

Policy Analysis

No. 578

September 20, 2006

Routing

Iran's Nuclear Program America's Policy Options

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Executive Summary

Although it is possible that negotiations between the leading powers in the international community and Iran may produce a settlement to the vexing issue of Iran's nuclear program, it is more likely that those negotiations will fail. If that happens, U.S. policymakers face a set of highly imperfect options.

One option—and the most likely initial response—is to seek a UN Security Council resolution imposing economic sanctions on Tehran. However, sanctions have a poor record of getting regimes to abandon high-priority policies. Even if Russia and China can be induced to overcome their reluctance to endorse sanctions, it is unlikely that such measures would halt Iran's quest for nuclear weapons.

A second option is to intensify efforts to subvert Iran's clerical regime. Washington already has a modest program to do that under the Iran Freedom Support Act. Unfortunately, such a strategy may backfire, undermining the domestic legitimacy of Iranian dissidents. Moreover, there is no certainty that a democratic Iran would choose to be nonnuclear.

Option three is to launch preemptive air

strikes against Iran's nuclear installations. That is the most unwise strategy. At most, such strikes would delay, not eliminate, Tehran's program. There is also a grave risk that Iran would retaliate with the full range of options at its disposal, including attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq and through proxy organizations. Attacking Iran would also further alienate Muslim populations around the world, creating the very real prospect of a war of civilizations.

Option four is to reluctantly accept Iran as a member of the global nuclear weapons club and rely on the deterrent power of America's vast nuclear arsenal. While that strategy is not without risk, the United States has successfully deterred other volatile and unsavory regimes, most notably Maoist China during that country's Cultural Revolution.

The best option, though, is to try to strike a grand bargain with Iran. Washington should offer to normalize diplomatic and economic relations with Iran in exchange for Tehran's agreement to open its nuclear program to rigorous, on-demand international inspections to guarantee that there is no diversion of nuclear material from peaceful purposes to building weapons.

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Introduction

Iran would be at or near the top of a list of countries Americans would least like to see have nuclear weapons, and the reasons for apprehension have deepened dramatically in the past year with the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Iran under the mullahs since the revolution of 1979 has been a weird and ominous country. With Ahmadinejad's new prominence, the weirdness quotient has reached new levels. Iran is now headed by an individual who expresses the hope that Israel be wiped off the map and denies that the Holocaust ever occurred. Those are sentiments not found in civilized circles anywhere in the world.

If one could wave a magic wand and eliminate Iran's nuclear program, all responsible governments would be grasping for that wand. Alas, in the real world such magical solutions do not exist. U.S. policymakers have only a choice among problematic options. Some choices, though, are clearly better than others.

Above all, as policymakers consider the various options, they need to avoid a sense of panic. U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded that Iran will not be able to build nuclear weapons for another 5 to 10 years.¹ Prominent independent experts agree with that assessment.² Even the Israeli government, which has an obvious interest in presenting a worst-case scenario of the Iranian nuclear threat, concedes that Tehran will not be able to build such weapons for another 3 years.³ Based on recent information, some Bush administration policymakers now embrace a similar conclusion, although the intelligence community has not changed its official estimate.⁴ Yet even 3 years is a significant amount of time to craft a response. Only the most intense members of the faction pushing war with Iran argue that the danger is more imminent.⁵ Their most recent thesis is that, although Iran might not be able to build nukes on its own in the immediate future, there is a very real danger that North Korea, whose program is more advanced,

might sell Tehran a bomb or two.⁶ Those who advance that thesis present little evidence that Pyongyang would take such a step, knowing that not only the United States but other countries in the international community (including North Korea's principal allies, Russia and China) would be most displeased with such reckless proliferation.

Anthony Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan, scholars at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, note that most government and independent analyses of Iran's nuclear program in the 1990s predicted that the country would be able to build nuclear weapons by 2000. That clearly did not happen. The reason for the faulty estimates, according to Cordesman and Al-Rodhan, is that they "often were based on the unrealistic assumption that Iran's nuclear program would evolve without interruptions, technical difficulties, or voluntary suspensions."⁷

Given that track record, we should be doubly skeptical of newer predictions that Tehran is on the brink of becoming a nuclear power. The bulk of expert opinion both inside and outside the U.S. government now concludes that Iran is still a long time away from having a nuclear arsenal. When a potential threat is measured in years, it allows policymakers to carefully consider alternative ways of addressing the problem. There is no need for precipitous action.

Prelude to Confrontation: The European-Led Negotiations

There has been a diplomatic effort underway for more than three years to dissuade Iran from trying to become a nuclear power. That effort began in 2003 when Britain, France, and Germany—the so-called EU-3—became sufficiently worried about Tehran's apparent objectives that they decided to address the problem through engagement and negotiations. They urged the United States to join that effort, but the Bush administration spurned the over-

tures of its allies and decided to remain on the sidelines. That posture did not prevent President Bush and other U.S. officials from issuing periodic statements stressing that a nuclear-armed Iran was “intolerable.” Indeed, from the earliest stages of the European diplomatic initiative, Washington urged that Iran be referred to the UN Security Council for possible sanctions.⁸

Russia and China (especially the former) have from time to time offered proposals from the diplomatic sidelines. Indeed, the most promising initiative has been Russia’s proposal to have Iran enrich uranium for power-generation purposes on Russian soil, with the product then being returned to Iran. That method would (at least in theory) prevent Iran from producing highly enriched uranium—which is the raw material for building nuclear weapons. Tehran has given conflicting signals regarding Moscow’s proposal.⁹ On some occasions Iranian leaders have expressed interest in the offer and have even indicated that it could be the basis of a settlement to the crisis. On other occasions, however, they have criticized the proposal and emphasized that Iran has a right under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) to have a nuclear program on Iranian soil for peaceful purposes.

The EU-3 effort has achieved little. Iran did suspend its uranium enrichment program from November 2004 to August 2005, but for the most part the negotiations proceeded in a desultory fashion. European pressure on the Bush administration did lead to a modest shift in U.S. policy in the spring of 2005. Washington finally agreed to endorse the EU-3 negotiations and to authorize the Europeans to offer the Iranians some informal U.S. concessions if Tehran agreed to abandon its uranium conversion process permanently. Those concessions included Washington’s agreement to end its blocking of Iran’s admission to the World Trade Organization. The Bush administration also agreed to consider licensing the sale of spare parts for Iran’s aging fleet of civilian airliners.

Although the Europeans were gratified that the U.S. administration had become

more supportive and cooperative, those concessions reportedly came at a price. At the urging of Vice President Cheney’s office, the administration insisted that the foreign ministers of the EU-3 sign a letter stating that, if the talks failed, they would support U.S. efforts to refer Iran to the Security Council for possible sanctions.¹⁰

The crisis turned more intense in August 2005, when Ahmadinejad took office. A few days later, Iran rejected the European proposals, which included the concessions agreed to by the United States. Indeed, Iran’s new chief nuclear negotiator declared that his country would never halt its conversion of uranium. A month later, the International Atomic Energy Agency found Iran in non-compliance with inspection requirements that were part of the country’s obligations under the NPT. In February 2006, the IAEA voted to report Iran to the Security Council. A Security Council vote on sanctions seemed just a matter of weeks or a few months away.

Washington made another significant shift in policy. At the end of May, the Bush administration agreed to join the EU-3 negotiations as an active participant.¹¹ Shortly thereafter, negotiators made a new offer to Iran, providing a number of concessions (including the previous concessions offered indirectly and informally by the United States) if Tehran agreed to put its uranium enrichment activities on hold. The offer apparently included a provision for Western aid to build proliferation-resistant light water reactors in Iran, which would allow Tehran to have a peaceful, nuclear power-generation program.¹² Washington and its allies pressed the Iranian government for a prompt response to the offer, at one point demanding an answer by mid-July. The Iranians refused to be pressured in that manner, instead telling the Western powers that they would provide an answer by late August. On August 22, Tehran did reply, indicating that it would undertake “serious negotiations.” There was no indication, though, that Iran was prepared to halt the enrichment of uranium—the key demand of the United

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States and other powers.¹³ Indeed, as the August 31 deadline imposed by the UN Security Council resolution expired, the Iranian government remained as defiant as ever on the issue of enrichment.¹⁴ Given the apparent failure of the EU-3-led negotiations, the United States faces a set of highly imperfect options.

Option 1: Impose Multilateral Economic Sanctions

Washington will now seek a resolution from the UN Security Council imposing an array of sanctions against Tehran. Most of those sanctions would focus on three areas: curtailing transfers of technology, impeding financial flows to and from Iran (including freezing Iranian assets worldwide), and restricting the ability of Iranian officials to travel abroad. How restrictive these sanctions are likely to be remains an open question. When it agreed to end its policy of boycotting talks with Iran and join the EU-3 negotiations, the Bush administration clearly believed that it had a commitment from all five permanent members of the Security Council to impose serious sanctions if those negotiations failed.

Since then, however, signs have emerged suggesting that Russia may not be on board, as the Putin government expressed reservations about key wording of the U.S.-backed draft resolution merely to put Iran on notice that the UN might impose sanctions if Tehran did not respond by the end of August to the diplomatic offer that was on the table.¹⁵ There are also questions about how firmly committed China is to imposing meaningful sanctions on Iran.¹⁶ Indeed, resistance from Moscow and Beijing required Washington to accept diluted language in the preliminary resolution that the Security Council passed at the end of July.¹⁷ If Iran continues its refusal to comply, one can expect the negotiations among the permanent members of the Security Council over

the wording of a resolution actually imposing sanctions to be even more contentious than in the first round.

Moreover, even if the United States ultimately gets the Security Council to pass something other than a watered-down sanctions resolution, there is reason to doubt whether it would have much impact on Iran's nuclear program. Sanctions have a less than stellar record of inducing regimes to change policies—especially to abandon high-priority, high-prestige projects. And Iran's nuclear program clearly belongs in that category.

The Dismal Record of Sanctions

Unilateral U.S. economic sanctions have a poor track record of inducing policy change.¹⁸ Washington has maintained a comprehensive embargo on trade with and investment in Cuba for more than 45 years. Yet the Castro government remains entrenched in power, and Havana still pursues retrograde communist economic and social policies—much to the annoyance of the United States. Washington's attempt to isolate North Korea has entered its seventh decade, again without having much discernible impact on Pyongyang's policies.¹⁹ In both cases, U.S. efforts have been badly undercut by the refusal of other nations to go along with policies of economic coercion. That problem is even more pronounced with Washington's sanctions against Iran, which date from the 1979 Islamic revolution and the subsequent seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran and the resulting hostage crisis. Today, Russia, China, Japan, and several members of the European Union conduct significant trade with Iran and have important investments in that country. Those actions render the U.S. sanctions largely ineffective except with respect to a few sectors, most notably spare parts for aircraft.

Even when sanctions are imposed on a comprehensive multilateral basis, they have a mixed record at best. The most highly touted success story was the decision of South Africa's white minority government to abandon the policy of apartheid and turn over political power to the black majority. Most of the other apparent success stories involve far

more limited policy changes by the target regime. But even the transformation of South Africa was a highly complex process, and economic sanctions were merely one factor among many that led to political change.²⁰ Moreover, the process took decades. We don't have the luxury of that amount of time with regard to Iran's nuclear program.

The most detailed study on the coercive power of sanctions remains Gary Hufbauer, Jeffrey Schott, and Kimberly Elliott's *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*.²¹ The authors examined 115 cases in which sanctions were imposed and determined that, in 41 cases, or approximately 36 percent of the time, sanctions were the primary reason that a target state shifted its behavior. Other scholars have challenged that assessment, however, contending that Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott substantially overstated the effectiveness of economic sanctions.²² Even if those criticisms are not valid, it is clear that sanctions were in only a minority of cases—and the vast majority of successes involves a combination of broad cooperation by important countries and relatively narrow policy changes or low-priority objectives for the target regime.

One of the major problems with multilateral sanctions is the incentive for some sanctioning parties to defect. As political scientist Daniel Drezner notes, that phenomenon occurs repeatedly.²³ For example, during the U.S.-led grain embargo against the Soviet Union following that country's invasion of Afghanistan, the defection of grain-rich Argentina fatally undermined the campaign.²⁴

Why Iran Is a Poor Target for Sanctions

Iran is an especially unpromising candidate for a successful campaign of economic coercion. Even if the United States can induce the major EU powers, Russia, China, Japan, and India to impose serious sanctions against Iran, the defection of one or more of those countries is very likely. All of them have important investments in Iran. Japan, for example, is extremely worried that if it goes along with a sanctions regime, China will swoop in and displace Tokyo's investments

in Iran's oil industry.²⁵ Some smaller countries may also defect from any sanctions regime. Australia, for example, has already voiced reservations about its participation.²⁶

The fact that Iran is a major oil producer is another factor reducing the probable effectiveness of any UN sanctions resolution. Theoretically, the Security Council could authorize an embargo on Iranian oil and establish a blockade of Iran's ports to execute that edict. Given Tehran's dependence on oil revenues, sanctions directed against its oil exports might force the country to the brink of bankruptcy and create powerful pressures to alter course on the nuclear issue. But with global crude oil prices already approaching \$70 a barrel, it strains credulity to imagine a major oil consumer like China approving such a measure. Indeed, it is not certain that even the United States would be willing to endure the resulting economic pain. Some experts predict that such an embargo would likely send oil prices well above \$100 a barrel, with highly unpleasant consequences for the global economy.²⁷

Yet without an embargo on Iranian oil, there is almost no chance that economic sanctions will cause Tehran to abandon its nuclear program. If the United States and the other powers are determined to keep Iran nonnuclear, they must look to other strategies.

Option 2: Orchestrate Regime Change

A strategy of regime change is the favorite panacea of most neoconservatives, and they usually argue that it is possible to orchestrate an overthrow of the clerical regime without an extensive U.S. military role. According to enthusiastic proponents of regime change such as American Enterprise Institute activist Michael Ledeen, there is so much Iranian public opposition to the mullahs that a U.S. propaganda offensive combined with financial and logistical assistance to prospective insurgents would be sufficient to topple the regime. Ledeen has boasted, "I have contacts in Iran,

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fighting the regime. Give me twenty million [dollars] and you'll have your revolution."²⁸

Proponents of regime change were active even before the Iranian nuclear crisis became prominent; most hawks during that earlier period emphasized Tehran's support for terrorist organizations as the principal justification for seeking to oust the clerical government.²⁹ Calls for regime change have become even more pronounced since Hezbollah's attack on northern Israel in July 2006 and the resulting conflict.³⁰ Increasingly, the counterterrorism justification has melded with arguments about the need to thwart Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

The initial stage of the regime-change strategy is already underway with congressional passage of the Iran Freedom Support Act in the spring of 2005, and a dramatic boost in funding for anti-regime activities the following year. As outlined by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the expanded program funds radio broadcasts and other propaganda activities and provides modest support for trade unions and other dissident groups.³¹ The Bush administration proposed an infusion of an additional \$75 million for the campaign (augmenting the \$10 million that had previously been appropriated for democracy support activities); Congress ultimately approved \$66 million.

Dubious Exile Allies

The regime-change thesis might seem more plausible if we had not heard similar arguments in the years leading up to the Iraq war.³² Indeed, the argument for regime change and the strategy embodied in the Iran Freedom Support Act³³ are eerily reminiscent of the approach adopted with respect to Iraq between 1998 and 2003. Congress also passed and funded an Iraq Liberation Act during that period. American policymakers swallowed the self-serving propaganda of Ahmed Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress, which said that with just modest U.S. financial and logistical support Iraqi factions opposed to Saddam Hussein would be able to overthrow his regime. It has since

become apparent that the INC never had more than a meager domestic following. (Chalabi's party garnered less than 0.5 percent in the December 2005 parliamentary elections in Iraq.)

There are manipulative (and in some cases utterly unsavory) Iranian exiles waiting in the wings to pull the same con game on Washington.³⁴ They include notorious arms dealer Manucher Ghorbanifar, a shadowy figure in the Iran-Contra scandal during the Reagan administration.³⁵ Perhaps the most unsavory opposition group is the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK), which even the U.S. State Department considers a terrorist organization.³⁶

The MEK, an organization founded on a combination of Islamism and Marxism, has a long history of terrorism and cult-like behavior. The MEK is the military wing of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), regarded by many neoconservatives as a key ally in the effort to overthrow the Iranian clerical regime. After moving its base of operations from France to Iraq in 1986, the MEK was reportedly funded by Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime and sent into combat against Iran. It has also been implicated in the killing of American citizens.³⁷ Currently led by a married couple, Masoud and Maryam Rajavi, the organization has increasingly become a cult of personality.³⁸

That reputation does not discourage some neoconservative proponents of regime change from making common cause with MEK activists.³⁹ In May 2003, scholars Daniel Pipes and Patrick Clawson of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy recommended that "when the secretary of state next decides whether or not to re-certify the MEK as a terrorist organization," that official "should come to the sensible conclusion that it poses no threat to the security of the United States or its citizens." Pipes and Clawson went on to praise the MEK as a potential U.S. ally, citing the organization's "key information" about Iran's nuclear program and other activities of the Iranian regime.⁴⁰ In November 2005, Raymond Tanter, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy,

stated that an effective U.S. policy

requires working with Iranian opposition groups in general and with the main opposition in particular. The National Council for Resistance of Iran (NCRI) and Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK) are not only the best source for intelligence on Iran's potential violations of the nonproliferation regime. . . . The NCRI and MEK are also a possible ally of the West in bringing about regime change in Tehran.⁴¹

He declared, with little evidence, that the MEK and the NCRI were the only opposition groups the clerical leaders feared.

In addition to the dubious wisdom of supporting groups like the NCRI and the MEK, the assurances that significant U.S. military assistance would be unnecessary to effect regime change in Iran should be greeted with skepticism. In the case of Iraq, such assurances were quietly buried when regime-change advocates became impatient with Saddam Hussein's continuing ability to cling to power. Saddam's overthrow was carried out by a massive application of U.S. military power, with the much-touted exiles playing the role of embarrassing hangers-on. If the United States adopts a strategy of regime change in Iran, it is likely that an even greater military effort will be required.⁴²

Why a Regime-Change Strategy Might Backfire

Aggressive democracy promotion is a strategy that is likely to backfire in another way. There is little doubt that a growing number of Iranians (especially young Iranians) are fed up with the repressive rule of the mullahs and want a more open society. But outspoken U.S. endorsements of their resistance campaign could be the kiss of death. U.S. support gives the religious hierarchy the perfect pretext to portray even cautious advocates of political reform as traitors and American stooges.

We must remember that there are millions of Iranians who have not made up their

minds yet about whether to support the current ruling elite or back the challengers. Many of those moderates seem increasingly disillusioned with the mullahs, but they are not necessarily fond of the United States.⁴³ Moreover, it is a nearly universal trait in world affairs that populations resent pressure and interference from foreign powers. The typical reaction is to rally around the incumbent domestic regime and reject those opposition figures tainted by foreign influence—even if the public might normally be sympathetic to the reformers' political values. In other words, nationalism usually trumps allegiance to abstract principles.

Some Iranian dissidents seem to understand that point and are very nervous about a U.S. political embrace. Iranian human rights activist Emad Baghi complained, "We are under pressure from both the hardliners in the judiciary and that stupid George Bush." Vahid Pourostad, editor of the pro-reform *National Trust* newspaper, noted that whenever the United States "supported an idea publicly, the public has done the opposite."⁴⁴

Popular resentment against a heavy-handed U.S. role is especially likely in Iran.⁴⁵ A good many Iranians remember that the United States interfered once before in their country's internal affairs, and the outcome was not a happy one. It was a coup orchestrated by the CIA in 1953 that ousted a democratic government and restored the autocratic shah to power. His corrupt and repressive rule for the next quarter century paved the way for the Islamic fundamentalist revolution.⁴⁶ Any hint of U.S. meddling today would probably cause Iranian moderates to make common cause with the ruling religious elite.

Would a Democratic Iran Remain Nonnuclear?

Moreover, in the unlikely event that the United States and the Iranian exiles were able to bring a secular, democratic regime to power in Tehran, that would not necessarily mean the end of Iran's quest for nuclear weapons. Proponents of regime change seem to assume

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that Tehran's nuclear program is the pet initiative of the Islamic elite, while most Iranians are indifferent or hostile. Regime change, according to that logic, would not only remove an odious regime, it is the ultimate solution to the nuclear problem.

That is yet another dubious assumption. Tehran's nuclear ambitions date back to the 1970s when Iran was still ruled by the shah.⁴⁷ The bulk of the evidence suggests that a "peaceful" nuclear program has widespread support in Iran for reasons of national pride and regional prestige.⁴⁸ The goal of a nuclear-weapons arsenal is more controversial, but given the dangerous neighborhood in which Iran is located, support for that objective extends well beyond the mullahs and their staunch supporters. Washington could be making a serious miscalculation if it assumes that a democratic Iran would be content to remain nonnuclear.

Option 3: Preventive Air Strikes

Proponents of preventive military action typically cite the successful Israeli strike on Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981 as a model for derailing the Iranian nuclear program. Some suggest that the United States undertake that mission on its own; others suggest that Washington encourage Israel to do so—a form of security outsourcing. In terms of the larger geopolitical consequences, it would be a distinction without a difference. Even if Israel undertook the task (either with U.S. encouragement or on its own initiative), the United States would be blamed, given the close political ties between Washington and Tel Aviv. The perception of collusion would be deepened because to reach targets in Iraq, Israeli planes would probably have to overfly U.S.-controlled Iraq.⁴⁹ Clearly, they could not do that without Washington's approval.

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comments of *Weekly Standard* editor William Kristol epitomize those recommendations. He suggests "countering this act of Iranian aggression with a military strike against Iranian nuclear facilities." And he is in a hurry, asserting that it "would be easier to act sooner than later." Kristol is sanguine about the consequences. "Yes, there would be repercussions—and they would be healthy ones, showing a strong America that has rejected further appeasement."⁵⁰

Problems with the Air Strikes Option

There are numerous problems with the strategy of preemptive air strikes whether they are conducted by Israel or the United States.⁵¹ Iraq's Osirak facility was one easily identified, above-ground site. There are numerous nuclear-related sites in Iran—many of which are in or near major population centers, maximizing the probable number of civilian casualties in an attack. Indeed, thousands of innocent Iranians would likely perish in a campaign of air strikes.

Moreover, there is no certainty that we have identified all of the relevant targets. There could be many other covert facilities, since Tehran has had nearly three decades to pursue its nuclear activities. Worst of all, some of the installations may be in reinforced, underground locations. Taking out such sites with conventional weapons would be problematic at best. Although some ultra-hawkish types have apparently mused about using nuclear "bunker busters" for the required strikes,⁵² crossing the nuclear threshold is a momentous step that could come back to haunt the United States in multiple ways.

Even launching conventional strikes would be extremely dangerous. Contrary to Bill Kristol's optimistic assessment, there are likely to be highly negative repercussions. At the very least, Tehran would be tempted to cause even more trouble than it is already doing for U.S. and British occupation forces in Iraq. The infiltration of a few thousand dedicated Revolutionary Guards, working with tens of thousands of Iraqis in Shiite militias, could accomplish that goal. The Iranian regime would also be tempted

to unleash its terrorist ally, Hezbollah, on American targets throughout the Middle East. And there is always the risk that an attacked and humiliated Iran might do something incredibly rash, such as closing the Strait of Hormuz or launching attacks against Israel, triggering a massive regional crisis.

Bomb Iran to Win the Support of the Iranian People?

Perhaps the most bizarre incarnation of the air strike thesis is the argument made by some American hawks that it would serve as the needed catalyst for regime change. According to that thesis, the Iranian people would be so enraged at the clerics for bringing destruction upon them that they would overthrow the regime. Bill Kristol, once again, is the most explicit with that rationale. Asserting that “the Iranian people dislike their regime,” he predicts that “the right use of military force . . . could cause them to reconsider whether they really want to have this regime in power.”⁵³

The notion that populations will rise up against their government and make common cause with the country that is bombing them and killing their loved ones is based on highly dubious logic. Moreover, the historical record lends little support to the thesis. Despite massive bombing of Germany and Japan in World War II, the fascist regimes remained in power to the bitter end in both cases. U.S. bombing of North Vietnam during the 1960s and early 1970s did not dislodge Ho Chi Minh or his successors from power. NATO’s bombing of Serbia in 1999 actually caused Slobodan Milosevic’s popularity to *increase* for a time. It was not until much later—and the election that drove him from power was based on largely domestic issues—that the democratic opposition was able to get rid of him.⁵⁴

Bombing Iran would almost certainly be counterproductive for the goal of regime change. Iranians, like most other people, could be expected to “rally around the flag” if their country comes under attack. Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian liberal critic of

the clerical regime, likely expressed the views of most of her fellow citizens when she warned Washington not to attack Iran: “We will defend our country till the last drop of blood.”⁵⁵ If that is the attitude of a pro-Western liberal Iranian, one can only imagine what the attitude would be of Iranians less hostile to the current government.

Finally, there is the probable impact on the rest of the Muslim world. If the United States attacks yet another Muslim country (which would make three in the last five years), most Muslims from Morocco to Malaysia will believe that Washington is out to destroy their culture and religion. America’s troubles with the Islamic world do not yet constitute a war of civilizations, but attacking Iran could well produce that result. The military option is one that no rational U.S. policymaker should embrace.

Option 4: Acceptance and Deterrence

An alternative to sanctions, forcible regime change, or air strikes is simply to grudgingly admit Iran into the global nuclear weapons club. The United States would then rely on its own vast nuclear arsenal to deter Iran from contemplating an attack on American targets or threatening important American interests. Admittedly, the presence of Ahmadinejad makes the deterrence option more nerve-racking than it would be otherwise. Having such an emotionally volatile and hate-filled individual as Iran’s head of state understandably makes people wonder whether deterrence would work in this case.

That is a legitimate concern. It is worth remembering, though, that Iran’s political system is fairly diffuse, and Ahmadinejad is only one actor among many. Indeed, despite his lofty title of president, he had to submit several candidates before he induced the parliament to approve his nominee for oil minister. Other Iranian officials have openly disagreed with his policies, not only on the nuclear issue, but on other foreign policy

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matters as well.⁵⁶ Iran, under Ahmadinejad, is not a tightly centralized system like Germany under Hitler or the Soviet Union under Stalin, where one man's decision could plunge the nation into war.

America Has Deterred Other Odious Regimes

The experience of dealing with Stalin is relevant in another way. The United States has successfully deterred other repugnant and bizarre regimes. Stalin was a genocidal psychopath, yet he was never so reckless as to attack a nuclear-armed America or even U.S. allies in Western Europe. Washington's experience with China in the 1960s and early 1970s is perhaps even more pertinent.⁵⁷ China became a nuclear power under Mao Zedong, a leader who exceeded even Stalin's record of genocide. Mao's publicly enunciated views on nuclear warfare also were alarming in the extreme. His boast that China could outlast the United States in a nuclear war of attrition so disturbed the other communist giant, the USSR, that Soviet leaders hastened to assure their American counterparts that such thinking in no way reflected the Kremlin's views.⁵⁸

China also emerged as a nuclear power on the eve of the Cultural Revolution. China during that orgy of fanaticism makes today's Iran look like a normal, even sedate, country. U.S. policymakers were understandably very uneasy about China joining the ranks of nuclear-weapons states. Yet they rejected the advice of those inside and outside government who advocated military action to take out Beijing's nuclear program. Given the constructive changes that have taken place in China, and the important relationship that has grown up between Washington and Beijing in the past three decades, history has vindicated a policy of restraint. A similar policy of caution and deterrence may also pay off with Iran.

In any case, the obnoxious nature of the Iranian regime (or other rogue regimes) does not negate the underlying realities of deterrence.⁵⁹ The United States has an enormous nuclear arsenal and the delivery systems to

launch retaliatory strikes with pinpoint accuracy. Any government in Tehran, whether headed by Ahmadinejad or some other figure, would know that an attack on America would be a regime-extinguishing event. Such an attack would be suicide, both politically and literally. And while nonstate actors that embrace terrorism may sometimes be suicidal, political leaders seldom are. We have little credible evidence that the Iranian leadership is an exception to that rule.

Most people who reject a strategy of acceptance and deterrence tacitly acknowledge the improbability that Iran would launch a suicidal attack on the American homeland. Instead, a majority of the objections focus on other fears about Iranian misconduct. Those objections are based on several assumptions of varying plausibility.

Would a Nuclear Iran Attack Israel?

Advocates of a hard-line policy toward Tehran argue that if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, it will use those weapons against its hated adversary, Israel. Fears of such a scenario have risen sharply in the past year following comments by Ahmadinejad that it would be a good thing if Israel were wiped off the map.

Such a comment is certainly reprehensible, but does it invalidate the long-standing realities of deterrence? Israel has between 150 and 300 nuclear weapons of its own. Even if Iran can go forward with its nuclear program, it will not be able to build more than a dozen or so weapons over the next decade—even assuming the most alarmist predictions of the current state of the program prove valid. Moreover, Israel is moving to expand its submarine fleet to have at least one nuclear-armed submarine on station at all times, giving the country a secure second-strike capability.⁶⁰ Once that process is complete, Tehran could not hope to launch a “decapitation” sneak attack based on the (already remote) possibility that Israel would be unable to retaliate. As in the case of contemplating an attack on the United States, it would be most unwise for Iran to contemplate attacking Israel. The same realities of deterrence apply, albeit on a small-

er scale. Iranian rhetoric about wiping Israel off the map is so much ideological blather. Israel has more than a sufficient capability to deter an Iranian nuclear attack.

Would Iran Pass Along Nuclear Weapons to Terrorist Groups?

This concern has slightly greater plausibility. Tehran does have a cozy relationship with a number of terrorist organizations in the Middle East, most notably Hezbollah. The pervasive assumption among American hawks is that if Iran obtains nuclear weapons, sooner or later it will pass one along to a terrorist ally.

But how likely is it that Iran would make such a transfer? At the very least, it would be an incredibly high-risk strategy. Even the most fanatical mullahs in Tehran realize that the United States would attack the probable supplier of such a weapon—and Iran would be at the top of Washington’s list of suspects.

It is significant that Iran has possessed chemical weapons for decades, yet there is no indication that it has passed on any of those weapons to Hezbollah or to Palestinian groups that Tehran supports politically. Why should one assume that the mullahs would be more reckless with nuclear weapons when the prospect of devastating retaliation for an attack would be even more likely? The more logical conclusion is that Iran, like other nuclear powers, would jealously guard its arsenal.

Just in case the mullahs might entertain thoughts of transferring such weaponry, though, U.S. leaders should be explicit about the consequences, making it clear that such a transfer is a very bright red line that no regime can cross and hope to survive. The reason for such an uncompromising position on that point is that al-Qaeda and its ilk are not deterrable; they are not rational nation-state actors, and they have no fixed “return address” for the purposes of retaliation. The message to Tehran should be that we can tolerate Iran in the global nuclear club, albeit reluctantly, but any transfer of nuclear material or weapons to nonstate actors will be considered an act of war, and a regime-ending event.

Would a Nuclear Iran Engage in Blackmail?

Prominent hawks insist that an Iran armed with nuclear weapons would seek to establish its hegemony in the Persian Gulf region and would seek to undermine U.S. interests there and elsewhere in the world whenever possible. Edward Luttwak, a scholar at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, states that thesis starkly: “Given what Iran’s regime is now doing to attack American interests worldwide from Venezuela to Iraq even without the shield of nuclear weapons, it is irresponsible to do nothing and merely wait to see how they will behave when they feel more secure.”⁶¹ American Enterprise Institute scholar Reuel Marc Gerech makes a similar argument. “We—America and Europe—have done an awful job confronting the clerical regime for its terrorism when the Islamic Republic wasn’t a nuclear power.” Given that record, he predicts that “the Europeans (certainly) and the Americans (probably) would be likely to blink and give way to Iranian intimidation backed by a nuclear threat, especially one that had a terrorist edge to it.”⁶²

There may be some truth to the blackmail thesis. Iran might become more assertive in the geopolitical arena—especially in the Persian Gulf region—once it had a secure nuclear deterrent. The prospect of at least subtle blackmail becomes more likely if Tehran’s neighbors choose to remain nonnuclear, perhaps counting on the U.S. nuclear umbrella to shield them from Iranian pressure. That would create a dilemma for the United States. Extended deterrence (protecting third parties from attacks) has always been more problematic than primary deterrence (protecting the United States from attack), since a challenging power might doubt that the United States would really risk adverse consequences by putting its own security on the line for an ally or client.

Extended deterrence is especially problematic if the country being protected is only a marginal ally or client of the United States. Although Israel (and probably Saudi Arabia) would not fall into that category, other

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nations in the region do. Tehran might wonder whether the United States would really risk a major war with a nuclear-armed Iran merely to prevent some modest muscling of, say, one of the small Persian Gulf states.

Nevertheless, one can overstate both the probability and the effectiveness of blackmail. It is again useful to recall that analysts expressed similar fears about China when it acquired nuclear weapons, yet Beijing’s behavior for the most part did not validate those fears. Although China did attack Vietnam in 1979, the PRC’s conduct since the late 1960s has generally been less, rather than more, bellicose than it was when China lacked a nuclear capability. That episode illustrates the larger point that nuclear weapons are much more useful as a deterrent against possible adversaries than they are as a mechanism for intimidating those adversaries, much less for war-fighting purposes.⁶³ There are indications over the past several years that the two newest nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, have reached that conclusion. As in the case of China after the 1960s, New Delhi and Islamabad appear to have become more cautious and restrained since they built nuclear arsenals. One cannot guarantee that Tehran would follow that pattern, but by the same token it is unwarranted to assume that the Iranian regime would engage in rampant blackmail.

Would a Nuclear Iran Lead to Further Nuclear Proliferation in the Region?

Finally, those who favor a more confrontational policy toward Iran warn that if Tehran succeeds in its quest for nuclear weapons, other nations in the region will quickly do the same, creating an especially dangerous security environment. As do concerns about possible blackmail, this fear has some validity. Because of the uncertain reliability of the protection afforded by the U.S. umbrella for some U.S. allies and client states in the Middle East, there is a very real prospect that if Iran develops a nuclear arsenal, sooner or later such countries as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey might follow suit.

Whether additional proliferation would reach epidemic proportions and create the nightmare scenarios forecast by some analysts is uncertain. It is important to recall that pundits and even international relations experts have tended to overestimate both the probability and the extent of proliferation in the past. The conventional wisdom in the 1960s was that there would be as many as two dozen nuclear-weapons powers within a generation.⁶⁴ Similar predictions were made in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁶⁵

Moreover, it is not an established fact that nuclear weapons in the hands of a larger number of nations would necessarily be a bad development. Indeed, a few respected international relations scholars have argued that nuclear proliferation might be stabilizing rather than destabilizing.⁶⁶ Given its volatile political makeup, though, the Middle East is probably not the best region to test that thesis.

Admittedly, acceptance and deterrence are not an easy or comfortable course to advocate, but that course is more realistic and less dangerous than the confrontational options. On balance, though, we should make every reasonable effort to dissuade Tehran from proceeding down the nuclear path. The best way to do that is to propose a “grand bargain” to the Iranian government.

Option 5: Try for a Grand Bargain

We should make a serious diplomatic effort to get Iran to give up its quest for nuclear weapons—and that means going substantially beyond the scope of the EU-3-led negotiations. Washington should propose a grand bargain to Tehran. That means giving an assurance that the United States will not use force against Iran the way we did against such nonnuclear adversaries as Serbia and Iraq.⁶⁷ It also means offering restored diplomatic relations and normal economic relations. In return, Iran would be required to open its nuclear program to unfettered inter-

national inspections to guarantee that the program is used solely for peaceful power-generation purposes.

The strategy of offering a grand bargain also attempts to understand why Iran might be pursuing a nuclear-weapons program and what it is likely to take to get that country to choose a different course. Why would Iran want to build nuclear weapons? In attempting to answer that question, we need to look at why the vast majority of countries decide to remain nonnuclear. Only a small number have ventured down the path of creating a nuclear capability, and some of them have turned around while on that path. South Africa is a notable example.

Why Nations Choose to Build Nuclear Weapons

There are important reasons why most nations choose not to acquire a nuclear-weapons capability. For one thing, it is very expensive. The opportunity cost to most societies is regarded as prohibitive. Occasionally, a poor country such as North Korea will be willing to make a nuclear-weapons program the highest priority, but most governments will not make that sacrifice. A decision to go nuclear has important adverse diplomatic repercussions as well. Trying to build a nuclear arsenal is not the way to win friends in the international community. The majority of governments become extremely agitated when a country seeks to break out of the nonproliferation system and become a nuclear weapons state, and any would-be nuclear power has to take that hostility into consideration. Finally, by trying to acquire a nuclear arsenal, a country may trigger or exacerbate a regional arms race, and at the end of the process end up no more secure than it was at the beginning. In fact, it might be even less secure.

On the other hand, there are some important reasons why a country might decide to go nuclear. One reason is prestige. The global nuclear weapons club is a very exclusive association. All five permanent members of the UN Security Council are nuclear weapons

states, and a sixth, India, is likely to become a permanent member of the council in the next few years. Countries that have nuclear weapons are treated differently than are non-nuclear powers. Before they became nuclear powers in 1998, India and Pakistan were treated with less than a great deal of respect by other international actors. India was considered a chronic Third World underachiever, and Pakistan was viewed as a problem state—if not a potential failed state. Consider how those countries are treated now, since they have joined the nuclear weapons club. It is markedly different.

Another motive for going nuclear is to deter or possibly intimidate a regional adversary. That appeared to be a consideration for both India and Pakistan. India had long sought to overawe its smaller neighbor, and possessing a nuclear arsenal eventually became part of that strategy. Pakistan, in turn, concluded that it had to neutralize India's growing conventional military advantage as well as its new nuclear capability. A nuclear deterrent was the most decisive and cost-effective way to achieve that goal. Beyond its regional rivalry with Pakistan, India was also concerned about the rising military power of China. There was no question the perceived Chinese threat was a factor in India's decision to go nuclear, as then-minister of defense George Fernandes has emphasized.⁶⁸

In addition to the motive of deterrence within a region, there is a potential motive of broader deterrence—especially to deter the United States. With regard to that factor, we need to be realistic about the unintended consequences of some U.S. actions. The United States has taken major military action on nine occasions since the end of the Cold War. Although many Americans may think that those episodes were justified, other countries don't necessarily see it the same way. In particular, countries such as Iran and North Korea have seen how the United States has treated nonnuclear adversaries such as Serbia and Iraq, and that may have led them to conclude that the only reliable deterrent to U.S. coercion was a nuclear arsenal.

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Why Iran Might Want to Be a Nuclear Power

So what are Iran's possible motives for going nuclear? Prestige is certainly one consideration—that was a factor even when the shah was in power. But prestige does not appear to be the dominant reason in Iran's case today. Deterrence, both regional and extraregional, seems to be a more important consideration. Iran is located in a volatile region, surrounded by hostile neighbors. Russia, Israel, Pakistan, and India all have nuclear weapons already, so regional deterrence issues probably loom large for Tehran.⁶⁹ Iran very likely is also reacting to U.S. actions. President Bush's "axis of evil" speech, linking Iran to Iraq and North Korea, came as a prelude to an invasion and occupation of Iraq. A policymaker in Tehran (or Pyongyang) seeing his country linked to Iraq in that fashion might well assume that his country will also be on the U.S. hit list at some point.

In addition to President Bush's hostile rhetoric, the United States has deployed its forces in ways that many Iranians find menacing. U.S. troops are already in several Persian Gulf states, and have been in the region since the first Persian Gulf war. Additional forces have now been deployed to some of the Central Asian republics, to Afghanistan, and, of course, most recently to Iraq. To leaders in Tehran, those moves look suspiciously like an encirclement strategy with Iran as the next target for U. S. military action. Iran's apparent response in wanting to build nuclear weapons is not irrational; it is quite logical.

A grand bargain is the one offer that might induce Iran to abandon the quest for a nuclear arsenal, despite the various powerful incentives to pursue that goal. Normalized relations, an end to economic sanctions, the removal of any threat of a campaign of forcible regime change, and a settlement of Tehran's multi-billion-dollar financial claims are very appealing carrots that Washington can offer. But it is hard to imagine Iran giving up its long-standing effort to build a nuclear arsenal for much less than that package of incentives.

It is possible, though, that Tehran would spurn a proposed grand bargain, despite the attractiveness of the incentives. The Iranian political elite still seems uncertain about whether even to seek a rapprochement with the United States.⁷⁰ Those who propose a grand bargain also have to acknowledge that Iran may be unalterably determined to join the global nuclear weapons club for reasons of prestige and security. But we will never know unless we make the offer.

Signs That Tehran Might Want an Improved Relationship with Washington

There are intriguing signs that at least some portions of the clerical regime would like an improved relationship with the United States. According to the *Washington Post*, the Iranian government approached the Bush administration in 2002—after Bush's hostile "Axis of Evil" comment in his State of the Union address—and proposed cooperating with the United States against Al Qaeda. As a gesture of good faith, they informed Washington of the identities of 290 members of Al Qaeda that Iran had captured and sent back to their home countries. The Bush administration spurned that overture. Aides to Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld argued that any diplomatic engagement would "legitimate" Iran and other state sponsors of terrorism.⁷¹

In the spring of 2006 Ahmadinejad surprised Washington and the rest of the international community by sending a lengthy letter to President George Bush—the first communication to an American chief executive from an Iranian head of state in decades. It was a curious document—a rambling 18-page treatise on history, religion, politics, and world affairs. As a foundation for serious, substantive negotiations on the Iranian nuclear crisis, the letter was decidedly inadequate. Nevertheless, it was a sign that even the hardest of the Iranian hardliners was interested in some dialogue with Washington.

Ahmadinejad's letter was not the only feeler for negotiations. A few days later, *Time* magazine published an open letter from

Hassan Rohani, representative of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khomeini. That letter was considerably more focused and substantive than Ahmadinejad's mis- sive.⁷² The former speaker of the Iranian par- liament, Mehdi Karroubi, has been perhaps the boldest of all in favoring a rapproche- ment with the United States. "This silence between the two countries cannot go on for- ever," he said. "The ice should be broken and the walls of mistrust should fall."⁷³

Although those initiatives may have been a factor that finally induced Washington to join the EU-3-led negotiations with Tehran,⁷⁴ U.S. leaders still avoid any suggestion of bilateral negotiations with the Iranian gov- ernment. Indeed, Secretary of State Rice went out of her way to stress that U.S. participa- tion in the multilateral talks in no way implied that Washington was willing to con- sider a grand bargain.⁷⁵ That attitude needs to change. Bilateral negotiations will be nec- essary to pursue the strategy of a grand bar- gain, because the United States holds most of the carrots that Iran desires. The European powers (and Russia and China) might be able to facilitate such negotiations, but progress will be unlikely unless there are direct talks between Tehran and Washington.

And we have little to lose by making the offer of a grand bargain—unless we were to let negotiations drag on endlessly. Proposing the grand bargain to Tehran and indicating that the offer would remain on the table for a maximum of six months would have no sig- nificant downside. If the Iranians rejected the proposal—or if they simply stalled—all of the other options would still be available.

The Need to Deal with Obnoxious Regimes

To create the possibility of achieving a grand bargain, however, the United States has to overcome an entrenched reluctance to negotiate with repressive and obnoxious regimes. We simply do not have the luxury of confining our diplomacy to friendly govern- ments.⁷⁶ One of the great challenges of effec- tive diplomacy is to deal with, and get results

from, regimes that most Americans would prefer did not exist. Unfortunately, that is an unpleasant reality that seems to elude recent generations of U.S. policymakers. Since the days of Woodrow Wilson, Washington's typ- ical response to unfriendly, repressive govern- ments (especially of small countries) is to try to isolate and berate them. Before Wilson, the general U.S. practice was not to apply a moral litmus test for diplomatic relations. That pol- icy was far more realistic and productive. The current approach is akin to the maturity level one would expect from an elementary school student: "I don't like you, and I'm not going to speak to you." We need a far more sophis- ticated, flexible, and mature approach to deal with Iran.

If Iran turns down the proposal for a grand bargain, Washington's fall-back position should be to rely on deterrence, despite the limitations of that strategy and its unpleasant side effect of creating incentives for greater nuclear proliferation. The one thing we should not do is start yet another war that would further destabilize the Persian Gulf region and threaten the lives and welfare of millions of people.

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2. See, for example, the views of former UN chief weapons inspector Hans Blix. "Blix: Iran Years Away from Nuclear Bomb," Associated Press, April 3, 2006. The most detailed independent assessment of Iran's nuclear potential can be found in Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan, *Iran's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Real and Potential Threat* (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2006).
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One of the great challenges of effective diplomacy is to deal with, and get results from, regimes that most Americans would prefer did not exist.

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 9. Paul Hughes, “Iran Sounds Positive Note on Russia Atomic Plan,” Reuters, December 28, 2005; and “Iran Insists on Right to Enrich Uranium at Home,” Agence France Presse, January 2, 2006.
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 11. Steven R. Weisman, “U.S. Makes Offer to Meet Iranians on Nuclear Plan,” *New York Times*, June 1, 2006.
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41. Raymond Tanter, “Iran Building Nuclear-Capable Missiles in Secret Tunnels: Options for the International Community,” Statement to the National Press Club, Washington, DC, November 21, 2005, <http://www.nci.org/05nci/11/Tanter-Statement-Nov-21.htm>. In fairness, not all neo-conservatives flirt with the MEK. Both Michael Rubin and Michael Ledeen have given the organization a wide berth.

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58. Author's conversation with Walt W. Rostow, national security adviser to President Lyndon B. Johnson.
59. See Jeffrey Record, "Nuclear Deterrence, Preventive War, and Counterproliferation," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 519, July 8, 2004.
60. Ramit Plushnick-Masti, "Israel Buys 2 Nuclear-Capable Submarines," Associated Press, August 25, 2006.
61. Edward Luttwak, "The Three Options," *Cato Unbound*, July 2006.
62. Reuel Marc Gerecht, "Another Round," *Cato Unbound*, July 2006. For contrary views, see Barry R. Posen, "We Can Live with a Nuclear Iran," *New York Times*, February 27, 2006; and Christopher Layne, "Iran: The Logic of Deterrence," *American Conservative*, April 10, 2006.
63. Kenneth Waltz, "The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better," *Adelphi Papers* no. 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981).
64. In March 1963, President John F. Kennedy said that he was haunted by the fear that sometime in the 1970s the United States would "face a world in which 15 or 20 or 25 nations" possessed nuclear weapons. Quoted in Scott Sagan, "How to Keep the Bomb from Iran," *Foreign Affairs*, 85, no. 5 (September-October 2006): 49.
65. Lewis Dunn and Herman Kahn, "Trends in Nuclear Proliferation," Report prepared for the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, Hudson Institute, May 1976; Ashok Kapur, "And Where We Go: Nth Powers of the Future," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, March 1977, p. 84; and William Epstein, "Why States Do—and Don't—Go Nuclear," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, March 1977, pp. 17-19.
66. See Waltz; and Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Revisited*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2002). See also John Mearsheimer, "Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War," *Atlantic*, August 1990, pp. 39-40.

67. That is likely to be a key point in any bargaining with Iran. Sagan, p. 59.

68. In a February 2004 lecture, Fernandes admitted that in the past he “had qualified China as ‘potential threat number one,’” Since India became a nuclear power, he noted that Indo-Chinese relations had warmed considerably. Quoted in C. Raja Mohan, “India Rethinks China Policy,” *The Hindu*, February 26, 2004.

69. There are also reports that Iran’s neighbor, Pakistan, is building a large reactor that would enable the country to significantly expand its nuclear arsenal. Such a reactor could generate enough plutonium to build 40 to 50 weapons a year. Joby Warrick, “Pakistan Expanding Nuclear Program,” *Washington Post*, July 24, 2006. U.S. government officials, however, contend that the reactor in question will be “substantially smaller and less capable than reported.” Quoted in William Broad and David E. Sanger, “U.S. Disputes Report on New Pakistan Reactor,” *New York Times*, August 3, 2006. Even the addition of a smaller reactor, though, could enhance Pakistan’s nuclear capabilities.

70. Sometimes even the same leader gives conflicting signals within the span of a few days. See the comments of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Al Khamenei. “Khamenei Dismisses Iran-U.S. Talks,” Reuters, June 27, 2006; and Karl

Vick, “Ayatollah’s Moves Hint Iran Wants to Engage,” *Washington Post*, July 5, 2006.

71. Barton Gellman and Dafna Linzer, “Afghanistan, Iraq: Two Wars Collide,” *Washington Post*, October 22, 2004.

72. Adam Zagorin, “A New Gesture from Iran?” *Time*, May 9, 2006, <http://www.time.com/time/world/printout/0,8816,1192578,00.html>.

73. Quoted in Brian Murphy, “Iranian Politician Urges U.S.-Iran Ties,” Associated Press, May 27, 2006.

74. A more likely explanation, though, is that the Bush administration came under growing pressure from prominent Republicans to adopt a different strategy. Laura Rozen, “GOP Heavy Hitters Pressuring White House to Talk with Iran,” *New York Times*, May 27, 2006.

75. “Condoleezza Rice Holds News Conference on Iran, Transcript,” *Washington Post*, May 31, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/31/AR2006053100937.html>.

76. A few experts have recently pointed out that important reality. John McLaughlin, “We Have to Talk to Bad Guys,” *Washington Post*, July 23, 2006; and Leslie H. Gelb, “Time to Talk (to the Bad Guys),” *Wall Street Journal*, July 28, 2006.

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