

## U.S.-IRANIAN RELATIONS: THE ROAD AHEAD

BY

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# **PROPERTY OF U.S. ARMY**

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

## **U.S.-IRANIAN RELATIONS: THE ROAD AHEAD**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Following World War II, Iran had a strong partnership with the U.S. under the government of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who was more commonly known as the Shah of Iran. Since 1978, the U.S.-Iranian relationship has been poor at best and even hostile at times. Reestablishing a U.S.-Iranian partnership would be beneficial to both countries for political and economic reasons. In the context of U.S. policy and interactions with Iran over the last half century, two key issues complicate a new and better U.S.-Iranian relationship: Iran's ambition to develop nuclear weapons and Iran's support of groups that the U.S. regards as terrorist organizations. While several other contentious issues divide the two countries, there are also several issues in which the two countries share common interests. These common interests can be the cornerstone for a new and mutually beneficial relationship. This paper describes key policy differences between the two countries and concludes with policy recommendations to improve U.S. strategic relations with Iran.

## U.S. IRANIAN RELATIONS: THE ROAD AHEAD

The Obama administration has a unique opportunity to revise the current strategy with Iran. Establishing this new policy toward Iran is a difficult and complicated task. However, the United States has much to gain by revising its relatively consistent policies of the past three decades.<sup>1</sup> For the past 30 years, U.S.-Iranian relations have been marred by enmity, confusion, and mistrust. Many Iranian leaders regard the U.S. as its greatest enemy for nationalistic and security reasons.<sup>2</sup> There have been little to no diplomatic relations between U.S. and Iran since the hostage crisis of 1979. Every time one country makes a conciliatory gesture the other country pulls back. For example, in 1998-1999, Iran rejected Secretary of State Albright's offer to discuss a "roadmap to better relations." In 2003, Iranian's request for an open dialogue with the U.S. through the Swiss embassy was ignored.<sup>3</sup>

A new and improved U.S.-Iran relationship is beneficial to both countries. Even though establishing viable diplomacy with Iran may be difficult, Iran could greatly assist U.S. efforts to stabilize both Iraq and Afghanistan. Iran sees itself as regional power and exercises its power in the region through close relations with Hezbollah and Hamas. As a regional power, Iran is positioned to assist in resolving or at least mitigating the Israel-Palestinian conflict and helping reduce global terrorism. Iran can also improve U.S. and allied access to the region's oil and natural gas. However, two key issues currently complicate building a new and better U.S.-Iran relationship: Iran's ambition to develop nuclear weapons and Iran's support of groups that the U.S. regards as terrorist organizations.

Although there are many issues about which the two countries disagree, the two countries share several common interests. For example, a stable Iraq and Afghanistan and the assured flow of oil and natural resources through the Persian Gulf are in both countries' national interest. Iran has come to realize that it will never achieve its full potential without positive relations with United States.<sup>4</sup> This SRP reviews key policy differences between these countries and concludes with policy recommendations to improve U.S. strategic relations with Iran.

### Background

Iran was occupied by the Russians and British during World War II (WW II), and it became an important link in the Allied supply line that provided war supplies to the Russians. After WW II, in violation of agreements to withdraw troops from Iran, Soviet troops remained in Iran. But President Harry Truman eventually persuaded Stalin to withdrawal the Soviet troops from Iran.<sup>5</sup> In 1947, the popular nationalist Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq ascended to power largely because of his nationalist ideas and his stand against the West.

One of the major reasons that he ascended to power was his government's position against the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). This oil company paid royalties to Iran on the oil it extracted. However, the British heavily taxed the oil revenue that was given to Iran; these taxes exceeded the royalties provided to Iranian government. The AIOC was literally robbing Iran of its natural resources. In 1949 the Majlis (Iranian Parliament) began to protest Iran's meager revenues from AIOC. In order to raise the revenue from oil, Mossadeq started to renegotiate the agreement with AIOC for equal sharing of oil revenues. The AIOC agreed to increase revenues but not to the equal sharing that Mossadeq had proposed. In 1951 Mossadeq with Majlis support

nationalized the oil industry.<sup>6</sup> Because of Mossadeq's stand against Western exploitation, he was nominated by Majlis to be the Prime Minister. However, the Shah did not want to appoint Mossadeq as the new Prime Minister. But he was forced to agree to the nomination after days of public unrest and demonstration.

In August 1953 Reza Shah tried to dismiss Mossadeq as the Prime Minister, but the Iranian people opposed the Shah. Violent demonstrations and protests ensued, forcing the Shah to leave Iran.<sup>7</sup> Later in 1953, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and British government engineered an overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq which paved the way for the Shah to return to Iran. Iranians view the CIA's intrusion into Iranian affairs as the veritable U.S. original sin. They view this support as an economic mechanism to continue to reap profits from Iranian resources. The Shah was never able to overcome the perception that he was an American puppet.<sup>8</sup> In fact, from 1953 to 1978 U.S. foreign policy actively supported Shah Reza Pahlavi. Using this support, the Shah rapidly modernized the country and promoted westernization, which inevitably collided with more traditional Iranian culture.<sup>9</sup>

As a native Iranian, I have childhood memories of listening to American music and watching U.S. programs on Iranian television. Many American-style bars, clubs, and casinos opened in Iran. Many traditional Iranians resented these cultural intrusions. No one could criticize the Shah's regime; individuals who openly spoke against him were arrested by the Shah's secret police the SAVAK. One of the initial critics of Shah's regime was Ayatollah Khomeini, who was arrested because of his views and expelled from Iran.

The Shah also rapidly modernized the Iranian military. The Nixon and Ford administration allowed the Shah to use the oil revenues to build the sixth largest armed forces in the world at the time.<sup>10</sup> The U.S. facilitated this through the sale of U.S. military equipment and by providing training for the Iranian military. As the Shah's relationship with the U.S. leaders became better known, a number of Iranian religious groups rejected his Western policies. In retaliation SAVAK used intimidation, fear, and torture to silence these religious groups. Despite the Shah's efforts to gain support for his policies, SAVAK's actions served to further alienate the Shah from the Iranian people.

The Shah's policies failed to help many of the common people. Although Iran had vast energy resources, many Iranian villages had no electricity. Even the capital Tehran was subjected to blackouts. Most revenues from the oil industry were expended on the army and military hardware. Corruption in the Shah's regime was rampant, which further aroused Iranian resentment of the Shah. SAVAK's repression activities and the regime's corruption led to the Shah's downfall and the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini, the Shiite Muslim clergyman who had been exiled by the Shah in 1964.<sup>11</sup> Iranians viewed him as a leader who could assist in moving the country back to its cultural roots.

The Iranian revolution began in 1978 and was completed by 1979, when Ayatollah Khomeini assumed the position of Iran's Supreme Leader and established the Islamic Republic of Iran. The new Islamic regime radically altered Iran's foreign policy. In November 1979, Iranian students took over the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held over 50 Americans hostage for 444 days. These actions effectively destroyed diplomatic relations between the two countries and fostered an anti-Western Islamic government in Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini viewed global affairs as a desperate struggle between good

and evil, with Iran representing Islamic good and the U.S. representing everything evil.<sup>12</sup> Since the fall of the Shah, both the U.S. and Iran have engaged in many actions that challenge the other country's national interests.

### The Strategic Importance of Iran

Iran is strategically positioned in the Middle East. It is slightly larger than the state of Alaska, with two formidable mountain ranges Alborz and Zagros that provide strategic defensive terrain. It occupies the only land stretching from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean. Unlike Iraq, which is mostly landlocked, Iran cannot be totally geographically isolated and blockaded, as Iraq was by the U.S. for many years. As a result, the U.S. is unable to impose the same kind of economic pressures on Iran.

Iran also has the ability to control or at least disrupt the transport of oil tankers in the Persian Gulf, which could have significant impact on the world economy. Iran shares borders with Iraq and Afghanistan, both of which are currently occupied by U.S. and coalition forces.<sup>13</sup> With appropriate incentives, Iran could assist the U.S. in stabilizing its neighbors, Iraq and Afghanistan. Iran has a population of over 66.4 million people, with a 77+ percent literacy rate.<sup>14</sup> Unlike Iraq and Afghanistan, Iranian people are not tribal; they tend to be loyal to the nation, not sectarian. In case of an invasion, the people would more likely rally to their government than is the case with more tribally oriented Afghans.

Iran is a founding member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC); it holds the world's third largest oil reserves and second largest natural gas resources.<sup>15</sup> Iran's oil exports play a large role in stabilizing the global oil market. Even though Iran is not considered a model democracy by the U.S., it is a

stable country with several active political parties. It is more progressive politically than most countries in the region.<sup>16</sup> Because of these strategic factors and because the U.S. needs strong stable allies in the region, a U.S.-Iranian partnership would greatly benefit the U.S. and the region.

### U.S. and Iranian Concerns

Both countries have several pressing concerns. The U.S. has two major concerns regarding Iran: First is Iran's pursuit of nuclear power program and its refusal to comply with a United Nation Resolution to stop enriching uranium. Second is Iran's support to groups that the U.S. considers terrorist organizations. On the other hand, Tehran is concerned that the U.S. supports a regime change in Iran. Additionally, a growing population in Iran requires the government to focus on nuclear energy as an additional source of electricity. In order to make any diplomatic progress toward an improved U.S.-Iranian relationship, these concerns must be addressed.

The Iranian nuclear program began long before the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The Shah launched Iran's nuclear program in 1967.<sup>17</sup> In 1974, the Shah established the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI). As part of his long-term development program he announced a plan to build 23 nuclear power plants throughout Iran by 1994.<sup>18</sup> During the Shah's regime, Iran was a close ally of U.S., so the Iranian nuclear program was supported by Western powers. In 1978 the Shah suspended Iran's nuclear research and training because of nation-wide demonstrations and riots against his regime. The establishment of the revolutionary Islamic government in 1979 ended U.S.-Iranian relations. Subsequently, the U.S. no longer supported Iran's nuclear program. As a result, Iran's nuclear program had a temporary set-back until 1984, when the

nuclear research center at Esfahan opened.<sup>19</sup> A program originally supported by the U.S. was now viewed as a destabilizing threat by its original supporters.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Iran continued to develop its nuclear program with assistance from China and North Korea.<sup>20</sup> This nuclear program went relatively unnoticed until 11 September 2001. After the 9/11 attacks, President Bush labeled Iran a member of the "Axis of Evil." Since then, Iran's nuclear program has been an issue of U.S. concern. In September 2002, Iran informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of its plans to modernize its nuclear energy program. IAEA requires countries with nuclear program to provide routine reports, but Iran had not provided any reports since 1978. Then in September of 2002 Iran announced that it was "embarking on a long-term plan....to construct nuclear power plants with a total capacity of 6,000 megawatts within two decades."<sup>21</sup> This program had previously been exposed in August 2002 by an exiled opposition group, the People's Mujahidin Organization of Iran.<sup>22</sup> For almost 20 years, Iran had concealed its nuclear weapons development program from the IAEA and denied its existence.

Subsequently, the IAEA's inspection team traveled to Iran and discovered "extensive concealment activities" regarding Iran's nuclear enrichment programs.<sup>23</sup> Based on the IAEA November 2006 report, Iran had not declared uranium imports, uranium conversion, and uranium enrichment. Iran also failed to declare all existing nuclear facilities, laser isotope enrichment experiments, and plutonium experiments. Subsequently, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 1696 and 1737 gave Iran 90 days to suspend uranium enrichment activities or face sanctions.

In response, Iran declared these resolutions illegal and proclaimed the country's right to pursue peaceful nuclear programs under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Iran claims that its nuclear program is designed for peaceful purposes, that Iran will use nuclear power plants only to generate electricity. Under the NPT, Iran has the right to enrich uranium at low levels to use for fuel cells in their power plants. Iran also allowed IAEA inspectors to conduct periodic inspections of Iranian nuclear facilities.

Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, the Security Council adopted resolutions 1737 in 2006, 1747 in 2007, and 1803 in 2008. These UN resolutions imposed sanctions against Iran in response to the proliferation risks presented by Iran's nuclear program in light of Iran's continuing failure to meet the requirements of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and failure to comply with the provisions of earlier Security Council resolutions.<sup>24</sup> These sanctions only prohibit the export of materials or technical assistance that contributes to Iran's uranium enrichment process. This means that Iran can continue to sell their oil and have otherwise normal trade relations with its partners. Bans on nuclear technology and material do not have an economic impact on Iran or Iranian people. In addition to the United Nations Sanctions, since 1995 the United States has prohibited U.S. companies from having any dealings with Iran. These prohibitions include banning U.S. companies from helping Iran develop its oil industry. These U.S. sanctions would have expired in 2010, but President Obama extended them.<sup>25</sup>

These economic sanctions have not been working because the U.S. and its European allies cannot agree on the same set of sanctions against Iran. Meanwhile, unilateral U.S. sanctions are not likely to change Iran's behavior. Richard N. Hass, an

expert on economic sanctions, claims that “Unilateral sanctions are rarely effective. Sanctions tend to work best when international political consensus exists.”<sup>26</sup> Despite economic sanctions from the U.S., Iran continues to trade with China, Russia, India, and North Korea. Iranian oil and gas resources continue to attract buyers from other countries. These sanctions serve to help Iran strengthen its economic relations with the Central Asian states. The United States is also sending mixed signal to Iran. For example, President George W. Bush’s inclusion of Iran in his "axis of evil" speech has increased concern within Iran of a possible U.S. attack. Yet given Iran’s perception of regional threats, it will probably continue its nuclear strategy even if U.S.-Iran tensions are eased.<sup>27</sup>

For diplomacy to work, U.S. officials must determine both what they expect from the Islamic Republic and identify which Iranian interests the U.S. is prepared to support. Successful diplomacy will require some give-and-take or diplomatic use of carrots and sticks. So far, U.S. diplomacy has focused mostly on sticks, providing few incentives. Based on the March 2006 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS), the U.S. views proliferation of nuclear weapons as its greatest threat and declares: “We may face no greater challenge from a single country than from Iran...The United States has joined with our EU partners and Russia to pressure Iran to meet its international obligations and provide objective guarantees that its nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes. This diplomatic effort must succeed if confrontation is to be avoided.”<sup>28</sup> It is important to reject the view that Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons is inevitable, so there’s nothing that can be done to stop it. However, if the U.S. and its allies do not change some of their policies, Iran most likely will proceed to acquire nuclear weapons.

In September 1980, shortly after the Islamic Revolution, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini declared, "We should try hard to export our revolution to the world, and should set aside the thought that we do not export our revolution...we [shall] confront the world with our ideology."<sup>29</sup> In order to accomplish Khomeini's intent, Iran supports activities of Islamic non-state actors to increase their sphere of influence and shape the region. From Iran's perspective, Hezbollah and Hamas are not terrorist groups but legitimate Muslim freedom-fighting organizations. Iran supports Hamas and Hezbollah in order to counter and weaken the unfriendly forces in the region, especially Israel. These groups also provide the capability to strike the U.S. and Israel. Iranian support for non-state actors provides a means to project its power within the Middle East. Support for non-state actors diverts attention away from Tehran. In a way, the Iranian support for Hamas and Hezbollah keeps the U.S. occupied with the Arab/Israeli conflict and distracts the international community's attention to Iranian pursuit of nuclear technology.

Hamas, an Iranian-backed organization founded in 1988, has proclaimed its intent to destroy Israel. Iran supports Hamas' virtually constant war with Israel by transferring funds to Hamas through Hezbollah.<sup>30</sup> Iran's ties with Hamas began in the late 1980s, when Iran supported Shiite groups in the Gulf region. Initially due to sectarian differences, Hamas had poor relations with Iran. After the 1991 Gulf War, in October 1992 the Iran-Hamas ties grew closer. Iran currently provides an estimated \$30 million annually in support of Hamas operations.<sup>31</sup> Following U.S. operations against Iraq and Afghanistan, Hamas became fully allied with Iran.<sup>32</sup>

In June 2007, Hamas forces violently seized control of Gaza from the Palestinian Authority and targeted Israel with thousands of rockets and mortars. With support from Iran Hamas continues to disrupt Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. Hamas will be a legitimate partner for negotiations with the U.S. only when it is ready to live in peace with Israel.<sup>33</sup>

In 1982 following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Iran established its ties with the Hezbollah (which in Arabic means Party of God), an Islamist Shiite militia based in Lebanon.<sup>34</sup> This group supports the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Iran has supported, funded, and trained Hezbollah forces and committed the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to assist in the war with Israel.<sup>35</sup> The IRGC was created following the 1979 revolution to protect and promote the objectives of the revolution. There is some evidence that IRGC is actively undermining the new Iraq government by funneling funds and arms to Shiite militias and engaging directly in military activity and gathering intelligence. Although this is difficult to verify, Iran provides over \$100 million yearly in support of Hezbollah.<sup>36</sup> In exchange for this aid, Hezbollah provides leverage against Israel and extend Iranian influence beyond its borders, thereby enhancing Iranian prestige.

There is also a U.S. concern about the legitimacy of the current Iranian election and its President Ahmadinejad. U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden told an NBC broadcaster he had doubts about the results of Iranian election: "There's an awful lot of questions about how this election was run, but we'll see, we're just waiting to see, we don't have enough facts to make a firm judgment."<sup>37</sup> Ahmadinejad allegedly received a majority of the vote at 62%, followed by his challenger Mosavi's 33%.<sup>38</sup>

Although Iran's elections were not free by Western standards, the Islamic Republic has a 30-year history of highly contested and competitive elections at the presidential, parliamentary and local levels. Manipulation has always been there, as it is in many other countries. It is time for the Obama administration to accept the Iranian administration headed by the reelected President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Iran has two key concerns regarding the U.S. policy on Iran. The major Iranian concern is potential U.S. military action against Iran to change the current regime. The Obama administration has stated that the U.S. reserves all its options, ranging from diplomacy to military action, to pressure Iran to abandon its nuclear program.<sup>39</sup> Iranians have not forgotten the CIA operations in Iran that overthrew the Mossadeq regime. They are now gravely concerned about a military invasion because U.S. forces are fighting in nearby Iraq and Afghanistan.

The second major Iranian concern is the growing power requirements in Iran. Iran has a population growth rate of six to eight percent annually; by 2025, Iran is projected to have 100 million citizens.<sup>40</sup> Its energy need cannot be met by only oil and gas. U.S. sanctions against Iran have greatly impacted the Iranian oil industry. Iran has not been able to match its pre-revolution oil productions; 57 of Iran's 60 major oil fields need major repairs.<sup>41</sup> Because oil and gas are major Iranian exports, Iran wants to preserve them to optimize their value. Also there is no reason that Iran should use all their oil and gas resources to produce power. The nuclear power plants could easily solve Iranian power requirements while freeing their oil and gas resources for profitable trade.

Also there is a concern about U.S. economic sanctions against Iran. These sanctions had major impact on Iranian oil industry, leaving much of the oil infrastructure in disrepair. Iran has not been able to match its pre-revolution oil production. Through engagement and diplomacy, the U.S. could lift economic sanctions as an incentive for Iran to comply with UN resolutions. Lifting economic sanctions will greatly improve the Iranian economy and open a way for an economic partnership with the United States.

### U.S. and Iranian Common Interests

Despite three decade of hostilities, Iran and the U.S. have several common national interests: a stable and peaceful Iraq and Afghanistan, development of Iranian oil and gas resources, and clear access to the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz.<sup>42</sup>

In Afghanistan, both Iran and the U.S. seek to build a functioning government in order to move forward with reconstruction efforts and building the economy. Iran is eager to return an estimated two million Afghan refugees back to Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup> Both Iran and the U.S. support the Karzai Government; both have pledged economic and security assistance. Both the U.S. and Iran oppose the narcotics commerce and traffic in Afghanistan, which has fueled addiction and illegal trade in both countries. Iran strongly opposes the Taliban, as does the U.S.; Iran nearly declared war on the Taliban in 1998.<sup>44</sup>

Both the U.S. and Iran want a democratically elected Afghan government. However, Iran wants a Shiite-led government friendly with Iran, while Washington prefers a government friendly to the U.S. Both countries want a stable and peaceful Iraq. Iran is indirectly assisting the U.S. in stabilizing Iraq by providing significant economic support in the form of business investments in Iraq. Iran is rebuilding infrastructure in Najaf and Karbalah; it provides various training and funds to political

factions, especially the Interior Ministry.<sup>45</sup> Given Iraq's Shiite majority, Iran believes that a democratic Iraqi government will put the Shiite majority in power.

The U.S. and Iran share a common interest in Iran's natural resources, especially oil and gas. Before the Islamic revolution, Iran produced approximately 6 million barrels of oil a day; today its oil output is down to 4.2 million barrel a day.<sup>46</sup> This decrease has been caused by U.S. sanctions, lack of investment, mismanagement, and a weakening infrastructure. U.S. energy companies could provide investment and expertise to increase Iran's oil and gas production. A U.S.-Iranian partnership would be economically advantageous to both countries. This cooperation would not only benefit the U.S. and Iran but also benefit the global energy market.<sup>47</sup>

Connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, and the world's oceans is the Strait of Hormuz, which is roughly 20 miles wide at its narrowest point.<sup>48</sup> The Strait's commercial and naval traffic includes passage of 16 to 17 million barrels of oil per day aboard 15 or more tankers. Nearly 40% of all sea-born oil trade transits through a two-way shipping lane inside Omani waters.<sup>49</sup> Since the 1980's, the U.S. has enjoyed an unchallenged presence in the Persian Gulf waters.<sup>50</sup> Both Iran and the U.S. share a great interest in this waterway: Iran wants to ensure its oil and gas exports move freely to its customers, and the U.S. wants to ensure that all the Gulf states' oil exports transit to their destination without interference to ensure the global economy remains robust and stable. The Strait of Hormuz is a lifeline of energy for Western countries that obviously have significant interest in maintaining its freedom of navigation.

## U.S. Strategies for Building a Partnership with Iran

Based on the June 2009 polling of Iranian people, 77 percent of Iranians would like better relations with the U.S., and 60% support unconditional negotiations with the United States.<sup>51</sup> However, Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons and support for Hamas and Hezbollah challenges the future stability of the Middle East and increases the possibility of further confrontation with the United States. A new U.S. strategy toward Iran is needed. It should be driven by the global perception of an Iranian threat. The United Nations has declared that Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons is the greatest global threat. Current UN sanctions against Iran address this threat. If Iran remains recalcitrant, further UN sanctions against Iran's are likely. A new U.S. strategy for Iran must acknowledge the international consensus opposing Iran's nuclear weapons program.

Iran is a challenging and complex country, both in terms of its government and its people. Formulating a new strategy with Iran is a difficult task. Any strategy toward Iran is likely to require significant time to achieve its desired effects. The U.S. should consider several strategies for dealing with Iran. These strategic options will be influenced by the international system, U.S. foreign policy, and national/international culture and values.

In March 2009, Admiral Mike Mullen, the Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, citing the findings of the IAEA, declared that Iran probably had sufficient low enriched uranium to make a single nuclear warhead.<sup>52</sup> Once Iran has acquired nuclear capability, U.S. options become more limited because of potential Iranian nuclear retaliation against Israel. Currently, U.S. could consider the following options: Engagement and Diplomacy, Airstrike, and Invasion and Regime Change.

An engagement strategy calls for the U.S. and international community to engage Iran with diplomacy that include incentives to abandon a nuclear weapons program and consequences for failing to abandon the program. For example, the U.S. would lift economic sanctions if Iran cooperates by complying with the resolution. Also, Iran must understand that failure to comply with the resolution will result in a severe international response. Compliance with this international resolution will provide legitimacy for Iran's government and encourage it to stop enriching uranium and rejoin the international community. However, if Iran fails to stop their enrichment of uranium, then the UN would increase the severity of sanctions, to include all economic trade with Iran. Multilateral economic sanctions will greatly impact the Iranian people and economy and further isolate Iran from the international community. Once Iran is totally isolated, internal pressures from the Iranian people could force the regime to comply with international laws and possibly ignite an internal overthrow of Iran's government. However, if Tehran continues to develop nuclear weapons, the next step is to sponsor a UN resolution and build a coalition to conduct military operations against Iran, similar to the G.W. Bush administration's case against Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

This course of action is feasible because resources are available to implement this strategy of engagement and diplomacy. The U.S. currently has the international community's support in opposition to Iran's enrichment of uranium. All the resources and diplomatic actions are in place to pursue this course of action.

This strategy of engagement and diplomacy is quite acceptable. The international community's effort to engage Iran in a united front to apply multilateral sanctions is legitimate. As a last resort, it is acceptable to build a military coalition in accordance with

a UN resolution to stop Iran's nuclear program. This course of action is politically, socially, and legally acceptable.

Because this strategy of engagement and diplomacy can increase pressure on Iran to comply, it is suitable for achieving of Iran's compliance. Currently, the U.S. has international support, and Iran is defying the U.S. and international community. If Iran continues its non-compliance with UN resolutions, then Iran could face additional multilateral sanctions, followed by military operations. All of this international pressure will be designed to encourage Iran to change its ways or face an international force just as Iraq did in 1991. This strategy is likely to work. If it accepts the incentives to stop its nuclear program, the Iranian government has an opportunity to declare victory against the West while the U.S. also achieves its objectives. The Iranian President could declare this victory by conducting several interviews to convey to the world that the West had backed down against Iran and changed its policies. This could be a win-win situation.

For this strategy to succeed, the U.S. must rely on international cooperation to support a policy of engagement and diplomacy. To achieve the objective, this strategy will require patience and time. Using stalling tactics, Iran could develop a nuclear weapon and thereby foil the strategy. The international community could mitigate this risk by closer cooperation and making swift decisions against Iran.

Another course of action is for the U.S. to launch limited military operations to destroy key Iranian nuclear facilities. The U.S. would probably use airstrikes to accomplish this task. The Air Force and Navy are not constrained from conducting operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>53</sup>

The airstrikes can physically eliminate most Iran's nuclear facilities. Even though the uranium enrichment facility close to Qom is built underground, U.S. airstrikes could severely damage accessibility to the facility and at least partially disable the operation. This operation is well within U.S. military capabilities and is thus feasible. For airstrikes to be effective, the U.S. military needs precise information on the location of key Iranian nuclear facilities. Air assets are readily available to conduct airstrikes against Iranian nuclear facilities.

Iran's failure to comply with UN Security Council resolutions may provide reasonable justification for such limited military operations. However, the U.S. may need to override Chinese and Russian diplomatic objections to airstrikes. Aerial engagement and destruction of nuclear facilities will most likely include collateral damage to civilian structures and loss of civilian lives. The U.S. airstrikes against Iran would be unpopular in the international community. So although airstrikes may be legally sanctioned, they would not be universally accepted.

Successful airstrikes will potentially delay Iran's nuclear program by several years. The airstrikes will destroy or damage most nuclear facilities; however, Iran's knowledge of nuclear technology will remain. An airstrike, even a 100% effective strike, provides only a short-term solution to the problem.

In response to airstrikes, the Iranians may rally around their flag and strengthen the fundamentalist Islamic government. U.S. pilots could be shot down and captured by Iranians, then used in a propaganda campaign. Hezbollah and Hamas could increase their terrorist activities in response to U.S. military action. Airstrikes would most likely

only delay the Iranian nuclear program. Once the U.S. attacks Iran, all other strategies will most likely be rendered moot.

The final course of action is an invasion of Iran to overthrow the regime. There is significant international opposition to a military action against Iran. In an interview with *Washington Post*, Secretary of Defense Gates admitted war with Iran would be "disastrous," but added that "the military option must be kept on the table, given the destabilizing policies of the regime and the risks inherent in a future Iranian nuclear threat."<sup>54</sup> A regime change would alleviate current U.S. problems with Iran. However, as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated, post-conflict issues may arise.

As it did in Iraq, a U.S.-led invasion of Iran could topple the current regime. Even though the U.S. military is engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan, additional brigades are available to invade Iran.<sup>55</sup> However, U.S. military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran cannot be sustained indefinitely with current U.S. military end strength. National Guard and Reserve units would have to be fully mobilized to support this mission. Also, the U.S. military will need to increase the number of brigades on active duty to sustain prolonged operations in the Middle Eastern countries. This strategy, just as in Iraq and Afghanistan, will be very costly and resource-intensive.

The U.S. is not likely to receive support from the international community to invade Iran. The Russians and Chinese will almost certainly oppose this course of action in the UN. Consequently, the U.S. will not receive much support from other countries, with a few possible exceptions. So the President must have strong support from the American people for this course of action. There is also the potential for a great number of U.S. casualties in an invasion of Iran.

An invasion and regime change in Iran would probably attain all U.S. objectives. However, an Iranian invasion will be very unpopular with the international community.

Iran would undoubtedly retaliate against targets within their reach, particularly Israel. The cost of a U.S. invasion of Iran would be extremely high, perhaps higher than operations in Iraq. The prospect of U.S. casualties and lack of international support could alienate the U.S. from its allies. Military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran will overly extend U.S. forces. To sustain such prolonged military operations, the U.S. may resort to returning to an unpopular draft and consequently lose the support of the American people. An Iranian invasion could interrupt the transit of oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz and trigger an increase in oil prices, which would disrupt the global economy.

### Recommendation

Although a U.S. airstrike could damage Iran's nuclear facilities, the gains would be temporary and this strategy will not improve U.S.-Iranian relations. The cost of a U.S. invasion of Iran would be extremely high. Military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran will overly extend U.S. forces. Also, an Iranian invasion could interrupt transit of oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz and subsequently increase oil prices.

On the other hand, an engagement and diplomatic strategy provides an opportunity to offer incentives for Iran to comply with UN resolutions. If it accepts the incentives to stop its nuclear program, the Iranian government has an opportunity to declare victory against the West while the U.S. also achieves its objectives. The Iranians will most likely announce their victory against the West through media. The goal of this strategy is to bring Iran back into the global community. The Obama administration is on the right track: It has already started to engage Iran. This

dysfunctional relationship has developed over thirty difficult years, so we cannot rebuild it overnight. This strategy will require patience and time. In the long run, Iran is likely to comply with international laws. Then in the next thirty years the U.S. can restore a relationship based on trust that will benefit both countries.

### Conclusion

For the past three decades U.S.-Iranian relations have been characterized by mistrust, hostility, and confusion. The two nations have much to gain by establishing positive diplomatic relations. If Iran is to abide by its global obligations, it could play an important role in the Middle East. The current Obama Administration has a new opportunity to engage Iran with a new diplomatic approach. Both countries should put the past thirty years aside and start a new relationship. Reestablishing the U.S. relationship with Iran requires understanding and patience on both sides. Before the start of any diplomatic initiatives two issues must be addressed: First, Iran must understand that its pursuit of nuclear weapons is universally unacceptable. Second, Iran must end its support for terrorist organizations. The future stability of the Middle East depends on reestablishing positive U.S.-Iranian relations.

### Endnotes

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