



NORTH KOREA AND IRAN

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PREFACE

I am pleased to present *North Korea and Iran*, the fourth in a series of Stimson publications addressing questions of how the elimination of nuclear weapons might be achieved. The Stimson project on nuclear security explores the practical dimensions of this critical 21st century debate, to identify both political and technical obstacles that could block the road to “zero,” and to outline how each of these could be removed. Led by Stimson's co-founder and Distinguished Fellow Dr. Barry Blechman, the project provides useful analyses that can help US and world leaders make the elimination of nuclear weapons a realistic and viable option. The series comprises country assessments, to be published in a total of six different monographs, and a separate volume on such technical issues as verification and enforcement of a disarmament regime, to be published in the fall.

This fourth monograph in the series, following volumes on *France and the United Kingdom*, *China and India*, and *Israel and Pakistan*, examines the two newest nuclear aspirants — North Korea and Iran. North Korea has made its nuclear weapon status extremely clear in recent weeks in defiance of world-wide condemnation. Iran maintains it seeks only to develop nuclear energy for civilian purposes, but so far has resisted multinational efforts to negotiate agreements that would provide confidence that a weapons' capability was not acquired covertly.

North Korea's break-out from the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty is analyzed by Joel Wit, a former State Department official who served as the Department's coordinator for implementation of the 1994 US.-North Korea Agreed Framework, and Leon Sigal, the director of the Northeast Asia Cooperative Security Project at the Social Science Research Council. The Iran paper is written by Anoush Ehteshami, a Professor of International Relations and Dean of Internationalization at Durham University in the United Kingdom.

This new series makes an important contribution to the new and renewed debate about how to rid the world of the dangers of nuclear weapons. This enduring strategic issue has been a central concern of the Stimson Center since its founding twenty years ago. I hope that this new publication will provide insights and pragmatic ideas to facilitate wise policymaking, in keeping with Stimson tradition.

Sincerely,



Ellen Laipson

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the twin threats of proliferation and terrorism have led to a growing chorus of world leaders calling for the global elimination of nuclear weapons. Thousands of individuals from around the world and across political lines have come together in a project called *Global Zero*. Combining policy research with broad-based public outreach, the project seeks to encourage governments to negotiate an agreement to eliminate all nuclear weapons through phased and verified reductions.

In support of *Global Zero* and the many other ongoing efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons, and in collaboration with the World Security Institute, the Stimson Center has commissioned a series of papers examining the strategic obstacles that block the achievement of zero nuclear weapons world-wide. Written from the perspectives of individual countries that either possess nuclear weapons or have the potential to develop them relatively quickly, the papers describe those nations' official views on, and plans for, nuclear weapons, as well as how the prospect of wide-spread proliferation and the possibility of nuclear disarmament might change those perspectives. The primary purpose of each paper is to identify the policies and international developments that would encourage decision-makers in each nation to look favorably on a treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons by a date certain.

The fourth pair of papers in the series, *North Korea*, by Joel Wit and Leon Sigal, and *Iran*, by Professor Anoush Ehteshami, is published together in this volume. Both nations have pursued nuclear programs outside the boundaries of their Nonproliferation Treaty obligations, in part as a counter to security threats they perceive from the US and its allies in their respective regions. North Korea has broken out of the Treaty all together and, after two nuclear tests, has made clear that it intends to remain a nuclear weapon state. Iran's aspirations are more ambiguous. It remains within the nonproliferation regime, but has not cooperated fully with international inspectors or complied with UN Security Council resolutions. The analyses make clear that underlying geo-political tensions would need to be addressed before these two states would allow their programs to be contained or reversed.

This series of papers has been made possible by grants from the World Security Institute (with the support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York) and the Ploughshares Fund, as well as by gifts from individual donors. The Stimson Center and the series' editor are grateful for their generosity.

Barry M. Blechman

Distinguished Fellow, The Stimson Center and Research Coordinator, *Global Zero*

NORTH KOREA'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE GLOBAL ELIMINATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPON

Leon V. Sigal and Joel Wit

North Korea's position on the global elimination of nuclear weapons has only been addressed in passing. The government has had little to say about global elimination in negotiations with the United States, in informal discussions with Americans, or in public comments and propaganda beamed at audiences overseas or at home.

What North Korea says about nuclear weapons, its own decision to arm, US nuclear weapons policy, and the nuclear weapons policy of its neighbors does have some bearing on global elimination, but a review of North Korea's positions suggests that global elimination is not central to its concerns. Rather, Pyongyang is focused on eliminating the political, economic, and security threats it perceives to be posed by the United States and its allies. Whether a successful nuclear test will change its stance is not known.

NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR MOTIVATIONS

North Korea's nuclear program has been stimulated primarily by security concerns, but there are also domestic, regional and international political motivations behind the program.

Security Concerns

No country's motivation for building nuclear weapons can be known with certainty, but North Korea has been unusually explicit in its public statements about why it acquired nuclear weapons: insecurity. The prime reason for that insecurity is the United States and what Pyongyang calls America's "hostile policy." For North Korea, the concept of Washington's hostile policy is much broader than the threat posed by Washington's nuclear arsenal, and particularly the US threat of first use of nuclear weapons against it. It includes political, economic, and other military factors, such as the danger of invasion by conventional forces, economic sanctions, and attempts to suborn its government. Ending this hostile policy, rather than requiring the elimination of American

nuclear weapons, has been the main condition for Pyongyang to eliminate its arsenal.

The North's view is the product of decades of confrontation with the United States starting with the Korean War. Aside from a continuing policy of political and economic hostility, which only began to thaw in the mid-1980s, US threats, both nuclear and conventional, were unusually explicit. Thousands of US tactical nuclear weapons were deployed on the Korean Peninsula as part of a strategy designed to deter a North Korean attack, as well as for possible use in a war. The location of these weapons, along with the positioning of US strategic forces, served to compel North Korean actions in certain circumstances, for instance, to coerce the North into ending the Korean War. North Korea has been the object of nuclear threats by the United States more often than any other country in the world—at least seven times since 1945.¹ On top of clear nuclear threats, the US conventional war plan has long called for American and allied forces to both repel an attack on the South and move into the North in event of a conflict.

The North's reaction to these threats has manifested itself in a number of ways. Aside from periodic propaganda offensives intended to undermine US ties with Japan and South Korea, Pyongyang's construction of an extensive system of underground military installations and tunnels dates back to just after 1963 when the Cuban Missile Crisis cast doubt on the Soviet Union's security guarantee. In addition, North Korea's forward conventional military posture, which clearly threatens Seoul, is probably designed to help deter such an attack. Beyond its bristling rhetoric and steps taken to defend against a possible nuclear attack, the North's interest in acquiring its own nuclear weapons to deter attack seems to date back to the immediate aftermath of the 1963 crisis when Kim Il Sung sent Mao Tse-tung a letter proposing that the two countries cooperate in building the bomb.²

By the early 1990s, Pyongyang's strategy seemed to have developed more emphasis on ending hostile relations with Washington, even to the point of constraining its nuclear weapon programs. The collapse of the Soviet bloc, China's establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States and Japan and its tentative movement towards normalizing relations with South Korea, and the deterioration of its own economic and military position vis-à-vis the South required a dramatic rethinking of North Korean security policy. Since Kim Il Sung could no longer count on his erstwhile allies, militarily or economically, he began reaching out to North Korea's lifelong enemies — the United States, South Korea and Japan — in an effort to turn foe into friend. Such realignment would

improve North Korea's security and provide a hedge against an increasingly powerful China.

As a result, Pyongyang's strategy included a new component — not only seeking to deal with the threat of a nuclear attack by acquiring its own weapons, but also using that program as a possible bargaining chip to end US hostility. This strategy has formed the basis of North Korean policy towards the US for the past two decades.

The first significant sign of a shift came in 1991 when US withdrawal of its tactical nuclear weapons prompted North Korea to sign a safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Joint North-South Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The 1994 US - North Korean Agreed Framework, which laid out a roadmap to denuclearization, seems to have been based on the assumption that Pyongyang would trade its nuclear program for better relations with the United States.

A fundamental turning point in that direction was reached with the visit of Marshal Jo Myong Rok to Washington DC in October 2000 and the trip by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to Pyongyang a few weeks later. Pyongyang welcomed the US-drafted joint statement made public during Marshal Jo's visit in which the two sides affirmed that "they are prepared to undertake a new direction in their relations." As a crucial first step, the two sides stated that "neither government would have hostile intent toward the other and confirmed the commitment of both governments to make every effort in the future to build a new relationship free from past enmity."³ That progress was discarded by the Bush Administration, which was more interested in confronting than engaging North Korea and other so-called rogue states.

While diplomatic efforts since the 2002 collapse of the 1994 Agreed Framework have made limited progress in restraining North Korea's revived nuclear program, success in addressing the fundamental political issue of strategic relations between Washington and Pyongyang has been even more elusive. As a result, the North has returned to an emphasis on the US's "hostile policy," which it says is designed to "isolate and stifle" North Korea.⁴ The improvement of political relations is absolutely essential to achieve denuclearization. In that context, authoritative North Korean interlocutors have characterized US nuclear strategy as threatening and emphasized the need to remove that threat, but have seldom talked about the need to reduce or eliminate all US nuclear weapons.

North Korea's stance that as long as the United States remains hostile, it will seek nuclear weapons and missiles to deter that threat has permeated all of Pyongyang's major policy moves and statements. For example, the North's resumption of its plutonium production program in 2003 following the collapse of the Agreed Framework was, according to Pyongyang, a response to renewed hostility from the Bush Administration and US refusal to negotiate after confronting the North over its suspected uranium enrichment program.

Drawing lessons from the start of the Iraq war earlier that year, North Korea noted that the United States had first demanded that Iraq submit to inspections, and it did. The United States next demanded that Iraq disarm, and it began to. The United States attacked it anyway. "This suggests that even the signing of a non-aggression treaty with the US would not help avert war," a DPRK Foreign Ministry spokesman said on April 6, 2003. "Only military deterrent force, supported by ultra-modern weapons, can avert a war and protect the security of the nation. This is the lesson drawn from the Iraqi war."⁵ In short, Pyongyang's price for eliminating its nuclear arsenal is that Washington must demonstrate an end to enmity in deeds, not just words. Pyongyang requires a combination of written statements reaffirming respect for the North's sovereignty and non-interference in its internal affairs. This could be accomplished through significant agreements like a peace treaty ending the Korean War and a non-aggression pact or negative security assurance. North Korea also requires concrete demonstrations of non-hostility, such as normalizing political and economic relations and the provision of energy and other assistance.

A February 10, 2005 statement by the Foreign Ministry that declared North Korea to be a nuclear weapons state also put emphasis on US enmity:

As we have clarified more than once, we justly urged the US to renounce its hostile policy toward the DPRK whose aim was to seek the latter's 'regime change' and switch its policy to that of peaceful co-existence between the two countries...However, the administration turned down our just request and adopted it as its policy not to co-exist with the DPRK.

The statement cited a US nuclear threat, but in the context of more generalized hostility from Washington: "The US disclosed its attempt to topple the political system in the DPRK at any cost, threatening it with a nuclear stick. This compels us to take a measure to bolster [our] nuclear weapons arsenal."⁶

In other public statements, as well as in discussions with US officials, the North Koreans drew attention to the 2001 Nuclear Posture Review, which designated North Korea as a possible target for nuclear attack; and the Bush doctrine of preventive war, promulgated in the president's West Point speech of June 2002.⁷ Yet North Korea usually framed the US nuclear threat in the context of broader conventional military, economic, and political threats, as well as by its neighbors, Japan and South Korea. As the February 2005 statement noted,

We had already taken the resolute action of pulling out of the N.P.T. and have manufactured nukes for self-defense to cope with the Bush administration's evermore undisguised policy to isolate and stifle the DPRK. [Our] nuclear weapons will remain [a] nuclear deterrent for self-defense under any circumstances.⁸

In announcing the October 6, 2006 nuclear test three days before conducting it, the DPRK Foreign Ministry cited the nuclear threat as just one reason among many for the test. Pyongyang denounced the UN Security Council resolution imposing sanctions on the North for its July 4 missile tests, "a de facto 'declaration of war' against the DPRK," and added,

The US extreme threat of a nuclear war and sanctions and pressure compel the DPRK to conduct a nuclear test, an essential process for bolstering nuclear deterrent, as a corresponding measure for defense.⁹

Nevertheless, the North stated that its aim of negotiated denuclearization of the Korean peninsula remained unchanged and focused on ending its contentious relationship with the United States:

The ultimate goal of the DPRK is not 'denuclearization' to be followed by its unilateral disarmament but one aimed at settling the hostile relations between the DPRK and the US and removing the very source of all nuclear threats from the Korean Peninsula and its vicinity.¹⁰

That source of the nuclear threats is not the weapons themselves, but the political context in which they are deployed.

Whether North Korea will change its approach as a result of a successful nuclear test remains unclear. For example, Pyongyang, like China, could seek to link its own nuclear reductions to those of the United States and other nuclear powers. In

a recent formulation, a January 13, 2009 statement by the Foreign Ministry spokesman hints at a potential change of approach: “If the nuclear issue is to be settled, *leaving the hostile relations as they are*, all nuclear weapons states should meet and realize the simultaneous nuclear disarmament. This is the only option”¹¹ (emphasis added by author). While the statement retains a key qualifier, “leaving the hostile relations as they are,” it can be argued that the North Koreans have now at least raised an alternative path into the future that has evolved from their previous position. North Korean interlocutors have never broached mutual disarmament in US talks, but hinted at the possibility in informal conversations.

Aside from the threat posed by the United States, the North has mentioned, on occasion, the possible dangers of nuclear weapons acquisition by Japan and South Korea. Whether those statements reflect real concern or are purely opportunistic is unclear, although Pyongyang probably does view Japan as a long-term danger. A case in point came on May 31, 2002, after Pyongyang restarted its plutonium program and Washington refused to hold talks. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda contended that Japan's peace constitution did not preclude nuclear weapons and suggested that “depending upon the world situation, circumstances and public opinion could require Japan to possess nuclear weapons.”¹²

The North's response again framed the nuclear issue in the context of broader threats. A KCNA report noted Fukuda's comments:

As evidenced by Japan's arms buildup and the tremendous strength of the ‘self-defense forces,’ such terms as disarmament, peace and three non-nuclear principles are nothing but a fig-leaf to cover up the revived Japanese militarists' moves to turn Japan into a military power and their policy of overseas expansion.¹³

The statement added that, “It is an open secret that one of the important targets of Japan's avowed policy of becoming a military power is to go nuclear to emerge a nuclear power.” The article ended with a warning,

Japan should discard its nuclear ambition, not oblivious of the lesson of history drawn from the nuclear disaster suffered by it in the past. If Japan persistently opts for nuclear armament, it will only invite an unimaginable nuclear disaster.¹⁴

More recently, in an authoritative April 2007 article appearing in the communist party's newspaper, the North criticized Tokyo's less than cooperative stance in

the Beijing Six Party Talks and observed that “Japan’s objective in intensifying its maneuvers against us is to make the settlement of the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula out of reach and use it as an excuse to arm itself with nuclear weapons.” The article noted that,

Japan dreams of attaining superpower status after getting out from the United States’ “nuclear umbrella” of shamelessly taking an active hand in major international issues on equal footing with other major powers, and of realizing its ambitions for overseas expansion by coming into possession of nuclear weapons.¹⁵

As for Seoul, when revelations of South Korean enrichment experiments surfaced in October 2004, North Korea’s reaction was low-key, exploiting the disclosure to call for six-party discussions of the issue and later for reciprocal inspections in the South. A Foreign Ministry spokesman put it this way,

The gravity of the situation lies in that South Korea has pursued in secrecy the nuclear weapons program at the tacit connivance of the US and with its cooperation and has now full access to the nuclear weapons development technology. This cannot but be a serious challenge to the efforts to denuclearize the Korean peninsula...The reality proves that the nuclear issue of South Korea should be discussed and clarified at multilateral negotiations in the future if any discussion is to be made on the issue of denuclearization of the peninsula.¹⁶

Two months later, a Foreign Ministry spokesman linked the North’s denuclearization to the South’s more explicitly:

Double standards as regards the nuclear issues of the north and the south of Korea can never be allowed under any circumstances and it does not stand to reason that the DPRK alone should work for denuclearization. It is illogical for the DPRK to unilaterally dismantle its nuclear deterrent force unless the secret nuclear-related experiments of South Korea are thoroughly probed. Under this situation the DPRK is left with no option but to increase its nuclear deterrent force.¹⁷

Domestic, Regional and International Political Motivations

While Pyongyang's primary motivation for building nuclear weapons seems to be concern about the threat posed by the United States, a number of domestic, regional, and international political factors may also be driving its program.

Some analysts argue that nuclear weapons have become an important domestic prop for the current regime and could give the North greater confidence in pursuing much needed economic modernization. According to this view, Pyongyang's nuclear program has proven to be an important asset in building support among the general population, as well as in strengthening Kim Jong Il's control over the powerful North Korean military. That increased control, along with the greater security against outside threats which these weapons provide, might also enable the North to justify reallocating military resources to civilian use, thereby allowing it to pursue more actively the economic reform program begun in the early 2000s.

The annual 2007 New Year's Day editorial published in the leading newspapers, observed that while the acquisition of a nuclear deterrent "was an auspicious event in our national history," the civilian economy was also critically important to North Korea, arguing that,

The present reality, in which all conditions for leaping higher and faster have been created, demands that we step up the revolutionary advance more boldly to achieve the high objectives of building a powerful socialist state...Building an economic power is an urgent demand of our revolution and social development at present and a worthwhile and historic cause for perfecting the looks of a powerful state. We should concentrate national efforts on solving economic problems, so as to turn the military-first Korea into a prosperous people's paradise. The main task in today's general onward march is to direct primary efforts into rapidly improving the people's living and step up technological updating to put our economy on a modern footing and display its potentials to the fullest...We should successfully realize the noble intention and plan of our party that regards the improvement of the people's living as the supreme principle in its activities.*

**Rodong Sinmun*, "Let Us Usher in a Great Heyday Full of Confidence in Victory," January 1, 2007. This is in contrast to an earlier line taken by the Korean Workers' Party to call the nuclear test "a demonstration of its scientific and technological potential" as justification for belt-tightening to give priority to military spending. KCNA, "*Rodong Sinmun* Praises Songun as Great Banner of National Prosperity," November 27, 2006.

Whether Pyongyang has sought nuclear weapons in order to conduct a more assertive regional policy is unclear. From a geopolitical perspective, the North may see its nuclear weapons as helping to shift the regional power paradigm more in Pyongyang's favor, enhancing its standing and placing it front and center of the diplomatic agenda. According to an article published in a pro-DPRK Japanese newspaper in December 2006:

The DPRK's nuclear test has shaken the balance of power and mechanical structure in Northeast Asia. In the past, the United States threat of nuclear war and the DPRK's responsible measures for self-defense created tension in the region. As the DPRK and the United States are facing each other as nuclear states, the prevention of their all-out confrontation has now become the most urgent task. A phase is opening where the new order of peace and stability can be established in the region by putting an end to the two countries confrontation and by seeking coexistence by the two countries.¹⁸

As for inter-Korean relations, some conservative South Koreans believe that a nuclear Pyongyang will feel empowered to conduct a more aggressive, intimidating policy towards South Korea. Nuclear weapons may also give the North new hope that it will be able to achieve reunification of the two Koreas on its own terms. Others disagree, arguing that the North already has sufficient political, military, and economic resources to act provocatively towards the South. And, regardless of its capabilities, Pyongyang cannot hope for reunification on its terms given the strength of political, military, and economic factors arrayed against it.

Pyongyang's nuclear weapons have helped enhance its political leverage, though not its international standing. While the North has been relatively low-key in boasting of its nuclear prowess, its nuclear stockpile and ballistic missile program have been important sources of political leverage in dealing with other more powerful countries, particularly the United States. These programs have allowed a small, economically devastated country to command international attention and to bolster what otherwise would be a weak bargaining position vis-à-vis the rest of the global community.

Moreover, by sowing mistrust and feeding doubts about its ultimate intentions, the North has skillfully exploited that attention. The North has played to uncertainty about whether it will give up its weapons (including Pyongyang's pledge in the September 2005 Joint Statement to abandon "all nuclear weapons

and existing nuclear programs.”) By continuing to yield, however grudgingly, to demands that it constrain its nuclear programs, the North has kept alive hopes that it will finally agree to denuclearization.

NUCLEAR PLANS

Little is known about North Korea’s plans for the development of a nuclear arsenal and its possible uses. As of the end of 2008, all the components for a small nuclear force appeared to be in place. Pyongyang has sufficient nuclear material, has worked for many years on a weapons design, and has developed ballistic missiles potentially capable of striking targets in the region. But critical questions still remain, particularly about the size and reliability of Pyongyang’s nuclear device and whether it can be mated successfully to existing missile delivery systems. Data from its May 2009 test may answer some of those questions.

Over the past 15 years, the North’s planning for a nuclear arsenal may have evolved. In the late 1980s, those plans appeared to have been extensive. Pyongyang’s plutonium production program, located at the Yongbyon nuclear facility, included an operating five megawatt reactor, two much larger reactors under construction, and a large reprocessing plant near completion. Overall, US intelligence estimates were that by the end of the decade, if all these facilities became operational, the North could produce hundreds of kilograms of plutonium, enough nuclear material to build a large nuclear weapons stockpile.

However, that large stockpile never materialized. As a result of the 1994 US-North Korea Agreed Framework, Pyongyang never completed its two larger nuclear reactors. While the five megawatt reactor and reprocessing plant were “frozen,” they were still maintained. Both larger reactors, however, were allowed to atrophy to the point where they were no longer salvageable. A fuel fabrication facility, which had produced fuel rods for all three reactors, fell into a state of serious disrepair even before the 1994 agreement was signed. Efforts to refurbish it were suspended during disabling.

Consequently, North Korea’s plan for plutonium production now seems limited. In addition to the small amount US analysts believed was extracted at Yongbyon before the 1994 agreement was signed (some 8.4 kilograms), Pyongyang is thought to have separated approximately 25 kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium in its 2003 reprocessing campaign, following the collapse of the agreement in 2002, and 12 to 14 kilograms in its subsequent campaign in 2005. As a result, the North may have had approximately 40 to 50 kilograms of

weapons-grade plutonium, sufficient for roughly six to eight bombs, before using a certain amount of that material in its October 2006 nuclear test.¹⁹ The North also has a bomb's worth or more of plutonium in the spent fuel unloaded from the Yongbyon reactor in 2008 as part of the process of disabling that facility, as agreed to in the Beijing Six Party Talks.

There is some evidence to suggest that North Korea has also periodically explored the possibility of producing highly-enriched uranium (HEU) to build nuclear weapons. The North Koreans have told visiting Americans that they had a pilot uranium enrichment program in the early 1990s which was discontinued. In the late 1990s, US intelligence received reports that Pyongyang had acquired a small number of centrifuges from Pakistan that could be used for enrichment. Acquisitions of technologies useful for uranium enrichment were stepped up in 2001, leading the United States to estimate that the North was "constructing a plant that could produce enough weapons-grade uranium for two or more nuclear weapons per year when fully operational, which could be as soon as mid-decade."²⁰ However, the US later admitted that it was less certain about the North Korean program and that no such plant had ever been located. The North, meanwhile, unable to acquire components for very many centrifuges, seems to have diverted aluminum tubes acquired for that purpose to other uses. Pyongyang has now threatened to resume its enrichment effort.

Parallel to its plutonium production program, Pyongyang has been developing — albeit in a haphazard manner — ballistic missiles, some potentially able to deliver nuclear weapons. Pyongyang's indigenous program dates back over three decades and is largely based on old Soviet technology. The first missile thought capable of delivering nuclear weapons, the Nodong, was developed during the late 1980s and has a range of about 1500 kilometers, sufficient to reach targets in Japan. During the 1990s, the North unveiled a longer-range missile capable of reaching the United States (Taepodong), albeit only if carrying very small payloads. More recently, Pyongyang is reported to be working on a new family of solid-fuel mobile missiles based on the design of an old Soviet submarine-launched ballistic missile that would presumably be capable of delivering nuclear weapons throughout the region.

A key factor in determining whether these missiles could serve as delivery systems is whether the North had tested them sufficiently so that DPRK leaders could be confident that they would work reliably and with a modicum of accuracy. The North's indigenous test program has been limited. Only two tests of medium- and longer-range missiles were conducted until July 2006, when it launched eight missiles, including a failed Taepodong-2 test, and April 2009,

when it tested Taepodong-2 technology with partial success in the guise of trying to put a satellite into orbit. One possibility is that the North has gathered sufficient test information from Iran and Pakistan, both of which also have developed missiles based on the Nodong design. Even if that is the case, test data for the Taepodong and the new family of mobile missiles would seem to be limited.

A closely related consideration is North Korea's nuclear weapons design. The North has been working on a design since at least the early 1980s when US intelligence detected implosion tests of the required high explosive core at the Yongbyon facility. A KGB report issued in 1990 concluded that the North had completed the development of a nuclear device.²¹ The following year, the Pentagon estimated that Pyongyang was capable of building a crude device able to fit on a railroad boxcar.²²

Whether Pyongyang's partially successful nuclear test in 2006 allowed it to further miniaturize its design remains unclear. If North Korea had attempted to test a large, crude nuclear device, some analysts think the detonation demonstrated that it had not mastered the complex timing of high explosives needed to compress the plutonium into a critical mass. Others contend that North Korea was testing a smaller device, one with a lower yield-to-weight ratio that could be mounted on a missile. If so, the North may require another nuclear test to validate the warhead. Without further tests, however, the North may not be sufficiently confident about the reliability of its missiles to risk mounting its few nuclear warheads on them.

Answers to key questions about the North's nuclear capabilities and its plans for employing those weapons remain uncertain. There is no indication that the North Koreans have any illusions about the military utility of nuclear weapons. As Kim Il Sung himself told a visiting member of Congress, Stephen Solarz, chair of the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, in December 1991:

What's the use of a few nuclear weapons? In 10,000 years time we couldn't have as many nuclear weapons as you. Assume that we are producing nuclear weapons and have one or two nuclear weapons. What's the point? They'd be useless. If we fire them, they will kill the Korean people.²³

Instead, the North Koreans have spoken of their weapons capability as a deterrent. Given the retaliatory capabilities arrayed against Pyongyang, the North Koreans would likely consider nuclear use only as a last resort in the event that

their country came under attack. A case in point came in announcing its nuclear test, when a Foreign Ministry spokesman declared its policy to be one of no first use and nonproliferation: “The DPRK will never use nuclear weapons first but strictly prohibit any threat of nuclear weapons and nuclear transfer.”²⁴

One possibility is that the North is planning a small nuclear force consisting of a few weapons deliverable by missiles and other, larger devices. The main purpose of such a force would be to deter attack against North Korea, perhaps through a combination of detonating “warning shots” during a crisis, as well as using them against military targets and population centers in South Korea and Japan during a conflict. In 1998, Hwang Chang-yop, the most senior North Korean official to have defected, stated that the North “will use them [i.e., nuclear weapons] if South Korea starts a war. For another, they intend to devastate Japan to prevent the United States from participating. Would it still participate even after Japan is devastated? That is how they think.”²⁵

NORTH KOREA’S PROLIFERATION CONCERNS

While North Korea may have some concerns about the spread of nuclear weapons to neighbors, particularly Japan, its primary focus has been on US hypocrisy in its relationships with proliferating states. Pyongyang has condemned Washington’s willingness to condone proliferation by friendly states (evidenced by the 2008 US-India deal), but to exploit the proliferation issue to isolate and attack unfriendly states. A Korean Central News Agency commentary recently noted:

The US biased nuclear policy is upsetting the general view of the international community on the energy issue. The US is still working hard to completely block the DPRK’s nuclear activities for a peaceful purpose although it talks about the provision of nuclear technology and fuel for a civilian purpose and the like to those countries outside the NPT [India]...The US has long shut its eyes to its allies or those countries in which it is interested over the matter of R&D for nuclear weapons and its intensification and covertly helped them, unhesitatingly transferring even nuclear technology to those countries although they are outside the NPT. This notwithstanding, it urged the other countries to strictly observe the NPT and has applied sanctions against them in a coercive manner. The US not only insists that those countries incurring its displeasure including the DPRK be denied access to nuclear technology including that for

a civilian use but threatens that it would not rule out a preemptive nuclear attack on them. This proves that the US call for nuclear non-proliferation is nothing but sophism intended to pressurize other countries to meet its own interests. The US biased application of double standards concerning the settlement of major international issues found a clear manifestation in the issue of providing light water reactors (LWRs) to the DPRK.²⁶

A different tack was taken by a pro-North Korean newspaper in Japan which was sharply critical of the India deal on nonproliferation grounds:

The essence of the nuclear agreement concluded at summit talks between President Bush and Prime Minister Singh states that the United States not only acknowledges India's possession of nuclear capability, but also recognizes cooperation in the field of nuclear technology between the two countries...The United States has come out now and ratified India's withdrawal from the N.P.T.[sic] to become a nuclear state, and it has even decided to shower it with 'gifts'...The Bush government's underlying motives are clear. First, it wants to drive a wedge in the tight India-China-Russia relationship, and especially contain China by pulling another great Asian nation – India – over to its side, while at the same time it wants to make large sales of its latest weapons to India, along with state-of-the-art nuclear technology. We do not know if this measure by the Bush government will be a money-maker, but we can say it is a fatal diplomatic blunder that will destroy the basic framework of the N.P.T. built by the United States itself and will hasten the collapse of the already-crumbling [US] policy of unipolar domination.²⁷

Pyongyang's commentary may reflect its own policy objectives. For example, there is little doubt that the North's ideal outcome for the Six-Party Talks is both to improve relations with the United States and to hold on to its nuclear arsenal. In short, the North would like to be included in a class of "approved" proliferators. Another possibility is that if North Korea finally agreed to eliminate its nuclear arsenal, it would likely demand nuclear power plants in return, a point its diplomats noted after the India deal. In either case, the proliferation issue is not one that motivates North Korea to do much besides take rhetorical and tactical negotiating positions.

NORTH KOREA'S LIKELY RESPONSE TO GLOBAL ELIMINATION

A serious initiative by leading nuclear weapon states to eliminate nuclear weapons might make it easier for North Korea to rationalize eventual implementation of its commitment to eliminate its own nuclear weapons. But Pyongyang is unlikely to move down that path regardless of what steps other countries take unless there is a fundamental improvement in political relations with long-time enemies, particularly the United States, but also Japan and South Korea. Without such an improvement, the North is likely to see its small nuclear arsenal as vital to defend against the threat posed by these more powerful countries, even if they are armed only with conventional weapons.

That reality would seem to argue for a parallel process of bilateral and multilateral denuclearization and normalization of negotiations with Pyongyang, part of which focuses on steps to improve political relations, even if the international community moves down the road towards the elimination of nuclear arsenals. Such a process is already in place through bilateral contacts between Washington and Seoul, as well as the Beijing Six-Party Talks, which have been ongoing since 2003. While the future of those talks remains unclear given recent differences between Pyongyang and the other participants over verification issues and North Korea's refusal to return to talks in response to the UN Security Council's criticism of its April 2009 missile test, it is well understood that steps towards political and economic normalization of relations with the North must be embedded in any future agreements if denuclearization is to be achieved.

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IRANIAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE GLOBAL ELIMINATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

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Iran's nuclear program has emerged as one of the major security concerns of the early 21st century. Since early revelations about the extent of Iran's public and clandestine nuclear-related activities were revealed in late 2002, it has rarely moved off the international agenda. For the West, it has become a signature battle for the containment of hostile, or potentially hostile, regional powers. The harsh rhetoric of Iran's combative, neo-conservative president, Dr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has not helped matters, of course, but in reality the die for this tense situation were cast at the height of the Khatami Presidency (1997-2005), toward the end of which Tehran announced to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) the termination of its self-imposed moratorium on uranium enrichment. This action, taken in July 2005 just weeks before Ahmadinejad's formal inauguration as president, has done more than any of the new president's subsequent pronouncements to widen the gap between the international community and Iran. In essence, Tehran's decision to proceed with uranium enrichment reignited a cycle of IAEA engagements which, in September 2005, led the IAEA board to pronounce Iran "non-compliant" with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), of which it is a signatory, and to refer the matter to the UN Security Council.

The situation became so difficult that between late 2006 and early 2008 Iran was the subject of three UN Security Council resolutions, each imposing sanctions on Iran and each designed to increase the economic costs of Iran's violation of previous Security Council demands.¹ By early 2008 it was clear that Tehran had made the decision to simply ignore the UNSC resolutions. Indeed, according to the IAEA report in February 2008, Tehran claimed, the Agency was now satisfied that Iran's program did not violate its NPT obligations. The actual words of IAEA Director General Mohamed El Baradei were, "We have managed to clarify all the remaining outstanding issues, including the most important issue, which is the scope and nature of Iran's enrichment programme." However, he did go on to express concern that Iran still had much explaining to do:

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As a result of Iran running an undeclared nuclear programme for almost two decades, there has been confidence deficit on the part of the international community about the intentions, future intentions of Iran's nuclear programme. Therefore the Security Council asked Iran to suspend its enrichment-related activities. I hope that Iran will continue to work closely with the Security Council, to create the conditions for Iran and the international community to engage in comprehensive negotiation that would lead to a durable solution. A durable solution requires confidence about Iran's nuclear programme, it requires a regional security arrangement, it requires normal trade relationship between Iran and the international community. As the Security Council stated, the ultimate aim should be normalization of relationships between Iran and the international community.²

The sense of concern and urgency was repeated in El Baradei's follow-up report to the IAEA Board and also the UN Security Council. According to press reports, this report contends that, "Iran may be withholding information needed to establish whether it tried to make nuclear arms...The tone of the language suggesting Tehran continues to stonewall the U.N. nuclear monitor revealed a glimpse of the frustration felt by agency investigators stymied in their attempts to gain full answers to suspicious aspects of Iran's past nuclear activities."³

Initially obtained by the Associated Press, the restricted report forwarded to the Security Council and to the IAEA Board said that Iran remained defiant of the Council's demands that it suspend uranium enrichment. Iran apparently expanded its operational centrifuges machines generating enriched uranium by about 500 since the last IAEA report in February, according to the follow-up report. The report states that,

Iran has not provided the Agency with all the information, access to documents and access to individuals necessary to support Iran's statements [that its activities are purely peaceful in intent]. The Agency is of the view that Iran may have additional information, in particular on high explosives testing and missile related activities which...Iran should share with the Agency.⁴

It goes on to say that the allegations of nuclear military programs "remain a matter of serious concern."⁵

For the Ahmadinejad Administration, however, the February IAEA report effectively closed the book on the controversy, giving Iran a clean bill of health and, in the process, also condoning Iran's enrichment activities as part of any NPT member's inalienable right to all aspects of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. Much of the diplomatic activity to contain Iran's nuclear program had already taken place, of course, culminating during President Khatami's term in office in the EU3 countries' (Britain, France and Germany) November 2004 "Paris Agreement" with Iran, which stated that in return for security guarantees and substantial economic support Iran would agree to suspend uranium enrichment. The spirit of the Paris Agreement endured and led to further diplomatic negotiations with Tehran by the "5+1" group (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany). The result was a comprehensive package of incentives put to Tehran by the 5+1 group in June 2008. So, while the Security Council was imposing sanctions on the country for non-compliance, its core members were also extending the hand of compromise to Tehran.

Indeed the momentum for dialogue had gained so much speed by 2008 that even the sceptical Bush Administration had directly bought into the process, and as a sign of its seriousness dispatched William Burns, a senior State Department official, to the July 2008 round of meetings with Iranian officials in Geneva. However, within two months of the Geneva meeting, the IAEA reported that not only was Iran stonewalling the Agency about several aspects of its nuclear program, but that between 2005 and 2008 Iran had substantially improved the efficiency of its centrifuges that produce enriched uranium.⁶ Then came the news from the IAEA's latest report to the Security Council in March 2009 that the country had already accumulated more than 1,000 kilograms of low enriched uranium (LEU), apparently under-reporting its stock of LEU by some 200 kilograms. For the United States, this revelation meant that if the LEU were enriched further, by early 2009 Iran would have enough fissile material to make one nuclear bomb.⁷

The sense of crisis, which had been prevalent since rumors of an imminent Israeli strike on Iran appeared in the summer of 2008, intensified with this news. Indeed, the New York Times reported in June 2008 that the Israeli Air Force was already practicing for an aerial bombardment of Iranian nuclear targets.[†]

[†] "More than 100 Israeli F-16 and F-15 fighters participated in the manoeuvres, which were carried out over the eastern Mediterranean and over Greece during the first week of June [2008], American officials said." The article further reported that, "Mike McConnell, the director of national intelligence, said in February that Iran was close to acquiring Russian-produced SA-20 surface-to-air missiles. American military officials said that the deployment of such systems would hamper Israel's attack planning, putting pressure on Israel to act before the missiles are fielded." New York Times (June 20, 2008).

President Barack Obama's election later that year and his apparently new agenda and outlook on Iran may shift this situation in a positive direction. President Obama entered the White House professing a new policy of engagement with the Middle East. He expressed interest in reaching out to Iran and Syria, working towards peace in Palestine, reducing America's military presence in Iraq, and generally mending bridges with the Muslim world. While yet to be matched by concrete proposals, this message of hope and diplomatic engagement is important as it provides the new administration with breathing space as it sets about to implement America's new policies and priorities. But it is important to point out that there are also some clear continuities with the previous administration's positions. Indeed, a skeptic might be forgiven for concluding that the US outlook has remained very similar to the mindset as the Bush era. One key driver of US policy remains the absolute security of Israel, which the new Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, spelled out in tones that echoed those of President Bush during her visit to Israel in early March 2009. While it is likely that this policy priority will remain paramount for any US administration for the foreseeable future, it is instructive that under President Obama the absolute security of Israel is also being linked to the containment of Iran, and is evidently directly affecting the Obama Administration's agendas with such global actors as China and Russia. Clearly, containment remains the policy goal, even in the efforts to establish direct contact with Tehran. These started in the last year of the Bush Administration and led to a high-level face-to-face encounter between Under Secretary of State William Burns and the Secretary of Iran's National Security Council, Saeed Jalali, in July 2008.

Iran's isolation also is being pursued through a new bridge-building exercise with Syria and an attempt to reshape the Levant's politics. Ironically, even the new Administration's efforts to reignite the Israel-Palestine peace process are seen by cynics as an effort to curtail Iran's influence in the region. Thus, while President Obama is seen as a breath of fresh air, friends and foes alike in the region remain suspicious and wary, uncertain of the direction in which his professed priorities will take the region.

Despite these diplomatic initiatives and the December 2007 US National Intelligence Estimate's conclusion that Tehran had suspended its weapons-design and related programs in 2003, Iran's nuclear program continues to be viewed with great suspicion by the United States and by the United States' key European allies (notably Britain, France, Germany, and also Italy). In the Middle East region, too, Iran's nuclear-related activities have caused real concern, with Israel and some of Iran's smaller Arab neighbors harboring security anxieties. The stated fear is that Iran is pursuing a two-track nuclear program, with the military

program disguised by Iran's massive civilian program. The broad assumption is that Iran's extensive industrial and intellectual nuclear know-how will serve its military and security needs sooner or later. The strategic concern is that no later than 2015, and perhaps as soon as 2010/11, Iran will have likely mastered the techniques necessary to utilize nuclear materials in a weapon, could be able to assemble a nuclear bomb, and also could be in a position to deliver nuclear payloads with a wide range of surface-to-surface ballistic missile systems to distant targets. There is also an equal concern that once Iran has a nuclear weapon, it will then be able to dictate its agenda to its neighbors—to become dominant in the Gulf sub-region in more ways than one.

This paper provides a brief assessment of Iran's nuclear program within the context of the country's overall security planning and analysis of Iran's security calculations, its perception of its security environment, and the strategic setting in which Tehran operates. On the basis of this analysis, the paper develops a wider ranging discussion of the possible drivers of proliferation in the Middle East region and the ways and means of mitigating nuclear proliferation.

WHAT FACTORS COULD MOTIVATE IRAN TO ACQUIRE NUCLEAR WEAPONS?

Iran's motives in pursuing nuclear capabilities cannot be much different from those of the countries that preceded it down the nuclear path, but naturally the context is different in every case. In examining the context for Iran's calculations, they can usefully be divided into security concerns, regional ambitions, and global ambitions.

Iran's Security Concerns

There are some generally accepted explanations as to why states acquire nuclear weapon capabilities. It generally comes down to two perceptions on the part of the states' leaders and decision-makers: (i) an acute sense of insecurity and vulnerability, and (ii) a strong desire to secure the freedom to project power unhindered. Though these twin objectives are linked in the majority of cases, to date it has been the former which has swayed most decision-makers. In the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent, particularly, insecurity has been the real driver for those parties which have acquired a nuclear-weapons capability, including India, Israel and Pakistan. At various points in their histories, the leaders of these countries became convinced that the possession of nuclear weapons would deter attacks on them, even attacks with conventional forces. Of course, this belief has not always proven to be true, as demonstrated by the Egyptian/Syrian attack on Israel in 1973; still, this perception of insecurity has

been the determining factor in these nations' decisions to acquire nuclear capabilities.

Analysts have justified Iran's pursuit of nuclear capabilities on the basis of the security dilemmas facing Tehran and, indeed, other regional actors. The ruling Iranian establishment is said to be vulnerable to the US' repeated calls for 'regime change' in Iran. The US did change the Iranian regime through a covert operation once – in 1953 – and the period between 2002 and 2008 is replete with direct and indirect threats by the Bush Administration to repeat history or to conduct military strikes against Iranian nuclear and military facilities. Of course, it should also be acknowledged that the bellicose language from the US is sometimes a response to provocations from Tehran. To be sure, Iran has provoked the US on more than one occasion, beginning with the embassy seizure in 1979, continuing with the Hezbollah bombings of the US Marine barracks and US embassy in Beirut in 1982, the bombing of the US Air Force barracks in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s, and current activities in Iraq. So, what ought to be acknowledged is that there is a long and tangled history of perceived injustices, provocations, and resulting hostility on both sides.

Without strategic allies and lacking an effective conventional military machine, Iran may feel a need to be able to deter this persistent enemy, as well as other threats, by every means possible. For Ray Takeyh, for example, the primary motivation for Iran's nuclear drive is to be found in its desire "to negate the American and Iraqi threats."⁸ Israel and its nuclear weapons capability, for Takeyh, are not seen by Iran to be a sufficient factor to justify the program or to constitute an existential threat to Tehran.

This view is not held universally. The rationale for acquisition of nuclear weapons by Tehran, Shahram Chubin argues, is not found in Iran's strategic environment, because it "does not create the insecurity driving Iran's nuclear program."⁹ The program, he states, "is driven more by frustration over status and the ambition to be taken more seriously and to play a larger, more global role."¹⁰ He also asserts that the one source of insecurity, namely the United States, "does not account for the start of the nuclear program or its persistence." The US, thus, for Chubin, is a secondary factor and not the primary cause of Iran's proliferation.

For most analysts, Iran faces a real security dilemma in its tense relations with the United States which, at the very least, provides additional incentives for Iran's nuclear drive. Kasra Naji, for example, notes that President Bush's 2002

“axis of evil” comment during his State of Union address led to an acceleration of Iran’s nuclear drive.¹¹

Iran’s bitter experience in the war with Iraq (1980-88) is another factor driving its nuclear program. The country suffered very high casualties during this conflict and was the victim of attacks with lethal chemical weapons. Many Iranians believe that if they had possessed nuclear weapons, Iraq would not have dared used chemical weapons against them, or that they could have retaliated effectively. The Iraq war experience is one side of the strategic coin that defines Iran’s perception of its need for nuclear capabilities, with the other being its single-minded effort to be independent and self-sufficient in as many realms as possible.

The strong US military presence on Iran’s doorstep is clearly a concern. The US Navy is a resident navy in the Persian Gulf and is also its largest and most powerful. Unlike any other naval force in the region, it has extensive support and logistics facilities in several Gulf Arab states. In Qatar, Bahrain (since the Second World War), the UAE, and Oman, it has substantial military assets and a strong military presence in Kuwait as well – if for no other reason than to support the US forces in Iraq. In short, the US has a very substantial military presence in the Persian Gulf through its navy alone, added to which is its major air base in Qatar.

Close to Iran’s borders, the US military is also omnipresent on land, as far as Tehran is concerned. In Iraq and Afghanistan, there are over 150,000 well-armed and well-supported US military forces in place. The United States also has established a minor military foothold in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. Add to these the close partnership between the US and Pakistan and the picture is complete as far as Tehran’s perception of encirclement is concerned. Further still are the strategic partnerships Israel, as the closest Middle East ally of the United States, is developing, including Israel’s growing relations with Turkey (a NATO member) and India. All three countries are of great importance to Iran’s strategic planners and Israel’s links to both is a worrying development as far as Tehran is concerned.

In short, the strong US military (and political) presence in southwest Asia, which of course is there to deal with a diverse set of American concerns in the absence of any substantial and meaningful dialogue between the two countries, has encouraged the sense of insecurity in Iran, coming as it has in the cascade of security-related developments since 9/11.

Furthermore, Iran's awareness of Israel's nuclear capability means that if it expects a confrontation with Israel in the medium-term, it would make sense from Tehran's perspective to have a nuclear deterrent in place to counter Israel's considerable military advantages. Israel's possession of nuclear weapons for decades has played a large role in Iran's motivations, particularly given that Israel was also able to remove Iraq's nuclear program in 1981 without retaliation from Baghdad. Iran wants to be able to deter Israel from threatening nuclear use in the event of a new war with Syria or further conflict in Lebanon that would involve Iran. Others fear that Tehran could use its nuclear capabilities, once developed, in a coercive way vis-à-vis Israel in the Palestinian context. Iran, indeed, acknowledged at the height of the Gaza conflict in January 2009 that it could not mobilize in support of Hamas and that its hands were tied "in this arena," according to Ayatollah Khamenei.¹²

The strategic shifts in the region have further shaped Iran's security perceptions. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001, for example, have removed two of Iran's worst enemies. Tehran's security has increased since the removal of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Tehran has been able to extend its reach well into Iraq as a consequence of regime change in Baghdad in 2003, and as a further consequence has been accused of developing a 'Shia crescent' extending through Iraq into the Levant area. In terms of strategic developments, Iran, it could be argued, is the only two-legged runner in a race of one-legged competitors in a dysfunctional regional system. Iran's nuclear program, thus, could mark a new watershed in the region's strategic relations. On the one hand, fear of Iran could provide the glue finally to bring the Arab countries and Israel together—to confront a common security foe that might require joint action. On the other hand, the view that Iran's nuclear ambitions will not go unchecked, and that the international community is impotent in dealing with this threat, could fuel a new nuclear arms race in the region. A third possibility would be one of rapid engagement: a so-called grand bargain between Iran and the United States could be a major priority of the new Obama Administration, in an effort to end Tehran's revisionist position.¹³ Success would have strategic consequences for the region and, particularly, for US relations with its traditional Arab allies and Israel.

At the same time, however, lack of security in both Iraq and Afghanistan is not good for Iran; nor indeed is the resultant extension of the US military presence in both countries beneficial to Tehran. The view that Iran is able to 'bleed' the US to distraction in Iraq, and therefore use its proxies to ensure that Washington cannot engage it militarily, has only limited validity if one considers Iran's potential gains in a stable and peaceful Iraq and Afghanistan. The thesis that US

involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan is a trap for the US also overlooks the many options available to the US were it to choose to use force as a means of dealing with Iran. The US is not as handicapped militarily as many pundits purport, and it retains considerable residual power to check the projection of Iran's power. Nor, during the Bush Administration, did the US reject the option of taking limited military action if it so chose, which pushed Iran to either escalate or accept a stand-off. Neither of these two options would suit Iran's long-term interests and there are voices in Tehran who would rather find ways of sustaining the *status quo* than being forced to expose the country's hand. A weak Iranian response to the US challenge, after so much baiting, can only result in the denting of Iran's international image and self-declared superiority. Iran's propaganda after all is anticipating its armed forces to deliver 'deadly blows' to the US.[‡]

In sum then, Iran's apparent strategic gains from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq should not be viewed from a static position. For every gain there is a potential price to be paid and a whole range of other pressures to accommodate and problems to manage. Iran's neighborhood is dynamic and that dynamism is a two-edged sword in strategic terms. While oil prices were over \$100/barrel, the US bogged down in Iraq, and its neighbors apparently too weak and divided to challenge Iran, it seemed assured of its supreme position. But the dramatic drop in oil prices over a short period of time – from \$147/barrel in July to under \$40/barrel by December 2008 – coupled with the apparently greatly improved US position in Iraq and the resurgence of an 'Arab core' led by Saudi Arabia, have dented Tehran's self-confidence, showing the country's vulnerabilities to international forces.¹⁴ Iran's strategic rise exposes it to classic counter-balancing in a region such as the Middle East, in which power politics continue to dominate the region's inter-state relations. Those fearful of Iran's rise and its nuclear plans have shown the tendency to at least consider 'band-wagoning' against it as a way of curtailing its influence.

For Tehran, the utility of a nuclear-weapon capability would be its deployment in circumstances in which the country was directly threatened or in which its wider strategic interests were indirectly threatened. The possible scenarios in which Iran might see utility for its nuclear weapons could be: (i) conflicts between Israel and Iran's allies, Syria or Hezbollah/Lebanon, in which Israel might otherwise be tempted to make nuclear threats; (ii) situations in which France threatened to act on its threat to utilize its nuclear forces against any state that

[‡] As much was claimed by the Revolutionary Guards' Commander in Chief Mohammed Ali Jafari in an interview to the Jam-e Jam satellite television station in late June 2008. See Y. Mansharof and A. Savyon, "Iranian Threats in Anticipation of Western Attack," *Inquiry and Analysis - No. 455*, Middle East Media Research Institute, (July 15, 2008).

made weapons of mass destruction available to terrorist organizations and thereby threatened France's national security interests; or (iii) serious conflicts between Iran and the Gulf Arab states in which Iran's nuclear weapons might be used to deter US intervention.

Iran's Regional Ambitions

Iran is said to have regional ambitions, and from the dominant Arab perspective, is seen also to be entertaining unreasonable claims to the region's politico-security agendas hitherto regarded as Arab concerns. Claims that Iran entertains the ambition to dominate the region originate from two sources. The first is Iran's own bellicose statements and pronouncements that leave observers with little doubt that many Iranian leaders regard the present epoch to be their historic opportunity. Iran's so-called "neo-cons," the Rightist factions who have supported President Ahmadinejad's neo-populist and neo-revolutionary policies, supported by the Leader (Ayatollah Ali Khamenei), are convinced that Iran should be bold and determined enough to fulfill its historic mission to lead the region and the wider set of Muslim countries to a just world.¹⁵ Some amongst the elite interpret this as a messianic role, while for others it is just a matter of policy.

Leading Muslims, though, is not the same as striving for domination of them or hegemony of Tehran's immediate neighborhood. Furthermore, domination and hegemony are two very different things. For hegemony to work, Iran would need the consent of the neighboring countries, which is unlikely to be forthcoming for the foreseeable future. None of Iran's neighbors, including the new Shia-dominated Iraq, are prepared to accept Iranian control of the Persian Gulf or its right to dictate the politics of the Levant.

But nor is domination a simple proposition when Iran's neighbors clearly have opportunities to counter Iran's efforts. Note in this regard both the large and smaller Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states' rush to begin their own nuclear programs since 2007, and their emerging military partnerships with not only the United States, but other Western countries (e.g., France) as well. These countries are neither helpless nor hapless. They have effective means of responding to perceived threats and challenges. Iran's gains in the Levant, for example, are matched by Saudi Arabia's flexing of its own considerable muscles when it comes to the security and political agendas of Palestine, Lebanon, and even Syria (Iran's only ally).¹⁶

There is real concern amongst Iran's close neighbors, in particular, and of course in Israel that Iran's ambitions run potentially counter to their interests. Though

Arab public opinion has generally been supportive of Iran's efforts to "stand up to the US and Israel," as is often the perceived context of this issue, at elite levels, the leaders of GCC countries, in particular, have since 2005 been willing to make public comments about the dangers of Iran's program—seeing the program very much in geo-political balance of power terms.¹⁷ Fears of Iran's actions remain despite repeated high level contacts between Tehran and GCC capitals since 2005.

Yet, despite these expressed fears, not a single Arab leader foresees military confrontation in the Persian Gulf. The nightmare of a nuclear Iran is haunting enough, but worse still is the vision of a wounded Iran hitting out at its neighbors. The consequences of a violent reaction (terrorism or a military attack) by Iran against the populations of neighboring countries is playing into Tehran's hands, ensuring that Iran's neighbors remain paralyzed in policy terms. This position leaves the door open for Iran's further penetration of the Arab heartland and core Arab issues (such as Palestine). Even in indirect ways, Iran's nuclear posture is feeding its regional ambitions.

In addition, the perception of Iranian domination is also being fed by strategic developments in the region since 2001. As has been said already, Iran stood to gain from the regime changes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed, between late 2001 and late 2004, Iran had to do very little to benefit from sea-changes in its neighborhood.

In more recent years, however, Iran has had to be much more nuanced in its behavior, as even before the opportunities afforded Iran in the aftermath of the fall of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein had been realized, President Bush had included Iran in the 'Axis of Evil' statement in his State of the Union speech in January 2002. Thus, for every apparent gain in Iraq or Afghanistan, Iran has had to contend with more pressure from the US and its allies. The fact that, according to US intelligence, Iran apparently halted its active military nuclear program in the spring of 2003 can be said to be largely due to the United States' willingness to replace the Iraqi regime, in principle, because of its belief that Saddam Hussein was pursuing weapons of mass destruction. The US problems in Iraq since then, and perceptions of Iran's net gains in Iraq since 2004, tend to overshadow the fact that Tehran was extremely concerned during the military assault on Iraq in 2003 that US forces could easily target Iran and energize internal opposition to the regime there. The fear that Iran could be next existed for much of 2003, even inviting a conciliatory letter of compromise from Ayatollah Khamenei to President Bush. At that point, Iran was on its back foot, trying to reach an accommodation with the United States.

Nevertheless, Tehran does have regional ambitions and it sees the present situation as ideal for the advancement of its interests and objectives in the Middle East. In this context, the Islamic Republic has always been happy to combine soft and hard power for its purposes. If religion and culture form the heart of its soft power, then military prowess must represent its hard shell. In the latter case, non-conventional weapons could well play a part, particularly if the deterrence of threats by the US and Israel is the object of Iran's exercise. In short, the key question is whether Iran is developing nuclear capabilities primarily in support of its desire to project power in the region, or is it simply trying to protect itself by balancing the power of others? Though it is difficult to separate the two in practice, where one chooses to place the emphasis will inevitably have operational implications for other actors.

Iran's Global Ambitions

In global terms, Iran's ambitions can be understood in the context of developments across Asia, in which Iran views itself as a key actor and stakeholder. In Asia, there are already a number of actors with nuclear weapons and, of course, one of Iran's key neighbors (Pakistan) is already a nuclear-weapon state. The dynamics of Asian geo-politics are a major factor as one looks at the range of factors behind Iran's conception of its nuclear role. By some Asian standards – namely by looking at the economic power bases of China, India, Indonesia, and Japan – Iran is less of a significant actor than its ambitions indicate. But, if one takes into account Iran's geo-political, cultural, demographic, and energy resources, then the country is an Asian power of considerable importance. In the Asian mix of powers, Iran has the potential to be a 'swing' state of significant weight, able to affect Asia's emerging new power lines as Eurasia begins to adjust to the rapid rise of China and India and the relative decline of Russia. Its partnerships with all of Asia's diverse major actors, including North Korea, mean that it has to be able to carry its own weight in this unstructured and unregulated regional setting, which encompasses and accommodates well over half of humanity. No other Middle East state has the same vulnerabilities and opportunities in Asia as Iran, so its "look east" policy has significance both strategically and operationally.

With India and Pakistan recently declared to be nuclear-weapon states, there is a sense that Iran is next in a hierarchical framework of proliferation. But Iran does not need nuclear weapons to deter Asian adversaries, far from it. Iran is actually increasingly reliant on a number of Asian countries for counteracting the pressures from the trans-Atlantic western alliance. Increased economic pressure from the US and the EU, for example, are driving Iran to loosen its financial presence in Europe and to shift its considerable deposits to the Far East.

But to be able to preserve its own position, and for these powers to take Tehran seriously as a big player, even an ambiguous nuclear posture can be beneficial. This is a trick that Iran clearly learned from North Korea as it was developing its nuclear program in the 1990s, and from the regional states' reactions to North Korea's nuclear diplomacy. There is much to be gained from pursuing nuclear capabilities, if its consequences can be controlled and do not lead to military confrontation, as happened in the case of Iraq in 2003. Let us not forget that it was Baghdad's deliberately ambiguous posture in the 1990s and early 2000s, ironically intended to deter Iran, which US leaders used to justify military action.

It may be premature to see Iran's nuclear program as leading to a 'grand bargain' with the United States but, nevertheless, it is possible to see the nuclear program's depth and diversity as providing Iran with a wide range of negotiable pawns in any deal with the international community. Unlike Libya and more like North Korea, the more complex the program the greater the opportunities for negotiations.

The danger is that such implicit and ambiguous threats can also lend support to those who advocate preventive military action against Iran: "Because the ultimate goal of prevention is to influence Tehran to change course, effective strikes against Iran's nuclear infrastructure may play an important role in affecting Iran's decision calculus," according to advocates of military action, Clawson and Eisenstadt.¹⁸ The depth and complexity of Iran's program, according to these analysts, implies Iran's retention of a 'breakout option' that must be stopped even by force.

A nuclear posture therefore strengthens Iran's profile in an Asian neighborhood full of heavy-weights and nuclear weapon states, and also strengthens its negotiating hand with its adversaries. There is obviously an awareness of this among Iranian leaders for it has been noted that, in the words of the former chief nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani, "If Iran becomes atomic Iran, no longer will anyone dare challenge it, because they would have to pay too high a price."¹⁹ This analysis does not sit easily with some clerics, who have commented that Iran should regard the possession of nuclear weapons as *haram* and therefore against the republic's principles. The reality is that the key policy makers are fully aware of advantages of implicit nuclear capabilities for Iran's global power games.

IRAN'S NUCLEAR PLANS

Much speculation surrounds Iran's actual nuclear plans. Takeyh, for example, has boldly argued that under the cover of civilian nuclear research program, "Iran is gradually accumulating the technology and the expertise necessary for the construction of nuclear weapons."²⁰ Fitzpatrick claims that "at the very least, it seems, Iran is seeking to have a nuclear-weapons capability that can be quickly put into place when it makes the final decision"—the 'bomb in the closet' option.²¹ Kam is of the view that for the Iranian leadership, "the acquisition of nuclear weapons is a strategic priority of paramount importance," and that "Iran sees nuclear weapons as a requirement for building its position as a regional power."²² Perkovich believes that "political leaders [such as Khamenei and Rafsanjani] see nuclear weapons as an almost magical source of national power and autonomy."²³ From the outside at least, there seems to be a logic to the program that will lead to nuclear weapons.

Indeed, since 2003 we have learnt much about the extent of Iran's nuclear program and its technical enhancement plans, which include an impressive and diverse set of initiatives. As noted earlier, Iran's nuclear program appears to be comprehensive and also supported by a concerted drive toward the mastery of the entire fuel cycle and its applications. As the UK Parliament's Select Committee on Foreign Affairs put it in its most recent report, Iran is engaged in "the mining and milling of uranium, the conversion of uranium, the enrichment of uranium, fuel fabrication, reactor construction, and reprocessing R&D."²⁴ The same report also notes that the potential for an Iranian nuclear 'break-out' remains strong given the diversity and richness of its nuclear program.

Iran's nuclear program may be designed to make the country less reliant on the outside world, but in practice its current success is due largely to a wide range of international links which have included Russia, Pakistan, North Korea, and China. Each has provided unique insights for the Iranians. Russia, of course, remains Iran's main nuclear partner, engaged in completing the engineering and construction of the 1,000 megawatt Bushehr nuclear power plant since the mid-1990s and also committed to providing its fuel. Russia is also Iran's main military supplier, exporting a wide range of equipment to its southern neighbor. Compared with Russia, China plays a more circumspect, but nevertheless significant, role in Iran's nuclear program. It is reported by US intelligence, for instance, that since the 1980s China has been responsible for helping the Islamic Republic build fuel fabrication, uranium purification, and zirconium tube production facilities, and even provided it with the equipment used in electromagnetic isotope separation enrichments of weapons grade uranium.²⁵

China has also been a major military partner of Iran, helping it to develop its naval, as well as complex land-based and sea-launched missile forces.²⁶ Another residual partner has been North Korea, whose engagement with Iran dates back to the Iran-Iraq war. Indeed, much of Iran's sophisticated and advanced domestic surface-to-surface missile (SSM) program is nurtured by North Korean modifications of Soviet-type hardware. Through the 1990s, the post-Cold War period, North Korea went further and played an important role in facilitating Iran's nuclear research and development. Verified intelligence reports also speak of North Korean willingness to transfer plutonium to Iran and also its help to Iran to build large, hardened, underground bunkers for its most sensitive facilities.

The final key outside player in facilitating Iran's nuclear achievements to date has been the AQ Khan network. Dr. Khan, of course, is the godfather of Pakistan's successful nuclear weapons program and leader of the world's most successful nuclear smuggling group. According to the US, the Khan network is responsible for supplying Iran with its first P-2 centrifuges and designs, in a sense being responsible for getting the entire uranium enrichment program on the road.

But what is Iran's nuclear program? Essentially, there are four known elements in Iran's nuclear-related activities: uranium enrichment, reprocessing activities and hot cells construction, heavy water reactor projects, and uranium conversion. Of these, enrichment, reprocessing activities, and reactor projects are on-going concerns of the UN Security Council, and it should be noted that repeated Security Council resolutions have pointedly asked for Iran's suspension of its enrichment program—as indeed have the European Union and the G-8.

Enrichment activities have grown steadily since 2002 and Iran is not only intent on intensifying the output of its fuel enrichment plant by adding new centrifuges and cascades, but notified the IAEA in April 2008 that it was planning to introduce a new generation of locally designed sub-critical gas centrifuges (IR-3). In total, Iran has converted 320 tonnes of uranium into UF₆ between March 2004 and 2008. The total amount of UF₆ fed into the operating cascades between February 2007 and May 2008 was 3970 kilograms, producing low enriched uranium (up to 4.7 percent U-235 according to the Iran's own Atomic Energy Agency). Iran is likely to accumulate 600kg-700kg of low enriched uranium during the course of 2008. The possession of such a stockpile has been described by scientists as a 'breakout capacity'—the brink of nuclear weapons status—since if 600-700kg of low enriched uranium were run through

Iran's enrichment facilities again, it would provide enough fissile material for one bomb.²⁷

It should be noted further that as of early 2008 Iran had completed the installation of eighteen 164-machine cascades at the Natanz enrichment plant, which were operating at full capacity, though obviously with the expected technical problems that such a sophisticated facility would face in the beginning of its operations. These data mean that there are nearly 3,000 (2,952 to be precise) operational centrifuges at this facility. But Iran's intention is to grow the centrifuges to a massive total of 50,000, which could be an aspirational figure given the complexities and intensities of such an undertaking, though still highly significant.

In terms of reactor projects, Iran is hoping to generate some 20,000 megawatts of nuclear electricity by 2030 through its light-water reactors. How safe and how well safeguarded these will be remains an international concern. Safety concerns include operational issues, as well as the big problem of nuclear waste disposal, which is a major concern for even established nuclear energy states, such as the United Kingdom, France, and Japan. Issues to do with the location of such reactors also have to be settled: concerns about pollution—radioactive materials seeping into the Persian Gulf and therefore the main water supply of the Gulf Arab states—are matched by those regarding the potential problems of power plants located in an earthquake prone country such as Iran.

Experts remain concerned that Iran's program continues to contain a military dimension, despite the fact that "no evidence has surfaced pointing to a parallel, covert facility," according to Mark Fitzpatrick.[§] However, Fitzpatrick himself has stated that there are ten reasons to suspect that Iran's nuclear or nuclear-related activities have a military dimension.

1. The role of the military in the administration of Iran's Gchine uranium mine and mill;
2. Polonium-210 experiments, which could be deployed as long-life batteries for deep-space satellites, but also as nuclear bomb neutron initiators;
3. Defense-based centrifuge workshops involved in production of parts for the P-2s;
4. Traces of highly-enriched uranium found by IAEA inspectors at the Lavisan military base Physics Research Center;

[§] Quoted in House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *Global Security: Iran* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, March 2008), page 11.

5. Iran's possession of a 15-page document from the AQ Khan network, "describing procedures for the re-conversion and casting of uranium metal hemispheres," which the IAEA has characterized as related to the manufacture of nuclear bombs components;
6. The military-controlled "Project 111," which is said to be an effort to reshape nose cones of Shehab-3 SSMs as nuclear implosion weapons;
7. Documents from a laptop computer provided by a defector showing blasts data consistent with the critical mass of an atomic explosion;
8. Documents from the same laptop source concerning conversion of uranium dioxide into uranium tetrafluoride undertaken by the IRGC;
9. Drawings of subterranean shafts with remote-control sensors to measure data relating to an underground atomic test; and
10. The military's deep involvement in many aspects of the nuclear program, including high explosives, nuclear ore processing, and parts fabrication, among others.²⁸

Together, these ten factors can be made into a case that Iran is pursuing a clandestine nuclear weapons operation, but Fitzpatrick also notes that Iran has willingly accommodated a highly intensive and intrusive IAEA inspections regime since 2003 in its efforts to dispel the suggestion that it is pursuing a weapons capability. These inspections continue to show that Iran does not seem to be developing a weapons program. But of course inspectors can only visit the sites they know about and also do not have access to Iran's off-limits military sites.

Iran's multi-faceted program reflects Tehran's real drive and desire to become self-sufficient in the nuclear realm. It is interesting that Iran has refused to curtail any part of its program, partly for the fear that this might adversely affect the rest of it, or that indeed such delays could set the program back. The drive for self-sufficiency may have been the starting point, but the self-generated momentum of such a comprehensive program cannot be underrated. Experience shows that, once unleashed, it takes the convergence of a set of international factors and domestic actors to contain a nuclear program. Examples are many: South Africa, Libya, Argentina, and Brazil.

In sum, it is therefore not very surprising to find some analysts that see Iran's nuclear program, along with North Korea's, as the "greatest proliferation dangers to world security."²⁹ In strategic and operational terms, as Cordesman and Al-Rodhan note, an Iranian nuclear capability will inevitably change the military map of the region.³⁰ Iran's development of its SSM forces and its drive to acquire a satellite system, the first of which was launched in February 2009, are

seen as part of its concerted effort to get to the point of being able to deliver a nuclear weapon at considerable distances.

IRAN'S PROLIFERATION CONCERNS

Iranian leaders, to a man (literally), have spoken about the dangers of proliferation in the Middle East, even welcoming the news that Libya had surrendered its clandestine nuclear program to the IAEA. The long shadow cast by Iraq's use of chemical weapons and ballistic missiles against civilian and military targets in the 1980s remains vivid in the Iranian mindset and Iranian leaders rarely miss an opportunity to remind visiting guests that their country remains one of the few victims of deadly non-conventional weapons attacks since the First World War. That experience, it is reiterated, had made Iran a strong advocate of disarmament. Proliferation, according to this logic, is bad for Iran and for its future. Yet, Tehran was one of the first to congratulate Pakistan on its nuclear achievement when it announced its nuclear weapons status in the second half of the 1990s. Also, under the Ahmadinejad presidency, Iran has been offering a range of Muslim countries (Kuwait, Sudan, Syria, Turkey, to name but a few), as well as other nations of compatible political persuasion, the gift of its nuclear know-how and technologies, apparently by-passing the IAEA's strict guidelines about nuclear states' obligations toward non-proliferation. In short, Iran's record with regard to counter-proliferation is inconsistent.

But the main direction of Iran's proliferation concerns has invariably veered toward Israel, which it, and virtually every other regional state, see as the only nuclear weapon state, and therefore chief proliferator, in the Middle East. Largely for this reason, Iran has embraced the Arabs' concept of a Middle East nuclear-weapons-free-zone. But given the largely rhetorical orientation of this position, it is unlikely to cause Iran to develop a well-thought out policy for preventing the proliferation of non-conventional weapons in the Middle East.

MOVING TO ZERO

If one assumes, as do Cordesman and Al-Rodhan, that were Iran, "to acquire nuclear weapons...it will use them largely as a passive deterrent and means of defense," then we must also make the working assumption that there is not a military solution to the current situation. Rather, Iran's position should encourage the opportunity for a negotiated settlement of the nuclear dispute. But, if we accept the contrary argument that Iran will deploy its nuclear weapons arsenal, "to put direct or indirect pressure on its neighbours, threatening them to achieve goals it could not achieve without the explicit or tacit threat of weapons

of mass destruction,” then clearly getting to a negotiated settlement will require the exercise of some tough choices.³¹

There is also the larger global picture to consider. Since the end of the Cold War, every established nuclear-weapon state has gone out of its way to reaffirm its deterrent capability and several have introduced programs to modernize their nuclear forces, as well. In the cases of UK and France, the explicit rationale for this has been the threat from emerging nuclear weapon countries, such as Iran. Fear of proliferation will only entrench these nuclear-weapon powers.³² “Deterrence,” former President Chirac of France said in 2001, “must also enable us to deal with the threats to our vital interests that regional powers armed with weapons of mass destruction could pose.”³³ Britain’s promised multi-billion dollar investment in the modernization of its Trident force is also seen as providing a credible independent deterrence against emerging powers. Indeed, Prime Minister Brown has made this very case on numerous occasions in the House of Parliament. To clarify, however, France and Britain have decided to replace their submarines, but have not yet committed the cash to doing so. But both have reaffirmed their deterrent doctrines while reducing the size of their nuclear stockpiles. The picture is mixed elsewhere too.

The United States and Russia, of course, have also been engaged in the modernization of their nuclear forces, and Moscow announced in March 2009 a program of military modernization starting with its nuclear forces. The US has made substantial cuts in its nuclear forces, to be sure, and is modernizing very slowly. Moreover, there is a new atmosphere in Washington, as reflected by the initiatives of former secretaries of state George Schultz and Henry Kissinger, former secretary of defense William Perry, and former senator Sam Nunn, and also by the fact that both presidential candidates, Senators John McCain and Barack Obama, made speeches devoted to nuclear problems in which they expressed support for goal of disarmament and outlined specific measures toward that end. With Obama now in the White House, there is hope and expectation that his administration will commit seriously to fulfilling this campaign pledge. China, India, and Pakistan, finally, are modernizing their nuclear forces more rapidly than the others, but their programs seem to have a more focused regional dimension to them. All three nations continue to express rhetorical support for disarmament, but maintain that given the much larger size of their nuclear arsenals, it is up to the US and Russia to take the first steps.

In short, there are slowly emerging global initiatives that arguably could eventually tie Iran into a serious disarmament effort. However, there does not appear to be in place at present an internationally-driven disarmament movement

sufficient to cajole Iran into joining, and for this Tehran rightly assumes that the efforts to get it to halt its civilian nuclear program suggest that it is being picked on. Though, of course, its own incendiary statements and behaviour do not quite help it get away with this cultivated innocent image.

Moving to zero requires flexibility from Iran and also an offer that Tehran could simply not refuse. As will be shown below, some progress on the latter has certainly already been made, but we need to make a final assessment of Iran's end-game. Is it to acquire a nuclear-weapons capability, and is this for deterrence or for power projection?

Bahgat notes that "it is apparent that convincing Iran to give up its nuclear program would require prolonged and complicated negotiations. The crux of these negotiations is to persuade Iran's policy makers that the risks of pursuing a nuclear program exceed the rewards."³⁴ Before this stage can be reached, however, governments must understand Iran's maximalist position regarding its nuclear rights under the NPT and weigh it against the possibility of offering credible security guarantees as part of a set of incentives to Iran to give up its nuclear program. On the first issue, Iran will need to be persuaded that being asked to end (or curtail) its fuel-processing capabilities may be asking it to compromise its NPT rights, but, at the same time, the IAEA can demonstrate that this proposal is not politically driven. The issue, as Huntley has usefully shown, is the fact that as many as 40 countries may now possess the industrial and scientific infrastructure for nuclear weapons manufacture: "This concern has generated new proposals to restrict fuel-cycle capabilities of non-nuclear countries more widely."³⁵ By all estimates, Iran is one such country and its offer of sharing this know-how with others—though probably made with the best of intentions—is actually to encourage unregulated proliferation.

The trick is preventing a global initiative to restrict fuel-cycle capabilities internationally from becoming hostage to those groups in Iran who might successfully foment pro-nuclear nationalism through their manipulation of Iran's complex political identity. The answer to this dilemma lies in the mix and nature of the rewards being offered and the price that non-compliance would otherwise cost. First, a serious initiative by the nuclear weapon states to negotiate a disarmament treaty that includes global agreement that fuel cycles must all come under multinational control need to be put in place. Second, while these negotiations are proceeding (or getting started), near-term resolution of the current crisis must be considered on the basis of the November 2004 Paris Agreement, with the amendment that the 5+1 agree to make available aid and wider support *at the same time* as Iran is ceasing enrichment activities. The

problem so far has been that Iran has been asked to end enrichment before the incentives would kick-in.

A general regional proliferation, following Iran's apparent intransigence, is not in Iran's security interests and the strategic fall-out from Iran's efforts in this field could be strongly demonstrated to Iran by the IAEA, particularly if it is true that "Tehran might fear the prospects of American and Israeli nuclear retaliation less than Western strategists would hope."³⁶ In other words, once the threat of the use of force had receded, then the door would have been opened for deeper discussions about the security consequences for Iran and other regional states of proliferation of nuclear know-how, and the falling into wrong hands of a 'dirty bomb' or equivalent that could directly damage Iran's own security.

In this broader context, revisiting of the November 2004 Paris agreement between the EU3 and Tehran may provide some useful insights regarding the appropriate next steps.³⁷ First, the agreement was reached on the back of Iran's consent to the EU3's request that it should suspend its enrichment activities, which it said it would do on a temporary basis and as a gesture of goodwill. "In the context of this suspension," the agreement notes,

The E3/EU and Iran have agreed to begin negotiations, with a view to reaching a mutually acceptable agreement on long-term arrangements. The agreement will provide objective guarantees that Iran's nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes, it will equally provide firm guarantees on nuclear, technological and economic cooperation and firm commitments on security issues...A steering committee will set up working groups on political and security issues, technology and cooperation, and nuclear issues.³⁸

As part of the same agreement, the EU3 also committed the Union to "actively support the opening of Iranian accession negotiations at the World Trade Organization (WTO)," and the parties confirmed their determination to combat terrorism (a code word for EU's acceptance of the anti-Tehran, Iraq-based Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) Organization as a terrorist movement).

The Paris agreement is a remarkable document for its tone and foresight and also for what it commits the West to supporting—CBMs, nuclear cooperation, WTO accession, lifting of sanctions and restrictions, and removal of the MEK as a deep and poisonous thorn in Tehran's side. This agreement was indeed on the verge of being revolutionary, given the tensions that had largely characterized Iran's

relations with the West to this point. But the Paris agreement was followed a few months later by a further remarkable document: The EU3's detailed proposal, billed as a "framework for a long-term agreement" between Iran and the EU. Issued on the 5th of August 2005 by the EU3, just a few days into President Ahmadinejad's presidency, the framework document provides a comprehensive blueprint for a new start between Iran and the international community. Under the general headings of "political and security co-operation," "long-term support for Iran's civil nuclear programme," and "economic and technological co-operation," the document details mechanisms for addressing many of Iran's concerns as fully as possible. By this juncture, of course, the US administration had dropped its opposition to Iran's WTO membership and had also agreed to the suggestion that Iran's civilian aircraft fleet be allowed to purchase parts directly from the manufacturers—the Bush Administration was prepared to board the train.

It is worth noting some of the most salient aspects of the framework proposal: Help in building a safe and economically viable civil nuclear power generation and research program; access for Iran to the international nuclear technologies market; assurances for external supplies of nuclear fuel; establishment of a buffer store of fuel; Iran being declared as a long-term source of fossil fuels for the EU; providing assistance in the fields of environmental, communications and information technologies; cooperation in the fields of air, maritime and railway transport, and agriculture and food industries. In other words, for the EU to provide help, cooperation, and assistance in every conceivable area that would help make Iran develop as a strong and robust state and economy.

Indeed, many of the incentives raised in the framework document can be found in the much more talked about the 5+1 6th of June 2006 package of incentives offered to Tehran (which now included the US, as well as China and Russia). In return for stiff assurances on Iran's nuclear program, the 5+1 package makes a series of eye-catching commitments on nuclear cooperation, help in the application of nuclear science and R&D, economic assistance, high technology cooperation, civil aviation support, etc. This was seen by most outside observers as a significant incentive package, but it too failed to move matters forward. In the summer of 2008, the world was still waiting Iran's formal response to an even better package offered in June of that year.

The Paris agreement and its successors, though remarkable in many ways, had failed to end the crisis and by 2008 there were three UNSC sanctions resolutions on the books against Iran and a host of other unilateral sanctions imposed by the US and the EU. Yet, there is evidence to suggest that Tehran was interested in

furthering the debate beyond sanctions resolutions. It is useful to note, for the record, that European diplomats had reported that Mr Mottaki and Mr Jaleli had expressed strong interest in the 5+1 2006/08 packages, under which the international community would help Iran to develop a state-of-the art civil nuclear energy program if it suspended uranium enrichment. Under the proposal, Iran would continue enrichment but, as a first step, declare that it had frozen installation of more centrifuges at its nuclear facilities. In return, the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany would freeze steps to apply more sanctions.

By the time this package was prepared and delivered, of course, Tehran had moved well away from a compromise. It should be recalled that on the 8th of August 2005 Iran broke the seals on its conversion plant in Isfahan, and after being reported by the IAEA Board as ‘non-compliant’ with its NPT obligations in September 2005, resumed enrichment in January 2006. By the autumn of 2006, by which time Iran’s president had repeatedly questioned the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign country and had also engaged in Holocaust denial at public national and international gatherings, the EU3 had had enough. It was, ironically, the party championing the introduction of the first set of UNSC sanctions against Iran.

This position is a world removed from the relationship that the Paris agreement had heralded just two years earlier. It is little wonder then that both sides are now even more wary. The June 2006 package (which also evolved into a similar 2008 package) is probably the defining edge of the abyss if we are to believe the reports that Israeli forces were poised to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities during the autumn of 2008, apparently convinced that Iran was weaponizing without delay.**

Having seen what might have been achieved, in terms of the Paris agreement and the 5+1 offers, and the scale of breakdown in the negotiations since, it is easy to be pessimistic. Yet glimmers of hope still exist and one can find silver linings not only in the new US administration’s expressions of commitment to find a negotiated solution to the crisis, but also in Iran’s nuanced responses to international pressures and offers of negotiations. It is also worth noting that in a poll of 35,000 Iranians in June 2008, 50 percent of the respondents said that Iran should accept the 5+1 package with some modifications and a further 21 percent said that Iran should accept the package in its entirety. Thus, the vast majority, over 72 percent of those polled, want a negotiated compromise on the basis of the

** This is the view expressed by John Bolton, former US ambassador to the UN. See [The Daily Telegraph](#) (June 24, 2008).

package of incentives. Only 24 percent of the Iranians polled said the package should be rejected.³⁹

Readers must also be conscious of the fact that alongside any package of rewards, the Western nations should pursue strategies that will “relieve Iran’s regional tensions and avoid provoking nationalistic reactions [which] could not only deflate Iranians’ perceived strategic need for nuclear weapons but also help promote more moderate domestic forces less dependent on threat-based nationalism for support.”⁴⁰ The international community still finds it very difficult to strike the right balance between these imperatives.

Thus, despite the upbeat assessment of Iran’s response to the 5+1 group’s package of incentives, it was apparent to observers that the dynamics of the relationship were far from accommodating a speedy settlement. Iran’s fears of Western motives had not gone away, nor indeed were the Western countries any closer to understanding what Iran’s perception of its own role in the region was going to look like in the future, any future—whether nuclear-free or with a weapons capability. Thus, on the 15th of June 2008, it was reported that a senior US official in Washington had told journalists that if Tehran refused the generous offer, the US would push the EU to step up sanctions—particularly on Bank Melli, Iran’s largest commercial bank with an international network of branches and links.⁴¹ Sure enough, within a few days of this report, it was announced on the 23rd of June that the EU had approved without debate the imposition of new sanctions against Iran, including freezing the assets of Bank Melli. This happened despite the fact that Iran’s promised ‘considered response’ to the package had not yet been delivered.

As we begin to look at end-states, it is worthwhile reflecting on Iran’s so-called ‘strategic’ offer of negotiating with the 5+1 group of countries in search of a solution to the on-going dispute between it and the Security Council, even though Tehran continues to regard the involvement of the Security Council as unlawful. Iran’s Foreign Minister Mottaki, in his letter of 13th of May 2008 to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, expressed a desire to try and settle the dispute on the basis of “real and serious cooperation among the concerned parties [i.e., 5+1].”⁴² The material sent to the UN Secretary General is billed by Mottaki as a package of comprehensive solutions to “the regional and global problems and challenges.” Though divided into three distinct baskets, at its heart the section entitled “The Nuclear Issue” is clearly the driver of the other two—“Political and Security Issues,” and “Economic Issues.” But even under the latter two baskets one can find evidence for compromise, albeit a hesitant one. Take the political and security issues basket, for example. Mottaki offers to cooperate, “to assist the

Palestinian people to find a comprehensive plan...to resolve the 60-year old Palestinian issue,” as “a symbol” of Iran’s commitment to its offer of dialogue. No mention of the end of Israel here, although cynics could interpret this statement as saying the end of Israel in more polite words. But the choice of words is very interesting, in that it tries to appear constructive and also willing to engage with the ‘Palestinian people’ as a whole (i.e., not only Hamas) to find a comprehensive plan for ending the conflict. What the statement does not say is that Iran and the Palestinians should join forces and follow Iran’s lead in forming an anti-Israel coalition. What is said and also what is not said are both significant.

The nuclear basket, itself divided into seven sub-sections, offers three very interesting propositions: “establishing enrichment and nuclear fuel production consortiums in different parts of the world—including Iran,” “nuclear disarmament and establishment of a follow up committee,” and “improved supervision by the IAEA over the nuclear activities of different states.” This represents Tehran’s efforts to find a constructive response to the ‘5+1’ package. Its horizons are limited, for sure, but it is not a blanket rejection of the operational aspects of the package either. It concedes some ground while wanting to see the IAEA more actively engaged.

This document appears to be Tehran reaching out to the 5+1 group as best it can, given its self-imposed ideological and political constraints, offering to partner with the West in dealing with the region’s crises collectively and collaboratively. Despite the many short-comings of the proposal, it is clear that its whole tenor, and the demeanour of the submission, is designed to be conciliatory—the kind of style that we have not seen since August 2005. But is it enough? The answer is clearly not. Riccardo Redaelli argues that one of the key ingredients of progress must be in efforts to de-securitize Iran’s foreign policy agenda, alongside a “step-by-step roadmap for defusing the crisis.”⁴³ But before such a roadmap can be implemented, the ground rules for engagement must be established and the international community must show a general willingness to consider nuclear disarmament as a priority.

Also, the essence of Iran’s security doctrine needs to be taken into account. For the Islamic Republic, defense (and therefore deterrence) has been a policy imperative. So long as this is the case, the West’s conventional and non-conventional capabilities will be regarded as potentially threatening. Tehran regards US conventional forces more dangerous in practical terms than its nuclear arsenal, for example. So, changing the Iranian mindset, so that the West is no longer seen as an existential enemy, will take time and much effort on both

sides. A glimpse of what is possible was found in the Paris Agreement and its successors; but at the same time we have also seen how easily matters can spin out of control and even nosedive. For the moment, the best that we can hope for is for the dogs of war to be kept at bay until the new administrations in Tehran and Washington have been able to take stock and decide to show the courage that would enable them to retrace their steps back from the edge. Once this happens, anything is then possible!

ENDNOTES

- ¹ UN Security Council Resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), and 1803 (2008).
- ² IAEA Staff Report, “Latest Iran Safeguards Report Circulated to IAEA Board,” 22 February 2008.
- ³ George Jahn, “IAEA: Iran may be withholding info in nuke probe,” International Herald Tribune (May 26, 2008).
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- ⁵ See International Herald Tribune (May 26, 2008).
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