

## INTRACTABLE DILEMMA: SUSPENDING THE OBJECTIONABLE ELEMENTS OF IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM

BY

COLONEL KEITH R. HARRIS  
United States Army

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A:

Approved for Public Release.  
Distribution is Unlimited.

USAWC CLASS OF 2011

This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.



U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050

The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle State Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

*Form Approved*  
*OMB No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 22-03-2011		<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> Strategy Research Project		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b>	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> Intractable Dilemma: Suspending the Objectionable Elements of Iran's Nuclear Program				<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Colonel Keith R. Harris				<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Professor Daniel Y. Coulter Department of National Security and Strategy				<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>	
				<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>	
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Distribution A: Unlimited					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> Since 2005, the international community has sought to compel Iran to suspend the objectionable elements of its nuclear program: namely, its nuclear enrichment program; its heavy-water reactor program; and its ballistic missiles program. Nonetheless, Iran continues to not offer credible explanations regarding its nuclear program's purpose. Needless to say, all past efforts to convince Iran to be more transparent about these activities have not been successful; after all these years, it remains a seemingly intractable dilemma. This paper posits that as a credible response to the grave threat that a nuclear-armed or even a nuclear-capable Iran would pose to international peace and security, the international community must wisely employ its instruments of foreign policy: namely, engagement; sanctions; covert actions; and the threat of and/or use of military force. Finally, this paper will recommend a classic carrot and stick approach that the international community should pursue that will most likely, with strategic patience, lead to a successful diplomatic resolution of this critical issue once and for all.					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Nuclear Proliferation Treaty, NPT, Break-out, IAEA, Tehran Research Reactor, Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>  UNLIMITED	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b>  24	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
<b>a. REPORT</b> UNCLASSIFIED	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b> UNCLASSIFIED	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b> UNCLASSIFIED			<b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)</b>



USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**INTRACTABLE DILEMMA: SUSPENDING THE OBJECTIONABLE ELEMENTS OF  
IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM**

by

Colonel Keith R. Harris  
United States Army

Professor Daniel Y. Coulter  
Project Adviser

This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

U.S. Army War College  
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013



## **ABSTRACT**

**AUTHOR:** Colonel Keith R. Harris

**TITLE:** Intractable Dilemma: Suspending the Objectionable Elements of Iran's Nuclear Program

**FORMAT:** Strategy Research Project

**DATE:** 22 March 2011      **WORD COUNT:** 5,158      **PAGES:** 24

**KEY TERMS:** Nuclear Proliferation Treaty, NPT, Break-Out, IAEA, Tehran Research Reactor, Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant

**CLASSIFICATION:** Unclassified

Since 2005, the international community has sought to compel Iran to suspend the objectionable elements of its nuclear program: namely, its nuclear enrichment program; its heavy-water reactor program; and its ballistic missiles program. Nonetheless, Iran continues to not offer credible explanations regarding its nuclear program's purpose. Needless to say, all past efforts to convince Iran to be more transparent about these activities have not been successful; after all these years, it remains a seemingly intractable dilemma. This paper posits that as a credible response to the grave threat that a nuclear-armed or even a nuclear-capable Iran would pose to international peace and security, the international community must wisely employ its instruments of foreign policy: namely, engagement; sanctions; covert actions; and the threat of and/or use of military force. Finally, this paper will recommend a classic carrot and stick approach that the international community should pursue that will most likely, with strategic patience, lead to a successful diplomatic resolution of this critical issue once and for all.



## INTRACTABLE DILEMMA: SUSPENDING THE OBJECTIONABLE ELEMENTS OF IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM

For many years, the international community has sought to compel Iran to suspend the objectionable elements of its nuclear program: more specifically, its nuclear enrichment program; its heavy-water reactor program; and its ballistic missiles program. This has been a difficult task because Iran has not been forthcoming with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regarding its nuclear program's purpose. Moreover, Iran continues its intransigence by not providing credible explanations to the IAEA regarding the probable military dimensions of its nuclear program. Needless to say, all past efforts to convince Iran to be more transparent about the objectionable elements of its nuclear program have been unsuccessful; it remains a seemingly intractable dilemma. Given the grave threat that a nuclear-armed or even a nuclear-capable Iran would pose to regional and international peace and security, the international community must wisely use all viable instruments of foreign policy in attempting to resolve this matter.<sup>1</sup> This paper posits that as a credible response to the grave threat that a nuclear-armed or even a nuclear-capable Iran would pose to international peace and security, the international community must wisely employ its instruments of foreign policy: namely, engagement; sanctions; covert actions; and the threat of and/or use of military force. Finally, this paper will recommend a classic carrot-stick approach that the international community should pursue that will most likely, with strategic patience, lead to a successful diplomatic resolution of this critical issue once and for all.

## Background

From the 1950's to the present, Iran's nuclear program has had its share of stops and starts.<sup>2</sup> In 1970, Iran signed and ratified the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Later in 1974, Iran and the IAEA completed an IAEA Safeguards Agreement to the NPT. Under its Safeguards Agreement, Iran agreed to permit IAEA inspectors unfettered access to and inspection of its known nuclear facilities and materials. By the time of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran had abandoned its nuclear program. But, for whatever reason, in the mid-1990s, Iran restarted it. In 2002, the National Council of Resistance on Iran (NCRI), an Iranian exile group, reported the existence of some of Iran's secret nuclear facilities to the international community.<sup>3</sup> In order to avoid sanctions, Mr. Khatami, Iran's president at the time, suspended the program in 2003 and allowed more comprehensive inspections by the IAEA to take place. Also in 2003, Iran signed the Additional Protocol to its IAEA Safeguards Agreement. The Additional Protocol required Iran to grant access to and inspection of all clandestine nuclear facilities and nuclear material stockpiles. Additionally, under the terms of the Additional Protocol, Iran was required to respond to all IAEA questions regarding its nuclear program. Even though its ratification was pending, Iran agreed to immediately implement the Additional Protocol. Nevertheless, in spite of these inspections, and Iran's numerous ambiguous responses to IAEA questions about its program, the international community was not able to determine its purpose; it is not clear whether its purpose was to produce electricity and medical isotopes as Iran declares or produce nuclear weapons as many in the international community believe. As will be discussed later in this paper, there are indeed indicators that its purpose is the latter.

In January 2006, Mr. Ahmadinejad, elected president in August 2005, over the international community's objections, revived Iran's nuclear program. Unfortunately, Iran has never ratified the Additional Protocol to its IAEA Safeguards Agreement. To make matters worse, in 2006, Iran announced that it would stop adhering to it altogether. Iran believes that it had a valid reason to do so. Having to respond to IAEA inquiries about the so-called "military dimensions of its nuclear program," Iran felt that it would have been forced to unnecessarily reveal sensitive information about its conventional military forces. Even though the IAEA was and is willing to work with Iran on this issue, Iran has still chosen not to respond to any specific evidence about this ambiguous aspect of its nuclear program. Below is a list of the major issues associated with Iran's nuclear program and a very revealing IAEA assessment regarding the status of nuclear material in Iran:

Several elements contribute to an increased opacity of Iran's nuclear dossier, including reduced cooperation with the IAEA; non-implementation of the Additional Protocol; lack of answers to long-standing questions regarding the possible military dimension of the program; and a back-and-forth approach to negotiating on its nuclear program. From what is being monitored, there appears to be a slow-down in practically all areas of the [nuclear] program. At the same time, all of these issues have led to a stalemate: *While the IAEA has been able to confirm the non-diversion of nuclear material, it is not able to provide assurances that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful use* [italics mine].<sup>4</sup>

Over the intervening years since 2006, in response to Iran's repeated refusal to suspend the objectionable elements of its nuclear program, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has passed four resolutions: UNSC 1737 (2006); UNSC 1747 (2007); UNSC 1803 (2008); and UNSC 1929 (2010). The primary intent of these resolutions is best summed up in paragraph two of UNSC 1737 (2006):

Iran should, without further delay, suspend the following proliferation sensitive nuclear activities: all enrichment-related and reprocessing

activities, including research and development; and work on all heavy-water related projects, including the construction of a research reactor moderated by heavy water. The halt to those activities would be verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, UNSC 1929 requires that Iran refrain from any activities related to developing ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons and to ratify its Additional Protocol to its IAEA Safeguards Agreement.<sup>6</sup> Why are these “proliferation sensitive nuclear activities” or certain elements of Iran’s nuclear program objectionable to the international community? They are objectionable because Iran’s uranium enrichment related activities, its reprocessing activities, and its heavy-water reactor projects set the conditions for it to develop a nuclear weapon. How do these objectionable elements of Iran’s nuclear program do that? First, Iran’s uranium enrichment program can result in 90 percent highly-enriched uranium (HEU), the major ingredient in one type of nuclear weapon. Second, Iran’s reprocessing of spent fuel from its heavy-water reactor program results in plutonium; the major ingredient in another type of nuclear weapon. Iran cleverly continues to state that both these programs, its uranium enrichment program and its heavy-water reactor program, are designed to produce fuel for either power plants or for its Tehran Research Reactor. Iran appears to be a master at cloaking its nuclear program’s true intentions under the guise of it being only for civilian purposes.

Since 2006, the United States’ policy to counter objectionable elements of Iran’s nuclear program has been almost exclusively to rely upon the sanctions spelled out in UNSC resolutions or upon ones that it, certain other nations, and the European Union have imposed separately upon Iran. Over the course of the Bush and Obama Administrations, the United States has linked this policy approach with varying degrees

of engagement toward Iran. As a result, the *New York Times* reports that “so far, Iran has produced about 5,730 pounds [low enriched uranium (LEU)], enough, with considerable additional enrichment, to produce roughly two weapons.”<sup>7</sup> Back in August 2009, United States officials thought it would take the Iranians about a year to “convert nuclear material into a working weapon.”<sup>8</sup> Since media reports of successful covert actions programs against Iran’s nuclear program surfaced in 2010, the projections for when Iran would be able to produce a nuclear weapon have been considerably delayed.<sup>9</sup>

*Iran’s Nuclear Infrastructure.* Iran is constructing a heavy-water reactor at Arak. Its light-water reactor, the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant (BNNP), is scheduled to be operational by the end of this year. Iran is in the process of building another light-water reactor at its Darkhovin Plant. It has a Fuel Enrichment Plant (FEP) and Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant (PFEP) at Natanz, an above-ground nuclear site. It is constructing a previously undisclosed underground enrichment plant at Fordow, near the city of Qom. It is installing fuel fabrication equipment at its Fuel Fabrication Plant in Isfahan. Finally, its Tehran Research Reactor (TRR), built by the United States, has been in operation in Tehran since 1967; it produces medical isotopes used to treat cancer patients.<sup>10</sup>

*Bilateral/Multilateral Uranium Storage/Enrichment Agreements.* On October 1, 2009, Iran agreed to an internationally-backed plan to ship most of its LEU abroad for further processing in return for fuel rods for its Tehran Research Reactor (TRR): the so-called Geneva Fuel Swap Proposal. This was the closest the international community and Iran had ever come to arriving at a viable Iranian confidence building measure in the unproductive, years-long negotiations. Surprisingly, Iran made the first move; the

United States quickly responded to it. In June 2009, Iran expressed an urgent need for “...assistance in obtaining replacement fuel for the TRR, which Iran said would run out of fuel in late 2010.”<sup>11</sup> This was very important to Iran because “The TRR produces radioisotopes, mainly for use in treating an estimated 850,000 cancer patients per year....”<sup>12</sup>

This fuel swap proposal was very ingenious in that it was designed to satisfy Iran’s stated need for reactor fuel rods or assemblies for its TRR in order to produce medical radioisotopes for treatment of its cancer patients and at the same time satisfy the international community’s concern that Iran, after the fuel swap, not have enough LEU remaining that could be further enriched to weapons-grade HEU. How did the fuel swap proposal accomplish these twin objectives?

Under the proposal, fuel assemblies for use in making medical radioisotopes would be provided, if Iran first supplied the necessary LEU. The plan was for Iran to export to Russia 1,200kg of the 1,600kg that it was assumed to have produced as of 1 October 2009. *The 1,200kg, when further enriched and processed, can provide three reactor loads of TRR fuel. Coincidentally (or perhaps not), 1,200kg of 3.5% LEU is approximately the amount needed to produce enough weapons-grade HEU for a single bomb [italics mine].*<sup>13</sup>

Consequently, if this agreement had been implemented it would have accomplished two other significant outcomes: namely, (1) it would have “inaugurated a form of multilateralisation [sic] of the fuel cycle”<sup>14</sup> and (2) it would have “allowed Iran to claim that the international community had finally... accepted its successful enrichment activities as a legitimate part of a peaceful nuclear programme [sic].”<sup>15</sup> Thus, it would have been a win-win situation for all parties. Unfortunately, because of Iran’s internal domestic politics, discussed in more detail later in this paper, it reneged on this fuel swap proposal; Iran could not get past its desire for a simultaneous swap of its LEU, on

Iranian soil, with the Russian-provided fuel assemblies for its research reactor; the concept of storage of its LEU in a third country and a subsequent delivery of fuel rods for its TRR ultimately became unacceptable politically. This was a lost opportunity for Iran to make some significant progress on this issue. This paper posits that some version of this original fuel swap proposal should be implemented in the future in order to spark true engagement toward resolving this seemingly intractable dilemma.

On May 17, 2010, Iran agreed to a similar fuel swap proposal, brokered by Turkey and Brazil, in which it agreed to “ship 2,640 pounds of low enriched uranium to Turkey, where it would be stored. In exchange, after one year, Iran would have the right to receive about 265 pounds of material enriched to 20 percent from Russia and France.”<sup>16</sup> The international community rejected this proposal because the amount proposed for export represented an even lower percentage of the LEU that Iran had stockpiled at the time of the previous fuel swap proposal seven months earlier. Thus, within a matter of days, the UNSC passed UNSC 1929 (2010), imposing even stricter sanctions upon Iran for its intransigence.

*Influence of Iran’s Domestic Politics on its External Behavior.* In order to better understand how Iran makes strategic decisions regarding its nuclear program, it is useful to examine the influence of its internal domestic politics on its external behavior. As stated above, Iran’s internal domestic politics played a significant role in its reneging on its initial agreement to accept the Geneva Fuel Swap Proposal. President Ahmadinejad, in the wake of the disputed elections in June 2009 and the subsequent violent crackdown on protesters, needed a foreign policy victory in October 2009 in order to reaffirm his regime’s legitimacy at home and abroad.<sup>17</sup> It was damning that “...a

regime that still defined itself as revolutionary and populist had apparently lost control over the streets and public discourse, only regaining it by force.”<sup>18</sup> Not only does the regime’s legitimacy rest upon President Ahmadinejad’s shoulders, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei and the rest of the Iran’s political elite bear it also. Currently, power is constantly shifting among the various factions within the political elite, making it very difficult to reach consensus on strategic decisions.<sup>19</sup>

Tumultuous domestic political sniping, ranging from substantive to petty concerns, doomed the agreement regarding the original fuel swap proposal, an agreement in which President Ahmadinejad invested substantial political capital on an international stage. In spite of that fact, Majlis Speaker, Ali Larijani; Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei; Reformist presidential candidate, Mir Hossein Mousavi; Conservative presidential candidate, Mohsen Rezai; and Conservative parliamentarian, Hesmatollah Falahatpisheh vigorously opposed it for various reasons.<sup>20</sup> It is very important for the international community to understand that “the aftermath of the attempted 'LEU-for-fuel-rods' deal suggests that decision-making has not become easier in Tehran....”<sup>21</sup> Additionally, this episode demonstrates unequivocally that some among Iran’s political elite were not beyond opposing a mutually beneficial agreement between Iran and the international community, but for no other reason than that they “wanted to deny Ahmadinejad this, or any, major success.”<sup>22</sup> This was probably a hard lesson for some leaders among the international community to understand. Particularly, since it appeared that the P<sub>5+1</sub>s [United States, France, United Kingdom, China, and Russia + Germany] engagement activities would finally result in a successful outcome with Iran over its nuclear program. How could Iran’s political elite not have accepted a

fuel swap proposal that was in their nation's interest? If Iran had accepted this fuel swap proposal, it may have resulted in a relaxing of the sanctions and in Iran's gradual reintegration into the international community. However, politics is politics no matter where you are in the world. Even in a mature democracy like the United States, it was difficult for President Obama to get the necessary votes in the United States Senate in December 2010 in order to ratify the New START Treaty: a nuclear arms reduction treaty having significant national security interest for both the United States and Russia. Although the treaty was ultimately ratified, media reports revealed that some of the 26 Republicans who opposed it may have voted against it for purely partisan reasons.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, destructive political infighting is not unique to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

*Irrationality of Iran's Claims about Its Nuclear Program's Purpose.* As stated above, Iran has not been very forthright in its dealings with the IAEA and in its negotiations with the international community regarding the intent of its nuclear program. Moreover, Iran appears to relish geo-politically operating in a realm of intentional ambiguity when it comes to this issue. For example, "as long as Iran has no fuel-fabrication capability, there is no civilian-use justification for enriching [uranium] to 20%."<sup>24</sup> But, having commenced doing so in February 2010, in the aftermath of two failed bilateral/multilateral uranium storage/enrichment agreements, Iran's true intent may have been either to create leverage for future negotiations or to develop a nuclear weapon as soon as possible. Again, from Iran's point of view, ambiguity reigns at all times. Regardless of this fact, the international community has to be always on alert for two possibilities: namely, (1) minimal effort would be required for Iran to enrich uranium

from 20 to 90 percent and (2) how Iran might seek to cover its true intentions in doing so:

Although 20% seems a long way from the 90% level of enrichment that is considered weapons grade, the vast majority of the effort required to enrich natural uranium to weapons grade has already been expended by the 20% level. In fact, 72% of the effort to produce weapons-grade uranium is accomplished by the time the product is enriched to 3.5%. By the time the uranium is enriched to 20%, nine-tenths of the effort to reach weapons grade has been expended.... Production of enriched uranium at any of these higher levels would complicate IAEA detection of clandestine HEU production, because Iran could claim that any environmental samples showing signs of higher enrichment were due to contamination by the activity connected with claimed TRR fuel or target production.<sup>25</sup>

Without a doubt, the IAEA must be very vigilant in its routine inspections of Iran's known nuclear facilities in order to detect any possible HEU production. Finally, the IAEA must hold Iran accountable for any out of the ordinary higher enrichment levels it discovers.

*Iran's Sensitivity Regarding Threats to Its Sovereignty.* Before concluding this section on the background of Iran's nuclear program, it is important to examine why Iran, over the international community's strong objections, continues to refuse to comply with the demands of the UNSC resolutions regarding its nuclear program. One explanation may be that Iranians have internalized a fear that other states have encroached upon Iran's sovereignty for centuries; many of them may still chafe at the United States' involvement in the 1953 coup that installed the unpopular Shah as their leader and at the United States' support of Iraq during the eight-year Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s.<sup>26</sup> A second explanation for Iran's intransigent behavior regarding its nuclear program may be that since 2003 Iran most likely perceives itself to be boxed in or threatened by the presence of United States military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, two of its neighboring states, and by the United States' significant engagement activities and support arrangements with other nations in the region, including Israel, Pakistan, and

Turkey, an Arab member nation in NATO.<sup>27</sup> If what Iran perceives itself to have experienced in its past traumatic history and what it perceives itself to be currently experiencing today has bearing on its current behavior in negotiating a suspension to objectionable elements of its nuclear weapons program, then, rightly or wrongly, Iran may feel strongly that its very survival may depend upon becoming a nuclear-armed state as soon as possible. If Iran believes that that statement is a fact, then the challenge for the international community is to convince Iran that it is not. In order to accomplish that objective, the international community will be required to skillfully execute the right combination of the instruments of foreign policy that will be discussed in the next section of this paper.

### Instruments of Foreign Policy

*Engagement.* For most of the past ten years, the United States intentionally ruled out engagement, as an instrument of foreign policy, vis-à-vis Iran. As early as 2002, President Bush, in his State of the Union Address, labeled Iran as one of the “Axis of Evil” nations, along with North Korea and Iraq. Whether justified or not, that type of rhetoric from either side of this issue does not promote constructive engagement or dialogue among the concerned parties. As a result, the Bush administration waited until its last year in office in order to attempt to engage Iran. Needless to say, the engagement was not successful.<sup>28</sup> On the contrary, President Obama has sought from the very beginning of his administration to engage Iran; even while still a candidate for the President of the United States, he stressed that that would be his approach to Iran if he were elected<sup>29</sup>. Since becoming President, he publically reached out to Iran during his Cairo speech.<sup>30</sup>

Although Iran has repeatedly rebuffed President Obama's overtures, the Obama Administration still must seek to engage Iran on a much broader scale than just its nuclear program. In one such area that is ripe for further engagement, the Obama Administration and the Iranian Regime must acknowledge that they can both exercise a positive role in the stability of Afghanistan; a nation in which Iran and the United States have a mutual interest in it becoming a stable and prosperous nation.<sup>31</sup> In another critical area, the Obama Administration must seek ways to engage Iran on improving its deplorable human rights record. Although criticized for its handling of the Iranian uprisings, the Obama Administration was wise not to be too vocal in condemning the Iranian regime for the manner in which it treated protesters in the aftermath of its disputed presidential elections in June 2009. Being too vocal would not have been welcomed by the protesters. It would have undermined their movement because any sign of overt support from the United States, the Great Satan, would have played right into the regime's narrative that the protesters were being backed by the West. Although it does not have much to show for its engagement efforts directed toward Iran yet, the Obama Administration should not relinquish this approach; used in conjunction with other instruments of foreign policy, it has the potential to produce a positive outcome in resolving this seemingly intractable dilemma.<sup>32</sup>

*Sanctions.* From 2006 until the present, the international community has imposed sanctions on Iran because of its nuclear program. After the passage of the UNSC 1929 (2010), the United States and the European Union imposed even more restrictive sanctions "against military purchases, trade and financial transactions carried out by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, which controls the nuclear

program....<sup>33</sup> Without a doubt, sanctions require strategic patience on the part of those imposing them. Recognizing that some have argued that United States policy toward Iran being heavily reliant on sanctions has failed,<sup>34</sup> sanctions, employed in conjunction with other instruments of foreign policy, can place pressure on Iran that may have the desired effect of convincing it to suspend objectionable elements of its nuclear program.<sup>35</sup> The bottom-line regarding the effective use of sanctions is that they “can create negotiation leverage, to be relaxed as incentives or tightened as disincentives”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, “export controls,” associated with sanctions on enrichment components/spare parts, “have clearly worked to limit Iran's enrichment capabilities....”<sup>37</sup> With that fact in mind, the international community must give the sanctions imposed on Iran all the time that is necessary to achieve the desired effect; without a doubt, sanctions “have put the Iranian economy under significant stress.”<sup>38</sup>

In order for sanctions to be even more effective in changing Iran’s behavior, the Iranian people may have to endure significantly more hardships than they are now or have in the past:

...sanctions will only compel Tehran back to negotiations, prepared to make meaningful concessions, if the continuation of sanctions is seen as a threat to regime survival. In order for this outcome to materialize as opposed to spurring a tactical decision to reengage in talks, but make no concessions the Iranian people will need to endure some difficulty if the regime is to believe that the status quo is unsustainable. This hardship need not be of dire humanitarian consequence, but it will need to be sufficient to make the average Iranian feel that the present economic situation is intolerable and the future holds no real promise of improvement. Inflation, unemployment, and the termination of benefits (due to budgetary pressures) are all things that can create this sense.<sup>39</sup>

Finding the right mix of sanctions that truly have a negative impact on the Iranian people’s lives will necessarily have to be a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, if the outcome ultimately is that because of economic hardships resulting from more

restrictive sanctions, the Iranian people rebel and successfully overthrow the current regime and replace it with one that is more susceptible to suspending the objectionable elements of its nuclear program, then that would be a winning scenario for both sides. On the other hand, if the economic hardships resulting from more restrictive sanctions are too severe, the Iranian people may side with the current regime in detesting those institutions and/or nations that imposed the sanctions; thus, increasing the likelihood that the current regime would not be compelled to suspend the objectionable elements of Iran's nuclear program. There are just too many variables in order to be anywhere near prescriptive in developing and implementing a properly balanced sanctions regime. As was stated earlier, the best course of action to make sanctions effective is that they should be flexible enough "to be relaxed as incentives or tightened as disincentives."

*Covert Actions.* Recently, the knowledge of certain covert actions' effectiveness in disrupting Iran's nuclear program has appeared in the news media. The first example of this is the Stuxnet worm's devastating effect on Iran's centrifuges at its Natanz plant:

The worm itself now appears to have included two major components. One was designed to send Iran's nuclear centrifuges spinning wildly out of control. Another seems right out of the movies: The computer program also secretly recorded what normal operations at the nuclear plant looked like, then played those readings back to plant operators, like a pre-recorded security tape in a bank heist, so that it would appear that everything was operating normally while the centrifuges were actually tearing themselves apart.<sup>40</sup>

Although no nation has claimed credit for developing this worm, the United States, in collaboration with Israel, are most likely the responsible parties.<sup>41</sup> A second example of this is deliberately seeding the market with intentionally damaged nuclear enrichment equipment components/parts for purchase by Iran's buyers. Note the affect that that subterfuge has had on the efficiency of Iran's enrichment process:

Western intelligence organizations [sic] have identified Iran's procurement patterns and intentions, and have supplied faulty parts and compromised components to Iranian buyers. Until Stuxnet, the best-known sabotage attempt occurred when power-supply units that had been tampered with exploded in Natanz in April 2006, destroying 50 centrifuges.<sup>42</sup>

A final example of this is the assassination of some of Iran's key nuclear scientists.<sup>43</sup> If the media reports are correct, these covert actions have proven to be very effective in disrupting /delaying Iran's nuclear program.

From a moral point of view, the first covert actions described above are clearly justifiable. However, that is not the case for the last one: carrying out assassinations against Iran's top nuclear scientists and engineers. It would be more morally acceptable if whoever is behind these assassinations would resort to kidnapping instead. By kidnapping Iran's key technical personnel instead of assassinating them, it would serve two purposes; namely, (1) their absence would definitely delay most, if not all, facets of Iran's nuclear program and (2) they would be a valuable source of intelligence about Iran's nuclear program.

*Threat of and/or Use of Military Force.* Over the years, as a passive defense to potential military strikes by the United States and/or Israel, Iran has widely dispersed and buried its disclosed, and potentially undisclosed, nuclear facilities in an elaborate tunnel network.<sup>44</sup> The threat of and/or use of military force is feasible because the United States is now capable of causing significant damage to Iran's underground nuclear facilities at Natanz and Qum; as of December 2010, the United States was expected to have added a "precision-guided, 30,000-pound Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP)" to its inventory.<sup>45</sup> Using military force against Iran's nuclear weapons program facilities would only be acceptable if the international community could be convinced that Iran was on the verge of NPT breakout: producing a nuclear weapon and

associated missile delivery systems. Operating in the embarrassing shadow of the failed intelligence on the existence of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, convincing the international community of Iran's culpability would be a very high bar to cross over; the intelligence would have to be incontrovertible. If the United States and/or Israel used this instrument of foreign policy without UNSC consent, either because of an inability to convince the international community of the validity of the threat or because of a lack of time to do so because of an imminent NPT breakout, it is very likely that in the wake of the attack that Iran would continue its intransigence regarding its nuclear program. Additionally, even with excellent targeting intelligence, Iran may still have undisclosed nuclear sites after military air strikes have ended. Finally, one must emphasize that this instrument of foreign policy, whether executed by the United States, by Israel, or by both nations, must be used only as a last resort to prevent Iran from producing a nuclear weapon. It should not be undertaken without careful analysis of the intelligence and thoughtful deliberations among all parties because it could result in a disastrous rally-around-the-flag affect among Iran's populous and on the Arab Street for the Iranian Regime and Iran's nuclear program; this would not be a good strategic communications outcome for the United States and the international community.<sup>46</sup> It would possibly result in a setback on or reversal of any significant progress that the Obama Administration has made in the last two years to improve the United States' image in the Muslim World.

### Recommendations

The international community should continue to flexibly employ three out of the four instruments of foreign policy, mentioned above, in order to convince Iran to suspend the objectionable elements of its nuclear program. The three recommended

instruments of foreign policy are engagement, sanctions, and covert actions. The fourth instrument of foreign policy, the use of military force, should only be used as a last resort because it cannot lead to a long-term solution to this crisis; it would only delay Iran's quest to develop a nuclear weapon.<sup>47</sup> To the contrary, skillful use of the three recommended instruments of foreign policy in a carrot and stick approach to dealing with Iran regarding its nuclear program should ideally result in another fuel swap proposal very similar to the one agreed upon at Geneva in October 2009. Like the original fuel swap proposal, it must not leave a sufficient quantity of LEU in Iran that could be enriched to weapons-grade. If such a proposal could be agreed upon by all parties, it could potentially be a first step in the right direction toward an ultimate resolution to this dilemma.

### Conclusion

This paper examined the background of Iran's nuclear program and various instruments of foreign policy designed to address its probable military dimensions. As has been elaborated upon in this paper, this is a difficult problem to resolve. In implementing a combination of instruments of foreign policy to address this dilemma, one has to take into account Iran's past and recent history, its internal domestic politics, and its ambiguous claims about its nuclear program's purpose. This paper posited that the international community must skillfully apply constructive engagement, flexible sanctions, and precise covert actions in order to convince Iran to suspend the objectionable elements of its nuclear program. In doing so, the international community must practice strategic patience because there are no quick fixes to resolve this longstanding, seemingly intractable dilemma.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Michael A. Levi, "Limiting Iranian Nuclear Activities: Options and Consequences," *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 2011, 12-14.

<sup>2</sup> Olli Heinonen, "The Nuclear Program," *Atlantic Council*, (November 2010): 9.

<sup>3</sup> Paul K. Kerr, "Iran's Nuclear Program: Tehran's Compliance with International Obligations," *Congressional Research Service Report R40094*, February 15, 2011, 2

<sup>4</sup> Heinonen, "The Nuclear Program," 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, "UNSC Resolution 1737, December 23, 2006, [http://www.parstimes.com/history/un\\_1737.html](http://www.parstimes.com/history/un_1737.html) (accessed March 10, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Kerr, "Iran's Nuclear Program," 2

<sup>7</sup> Mark Mazzetti and David E. Sanger, "U.S. Assures Israel that Iran Threat is Not Imminent," *New York Times*, August 19, 2010, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/20/world/middleeast/20policy.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/20/world/middleeast/20policy.html?_r=1). (accessed March 10, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Nicoll and Jessica Delaney, eds., "Stuxnet: Targeting Iran's Nuclear Program," *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, 17, no. 8 (February 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Heinonen, "The Nuclear Program," 9-11.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Fitzpatrick, "Iran: The Fragile Promise of the Fuel-Swap Plan," *Survival*, 52, no. 3 (June-July 2010): 68.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 69; and see also Marc Champion and Jay Solomon, "Iran Agrees to Transfer Uranium Abroad," *Wall Street Journal*, October 2, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125438735077055655.html> (accessed March 10, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Volker Perthes, "Ambition and Fear: Iran's Foreign Policy and Nuclear Programme," *Survival*, 52, no. 3, (2010): 100

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> "Iran's Nuclear Program," *New York Times*, November 16, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/info/iran-nuclear-program/?inline=nyt-classifier>. (accessed March 10, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Perthes, "Ambition and Fear," 100-101.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 101. Note that "The relative influence of certain factions within the elite has also shifted: the traditional clergy has been losing ground, the Revolutionary Guard Corps has been

gaining influence (even though it is by no means socially or politically united), and the New Right, the ideological trend represented by Ahmadinejad, has gained more weight in an altogether smaller group.”

<sup>20</sup> Fitzpatrick, "Iran: The Fragile Promise," 73; see also Barbara Slavin, "The Iran Stalemate and the Need for Strategic Patience," *Atlantic Council*, (November 2010): 4.

<sup>21</sup> Perthes, "Ambition and Fear," 102.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Peter Baker, "Democrats Scramble to Save Votes to Ratify Nuclear Pact," *New York Times*, December 19, 2010, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/20/us/politics/20start.html?\\_r=1&scp=5&sq=why%20did%20republican%20oppose%20the%20New%20Start%20Treaty&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/20/us/politics/20start.html?_r=1&scp=5&sq=why%20did%20republican%20oppose%20the%20New%20Start%20Treaty&st=cse) (accessed March 14, 2011); see also Peter Baker, "Obama's Gamble on Arms Pact Pays Off," *New York Times*, December 22, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/23/world/23start.html?scp=3&sq=why%20did%20republican%20oppose%20the%20New%20Start%20Treaty&st=cse> (accessed March 14, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Fitzpatrick, "Iran: The Fragile Promise," 78.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-79.

<sup>26</sup> Perthes, "Ambition and Fear" 97.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> David A. Anderson, Blaine N. Wales and Scott Brunson, "A Nuclear Iran? Failed U.S. Foreign Policy Requires Compromise and Patient Multilateral Dialogue," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, 8, no 4 (Winter 2010): 53.

<sup>29</sup> Barack H. Obama, "Press Conference by the President," The White House, February 9, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/press-conference-president> (accessed March 21, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Obama, "Remarks by the President on a New Beginning," The White House, June 4, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09> (accessed March 21, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> Slavin, "The Iran Stalemate" 8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> "Iran's Nuclear Program," *New York Times*, November 16, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/info/iran-nuclear-program/?inline=nyt-classifier>. (accessed March 10, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> Anderson, Wales and Brunson, "A Nuclear Iran?" 51.

<sup>35</sup> Simon Henderson, "Diplomacy, Sanctions, Sabotage: Putting Pressure on Iran," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, January 19, 2011, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=3293> (accessed March 14, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Fitzpatrick, "Iran: The Fragile Promise," 86.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83.

<sup>38</sup> Slavin, "The Iran Stalemate," 5; see also Alireza Nader, "Iran Overhauls Subsidies in the Face of Sanctions," *Rand.org*, January 13, 2011, <http://www.rand.org/commentary/2011/01/13/GS.html> (accessed March 14, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Meghan L. O'Sullivan, "Iran and the Great Sanctions Debate," *The Washington Quarterly*, (October 2010): 17.

<sup>40</sup> William J. Broad, John Markoff and David E. Sanger, "Israeli Test on Worm Called Crucial in Iran Nuclear Delay," *New York Times*, January 15, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/16/world/middleeast/16stuxnet.html> (accessed March 10, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Alexander Nicoll and Jessica Delaney, eds., "Stuxnet: Targeting Iran's Nuclear Program," *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, 17, no. 8 (February 2011).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*; and Fitzpatrick, "Iran: The Fragile Promise" 82-83.

<sup>43</sup> Nicoll and Delaney, eds., "Stuxnet: Targeting Iran's Nuclear"

<sup>44</sup> William J. Broad, "Iran Shielding Its Nuclear Efforts in Maze of Tunnels," *New York Times*, January 5, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/06/world/middleeast/06sanctions.html> (accessed March 10, 2011).

<sup>45</sup> "Exclusive: Pentagon Delays New 'Bunker Buster' Bomb," *Reuters*, December 18, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5BH5IQ20091218>. (accessed March 10, 2011).

<sup>46</sup> Fitzpatrick, "Iran: The Fragile Promise," 87.

<sup>47</sup> David Blair, "Robert Gates: Bombing Iran Would Not Stop Nuclear Threat." *The Telegraph*, May 1, 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/5257343/Robert-Gates-bombing-Iran-would-not-stop-nuclear-threat.html> (accessed March 21, 2011).