although severe sanctions improve chances of success, humanitarian harm should nonetheless be avoided.
4. Timing of the sanctions is important.
5. The sanctioned country should be offered incentives and compensation if it changes its policy.
6. Narrowly-focused sanctions should be avoided since they can be easily overcome.
7. Diluting the sanctions for political reasons conveys weakness.

Turning to the sanctions on Iran, he explained that Iran has already acquired most of the materials and know-how needed to obtain nuclear capability, therefore banning them is futile. However, the riots that broke out after a 40% rise in gasoline prices and the fact that Iran imports some 40% of its gasoline would suggest that imposing restrictions on imports of refined fuel could be more effective. Yet

American reluctance to complicate its relations with China and Russia has resulted in new sanctions that do not address this issue. He also proposed exploring the possible isolation of Iran in a manner similar to what had been done with Libya. This, he said, could have a significant effect.

Dr. Ascolai opined that as long as there was no comprehensive plan incorporating all the aspects he alluded to, the sanctions would have little or no impact on Iran.

**Dr. Emily Landau**, Senior Research Associate at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), argued that although it is hard to assess the effectiveness of the sanctions, such measures are the world's only option short of military action to punish a country that violates its treaty. If sanctions are to be effective, however, other means of pressure need to be applied, including a credible military threat. The Obama administration has erred by effectively removing this option from the table.

Dr. Landau contends that the existing sanctions are not strong enough and were diluted in order to accommodate Russian and Chinese economic interests and European concern about revenue losses that would result from cancelling transactions with Iran.

In her opinion, the international community made another mistake by viewing diplomacy as separate from sanctions and possible military action. Sanctions and diplomacy are inextricably linked, she concluded, because only pressure yields productive negotiations.

**Prof. Bernd Kubbig** from the Peace Research Institute in Frankfurt, Germany, reviewed a report he had prepared with a colleague concerning the circumstances under which sanctions work. In their report, they claim that the relevant literature points to three main conditions for success: a great extent of unity within the sanctioning coalition, the target country's considerable vulnerability, and as little economic and political costs as possible for the sanctioning states. Having analyzed 73 case studies, they arrived at the following three conclusions:

1. The more important the objective, the less effective the sanctions are. This is why the measures taken against Iran were doomed from the start.



2. Sanctions should also address the motivation of the other side. In the case of Iran, they do not address the motives and hence are ineffective.
3. Sanctions should take into account the regime of the target country.

Prof. Kubbig proceeded to describe the conditions for the success of the sanctions and why they failed in Iran's case. The first condition for their success is having a homogenous coalition with a clear objective. In Iran's case, this condition is not met, thereby undermining the sanctions' strength. The second condition is to focus sanction on that country's Achilles' heel. He and his colleague identified four Iranian vulnerabilities:

1. Ageing oil infrastructure that forces Tehran to invest heavily to either maintain or increase production. He is encouraged by the fact that European exporters do not supply the materials Tehran needs in order to modernize its infrastructure, although China and Russia are a good substitute.
2. The condition of the oil refineries forces Iran to import approximately 40% of oil distillates. This is the regime's most daunting challenge, because shortage of gasoline could lead to riots.
3. Half of the government's budget comes from oil export. Without oil or gas exports the Iranian economy will sooner or later be unviable. Curtailing those exports would bring about the demise of the Iranian regime. The monoculture of Iran's exports immediately conveys a great sanctioning potential. On the one hand, this applies to a closed international sanctioning alliance, in which the member states would decide not to import Iranian oil any more. On the other hand, Tehran could halt the export of its "black gold". Experts are skeptical, however, that either side will use the oil weapon, due to their mutually high vulnerability. As long as the oil price remains on a high level, the oil weapon - in the form of an international import ban - is likely to remain a blunt instrument for some time to come.
4. Financial and economic problems including the loss of purchasing power due to inflation, an increased capital flight, wide-spreading corruption, and foreign debt. The country's international credit ranking has

also worsened, while another considerable structural problem is the high unemployment rate, which is de facto at over 50%.

Despite these vulnerabilities, the sanctions have been rendered ineffective due to the international community's unwillingness to accept them in their original form. According to Prof. Kubbig, all rounds of sanctions, from 2006 to the most recent round of UN sanctions, have been severely diluted by Russia and China. For example, in the December 2006 UN sanctions, the comprehensive export ban initially proposed by the Western members turned into a specific ban on explicitly listed technologies and materials; the number of Iranians employed in the nuclear and rocket-related fields, whose foreign assets were frozen, were kept to a minimum; and the initially envisaged entry ban for Iranian military personnel and scientists in the respective field were reduced to entry restrictions. Indeed, the limited unity of the sanctioning alliance can be ascribed to economic interests of Moscow and Beijing as well, as to foreign policy differences among the leading powers.

Furthermore, political costs due to the new developments of the oil and gas market, with Iran serving at the center of the new energy order, could arise if Iran starts to deepen its relationship with China, India, and Russia - as a consequence of the European embargo policy. The focus of the international community on Tehran's growing interest in the "Asia-option" show that a fight over spheres of influence and the distribution of global resources is occurring.

Even Israel continues to deal with Iran. German exports to Iran have increased by four percent during the sanctions period, and Dubai, which manufactures nothing, actually exports 85% of the commodities it imports to Iran.

Prof. Kubbig concluded that currently there are not many indicators for Iran's readiness to give up its nuclear enrichment, which could be a first step towards nuclear weapons capacity, due to sanctions.

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## Third Panel - the Strategic Options in Dealing with Iran's Nuclearization

Deputy Director of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), **Dr. Ephraim Kam**, explained that given twenty years of secrecy



by Iranians about their nuclear weaponry development, his observations were necessarily based on analysis and inferences rather than specific information. Nonetheless, he noted the consensus among experts that Iran is on the brink of developing atomic weapons. Dr. Kam discussed three factors that he sees as motivating the Iranian program:

1. After the war with Iraq, the Iranians realized they needed a weapon that would deter a strong enemy such as the United States.
2. The Iranians believe that going nuclear would further their ambitions of becoming a regional power.
3. The Iranian regime believes such capability will bolster its standing at home.

Iran's development of ballistic missiles suggests that it will not settle for one or two bombs, but will rather seek a second-strike capability.

If Iran decides to cross the nuclear threshold, it will have to choose one of two diplomatic strategies: going public or maintaining ambiguity. The second option would enable it to limit diplomatic damage and minimize sanctions, while still posing a threat to Israel and the United States. Publicly acknowledging that it has achieved nuclear capacity would court international punishment, but at the same time solidify its standing as a major power. Among other things, the threat to Israel would be made more acute and European countries would be compelled to seek some accommodation with Tehran.

Dr. Kam estimates that Iran will adopt a policy of ambiguity since it will provide it with more diplomatic flexibility. He also contends that Iran will not use nuclear weapons for a number of reasons:

1. Using nuclear weapons will reduce deterrence, the *raison d'être* of acquiring this capability.
2. Israel has a second-strike capability that will inflict devastation and millions of fatalities on Iran.
3. The long-standing close ties between Israel and the United States might provoke America to act against Iran.

Notwithstanding these considerations, Dr. Kam observed that a nuclear attack on Israel is not impossible, resulting perhaps from diplomatic

misunderstanding or in response to an Israeli strike against one of Iran's allies.

Working under the assumption that Iran will acquire nuclear weapons, the Academic Director of the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue, Dr. Reuven Pedatzur presented the various actions Israel could take to cope with the challenge:

1. Military action - A military strike to destroy or significantly delay Iran's nuclear weapons program is only possible before Iran has acquired such weapons. But for logistical, tactical and intelligence reasons, such an operation is doomed to fail. Additionally, it will lead to the collapse of diplomatic pressure on Iran.
2. Continuing the policy of ambiguity is, in Dr. Pedatzur's opinion, a mistake. In this realm, gray areas are undesirable. It is important that the other side be made clear of the consequences of its actions.
3. Relying on American defense is not advisable. Such a policy would rest on an American promise whose fulfillment cannot be guaranteed.
4. Ideally, disarmament agreements would be desirable, but given the current state of affairs, this is unrealistic.
5. Passive defense would be the wrong approach. Providing shelter to the entire population is not feasible, and any such endeavor would come at a staggering cost for Israel.
6. The development of the Arrow anti-missile system suggests that active defense is in fact an element of Israel's policy. It cannot be a complete policy, however, because it cannot provide foolproof defense. One nuclear missile is all it would take to inflict intolerable damage to Israel.
7. Adopting an open nuclear deterrence policy would mean a departure for Israel since it would mean relinquishing the policy of ambiguity in favor of a manifestation of a clear intent. Israel's second-strike capability would deter the Iranians since they risk their own annihilation. This was the policy adopted by the superpowers during the Cold war. In Dr. Pedatzur's opinion, this is the best of the unpalatable choices facing Israel.



**Dr. Uzi Rubin**, director of Rubincon Defense Consulting, examined Iran's strategic intentions based on the assets it chooses to develop. While allowing its air and ground forces to fall into a state of technological obsolescence, Tehran is developing a new missile every eight years. The most recent of these is the nuclear-capable Shihab 3.

Iran's investments in ballistic technology have produced missiles with an ever-increasing range, with the current reach believed to be approximately 2,000 kilometers or more. This would mean a capability of targeting Europe.

Concurrent with these efforts, Iran has also improved its capability to launch missiles into space. They even succeeded in launching a satellite, stating that their objective is to have communication satellites in orbit and send astronauts to space. Their satellite launchers can be retrofitted into Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBMs), thereby putting Iran in a similar category with China, Russia and the United States.

Dr. Rubin concluded that Iran's weaponry development plans suggest that Tehran seeks to become a global power, and not just a regional one.

**Prof. Bernd Kubbig** from the Peace Research Institute in Frankfurt, Germany argued that Iran's motivation to develop nuclear weapons stems from its sense of isolation. To make his point, he presented claims made by Iranian colleagues to the effect that the West had ignored Saddam Hussein's use of chemical weapons against them, and that American hostility toward them was undiminished despite Iran's cooperation during the Gulf war. The reason for Iranian armament, in his opinion, is the desire to ward off an attack.

Prof. Kubbig maintains that if Israel accepts the Arab peace initiative and signs a peace accord with Syria, Iran's motivation to pursue its nuclear program will wane. He believes the key to a solution is for Tehran and Washington to improve their relations and guarantee Iran's national security. This "smart concept", which should consist of different elements, can be a very promising alternative to sanctions or war, which must include the following steps: delaying the nuclear program, compromises on uranium enrichment, strengthening the inspections of

Iran's nuclear plants, economic incentives, and offering direct diplomacy between Washington and Tehran. This concept does not aim at isolating Iran and abolishing all its nuclear plants. Instead of this it combines containment and engagement.

## Fourth Panel - Internal Power Struggles in Iranian Society

At the start of the panel, **Prof. David Menashri**, senior research associate at the Center for Iranian Studies at Tel Aviv University, examined whether the objectives of the revolution had been accomplished. This is an issue that Prof. Menashri believes preoccupies Iranians.

In his view, the revolution had two objectives. The first one was to seize power - which was accomplished. The second one, however, was to provide freedom and bread, welfare and freedom; these things did not materialize. Inequities in society have not been alleviated, and freedom is obviously non-existent.

There are disputes over the revolution's consistency with Islamic values. One of Iran's most senior clerics openly opposed Khomeini. And a few have proclaimed that there is no one valid interpretation of Islam, and that the Iranian regime therefore cannot dictate what is religiously appropriate.

The internal disputes in Iran focus on the tension between pragmatism and strict religious adherence. Those of a pragmatic bent demonstrate a greater degree of openness and are inclined to embrace solutions that take into account daily needs.

Considered moderate, Khatami was unable to change anything because the radicals retained their grip on the levers of power. The radicals' strength stems from four sources: (1) God; (2) the Revolutionary Guard; (3) their willingness to use force; and (4) a weak and divided opposition.

Prof. Menashri contends that the events of 2009 destabilized the regime, which caused a loss of legitimacy. If the revolution can accomplish its political and economic goals, it will succeed. The question remains whether this will occur before Iran turns nuclear.

**Dr. Brenda Shaffer** from the School of Political Science and the Department of Asian Studies



at Haifa University focused on the hardships of the Iranian regime in an effort to refute notions that it is a global power.

According to Dr. Shaffer, Iran has economic problems. It suffers from 20% inflation and a deficit that keeps growing due to the gap between oil prices and the government's budget. In addition, 50% of the country's revenues are generated by oil and gas. While oil production either decreases or remains constant, consumption keeps rising. Despite the fact that Iran has huge gas reserves, it nonetheless has to import oil and gas. Shortage of gas is ubiquitous, the electric infrastructure is poor and not accessible to all, and people are "freezing to death" in the north of the country.

Dr. Shaffer opines that Iran is also beleaguered by serious political problems, facing difficulties in all the provinces. It is unable to deter neighboring countries or even the terrorist organizations operating in its midst.

She further believes that the political situation is fluid because half of all Iranians are not Persian. Ethnic minorities live close to the border and have relatives in neighboring countries.

Although the smallest ethnic group in the country, the Baluchi minority has in the past resorted to violence. Its leader, who was arrested in 2010, enjoyed an extent of sympathy that was reflected even in the Talkbacks of the Iranian government's official web site.

The fear of the Kurdish minority prompted the Iranians to ban the funerals of people who were executed. Fearing riots, the regime went so far as to withhold the bodies from their families. These and other events suggest that the Iranian regime is having a hard time coping with ethnic tensions.

In her concluding remarks, Dr. Shaffer explained that the minorities are not seeking to become isolationist and independent, but seek recognition of their rights. She does not think they will spark a rebellion. However, if one breaks out, they will join it and will become hard to control.

**Ambassador Uri Lubrani**, the last Israeli ambassador to serve in Iran, claimed that Iran's nuclearization is unstoppable. According to him, Iran wants to consolidate its standing in the Middle East and then become an international power to be reckoned with.

Mr. Lubrani explained that Iran is fighting on two fronts - international and domestic. On the international front, it has been able to buy valuable time. Meddling in the Palestinian affairs has enabled it to gain significant support among Sunni Muslims.

He believes that on the domestic front a revolution will take place, yet it is hard to predict who will replace the incumbent regime. In his conclusion, Mr. Lubrani expressed regret that Israel was not doing enough to encourage that rebellion. By way of example, he mentioned constant and repeated budgetary pressure to shut down the Voice of Israel station in the Farsi language.

**Dr. Ephraim Sneh**, Chair of the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue, concluded the conference, stating that Iran's nuclear armament imperils Israel's existence even if Iran never uses nuclear weapons against it. He cited several reasons for this:

1. The Iranian threat will stop immigration to Israel.
2. It will prompt a debilitating "brain-drain" from Israel.
3. Foreign investments needed for Israel's economic growth will dry up.
4. The terrorist organizations will rear their head and increase their activity with the backing of a nuclear power.
5. Iran's nuclear armament will drive Saudi Arabia and Egypt to develop their own nuclear weapons.

In Dr. Sneh's opinion, such a situation would be intolerable. Therefore, no price can be considered too high to stop Iran's nuclear program.

Dr. Sneh believes that the conditions created by an Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons would not be comparable to the 'balance of terror' that existed between the Soviet Union and the United States. Unlike the situation between the two superpowers, there is no symmetry between Israel and Iran. Iran's population is ten-fold larger than Israel's and its area is seventy-fold bigger. In view of this, there will be no mutual deterrence, but rather Israeli inferiority.

He also asserted that sanctions should be applied to Iran's oil exports and imports because this is the only apparatus that can impact its leaders.

# Iran's Ambitions for Regional Hegemony



Dr. Sneh voiced concern that Israel would have to react militarily. The only way to avert this would be adoption by the United States of

effective legislation to prevent investments in Iran's oil industry and impose a boycott on its banking systems.



◀ Prof. Zvi Arad, President, Netanya Academic College

Dr. Ephraim Sneh, Chair, S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue, Netanya Academic College ▶



◀ Dr. Ralf Hexel, Director, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Israel Office

Dr. Uzi Rabi, Head of the Department of Middle Eastern and African History, Senior Researcher of Iranian Studies, with other panelists ▶



# Iran's Ambitions for Regional Hegemony



# Iran's Ambitions for Regional Hegemony



◀ Dr. Emily Landau, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)

Dr. Ephraim Kam, Deputy Directory, Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) ▶



◀ Dr. Reuven Pedatzur, Academic Director, S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue, Netanya Academic College, displaying Iran's missile range capabilities

Ambassador Uri Lubrani, former Ambassador to Iran ▶





◀ Prof. Lutz Mez, Department of Political & Social Sciences, Free University Berlin

Dr. Brenda Shaffer, School of Political Science and Department of Asian Studies, University of Haifa ▶



◀ Meir Javedanfar, Iran Analyst, Director of the Middle East Economic and Political Analysis Company (MEEPAS)

Dr. David Altman, Vice-Chair, S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue, Netanya Academic College ▶



# Iran's Ambitions for Regional Hegemony

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◀ Brig. Gen. (ret.) Mike Herzog

Prof. David Menashri, Head of the Center for Iranian Studies, Dean of Special Programs, Tel-Aviv University ▶



◀ Prof. Bernd Kubbig, Project Director, Ballistic Missile Defense Research International, Peace Research Institute, Frankfurt



Dr. Ephraim Ascolai, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), with other panelists ▶

