

Routing

## *The Bottom Line on Iran* *The Costs and Benefits of Preventive War* *versus Deterrence*

by Justin Logan

### Executive Summary

It appears increasingly likely that the Bush administration's diplomatic approach to Iran will fail to prevent Iran from going nuclear and that the United States will have to decide whether to use military force to attempt to delay Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability. Some analysts have already been promoting air strikes against Iran, and the Bush administration has pointed out repeatedly that the military option is "on the table." This paper examines the options available to the United States in the face of a prospective final diplomatic collapse.

Evaluating the two ultimate options—military action on the one hand and acceptance and deterrence on the other—reveals that neither course is attractive. However, the evidence strongly suggests that the disadvantages of using military action would outweigh those of acceptance and deterrence. Attacking Iran's nuclear program would pose several problems: U.S. intelligence seems likely to be even poorer on Iran than it was on Iraq; Iran has hardened and buried many nuclear facilities in a way that would make them difficult to destroy;

Iran could respond in such a way that the United States would feel forced to escalate to full-blown regime change; and there would be a host of unintended consequences inside and outside Iran.

A policy of acceptance and deterrence is also an unattractive prospect. Iran would likely be emboldened by the acquisition of a bomb and could destabilize the region and inject more problems into an already bleak prospect for peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. Still, given the costs of the military option, the only compelling rationale for starting a war with Iran would be if there were good reason to believe that the Iranian leadership is fundamentally undeterrable. But available evidence indicates that Iran is deterrable and would be particularly so if faced with the devastating repercussions that would result from the use of a nuclear weapon. Therefore, the United States should begin taking steps immediately to prepare for a policy of deterrence should an Iranian bomb come online in the future. As undesirable as such a situation would be, it appears less costly than striking Iran.

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## **The United States has no “good” options with respect to the Iranian nuclear program.**

### **Introduction**

On May 31, 2006, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice held a press conference in the ornate Benjamin Franklin Room at the State Department to announce that the United States would be open to joining the European Union Three (EU3) negotiations on Iran’s nuclear program. This new approach represented a significant shift away from Washington’s previous attempts to pressure and isolate Iran and increased the chances for a peaceful solution to the conflict over Iran’s nuclear program.

Still, even Washington’s new approach to the Iran issue has a good chance of failing. President Bush added a potential “poison pill” precondition—that the Iranians suspend uranium enrichment before talks could take place.<sup>1</sup> For its part, Iran irritated Washington and the international community by waiting to reply months, rather than weeks, after having received the offer. Ultimately, Iran responded by saying that it was willing to enter talks, but not under any preconditions, defying the U.S.-led demand for Iran to suspend uranium enrichment before it would be allowed to enter into talks. At the time of this writing the United States is continuing to pressure its allies to sign on to a restrictive sanctions package against Iran, with seemingly little success.

More broadly, unless Washington offers to put security guarantees and overall diplomatic and economic normalization on the negotiating table—a so-called “grand bargain” approach—it is unlikely that Iran will decide that the benefits of a diplomatic deal will outweigh the costs.<sup>2</sup> Given the likelihood of failure, then, it is worth evaluating America’s options should the negotiating process fail to yield fruit.

The debate in Washington today includes many different policy proposals. Should the administration attempt to engineer regime change through internal subversion of the government in Tehran? Should the United States agree to negotiate without preconditions with Iran, offering it a grand bargain? Can UN sanctions change the behavior of the

regime in Tehran, or possibly cause its ouster?

This paper does not examine the diplomatic options currently being explored.<sup>3</sup> Instead, it focuses on the options that will be left to the United States if and when any nonmilitary strategy fails. It is thus an attempt to get to the “bottom line” with respect to the stand-off between the United States and Iran, and it asks the ultimate question: Would it be better to use military force in an attempt to stymie Iran’s nuclear program or to accept the eventual Iranian acquisition of a nuclear weapon and prepare for a policy of deterrence?

It is important to acknowledge at the outset that the United States has no “good” options with respect to the Iranian nuclear program. Any strategy will have significant downsides for the United States, and we should not expect to find a silver bullet that will make the Iran problem go away. Instead, we should seek to craft a realistic policy designed to minimize the damage to U.S. national interests that results from the conflict with Iran.

### **The Preventive War Option**

One possible approach to the Iranian question is starting a war in an attempt to delay Iran’s acquiring a nuclear capability. It is important to emphasize that this option does not involve eliminating Iran’s potential to develop a nuclear weapon. Experts agree that Iran’s nuclear infrastructure is far too diffuse to make that feasible, and even optimistic scenarios offered by pro-war commentators have estimated that military strikes could delay Iran’s nuclear program by roughly three years—a time frame within which some have argued that we could work to overthrow the government in Tehran.<sup>4</sup> Other commentators have argued that air strikes should be coupled with a campaign of internal destabilization, utilizing dissident groups to both disrupt the nuclear program and change the regime at the same time.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, initiating military action against Iran’s nuclear program would be an act of war,

and the Iranian government would react by defending itself. As will be discussed below, Iran's strategy of defense against a U.S. attack could involve further destabilizing Iraq, in particular the southern Shi'a region; conventional or possibly chemical or biological attacks against either U.S. personnel in the region or against Israel; the use of mines or civilian boats to covertly attack oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz, similar to the attack against the USS *Cole*; and a long, protracted guerrilla war should the conflict escalate to regime change and involve U.S. personnel on the ground in Iran. These possibilities must be factored into any decision about whether to start a war with Iran. It is worth, then, looking systematically at the possible results of the military option.

### **Problem #1: Worse Intelligence Than Iraq?**

The U.S. government appears to know very little about Iran's nuclear program. It is quite difficult to gather effective intelligence on a country with which America has not had commercial or diplomatic relations for more than two decades, and a successful attack against a nuclear program as dispersed and effectively hidden as Iran's apparently is would require very good intelligence. In 2002 the United States learned of startling advances in Iran's nuclear program after revelations regarding the Natanz enrichment facility and the Arak heavy water reactor were made very publicly by the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq's (MEK's) political arm, the National Council of Resistance in Iran (NCRI).<sup>6</sup> Given that these facilities would rank high on any list of potential targets in Iran, we must understand that the Iranian leadership knows that we know about them.

Are Natanz and Arak still the key sites to strike in order to damage Iran's nuclear program? If so, the Iranians would be leaving themselves vulnerable to just the sort of U.S. air strikes that they fear. It is far more likely that the leadership in Tehran has taken into account that those locations would be first on a list of U.S. aim points and has adjusted their programs accordingly, by either diversifying the locations even further than they were or by relocating nuclear activity.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the inherent difficulty of gathering information about a country with which we have had nearly no diplomatic or economic engagement for 27 years, there is reason to fear that what little intelligence we do have is of poor quality. According to James Risen of the *New York Times*, the entire Central Intelligence Agency network inside Iran was "rolled up" in 2004 when a CIA operative accidentally sent a full roster of U.S. assets inside Iran to an Iranian double agent. This, according to Risen, left the CIA "virtually blind in Iran."<sup>8</sup> Even before the "roll-up," a presidential commission concluded in 2004 that the U.S. intelligence community had "disturbingly little" information on Iran's nuclear activities.<sup>9</sup>

That assessment was echoed in August 2006 in a report for the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. That report noted that "American intelligence agencies do not know nearly enough about Iran's nuclear weapons program."<sup>10</sup> Further, the report argued:

Improving intelligence collection and analysis to better understand and counter Iranian influence and intentions is vital to our national security. The Intelligence Community lacks the ability to acquire essential information necessary to make judgments on these essential topics, which have been recognized as essential to U.S. national security for many, many years.<sup>11</sup>

Some neoconservatives loudly criticize the CIA for its pre-Iraq war failings, and disdain its capability to assess the Iranian program. At the same time, though, they seem to assume that the intelligence we—or they—possess on the Iranian nuclear program is good enough to make striking Iran's nuclear programs remarkably easy. On March 5, 2006, during a presentation to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Pentagon adviser Richard Perle presented the option thus:

I trust we know where [the Iranian nuclear facilities] are. If we don't know

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where they are, what should we think about a diplomatic solution? So, either we know where they are, or we don't, and if we know where they are, let me tell you that with six or eight B-2 aircraft . . . those facilities could be eliminated in a single evening.<sup>12</sup>

Other neoconservatives are guilty of making outright erroneous predictions. Former CIA director James Woolsey, for example, predicted in 1993 that Iran would have a bomb within 8 to 10 years, possibly sooner.<sup>13</sup> Vocal regime-change advocate Michael Ledeen warned in April 2003 of the supposed danger that Iran would be conducting a nuclear test in the summer of 2003.<sup>14</sup> Charles Krauthammer warned in January 2006 that "instead of being years away from the point of no return for an Iranian bomb . . . Iran is probably just months away."<sup>15</sup> Such predictions do not instill much confidence in the depth of knowledge held by outside commentators regarding Iran's nuclear program.

In reality, the difficulty of preventive strikes against Iran's nuclear program is closer to that described by Anthony Cordesman and Khalid al-Rodhan of the CSIS:

To be effective, a military strike against Iran's nuclear efforts would virtually have to attack all probable and possible Iranian facilities to have maximum impact in denying Iran the capability to acquire a nuclear weapon or ensuring that its efforts would be delayed for some years. . . . The problem for anyone who starts a shell game is that some players either will insist that all shells be made transparent or else will proceed to smash all the shells.<sup>16</sup>

The implications of intelligence shortcomings would be severe. As Jeffrey Record of the U.S. Air War College has pointed out, "an effective strategy of counterproliferation via preventive war requires intelligence of a consistent quality and reliability that may not be obtainable within the real-world limits of col-

lection and analysis by the U.S. intelligence community."<sup>17</sup> Although the analysis in this paper is based on open-source intelligence reporting, and it is possible that the classified materials contain a systematic intelligence picture of the Iranian nuclear program, it is far from clear that that is the case. Given the apparent intelligence shortcomings inside Iran, a policy of preventive war as counterproliferation seems unlikely to produce a decisive outcome.

### **Problem #2: Site Dispersal and Burial and the Question of Escalation**

Perle's suggestion that six or eight B-2 aircraft could eliminate Iran's nuclear program in a single evening simplifies a complex situation with the assumption that we know where the relevant Iranian nuclear facilities are. Some Iran hawks explicitly point to Israel's 1981 strike against Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor as a model.<sup>18</sup> That analogy is strained at best. The attack against Osirak was a targeted strike at one above-ground facility located roughly 10 miles outside of Baghdad in open desert terrain. By contrast, Iran's known and suspected (to say nothing of unknown and unsuspected) nuclear facilities number as many as 70, some of which are in or around civilian population centers such as Tehran.

Unlike the Osirak reactor, Iran's nuclear facilities are widely dispersed, and as Cordesman and al-Rodhan argue, "many of Iran's research, development, and production activities are almost certainly modular and can be rapidly moved to new sites, including tunnels, caves, and other underground facilities."<sup>19</sup> Given that the 2002 revelations about the sites at Arak and Natanz came as a bolt from the blue, it is worth considering whether our ignorance pre-2002 has now been replaced by an ignorance of the latest developments inside Iran. The notion that we have a complete or near-complete target set for Iran's nuclear facilities is not supported by the available evidence.

And there are other uncertainties about Iran's program, as well. Iran has alleged, for

example, that the facilities at Natanz are buried 18 meters underground, whereas retired Air Force colonel Sam Gardiner argues that they are 15 meters underground.<sup>20</sup> Either way, this would raise questions about how air strikes could destroy the facility. The most effective conventional bunker-busting bomb in the U.S. arsenal, the GBU-28, can only penetrate approximately six meters of rock and hardened concrete.<sup>21</sup> That depth would be insufficient to destroy some Iranian targets.

The United States could always go a step further and decide to use low-yield earth-penetrating nuclear weapons against such a target (or other, more deeply buried targets that we might not know about yet), but it would be extremely difficult to limit civilian casualties in the event of such an attack. Even a weapon with a yield of five kilotons, detonated roughly six meters underground (which is roughly the current penetrating depth of the most advanced U.S. bunker-busting nuclear weapon, the B61-11), would create a cloud of radioactive dust over an area of roughly three square miles.<sup>22</sup> Since many of Iran's nuclear facilities are located close to civilian populations, significant numbers of noncombatants could be exposed to dangerous levels of radiation.<sup>23</sup>

Still, some analysts echo Perle's remark about the ease with which the United States could set back Iran's nuclear program. Security scholar Edward Luttwak has claimed that "the targets would not be buildings as such but processes, and, given the aiming information now available, they could indeed be interrupted in lasting ways by a single night of bombing."<sup>24</sup> But here again, Luttwak's argument is based on a dubious assumption about the quality of U.S. intelligence:

Because of the continuing flow of detailed and timely information out of Iran, it is possible both to overcome the regime's attempts at dispersion, camouflage, and deception and—if that should become necessary—to target air strikes accurately enough to delay Iran's manufacture of nuclear weapons very considerably.<sup>25</sup>

As noted above, there is little evidence to support the claim that the United States has quality intelligence on the Iranian nuclear program. Even the MEK, which provided the explosive revelations about Natanz and Arak in 2002, has issued a slew of false intelligence reports.<sup>26</sup> The disadvantages of relying on information from exile groups with a vested interest in regime change should have been illustrated in Iraq.

It is the uncertainty about the scope of the Iranian program, coupled with a question of Iran's willingness to escalate the conflict, that is likely to lead to a full-blown war between the United States and Iran. Put another way, if the United States initiated air strikes against Iran's known nuclear facilities, would it stop there, or would it carry on to suspected nuclear as well as chemical and biological weapons sites? If not, Iran could presumably retaliate by using any unscathed weapons it may have. Would an air campaign attempt to eliminate Iranian air defenses, which have been piled up around the known nuclear sites? If not, American aircraft would be exposed to antiaircraft fire. What about Iranian command-and-control nodes or the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps? Ultimately, once Iran responded to a U.S. attack, would Washington target the Iranian leadership in Tehran?

The Fall 2004 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* sponsored a war game involving Iran.<sup>27</sup> Col. Gardiner, the retired Air Force officer and an expert war gamer, was asked to simulate a potential set of options for attacking Iran's nuclear program. A number of Republican and Democratic foreign policy experts were brought in to play the roles of secretaries of defense and state, CIA director, and White House chief of staff. After developing military plans and running them through the war game, Gardiner concluded: "After all this effort, I am left with two simple sentences for policymakers. You have no military solution for the issues of Iran. And you have to make diplomacy work."<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, *Newsweek* magazine reported in September 2004 that both the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency had conducted

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war games on Iran and that “no one liked the outcome.”<sup>29</sup> Gardiner would later conduct more exercises, increasing the number of aim points from 300 to 400, with at least 75 targets requiring penetrating weapons, only to conclude, once again, that the military option would not prevent eventual Iranian acquisition of a bomb.<sup>30</sup> Ret. Gen. Barry McCaffrey went so far as to argue on NBC’s *Meet the Press* that “the notion that we can threaten them with conventional air attack is simply insane.”<sup>31</sup>

In part, Gardiner and the participants in the *Atlantic* game came to their conclusion because of America’s imperfect intelligence on the Iranian program. In addition, it was easy for the participants to see how, in any potential military scenario, the aim points multiply and the conflict escalates. But some commentators have suggested that the very notion of a “targeted” campaign is wrong-headed.

Writing in the *Weekly Standard*, Ret. Gen. Thomas McInerney presented what he thought was a viable war plan. McInerney suggested an air assault targeting more than 1,500 aim points, involving 700 aircraft, 500 cruise missiles, and 28,000-pound bunker-buster bombs, all to be completed in less than 48 hours.<sup>32</sup> A massive strike along the lines of McInerney’s vision, while unlikely to be enacted, would constitute a major military attack against a sovereign state. Even if the strikes began as “targeted,” it is exceedingly unlikely that Washington would be able to prevent or even control the escalation of a conflict. The scale of McInerney’s plan could quickly become reality if a conflict were to escalate.

**Problem #3: Iranian Counterstrategies and Responses**

One problem with a preventive war strategy is that Iran has the ability to retaliate in a number of ways. First among them is the prospect that Iran’s political and military penetration of Iraq could lead to a rapid escalation of violence in that country and might well plunge the entire Persian Gulf region into chaos.

In early 2006, U.S. intelligence warned of the most likely tactics Iran could employ: long-

range missiles, secret commando units (presumably IRGC), and “terrorist allies planted around the globe.”<sup>33</sup> In particular, both the political and the security situations in Iraq could become nightmarish if the United States were to attack Iran. In January, powerful Shi’ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr announced that if Iran were attacked, Sadr would throw his support behind Iran.<sup>34</sup> Sadr’s large militia, the Mahdi army, has clashed repeatedly with U.S. troops, and Sadr has become a major player in Iraq’s national politics; he demonstrated his political influence most recently by prompting tens of thousands of supporters to take to the streets of Baghdad in August to profess support for Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah’s campaign against Israel by chanting “Death to America! Death to Israel!”<sup>35</sup>

According to former National Security Council official Kenneth Pollack, Iran’s Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has “allowed the [Iranian] intelligence services to deploy to Iraq in force and position themselves to fight a war there if necessary.”<sup>36</sup> Pollack concluded that if Iran decided to ratchet up its activity inside Iraq, our troubles in that country would “increase dramatically, perhaps even insurmountably.”<sup>37</sup> U.S. officials confirm this account, noting that Iranian agents have poured money and personnel into southern Iraq in an effort to create a “greater Iran.”<sup>38</sup> England’s Chatham House think tank went so far as to argue that “Iran has superseded [the United States] as the most influential power in Iraq.”<sup>39</sup>

Although it is possible to overstate Iran’s influence in Iraq (and in particular Iraqi Shi’ites’ degree of fealty to Iran), it is important to recognize the influence that Iran has cultivated in southern Iraq, and the implications that a U.S. assault on Iran could hold for the stability and viability of the Iraqi government.

Another worry about a U.S. attack against Iran is the potential for Iran to lash out against Israel. Mohammad-Ebrahim Dehqani, commander of the IRGC, stated in May 2006 that “wherever America does something evil, the first place that we will target will be Israel.”<sup>40</sup> In August, a mid-ranking Iranian cleric warned

that Israel would be in danger if it “makes an iota of aggression against Iran.”<sup>41</sup> It is no secret that both the Iranian leadership and Iranian public see Israel and the United States as close allies and would look upon an attack by one of them as an act of war by both.<sup>42</sup>

The contours of a potential Iranian response against Israel are uncertain. Iranian foreign minister Manoucher Mottaki, in an interview with the *Guardian* newspaper, curtly stated that “the Zionist regime, if they attack, will regret it.”<sup>43</sup> The recent violence in Lebanon and northern Israel has underscored another potential Iranian tactic: the use of proxies such as Hizbullah to attack Israel. Even in the limited conflict between Hizbullah and Israel, the Arab force was able to achieve surprising tactical successes, even against hard Israeli targets. Anti-tank missiles struck 47 Israeli tanks, completely destroying 15 or 16 of them.<sup>44</sup> More notably, Hizbullah’s ability to use a radar-guided missile to disable an Israeli warship on patrol in the Mediterranean Sea indicated a new level of sophistication in its attacks.<sup>45</sup> In addition, Hizbullah was able to kill 119 Israeli soldiers in the conflict, including several members of the elite Golani brigade.<sup>46</sup> Despite the deaths of more than a thousand Lebanese civilians, Hizbullah was able to avoid defeat by the elite Israeli military.<sup>47</sup>

Presumably, if Iran were under attack, Hizbullah would be deployed more fully against Israel, inflicting much more damage than did its recent tactics. If Iran were to assault Israel directly, the United States could find itself in a situation similar to the predicament during the first Gulf War, attempting to keep Israel out of a conflict for fear that Israeli involvement could cause the war to escalate and spread throughout the region. Although it is uncertain whether Iran possesses large quantities of chemical and biological weapons, if it does possess usable chemical or biological weapons, it may decide to use them against Israel or even against U.S. troops in Iraq, or possibly even against U.S. territory. This prospect would become far more likely if a conflict escalated and threatened the survival of the Iranian regime.

Terrorism analyst Daniel Byman says that Iranian attacks against the U.S. homeland are “less likely” than attacks against U.S. interests overseas, but warns that they are “far from impossible.”<sup>48</sup> Former chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee Bob Graham stated after the 9/11 terrorist attacks that Hizbullah was the terrorist group with the largest presence inside the United States.<sup>49</sup> Serving as deputy secretary of state in 2003, Richard Armitage wondered whether “Hezbollah may be the ‘A-Team of Terrorists’ and maybe al-Qaeda is actually the ‘B’ team.”<sup>50</sup> Former U.S. counterterrorism officials Richard Clarke and Steven Simon worry that the forces Hizbullah could deploy against the United States are “far superior to anything Al Qaeda was ever able to field.”<sup>51</sup> Provoking a full-scale conflict with Hizbullah could have significant consequences if Armitage’s and Clarke and Simon’s thinking is accurate.

Although Israel and the United States have suggested that they may respond to nonconventional attacks with nonconventional means, these threats might not hold as much import if the conflict were to escalate to the point that the Iranian regime’s survival was in jeopardy. A cornered government in Tehran that felt it had nothing to lose would likely act far more recklessly than a government that felt confident of its survival.

Paradoxically, the American emphasis on “force protection” that has helped to limit U.S. casualties in Iraq could make U.S. troops more vulnerable to targeted strikes by Iran. By stationing U.S. troops on remote bases with a secure perimeter, policymakers have kept them relatively safe from vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices and other perils of occupying Iraq, but these secure and remote locations could make relatively easy targets for focused attacks by conventional forces like Iran’s.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, it is not just the troops themselves that are vulnerable. As the old military adage holds: “Amateurs talk strategy. Professionals talk logistics.” And U.S. supply lines through southern Iraq would be highly vulnerable to sabotage and attack, which could

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quickly imperil the entire U.S. occupation. Nearly all of the supplies that come into Iraq are transported from Kuwait through southern Iraq, in supply trucks driven by foreign civilians. As Patrick Lang, former head of the Near East bureau at the DIA, has pointed out: “If the route is indeed turned into a shooting gallery, these civilian truck drivers would not persist or would require a heavier escort by the U.S. military. It might then be necessary to ‘fight’ the trucks through ambushes on the roads.”<sup>53</sup> As Lang explains, it is a difficult and resource-consuming endeavor to protect supply convoys over hundreds of miles of hostile territory.

Another concern is that Iran could attempt to use mines or small skiffs armed with anti-ship weapons or rigged for suicide attacks to shut down or constrict oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly 40 percent of the world’s oil flows.<sup>54</sup> Michael Eisenstadt of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy has argued that the strait itself could not be blockaded by the forces Iran could deploy—that even its narrow shipping lane is “too wide and too deep to be obstructed.”<sup>55</sup> While that may be true in the long term, Vice Admiral Lowell E. Jacoby, director of the DIA, testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2005 that “Iran can briefly close the Strait of Hormuz, relying on a layered strategy using predominately naval, air and some ground forces.”<sup>56</sup>

An attempt to close off the strait would be a risky gambit both diplomatically and militarily. Doing so would invite wide opprobrium from the international community, since it would cause oil prices to skyrocket and could expose Iran’s limited naval capabilities to the vastly superior U.S. Navy. (Iran possesses only three Kilo-class submarines and a handful of vessels designed for mine laying.)<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, when Iran attempted to cause mischief in the strait in 1988, during the so-called tanker war, U.S. naval forces showed near-total dominance in the water, disabling six Iranian vessels and attacking two oil platforms used by Iran for intelligence monitoring.<sup>58</sup> Still, Iran could take a decidedly low-

tech approach to the strait, attempting at the least to raise insurance premiums on tankers traveling through it to prohibitively high levels. Raising insurance premiums (and, accordingly, the cost of petroleum products) would not require the infliction of much damage on ships, per se—it would only require that insurers become nervous that there is enough potential danger ahead that they hedge against this risk by raising premiums. Iran could attempt to use a naval version of the asymmetric warfare that the Iraqi insurgents are using—and history indicates that if they were creative, the Iranians could cause notable damage.

Such a low-tech approach would emphasize quantity, not quality, of mines. Minesweeping and detection are particularly difficult tasks, and a strategy that deployed an irregular pattern of mines would not need the use of high-tech mine-laying vessels or submarines. Mines could be dropped off the back of commercial vessels, to potentially strike oil tankers (or naval vessels) attempting to transit the strait specifically or the Persian Gulf more generally.<sup>59</sup> According to Anthony Cordesman, the Iranians possessed roughly 2,000 such mines as of 2004.<sup>60</sup> And during a test in July 2006, U.S. mine countermeasure vessels stationed in Bahrain were judged to have serious technical shortcomings, including dysfunctional mine warfare hardware “hampered by cracks and leaks in equipment, damaged wires and cables, faulty indicators and exposed electrical wiring.”<sup>61</sup>

And Iran has surely attempted to determine the weakest points of the U.S. Navy. The 2000 attack on the USS *Cole*, in particular, has no doubt been a topic of interest for Iranian strategists. When al-Qaeda used a suicide boat to blow a 40-by-40-foot hole through the hull of the USS *Cole*, a state-of-the-art American warship, one key weakness of the powerful U.S. Navy was exposed. Although the navy has since increased countermeasures to guard against a similar attack, such as sensors to track smaller vessels, and presumably changed rules of engagement, Admiral Vern Clark remarked after the *Cole* attack that “it would be extraordinarily difficult to have ever observed [the



attacking boat] in time to do anything to have stopped it.”<sup>62</sup>

The frigate USS *Samuel B. Roberts* was severely damaged and nearly sunk in 1988 by a mine,<sup>63</sup> and the USS *Princeton* (a guided-missile cruiser) and USS *Tripoli* (an amphibious assault ship) were badly damaged during the Persian Gulf war, also by mines.<sup>64</sup> Attacks of this kind may be appealing to Iran, should it come under attack by the United States. According to news reports, the Pentagon is “particularly sensitive” to the risk of similar attacks.<sup>65</sup>

If a 2002 war game is any indication, that sensitivity is apt. During a \$250 million war game called Millennium Challenge, a crafty Marine general, Paul Van Riper, was in the role of commander of the “red team,” the theoretical force opposing the United States in a conflict very much like that which the United States could face in the Persian Gulf. Van Riper used a low-tech strategy of suicide boats and aircraft, launching a sneak attack that killed thousands of U.S. sailors and sent 16 U.S. naval vessels to the bottom of the sea. Joint Forces Command, which sanctioned the war game, then reset it, limiting the tactics Van Riper could use, and thus tipping the scales in the U.S. side’s favor. In protest, Van Riper quit his position as the commander of the red team. Describing his decision to step down, Van Riper remarked that his main concern was that “we’d see future forces trying to use [similar tactics] when they’ve never been properly grounded in any sort of an experiment.”<sup>66</sup>

The real danger that Iran would attempt to mine or otherwise disrupt traffic through the Persian Gulf or Strait of Hormuz would likely occur well into a conflict; it is unlikely to be Iran’s first response to an attack. Still, given the likelihood that even a “limited” assault against Iran’s nuclear facilities could escalate to full-blown war, the prospect of some Iranian attempt to disrupt oil shipments—or even assault U.S. naval vessels—in the Strait of Hormuz should not be discounted.

It is relatively unlikely that Iran would attempt to sustain a cutoff of its own oil to world markets. As Secretary Rice has noted,

“I think something like 80 percent of Iran’s budget comes from oil revenue, and so obviously it would be a very serious problem for Iran if oil were disrupted on the market.”<sup>67</sup> Although the figure is closer to 60 percent, the secretary’s logic stands.<sup>68</sup>

Undersecretary of state for political affairs R. Nicholas Burns expanded on Rice’s comments:

The fact that Iran has oil power has not made one whit of difference in our determination to stop them from acquiring nuclear weapons. I don’t think it has with our allies, either. We are not going to allow Iran’s supposed oil power to exert any leverage over us.<sup>69</sup>

Rice’s and Burns’s recognition that Iran would be unlikely to disrupt its oil flows is convincing. At the same time, it calls into question one of the fundamental assumptions about U.S. security policy in the Middle East. Since the Reagan administration, one of the cornerstones of U.S. policy in the Middle East has been to maintain a presence of U.S. ground troops in the region in order to ensure that oil would make it out of the ground and to market. (Originally, this deployment was spawned by fears that the Soviet Union would attempt to take over Iranian oil fields.)<sup>70</sup> However, Rice’s and Burns’s recognition that Iran (and, by logical extension, other countries in the Persian Gulf) has every incentive to get its own oil securely to market seems to remove the argument that the U.S. military must be in place to secure the oil. That is, it is oil-producing regimes in the region that have the highest incentive to make sure their oil is sold, since so much of their own gross domestic product (and government revenue) comes from their oil exports.<sup>71</sup>

Doubts that Iran could close the Strait of Hormuz, and doubts that Iran would take its oil offline, however, should not remove fears about either the security of the strait or skyrocketing oil prices. Iran could calculate that doing limited damage to traffic in the Strait of Hormuz would be worth the trouble, in

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Washington's  
hit list.**

that it would raise the price of oil, which would increase Iranian revenues. According to Cambridge Energy Research Associates, a \$5 increase in oil prices would put an additional \$85 million per week into Iran's coffers, so Iran could decide that some—limited—mischief in the strait would be worth the consequences.<sup>72</sup>

Although it is impossible to predict what world oil prices would do in the wake of a U.S. attack, knowledgeable observers have estimated that oil could, for a time, move well above \$100 per barrel. Deutsche Bank analyst Adam Sieminski estimated that a strike on Iran could produce oil prices of \$100 per barrel, and Global Insight chief economist Nariman Behravesh estimated \$120 per barrel.<sup>73</sup>

Or, take another volatile period of oil production in the Persian Gulf for comparison. From 1978 to 1981, combined Iranian-Iraqi output plummeted from 7.8 million barrels per day (mbd) to 2.4 mbd.<sup>74</sup> World production dropped during that period from 60.16 mbd to 56.05 mbd.<sup>75</sup> As a result, world prices went from \$19.67 per barrel in 1978 to \$53.74 per barrel (both in 2000 dollars) in 1981.<sup>76</sup> The massive reduction in Iranian-Iraqi output in 1978–81 resulted in a 6.8 percent drop in world production over the same period, which led to a 173 percent increase in world price. Today, Iran produces 4.14 mbd, or 5.6 percent of world output.<sup>77</sup>

The Saudi ambassador to the United States, Prince Turki al-Faisal, estimated that an attack on Iran could cause prices to triple. Although al-Faisal may be operating from multiple motives in publicly describing a worst-case scenario, he also highlights the fact that it may not be only Iranian oil shipments that are disrupted: al-Faisal worried that “the whole Gulf will become an inferno of exploding fuel tanks and shot-up facilities.”<sup>78</sup>

**Problem #4 – Unintended Consequences**

The United States would likely also suffer serious unintended consequences if it were to attack Iran. These would include causing even more nuclear proliferation, as Washington's adversaries concluded that nuclear weapons

were the only way of deterring a U.S.-led regime change; causing large-scale civilian casualties, which would further pollute America's image in the world; and damaging the already limited prospects for political and economic liberalization inside Iran.

On the issue of proliferation, since the end of the Cold War, the United States has embraced a transformative foreign policy that has focused on fundamentally altering the international order. This approach is seen as inherently dangerous to many countries, given U.S. military action against Serbia and Iraq, among other nations, as well as loose talk about “regime change” in certain target states, and support for regime-changing “color revolutions” in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. In addition, after the September 11 attacks, President Bush identified a list of enemy states, and explicitly put them on notice in the infamous “axis of evil” speech. Of those countries, the one that the United States suspected of having nuclear weapons, North Korea, has been essentially untouched. The one country we were certain did not have nuclear weapons, Iraq, was invaded. As Kenneth Pollack has pointed out, “The Iraq example coupled with the North Korea example probably is part of the motivation for some in Iran to get a nuclear weapon.”<sup>79</sup>

In addition, Iran lives in a notoriously rough neighborhood: Both India and Pakistan possess nuclear weapons, as does Russia, just to the region's north. Turkey rests under the NATO umbrella, and Israel possesses nuclear weapons of its own. In the end, attacking Iran would only further underscore the dilemma faced by states that find themselves on Washington's hit list. Without nuclear weapons, there is no assurance that the United States will not attack—other than supine acquiescence to Washington's various demands.<sup>80</sup> As Nobel laureate Thomas Schelling has pointed out, the perverse fact is that America's counterproliferation policy is a prime driver of proliferation.<sup>81</sup>

The next unintended consequence would be the effect Iranian civilian casualties would have on American diplomatic standing and the hatred of America that they would generate in Islamic countries. While concern for

civilian casualties should not be a debate stopper in terms of policy decisions, any decision to attack Iran should be evaluated in terms of how it would affect the war on terror. Even the vastly more limited attack against Lebanon by Israel in the summer of 2006, which produced casualties in at least the high hundreds, resulted in an extremely detrimental political blowback against Israel. Civilian casualties in Iran would be aired again and again in Arab and Muslim media, and the political consequences would almost certainly be worse for America than the consequences Israel suffered in the Lebanon war.

Iran hawks are fond of pointing out the many false predictions that an amorphous “Arab street” would rise up in response to various American policy choices. Although many of those predictions failed to come true, public opinion in the Islamic world should be taken seriously. Keeping the recruiting pool for al-Qaeda and similar organizations small should be a goal of U.S. foreign policy. And the fact is that starting a war with a third Islamic country in the span of several years surely would be used as evidence that Osama bin Laden’s predictions about U.S. intentions were correct.

As a number of recent U.S. government reports have admitted, the main driver of Islamic extremism is American foreign policy. The Government Accountability Office conceded in May 2006 that “U.S. foreign policy is the major root cause behind anti-American sentiments among Muslim populations.”<sup>82</sup> Two years earlier, the Pentagon’s Defense Science Board made the point more forcefully:

American direct intervention in the Muslim World has paradoxically elevated the stature of and support for radical Islamists, while diminishing support for the United States to single-digits in some Arab societies. . . . Muslims do not “hate our freedom,” but rather, they hate our policies.<sup>83</sup>

If we are going to fight a war against Islamic terrorism, it would be wise to take

into account the factors that motivate it. Although American foreign policy should not be a popularity contest, policy choices that worsen public opinion of the United States in the Muslim world are strategically relevant and would be detrimental to the war on terrorism.

And finally, the effects that a U.S.-Iran war would have on the prospect of gradual Iranian political and economic liberalization—the factors most relevant to the eventual erosion of the clerical regime in Tehran—would be dire. It is difficult to find Iranian dissidents who support an American attack on the Iranian nuclear program; even the hardline NCRI and MEK have said that they oppose military action. Nobel laureate and Iranian dissident Shirin Ebadi has warned that “any attack on Iran will be good for the government and will actually damage the democratic movement.”<sup>84</sup>

San Francisco businessman Hamid Moghadam and Hoover Institution scholar Abbas Milani, who founded the Iran Democracy Project, think that a U.S. attack on Iran would be a blow to the democratic movement inside that country. Milani has argued that “an American or Israeli attack on the country would sound the death knell of [the democratic] movement.”<sup>85</sup> Moghadam argues that the trouble is that the Bush administration “doesn’t know much about how things work in that part of the world, so it is misled by people who appear to know what they’re doing.”<sup>86</sup>

The people misleading the Bush administration are American neoconservatives, who have argued alternatively that bombing Iran would be good for democracy, or that the effect on liberalization is irrelevant. William Kristol claimed on the Fox News Channel in July 2006 that bombing Iran could lead the Iranian opposition to overthrow the government. Kristol argued that “the right use of targeted military force . . . could cause [the Iranian people] to reconsider whether they really want to have this regime in power.”<sup>87</sup>

The American Enterprise Institute’s Reuel Marc Gerech, while agreeing with Kristol that starting a war with Iran “would actually accelerate internal debate and soul-search-

**Any decision to attack Iran should be evaluated in terms of how it would affect the war on terror.**

**The issue of undermining the reform movement in Iran is (or should be) at the center of the debate about whether or not to bomb.**

ing,” believes that that factor is largely beside the point. In Gerecht’s view, the nuclear clock, under the best circumstances, is still moving faster than the regime-change clock, so there is little point in worrying about what a war would do for Iranian liberalization.<sup>88</sup>

The issue of undermining the reform movement in Iran is (or should be) at the center of the debate about whether or not to bomb. Again, most scholars who argue in favor of attacking Iran do so in the hopes that it will delay, not prevent, Iran’s acquisition of a nuclear capability. Then comes the hope either that we could tolerate a subsequent, less confrontational Iranian regime’s acquisition of nuclear weapons or that the next regime would renounce nuclear weapons. But if attacking in the first place delays or disrupts the prospect of a different regime taking power, that entire line of reasoning collapses. To the extent that setting back the date Iran acquires a nuclear capability also strengthens the current regime’s hold on power, the goal of preventing the current regime from getting a bomb is not furthered.

Finally, there is reason to worry even if, against all evidence, Kristol and Gerecht turned out to be correct. Many of the leading proponents of “limited” military strikes against Iran’s nuclear program have regime change very much in mind as the ultimate strategy for Iran. As Gerecht has written forcefully, “In the end, only democracy in Iran will finally solve the nuclear and terrorist problems. Ditto for the rest of the Middle East.”<sup>89</sup> By this logic, an escalation from limited strikes to forcible regime change in Iran could be a blessing in disguise. What if the Iranian people did decide to overthrow their government under bombardment from the United States? What would Iran’s 70 million people do then?

Our strategy of “creative destruction,” in Michael Ledeen’s apt phrasing, has led to much destruction and little creation in Iraq. Who would take power in Iran? Would the deep ethnic and sectarian fissures that are touted as such a source of weakness for the Iranian regime bubble up to the surface and create a low-level civil war as they have in

Iraq?<sup>90</sup> What would be the medium- and long-term strategic implications?

The prospect of targeted air strikes eventually escalating to regime change raises a whole host of questions about the postwar environment, and these questions have not been addressed by war proponents. Similar questions either were not asked or were answered with propaganda and wishful thinking before the Iraq war, and America is still paying the price. We should not repeat the same process with respect to Iran.

## **The Deterrence Option**

Although the preventive war option for dealing with Iran’s nuclear program is remarkably unappealing, the prospect of deterrence raises a host of undesirable consequences as well. A nuclear-armed Iran would likely be bolder in advancing its regional political goals, many of which are currently opposed by the United States. It could press for dominance in the Persian Gulf region, which could trigger further proliferation. It would likely attempt to cast itself as the font of anti-Israel sentiment in the Muslim world, and could ratchet up its anti-Israel activities.

That said, some commentators have inflated the risks of a nuclear Iran, advancing the argument that the mullahs suffer from a suicidal impulse that will prompt them to launch a nuclear first strike. As will be seen below, this argument, given the available evidence, seems overblown. A much more likely result, based on the lessons of history, deterrence theory, and simple logic, is that a nuclear-armed Iran would constrain U.S. policy in the Middle East. Perversely, there is a chance that this constraint could lead to a more stable Middle East.

But the first concern must be the question of rationality. Some scholars have argued that strategic thinking in Iran is dominated not by the balance of power, or by dispassionate calculation of risk versus reward, but rather by theological and ideological imperatives. To those scholars, Iran would be prone to making strate-

gically foolish decisions—potentially even a suicidal nuclear first strike—based on its leaders’ religious or ideological views. This argument deserves serious consideration, since accepting a view of the Iranian leadership as irrational would make all other concerns moot.

### **Problem #1 – Are the Mullahs Crazy?**

The question of how to deal with the Islamic republic would change dramatically if one were to accept the premise that the regime in Tehran acts not according to rational calculations but to theological and ideological ones. The allegation that the Islamic republic is fundamentally undeterrable has become common.<sup>91</sup> Other commentators have argued that the situation is akin to that of Europe in the 1930s, with President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the role of Hitler.<sup>92</sup> Bernard Lewis, the distinguished Princeton historian who has advised Vice President Cheney, went so far as to claim that Ahmadinejad and the Iranian government “clearly believe” that “the cosmic struggle at the end of time . . . ending in the final victory of the forces of good over evil” has begun.<sup>93</sup>

Hawkish commentators seize upon President Ahmadinejad’s many bizarre and reprehensible statements about the Holocaust, and the Iranian government’s desire to “wipe Israel off the map.” Although the comments have gained new currency in the context of the nuclear dispute, it is important to recognize that these provocations have been a part of Iranian boilerplate for years, and similar statements have been uttered by a broad swathe of political figures, including Ayatollah Khamenei and former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Similarly, the repellent chants of “Death to America! Death to Israel!” that are shouted at Friday prayers in Tehran are a long-standing feature of Iranian society and have even been waning in fervor in recent years.<sup>94</sup>

Such consistency is not particularly reassuring in itself, but it does demonstrate that there has not been a noticeable shift in policy in Tehran that has thrown the levers of power to a madman who acts outside the standard (admittedly poisonous) political rhetoric of Iran. And continuity in rhetoric does not suggest change

in policy. Moreover, knowledgeable commentators such as Kenneth Pollack, after surveying the history of U.S.-Iranian relations and prospecting the options available to deal with the nuclear program, have concluded:

This regime probably can be deterred, either from using its nuclear arsenal or from taking other aggressive actions in the belief that its nuclear arsenal will itself deter countermoves by the United States or other states. Although willing to tolerate very high costs when core interests are threatened, key members of this regime—including Khamenei and Rafsanjani—have also demonstrated that they will concede in the face of heavy damage and are often unwilling to suffer more modest damage when their core interests are not threatened.<sup>95</sup>

Other veteran Iran watchers agree: Judith Yaphe and Charles Lutes of the National Defense University argue that although Iran and the United States have long been adversaries, Iran has not acted “carelessly or irrationally,” and they conclude that “in the final analysis, it is likely that the Iranian regime could be deterred from overt nuclear use.”<sup>96</sup> Cordesman and al-Rodhan concede similarly that the deterrence option “is one that many commentators need to consider in more depth.”<sup>97</sup> Reuven Pedatzur, a political scientist at Tel Aviv University and Israeli air force veteran, puts things still more bluntly:

Past experience shows that the radical Iranian regime, headed by the most extreme of them all, Ayatollah Khomeini, behaved with absolute rationality at the moment of truth.<sup>98</sup>

John Chipman of the International Institute for Strategic Studies has pointed to the need to start gathering an alliance of regional states to prepare for a policy of containment should an Iranian bomb come online.<sup>99</sup> Republican senator John Warner has also endorsed a policy of deterring Iran.<sup>100</sup>

**Accepting a view of the Iranian leadership as irrational would make all other concerns moot.**

**Iran's leadership looks more than rational—it appears to be quite savvy and pragmatic.**

Oddly, even Reuel Marc Gerecht, now one of the foremost advocates of starting a war with Iran, admitted in 1993 that “Rafsanjani and the clerics in general are not wild-eyed zealots,” and that “theories of deterrence work just as well between Muslim states as they do between liberal democracies and communist dictatorships.”<sup>101</sup> And analyst Thomas Donnelly concedes that traditional containment is the best possible policy for dealing with Iran.<sup>102</sup>

Of course, it is impossible to prove that the Iranians will not act in a given way at some point in the future. But we can examine the track record of the Islamic republic in search of evidence that its leadership is irrational. Looking at the decisions Iran has made since the Iranian revolution, its leadership looks more than rational—it appears to be quite savvy and pragmatic, even willing to change course when confronted with overwhelming force.

Take, for one example, Iran's behavior during the Iran-Iraq war. Early rhetoric from Iran was uncompromising, including clear indications in November 1981 that the newly minted Islamic government in Tehran had no intention of stopping the war as long as Saddam Hussein remained in power in Iraq.<sup>103</sup> Eerie propaganda later in the conflict included a fountain of fake blood the Islamic government built in Tehran. However, over time, the Iraqis began to make clear and decisive advances, in part due to Western governments' support for and arms sales to Saddam Hussein during the conflict. The Iranians were taking grave losses.

When by 1988 a long string of devastating tactical routs made clear that outright strategic defeat was possible, the Iranian leadership changed course. They sued for peace, jettisoning their original objective of deposing Saddam Hussein, and taking a deal that left Iran on the light side of the postwar balance of power. Hussein had emerged from the war relatively stronger with respect to Iran than he was before the war. Yet the Iranians agreed to end the fighting.

Even Ayatollah Khomeini, the “most extreme of them all” in Pedatzur's term, acted rationally when the costs of failure

became too high. Far from being divorced from reality or suicidal, Khomeini pleaded to the UN Security Council (which Iran had derided and boycotted since the revolution) and made the following statement to the Iranian people regarding his acceptance of an end to the fighting:

Taking this decision was more deadly than taking poison. I submitted myself to God's will and drank this drink for his satisfaction. . . . I had promised to fight to the last drop of my blood and to my last breath. . . . To me, it would have been more bearable to accept death and martyrdom.<sup>104</sup>

Why, then, did Khomeini accept this awful fate? In his own words, he was forced to accept the advice of “all the high-ranking political and military experts” in Iran, who had apparently told him that the prospect of victory was at least five years away and that Iran would be fighting a defensive war and attempting to rebuild its forces over the entire five years.<sup>105</sup> That the clerical leadership saw this reality and decided that an end to the conflict would be preferable seems clearly to indicate that the Iranian leadership, for all its religious bombast, was making rational strategic calculations.

Or, there is the Khobar Towers incident, where the Iranian government was implicated in the bombing of an apartment complex in Saudi Arabia which killed 19 Americans. According to former U.S. counterterrorism officials Richard Clarke and Steven Simon:

The United States responded with a chilling threat to Iran's government and conducted a global operation that immobilized Iran's intelligence service. Iranian terrorism against America ceased . . . [B]oth [the American and Iranian] sides looked down the road of conflict and chose to avoid further hostilities.<sup>106</sup>

Here again, the threat of overwhelming force

(perhaps potentially regime change) seemed to have been enough to dissuade the Iranians from doing more than nibbling at peripheral American interests.

The fact that the radical father of the Islamic revolution in Iran, Khomeini, was eminently capable of making sound, non-suicidal strategic calculations seems to indicate that Gerecht's 1993 comment was correct: despite how they may appear to Western eyes, the clerics are rational, deterrable actors. Moreover, given that the Iranians capitulated when they were threatened with overwhelming force previously, there is little evidence to support the notion that the much more drastic step of launching an unprovoked nuclear strike against the United States would pass strategic muster in Tehran.

If Iran were to launch a nuclear first strike, it would be subject to the same sort of massive response to which any other state would be subject. For the leadership in Tehran to enact such a policy, it would have to be suicidal. The somewhat more plausible prospect that Iran would give nuclear weapons to a terrorist proxy is also highly unlikely. Iran has never been known to have transferred chemical or biological weapons to Hizbullah, presumably for fear of Israeli retaliation if they were used.

Moreover, it is hard to believe that Israel or the United States would wait for a court-of-law degree of certitude after absorbing a nuclear attack to retaliate against the most likely country of origin: Iran. And the transfer of weapons from the control of the Tehran government to a nonstate group should be a bright red line communicated to Tehran openly and explicitly: such a transfer would be viewed as an act of war by the United States and immediately bring an end to the ruling regime.

In any event, whether Iran goes nuclear or not, much more should be done to strengthen deterrence more generally; one important and neglected tactic would be to improve the technology with which we could "fingerprint" weapons of mass destruction, thus identifying the source of the weapons and

increasing the chances that our prospective response could deter a transfer to terrorists in the first place.<sup>107</sup>

Finally, as hawkish American pundits repeat the bizarre and seemingly apocalyptic statements of Iranians to advance the case for war, they would be well-served to consider how hawkish Iranians could make much the same arguments about certain worldviews that are prevalent in America and enjoy influence in Washington. For one example, the evangelical preacher John Hagee has published a top-selling book titled *Jerusalem Countdown*, in which he uses biblical prophecy to advocate an apocalyptic showdown wherein Israel and the United States join in a preventive war against Iran, which will be, in Hagee's telling, the fulfillment of God's will.<sup>108</sup> Ultimately, according to Hagee, the war will provoke Russia to lead a group of Arab nations into war against Israel and the United States, and this will hasten the second coming of Christ, wherein Hagee and his followers will be granted eternal life.

Hagee has now formed a lobbying organization, Christians United for Israel (CUFI), which is designed to advance his apocalyptic visions. At CUFI's kickoff banquet, the 3,000 attendees heard speeches from Republican senators Sam Brownback and Rick Santorum, as well as Ken Mehlman, the chairman of the Republican National Committee. Subsequently, CUFI has enjoyed remarkable access to the Bush administration, including a series of off-the-record briefings on Middle East policy at the White House with officials that the Bush administration refuses to name.<sup>109</sup>

None of this is presented in order to pass theological judgment on Hagee's views. It does, however, illustrate how certain beliefs that appear bizarre and incomprehensible could be used by outsiders to portray an opponent as dangerous, or wedded to theological tenets that would suggest irrationality. For example, Iranian hardliners could easily cite Hagee's views and access to the White House to argue that the American administration is convinced that it must hasten the second coming of Christ by attacking their country. While that view would be rightly ridiculed as absurd in

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this country, it is not difficult to see how it could be used in a culture that does not understand some of the oddity and nuances of American society. A similar dynamic may be at work when Western commentators expound on the finer points of Iran's Twelver Shi'ism and the geopolitical implications of the hidden imam in the course of arguing for bombing raids on Iran.

### **Problem #2 – An Emboldened Iran and the Regional Response**

One of the other major concerns about Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability is the potential response of other states in the region. Iran would likely feel emboldened by its acquisition of a nuclear weapon and could make a play for regional hegemony in the Persian Gulf. That could in turn cause neighboring countries to seek nuclear deterrents of their own and bolster their own militaries generally in an attempt to deter the Iranians from any military mischief. Some observers fear that this arms race could lead to growing fear and insecurity among governments in the region, leaving better-armed regional governments on hair-trigger alert from fear of their neighbors.<sup>110</sup>

This concern is probably real but overstated. Those who fear the prospect of an arms race in the Middle East argue that it would increase the likelihood of war. But in fact war becomes *more* likely if neighboring states do *not* arm themselves. If neighboring states maintain their current, anemic military efforts and allow Iran to build power based on its nuclear capability, that would increase the likelihood of war by lowering the perceived cost to Iran of provoking conflict. As it happens, key states in the region are quite wary of a nuclear war.

An adviser to the government of Saudi Arabia told Reuters in July that "there is now an understanding that Iran has to be countered. There is going to be a huge strategic spending on defense, based on a new defense doctrine."<sup>111</sup> According to the adviser, the Saudi government is working to increase its total troop number by 25 percent and to

expand its air force. There are thus some indications that neighboring states recognize the potential dangers posed by an emboldened Iran and are preparing themselves for a posture of deterrence.

Still, many Arab countries hold fast to the idea that Iran's potential nuclearization is foremost an issue between Iran and the United States, and thereby of only secondary relevance to them. Richard Russell, a professor at the National Defense University, reports that there is a "fairly commonly held view" in Arab security circles that Iran's acquisition of a bomb merely "would 'balance' Israeli and American nuclear weapons."<sup>112</sup> Russell reports further that to the extent Arab states are concerned, it is not about potential Iranian moves in the region, but rather that the Arab countries will be "caught in a crossfire in an American military campaign against Iran."<sup>113</sup>

If Russell's account is accurate—and there is some evidence that Arab states in the region take the Iranian threat more seriously than Russell implies<sup>114</sup>—it would be extremely alarming. Arab states need to recognize that this ordering of the threats is backward—the first danger from an Iranian nuclear weapon would be to them, and the secondary danger would be to America. The United States would need to communicate to the Arab countries that America does not intend to simply extend nuclear deterrence over their countries, and that the security of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries—including Saudi Arabia—needs to be ensured by their own governments.

Attempting to take the Arab countries under an American security umbrella would be incredibly risky and would further validate the claim that the United States is the protector of repressive Arab governments, one of the foremost charges made by Osama bin Laden and like-minded terrorist recruiters. Meanwhile, just as it was during the Cold War, extended deterrence would be a commitment of dubious credibility: would the United States really risk a nuclear exchange over its currently enunciated interests in, say, Bahrain?



How to handle Iraq in the context of a nuclear Iran would be an even tougher problem. Depending on when an Iranian bomb came online, Iran could easily attempt to ratchet up its activities inside Iraq, raising the frightening prospect of open confrontation between Iran and the United States inside Iraq. Further, it is uncertain what kind of presence America would have in Iraq by the time Iran acquired a nuclear capability. Some scholars have suggested that even absent an Iranian bomb, the United States would need to provide a security guarantee to Iraq after leaving in order to deter interference from Iraq's neighbors.<sup>115</sup> Iraqi President Jalal Talabani told the *Washington Post* in September that Iraq will need American forces "for a long time," even including two permanent military bases and 10,000 soldiers to "prevent foreign interference."<sup>116</sup>

The United States should be exceedingly wary of extending security guarantees to Iraq. Perhaps the least bad option for the United States in handling the Iraq question would be to attempt to convene a regional conference before the Iranian bomb becomes a fait accompli, to try to clarify Arab minds on what the prospect of a still-Hobbesian Iraq coupled with an Iranian bomb could mean to Arab nations' strategic considerations. Here again, the choices are all bad options—there is no solution that will neatly solve the problems of the Iranian bomb.

Israel, the one existing (but undeclared) nuclear power in the Middle East, appears to be ramping up efforts to develop a fail-safe second-strike capability. The Israelis are moving to acquire two modified Dolphin-class submarines that would be capable of launching nuclear weapons, adding to the three submarines that Israel reportedly equipped in 2002 with a nuclear weapons capability, thereby ensuring its second-strike capability, and strengthening the deterrent value of Israel's nuclear arsenal.<sup>117</sup>

That effort is prudent and justified, but Israel would have a viable land- and air-based second-strike capability even if a potential adversary were to launch an extremely high number of nuclear strikes first. Certain state-

ments by the Iranian leadership imply strongly that some public pronouncements about strategy regarding Israel are made for domestic political consumption rather than as reflections of genuine strategic thought. In December 2001, for example, former president Rafsanjani warned that if the Islamic world acquires a nuclear weapon, "the imperialists' strategy will reach a standstill because the use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will destroy everything. However, it will only harm the Islamic world. It is not irrational to contemplate such an eventuality."<sup>118</sup>

Israeli vice premier Shimon Peres helpfully pointed out the flaws in this reasoning during an interview with Reuters in May 2006 when he made clear that "when it comes to destruction, Iran, too, can be destroyed."<sup>119</sup> Israel is thought to currently possess roughly 200 nuclear weapons, dispersed throughout its (admittedly small) territory. Given that Israel reportedly possesses both nuclear-equipped Jericho-2 missiles in hardened silos and submarines armed with nuclear-tipped cruise missiles<sup>120</sup> (both of which are extremely difficult to destroy, even with highly accurate weapons), it is clear that any conceivable Iranian first strike in the foreseeable future would not destroy Israel's retaliatory capability.

In addition, an Israeli second strike would have a devastating effect on Iran, as roughly two-thirds of its population is located in urban centers.<sup>121</sup> It is difficult to believe that the Iranian leadership would bring about the destruction of its own country only to pave the way for Sunni states like Saudi Arabia to position themselves as the vanguard of a triumphant, post-Israel Islam.

### **Problem #3 – A Nuclear Iran Will "Cramp Our Style" (and Israel's)**

Another likely result of Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapon is that Iran will use its deterrent to limit U.S. and Israeli policy options in the Middle East. Clearly, Iran's nuclearization would dramatically raise the costs of a U.S. regime change effort in Tehran. More broadly, however, Iran could attempt to extend deterrence to external goals, such as the pursuit of

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regional hegemony or attempts to dominate Iraq, Azerbaijan, or even Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Analyst Thomas Donnelly admits openly that the fear of constraint is a primary concern:

A nuclear-armed Iran is doubly threatening to U.S. interests not only because of the possibility it might employ its weapons or pass them to terrorist groups, but also because of the constraining effect it will impose on U.S. behavior in the region.<sup>122</sup>

The prestigious realist scholar Kenneth Waltz, in his groundbreaking work on the spread of nuclear weapons, put things still more bluntly: “A big reason for America’s resistance to the spread of nuclear weapons is that if weak countries have some they will cramp our style.”<sup>123</sup> This is indisputably true, but it is less important if America revises its grandiose and radical foreign policy posture.

Analysts like Donnelly fear an Iranian bomb because they favor a revolutionary American foreign policy that attempts to use force to transform regimes Washington dislikes. Although the Bush doctrine’s failures are on display daily in Iraq, there is still a chance that the Bush administration—or a subsequent administration—could decide on another rash, excessive use of the U.S. military. An Iranian bomb would, in almost any foreseeable scenario, essentially eliminate the option of forcible regime change in Iran.

If America intends to remain unconstrained by anything other than its own will in terms of its policy in the greater Middle East, then nuclear weapons will indeed give Iran influence that it does not possess currently. However, to evaluate the extent to which Iranian acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability would constrain America’s options, it is necessary to determine where Iranian interests and U.S. interests are likely to clash, and to further evaluate these interests in the context of nuclear deterrence.

The threat of nuclear retaliation is most credible when it is tied to core interests of a

state, such as government survival and territorial integrity. The trouble with nuclear deterrence comes when a state attempts to use it to protect peripheral rather than vital interests. For this reason, the American extension of deterrence to western Europe during the Cold War was always more dubious than American deterrence of a direct attack on U.S. territory.<sup>124</sup> A similar logic would apply with respect to Iran; while a nuclear capability would take “regime change” off the table, it would not give Iran *carte blanche* to act as it pleases with respect to all of its foreign policy goals, because threats to use nuclear weapons to secure peripheral interests would be vastly less credible.<sup>125</sup>

Still, a nuclear Iran would probably feel emboldened by the acquisition of a nuclear deterrent and would be more likely to challenge U.S. and Israeli interests in the Middle East. Iran could ratchet up its fight against Kurdish elements in Iraq or increase its support for anti-Israel terrorist groups, confident that should its proxies be discovered, Israel would be afraid to retaliate with overwhelming force.<sup>126</sup>

The introduction of nuclear parity between Israel and Iran would increase Iran’s willingness to openly challenge the status quo in the region. As the *Wall Street Journal’s* editors argued during the July Israel-Hizbullah war, that conflict was “a preview of what the Middle East will look like if Iran succeeds in going nuclear.”<sup>127</sup> President Bush echoed this sentiment on August 14, when he remarked that “we can only imagine how much more dangerous this conflict would be if Iran had the nuclear weapon it seeks.”<sup>128</sup>

The first way to limit the danger inherent in such a scenario is to increase communication between Israel, the United States, and Iran. As Judith Yaphe and Charles Lutes have pointed out, it is the lack of communication between relevant parties over so-called red lines that makes the prospect of a nuclearized Iran so dangerous.<sup>129</sup> Deterrence is contingent not just on capability, but on credibility, and opening a channel of communication between adversaries would help limit the potential for miscalculation.

Further, Israeli strategists have been considering the implications of proliferation in the Middle East for decades.<sup>130</sup> One of the clarifying effects that this thinking has had on Israeli strategy is the recognition that a nuclear counterpoint in the Middle East would prompt Israel to define for itself what its vital interests are. And media reports indicate that Israeli strategists and politicians are beginning to think seriously about the prospect that a nuclear Iran may emerge.<sup>131</sup> Some analysts have begun the hard work of attempting to prevent conflict by drawing clear “red lines.” For example, Yehezkel Dror, a former adviser to the Israeli government, is recommending that once Iran goes nuclear, Israel should announce that it would consider any missile fired from Iranian territory as a nuclear attack and reply accordingly.<sup>132</sup> More of this type of thinking is needed.

As discussed above, nuclear deterrents are useful for insulating core interests from threats; they are less useful in protecting a state’s peripheral interests. Indeed, as Steven J. Rosen wrote in 1975, the more stable the deterrence, the more likely it becomes that low-level conflicts could occur. Once both parties feel confident that they understand the other side’s red lines, either party could act beneath that red line to pursue its interests. However, when looking at the danger of nuclear escalation over peripheral Israeli interests, Rosen wondered:

Will Israel resort to nuclear weapons if the fighting is restricted to the occupied areas? It is difficult to imagine Israel committing national suicide to hold on to Abu Rudeis or Hebron or Mount Hermon . . . *the threat of MAD will insure the inviolability of the Israeli heartland, but will not in itself necessarily halt the endless round of border wars in the peripheral areas.*<sup>133</sup>

This view differs markedly from the prevailing Israeli view today. For decades, much of the Israeli foreign policy establishment has considered any military loss unthinkable and

any negotiated political concessions intolerable defeats. As former Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Shamir remarked to *Ha’aretz* in 1991:

There is no room for territorial concessions. Where would we be if we made concessions? Everybody wants territories from us. One might imagine that we are a huge continent. . . . The Balfour Declaration gave us a country on both banks of the Jordan.<sup>134</sup>

By this logic—Shamir’s argument implies that even the occupied territories represent vital Israeli interests—the prospect that a nuclear Iran could cause Israel to become more prone to make territorial concessions is indeed excessively dangerous to Israel. But as Waltz points out, “Establishing the credibility of a deterrent force requires moderation of territorial claims on the part of the would-be deterrer.”<sup>135</sup> This potential moderation is extremely troubling to those who hold grave doubts about territorial concessions, but would have less impact on Israel’s (and certainly America’s) long-term security than they believe. Rosen argued:

A stable regional system of mutual assured destruction would have as an almost unavoidable political corollary the assumption of a return of the captured territories, combined with agreements for the limitation of forces in the areas surrendered by Israel. Indeed, *the major virtue of nuclearization of the Middle East is that, while it will make a territorial settlement necessary, it will also render it possible.*<sup>136</sup>

Unless and until such a settlement emerged, however, it should be assumed that a nuclear-armed Iran would challenge Israel and Israeli interests with more fervor than it has until this point. Chatham House has argued against the conventional wisdom, however, claiming that fundamentally, although Iran is frequently depicted as a hell-bent revisionist power, “the Iranian regime is wary of provoking generalized chaos in the region because it is essentially con-

**Media reports indicate that Israeli strategists and politicians are beginning to think seriously about the prospect that a nuclear Iran may emerge.**

**American support for Israeli expansion has damaged the reputation of the United States and done little to put Israel on a path to long-term security.**

servative and seeks to maintain the status quo.”<sup>137</sup>

Although Iran’s approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shows little sign of preference for the status quo, it is worth briefly examining this claim. Iran—with or without a nuclear weapons capability—should be relatively pleased with the developments in its overall security environment over the past five years. Washington removed two hostile regimes on Iran’s borders—Taliban Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq—and it has not replaced them with effective, strong governments that could rival Tehran’s power or diminish Tehran’s legitimacy by providing examples of stable, liberal democracy in the Muslim world. Soaring oil prices have generated significant revenues, propping up Iran’s otherwise sclerotic economy and making Iran an increasingly important economic power in Eurasia. Despite Iran’s open hostility to Israel and its tensions with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and other neighboring states with sizable Shi’a communities, recent developments in the region may have made the Iranian regime more conservative and more at peace with the status quo than Western commentators have taken to suggesting.

Closer to home, Washington’s perception of itself as omnipotent has led to excesses in its Middle East strategy, such as the Iraq operation, and has also led to a strategic myopia in terms of its diplomatic posture in the Middle East. Washington has long promoted and encouraged Israel’s unrealistic approach to security. It has refused to stop the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and supported the ill-advised assault on Lebanon’s civilian infrastructure in July 2006. American support for Israeli expansion has damaged the reputation of the United States and done little to put Israel on a path to long-term security.

Some scholars have even argued that the introduction of a nuclear peer into the Middle East eventually could lead to a sustainable political environment in the region. Trita Parsi, an expert on Iranian-Israeli relations at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, has argued that a nuclear Iran would

force Israel to focus more on the strategic threat from Iran and less on territorial disputes that are not core interests of Israel. Parsi claims that “the only remedy to a nuclear Iran emboldening Syria, Hezbollah, and the Palestinians is to hasten efforts to conclude peace deals with the Arabs and not to ‘bargain out’ and expect Israel’s military superiority to predetermine the result of the negotiations.”<sup>138</sup>

Still, that argument does not consider why, in the advent of an Iranian bomb, the Arab states surrounding Israel would be prone to broker peace with Israel sooner, rather than waiting for the Iranian bomb to come online and then seeking more favorable terms. Thus, it should be assumed that an Iranian bomb would be fundamentally destabilizing in the short run, with respect both to Iran’s relations with Israel and to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>139</sup>

## **The Potential Benefits of War versus the Potential Benefits of Deterrence**

In a sense, the potential benefits of either policy can be defined by the negative outcomes they would avoid. One of the benefits of the preventive war option is that it could conceivably delay the Iranian nuclear program. As seen above, however, this prospect is far from certain, given the exceedingly poor U.S. intelligence on the Iranian nuclear program.

If the United States is able to buy a few extra years without a nuclear Iran emerging, it is not clear that that will ultimately prevent a mullah-led Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. Thus, we may end up with all of the negative outcomes of a war, and find ourselves confronting only a few years later the prospect that the war was supposed to prevent—a nuclear, theocratic Iran. Given that the imminent demise of the clerical regime has been predicted by advocates of regime change for years, and given that bombing would likely strengthen the mullahs’ grip on power, there is little reason to believe that America could successfully, and nonviolently, engineer regime change in Iran during any

extra nonnuclear years purchased by military strikes.

Still, a policy of bombing now could avoid the uncertainties and dangers of a deterrence policy, at least for a few years. We could delay having to face up to the difficulty of shaping the responses of Iran's neighbors to Iran's acquisition of a bomb, and we could keep the option of forcible regime change on the table. Bombing would not, however, prevent the prospect of Iranian escalation against Israel; rather, it would increase that prospect in the short run. But the ultimate question that must be asked about bombing is whether one believes that the mullahs are fundamentally undeterrable. If they are, all of the other assumptions about various policy options become irrelevant. Given available evidence and the track record of the Iranian leadership since the Islamic revolution, however, it is unwise to assume that the clerical government in Tehran is undeterrable. Iran has shown that it will take risks where it perceives benefits but back down where the potential costs become too high.

Moreover, delaying Iran's nuclear program is the only conceivable benefit that could likely be derived from a policy of preventive war. Juxtaposed against that benefit are an array of negative consequences, varying from merely undesirable to deeply dangerous. The assessment of the merits and demerits of deterrence necessarily presents a mirror image of the above analysis. The dangers of war would be avoided, but a host of other challenges and new concerns would emerge. Still, it is worth examining the benefits of not bombing.

Embracing a posture of deterrence would, in the first instance, prevent the inevitable loss of American life that would result from a war. Moreover, billions, if not hundreds of billions, of dollars would be left in the productive economy rather than being allocated to attempting to set back Iran's nuclear program. The mullahs in Iran would remain unpopular, unable to use the American bogeyman to consolidate support internally. We could also avoid the range of Iranian countermeasures: further chaos in Iraq, attacks against U.S. troops in that country or

against Israel, and the prospect of sky-high oil prices and volatility in the Strait of Hormuz. The problems of chaos in post-regime-change Iran, should a conflict escalate to that level, could also be avoided.

In the end, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, absent some very shaky assumptions about the Iranian leadership's rationality, deterrence is a preferable policy to preventive war. The preventive war option unleashes so many forces that are beyond the control of the American government that it should be looked on as a supremely undesirable policy. And given the historical record of the revolutionary Iranian leadership and the history of deterrence in the international system, deterrence appears to be highly preferable.

Deterrence is not automatic. It requires communication, credibility, and persistence. Historically, new nuclear regimes have been the most volatile and reckless nuclear actors, as the United States was from the late 1940s through the early 1960s, when it seriously contemplated using nuclear weapons against the Chinese, Soviets, and in Korea. Steps must be taken to ensure that Iran's entry to the nuclear club is constrained. In particular, it may be in the U.S. interest that technologies to solidify command and control of Iran's nuclear arsenal be quietly passed to Tehran—and, for that matter, to Islamabad, Pyongyang, and New Delhi.<sup>140</sup> These new nuclear states are the likeliest sources of danger in the nuclear club.

Deterrence is not "satisfying," in that it does not produce a decisive outcome quickly. But neither, in this case, would preventive war. The United States should start preparing now for a policy of deterrence—including the potential drawbacks and dangers. The consequences of a preventive war with Iran could easily be worse than what has occurred after the preventive war in Iraq. Neither the Bush administration nor the country should seek to make the same mistake twice.

## Notes

1. The *New York Times* reported that "few of [Bush's] aides expect that Iran's leaders will meet [the enrichment suspension demand]." See David

**It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, absent some very shaky assumptions about the Iranian leadership's rationality, deterrence is a preferable policy to preventive war.**

- E. Sanger, "For Bush, Talks with Iran Were a Last Resort," *New York Times*, June 1, 2006.
2. Secretary Rice was at pains to point out at the May press conference, "I want to make very clear we are not talking here about what some have characterized as a grand bargain." Condoleezza Rice, May 31, 2006, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/67103.htm>.
  3. For a discussion of current policy options, see Ted Galen Carpenter, "Iran's Nuclear Program: America's Policy Options," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 577, September 20, 2006.
  4. Reuel Marc Gerecht, for example, argues that "if we delayed Iran's acquisition of nuclear weaponry by even three years, that might turn out to be a great success." Gerecht, "To Bomb or Not to Bomb: That Is the Iran Question," *Weekly Standard*, April 24, 2006, pp. 16–24. *Time* magazine reports that "U.S. officials believe that a [bombing] campaign of several days, involving hundreds or even thousands of sorties, could set back Iran's nuclear program by two to three years." Michael Duffy, "What War with Iran Would Look Like," *Time*, September 25, 2006, p. 41. The *New York Times* quotes an administration official who said that the administration believes that "sooner or later," the Iranians will get a bomb, but that "the optimists around here just hope we can delay the day by 10 or 20 years, and that by that time we'll have a different relationship with a different Iranian government." See David E. Sanger, "Suppose We Just Let Iran Have the Bomb," *New York Times*, March 19, 2006.
  5. See, e.g., Thomas McInerney, "Target: Iran: Yes, There Is a Military Option against the Mullahs' Nuclear Program," *Weekly Standard*, April 24, 2006, p. 7.
  6. The MEK is an Iranian terrorist organization that is supported by some neoconservatives as a way to overthrow the government in Tehran. Anthony Cordesman has argued that the MEK "is far worse than Iran's government. It is little more than a cult that sold what passed for its soul to Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war, and murdered Americans when I served with the U.S. Embassy in Iran." Anthony Cordesman, "We Have the Right Policy Now and Better Options for the Future," *Cato Unbound*, July 14, 2006, <http://www.cato-unbound.org/2006/07/14/anthony-h-cordesman/we-have-the-right-policy-now-and-better-options-for-the-future/>. For more discussion of the MEK, see Connie Bruck, "Expiles: How Iran's Expatriates Are Gaming the Nuclear Threat," *New Yorker*, March 6, 2006, pp. 48–63.
  7. Seymour Hersh reports that "intelligence has also shown that for the past two years the Iranians have been shifting their most sensitive nuclear-related materials and production facilities, moving some into urban areas, in anticipation of a bombing raid." Seymour Hersh, "Last Stand," *New Yorker*, July 10, 2006, p. 42.
  8. James Risen, *State of War: The Secret History of the CIA and the Bush Administration* (New York: Free Press, 2006), pp. 193–94.
  9. Dafna Linzer, "Strong Leads and Dead Ends in Nuclear Case against Iran," *Washington Post*, February 8, 2006.
  10. "Recognizing Iran as a Strategic Threat: An Intelligence Challenge for the United States," Staff Report of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Subcommittee on Intelligence Policy, August 23, 2006, p. 8, <http://intelligence.house.gov/Media/PDFS/IranReport082206v2.pdf>.
  11. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
  12. Richard Perle, "Securing the Future: How to Defeat Terrorism and Achieve Middle East Stability," Remarks at AIPAC Policy Conference panel, March 5, 2006, [http://www.aipac.org/PDFDocs/PC06\\_Tran\\_script\\_Roundtable.pdf](http://www.aipac.org/PDFDocs/PC06_Tran_script_Roundtable.pdf).
  13. Douglas Jehl, "U.S. Outlines Concern over North Korean A-Arms," *New York Times*, February 25, 1993.
  14. "Time to Focus on Iran—The Mother of Modern Terrorism," *JINSA Online*, May 6, 2003, <http://www.jinsa.org/articles/print.html/documentid/2012>.
  15. Charles Krauthammer, "The Iran Charade, Part II," *Washington Post*, January 18, 2006.
  16. Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid al-Rodhan, *Iran's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Real and Potential Threat* (Washington: CSIS Press, 2006), pp. 204–5.
  17. Jeffrey Record, "Nuclear Deterrence, Preventive War, and Counterproliferation," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 519, July 8, 2004, p. 16.
  18. See Reuel Marc Gerecht, "Cognitive Dissonance: The State of America's Iran Policy," *Cato Unbound*, July 9, 2006, <http://www.cato-unbound.org/2006/07/09/reuel-marc-gerecht/cognitive-dissonance-the-state-of-americas-iran-policy/>. Some scholars have argued that this analogy fails on its own terms. Richard K. Betts, for example, argues that "there is no evidence that Israel's destruction of Osirak delayed Iraq's nuclear weapons program." See "The Osirak Fallacy," *National Interest*, Spring 2006, pp. 22–25. See also BBC News, "Israeli Attack 'Jump-Started Nuclear Programme,'" June 5, 2006, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/4774541.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4774541.stm).

19. Cordesman and al-Rodhan, p. 331.
20. Ron Synovitz, "U.S. Dismisses Nuclear Tour as 'Staged Media Event,'" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 31, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/03/a779389b-ddbf-418a-a0f6-1904f01204e6.html>; Sam Gardiner, "The End of the 'Summer of Diplomacy: Assessing U.S. Military Options on Iran,'" Century Foundation Report, p. 5, [http://www.tcf.org/publications/internationalaffairs/gardiner\\_summer\\_diplomacy.pdf](http://www.tcf.org/publications/internationalaffairs/gardiner_summer_diplomacy.pdf). The NCRI asserts that Natanz is only 8 meters underground.
21. "Guided Bomb Unit-28," *Global Security.org*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/munitions/gbu-28.htm>.
22. Robert Nelson, "Nuclear Bunker-Busters, Mini-Nukes, and the U.S. Nuclear Stockpile," *Physics Today*, November 2003, p. 34, [http://www.physicstoday.org/vol-56/iss-11/pdf/vol56no11p32\\_37.pdf](http://www.physicstoday.org/vol-56/iss-11/pdf/vol56no11p32_37.pdf).
23. See, for example, the discussion of the Kalayeh Electric Company, a suspected Iranian nuclear site, in David E. Sanger, "The U.S. vs. a Nuclear Iran," *New York Times*, December 12, 2004.
24. Edward N. Luttwak, "Three Reasons Not to Bomb Iran—Yet," *Commentary*, May 2006, p. 21.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
26. Cordesman and al-Rodhan, pp. 70–72.
27. James Fallows, "Will Iran Be Next?" *Atlantic Monthly*, December 2004, pp. 99–108.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 108. One analyst who did not observe the game would later complain that the options were rigged against military action, despite the fact that Gardiner said in the article that "I have been working on these options for almost eighteen months. I tried them in class with my military students. They were the best I could do." See Thomas Donnelly, "Strategy for Dealing with a Nuclear Iran," in *Getting Ready for a Nuclear Iran*, ed. Henry Sokolski and Patrick Clawson (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), p. 175, n. 23.
29. John Barry and Dan Ephron, "War-Gaming the Mullahs," *Newsweek*, September 27, 2004, p. 35.
30. Peter Baker, Dafna Linzer, and Thomas E. Ricks, "U.S. Is Studying Military Strike Options on Iran: Any Mix of Tact, Threats Alarms Critics," *Washington Post*, April 9, 2006.
31. Barry McCaffrey, *Meet the Press*, NBC, August 20, 2006, <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/14390980/>.
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33. Bryan Bender, "Iran Is Prepared to Retaliate, Experts Warn," *Boston Globe*, February 12, 2006.
34. Reports conflict as to whether Sadr stated that he would deploy his militia, the Mahdi army, inside and outside of Iraq, or whether Iraq, as a nation-state, would side with Iran. See Ellen Knickmeyer and Omar Fekeiki, "Iraqi Shiite Cleric Pledges to Defend Iran," *Washington Post*, January 24, 2006.
35. Vijay Joshi, "Shiites Rally for Hezbollah in Baghdad," Associated Press, August 4, 2006. Iraqi officials claimed that "hundreds of thousands" attended the rally, whereas the U.S. military estimated 14,000.
36. Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle* (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 357.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 381.
38. Rowan Scarborough, "Casey Cites Iran Hand in Attacks by Iraqi Shi'ites," *Washington Times*, June 23, 2006.
39. Robert Lowe and Claire Spencer, eds., "Iran, Its Neighbours and the Regional Crises," Chatham House Middle East Programme Report, August 2006, <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/pdf/research/mep/Iran0806.pdf>.
40. Quoted in Charles V. Peña, "Iran: Gulf War III?" *American Conservative*, June 5, 2006, p. 13.
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44. Ze'ev Schiff, "Israel's War with Iran," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2006, p. 30.

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46. "Israel-Hizbullah Conflict: Victims of Rocket Attacks and IDF Casualties," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 12, 2006, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism-+Obstacle+to+Peace/Terrorism+from+Lebanon-+Hizbullah/Israel-Hizbullah+conflict-+Victims+of+rocket+attacks+and+IDF+casualties+July-Aug+2006.htm>.
47. "Timeline of the July War 2006," *The Daily Star*, August 19, 2006, [http://www.dailystar.com.lb/July\\_War06.asp](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/July_War06.asp)
48. Daniel Byman, "Proxy Power: Understanding Iran's Use of Terrorism," *Slate.com*, July 26, 2006. See also Richard Clarke and Steven Simon, "Bombs that Would Backfire," *New York Times*, April 16, 2006. On the broad threat of Iranian terrorism in response to military strikes, see Dana Priest, "Attacking Iran May Trigger Terrorism," *Washington Post*, April 2, 2006.
49. Associated Press, "U.S. Studying Iran's Retaliation Options," *USA Today*, June 3, 2006.
50. "Hezbollah: 'A-Team of Terrorists,'" *60 Minutes*, CBS, April 18, 2003, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/04/18/60minutes/main550000.shtml>.
51. Clarke and Simon.
52. Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte argued that Iran poses a "challenge to U.S. interests" by way of its ability to "threaten to disrupt the operations and reinforcement of U.S. forces based in the region." See "Annual Threat Assessment of the Director of National Intelligence," February 2, 2006, p. 12, <http://intelligence.senate.gov/0602hrq/060202/negroponte.pdf#search=%22Annual%20Threat%20Assessment%20of%20Director%20of%20National%20Intelligence%22>.
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55. Michael Eisenstadt, "Deter and Contain: Dealing with a Nuclear Iran," in Sokolski and Clawson, p. 242.
56. "Threats to U.S. National Security," Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 17, 2005.
57. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2005-2006* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 189.
58. William R. Doerner, "Tangling with Tehran: In Its Most Serious Strike Yet, the U.S. Hits Iranian Ships and Oil Platforms in a Daylong Naval Action," *Time*, May 22, 1988, p. 40.
59. Michael Knights, "Deterrence by Punishment Could Offer Last Resort Options for Iran," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, April 1, 2006.
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62. Quoted in Richard J. Newman and Warren P. Strobel, "A Lesson in Readiness," *US News and World Report*, November 27, 2000, p. 50.
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65. Philip Sherwell, "Iran Builds a Secret Underground Complex as Nuclear Tensions Rise," *Daily Telegraph*, March 12, 2006.
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67. Quoted in Thom Shanker, "Rice Dismisses Iranian Cleric's Warning on Oil," *New York Times*, June 5, 2006. See also Steven Mufson, "The Weapon Iran May Not Want to Use: Withholding Oil Exports Could Wreak the Most Havoc at Home," *Washington Post*, May 19, 2006.
68. International Monetary Fund, "Staff Report for the 2005 Article IV Consultation," IMF Country Report no. 06/154, p. 32, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2006/cr06154.pdf>.
69. Quoted in Steven R. Weisman, "As the Price of Oil Soars, So Does Its Power to Shape Politics



from Washington to Beijing,” *New York Times*, July 25, 2006.

70. For a discussion of the origins of the U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf, see David Isenberg, “The Rapid Deployment Force: The Few, the Futile, the Expendable,” Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 44, November 8, 1984.

71. For a fully developed version of this argument with respect to the Middle East and American security policy more generally, see Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, “Energy Alarmism: The Myths That Make Americans Worry about Oil,” Cato Institute Policy Analysis (forthcoming).

72. Weisman.

73. Karen Lowry Miller, “Will We Hit \$100?” *Newsweek International*, May 15–22, 2006, <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/12667616>.

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75. U.S. Energy Information Agency, *International Petroleum Monthly*, Table 4.1c, “World Crude Oil Production (Including Lease Condensate), Part C - Egypt, Gabon, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, Russia, Former U.S.S.R., Syria, United States, Other, and World,” <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/ipstr/t41a.xls>.

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78. Chris Baltimore, “Military Move on Iran Could Triple Oil Price: Saudi,” Reuters, June 20, 2006. Al-Faisal made these remarks when oil was roughly \$70 per barrel. Al-Faisal noted in May that although the Saudis supported the diplomatic effort to disarm Iran, they are “against any military conflict” since “the results would be catastrophic.” See David R. Sands, “Envoy Urges No Attack on Iran,” *Washington Times*, May 31, 2006.

79. Quoted in Anne Gearan, “Analysis: Iraq War Ties U.S. Hands on Iran,” Associated Press, June 2, 2006.

80. Carpenter, p. 14.

81. See remarks of Thomas Schelling, “An

Astonishing Sixty Years,” Woodrow Wilson Center Director’s Forum, September 21, 2006.

82. Government Accountability Office, “State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim Audiences Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Significant Challenges,” GAO-06-535, May 2006, p. 25, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06535.pdf>.

83. Defense Science Board, “Report on Strategic Communication,” September 2004, p. 40, [http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-09-Strategic\\_Communication.pdf](http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-09-Strategic_Communication.pdf).

84. Michelle Goldberg, “Interview with Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi,” *Der Spiegel*, May 15, 2006, <http://service.spiegel.de/cache/international/0,1518,416210,00.html>.

85. Abbas Milani, letter to the editor, *Commentary*, July–August 2006, p. 16.

86. Quoted in Bruck, p. 59.

87. William Kristol, remarks on Fox News Channel, July 19, 2006.

88. Gerecht, “To Bomb or Not to Bomb,” p. 22. Gerecht argues that “the advance of democracy in Iran will likely have many anti-American overtones” anyway, so the point becomes doubly moot.

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