What To Do About Iran.doc

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Part I

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the current conflict between the Western Powers, particularly the United States, and the Islamic Republic of Iran over the issue of that nation’s nuclear development as it relates to nuclear weapons.

To accomplish this end, it is necessary to first examine the position of Tehran’s government. To do this requires an understanding that policy in Iran is not made by “mad mullahs but by calculating ayatollahs” (Milani, 2009), and that that policy is based on a belief that the United States, and Israel, present an “existential threat” (Ibid.) to the existence of the regime.

The second topic inspects how the government of Iran sees itself as a major regional power and has, as part of its overall strategy, set out to “create spheres of influence in Syria, Lebanon, and among the Palestinians” (Ibid.).

It is also necessary to understand why the government of the United States, and the Bush Administration in particular, saw the emergence of a nuclear Iran as a “crisis” situation, and why it felt that this represented a real threat to American strategic interests in the Middle East and Asia.

Finally, it will be shown that, despite being complex and deep-rooted, the conflict over Iran’s nuclear ambitions does have the possibility for peaceful resolution. This will require
examining possible negotiating strategies and positions that might lend themselves to bring
together the various actors involved and result in a rapprochment between the Western Powers
and Iran and fulfill Iran’s need for a peaceful nuclear program while allaying western fears of a
new nuclear power in the volatile Middle East.

The Position of Iran

In March 2006, the National Security Strategy of the United States stated that America
faced “no greater challenge from a single country than from Iran” (Strategic Studies Institute -
U.S. Army, March 2006). While much is known of American policy toward Iran, “hardly
anything comprehensive has been produced about Iran’s policy toward the United States”
(Milani, 2009), and, in particular, there has been “neglected discourse on Iran’s nuclear calculus”
(Entessar, 2009).

As Professor Milani explains, Iran’s foreign policy is not made by “mad mullahs”, but
rather by “calculating ayatollahs” whose top priority is the survival of the regime and the Islamic
Republic as it now is constituted (Milani, 2009). This policy is colored by the fact that the
ayatollahs believe that the United States represents a threat to the very existence of their regime.
Iran finds itself surrounded by the U.S. presence in neighboring countries such as Bahrain,
Kuwait and Qatar, as well as Iraq and Afghanistan (Ibid.). The ruling clerics believe that the
United States is attempting to strangle the life out of the regime with its economic sanctions, its
attempts to sabotage Iran’s nuclear program, and the Bush Administration’s “beating the drums
of preemptive war” (Ibid.)

Professor Milani see Iran’s political strategy as having four components; first,
“developing the means to fight an asymmetric low-intensity war inside and outside the country.”
Second, the “modernization of Iran’s weapons systems.” Third, “[d]eveloping indigenous missile and anti-missile systems,” and fourth, “its nuclear program.” (Milani, 2009)

Iran’s nuclear strategy is based on the perception that it is surrounded by hostile states, some of whom are nuclear-armed, and, remembering back to the Iran-Iraq War, that it has once before been the victim of regional aggression. (Entessar, 2009).

Of particular concern to Iran is what it perceives as the threat from a nuclear-armed Israel. To the Iranians, Israel is an existential threat. It is their belief that they would be justified in developing a nuclear capability as a counterweight to Israel’s nuclear threat. (Ibid.)

In Iran’s defense, however, it should be noted that, as Professor Nadar Entessar, in his Middle East Policy article, *Iran’s Nuclear Decision-Making Calculus*, points out, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has yet to conclude that Iran’s nuclear programs have violated the NPT [Nuclear Proliferation Treaty]. Professor Milani agrees that the IAEA has found “no smoking gun or any evidence that Iran has diverted its nuclear program toward military purposes” (Milani, 2009) In addition, it is a fact that the leadership of Iran has consistently repeated that nuclear weapons are not part of their military strategy. (Entessar, 2009).

**Iran’s Ambitions in the Middle East**

It has been the goal of the Iranians to create a regional sphere of influence in nations such as Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan by encouraging and supporting pro-Iranian factions within those countries. In addition, Iran has been a material supporter of the Palestinians.
As Professor Milani points out, “after centuries of using its influence to mostly defend Shi’ites, Iran is now increasingly trying to transcend the sectarian divide by supporting the Sunni groups Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad” (Milani, 2009). The Iranian goal being to supplant Egypt and Saudi Arabia as the dominant regional power (Ibid.).

Some believe that Iran’s alleged pursuit of nuclear weapons is a means by which it can enhance its role as a leading player in the Middle East. (Ben-Meir, Spring 2009). Dr. Ben-Meir also believes that the Iranians seek to have the American military out of the Middle East because American power is preventing them from dominating the region (Ibid.).

The View from the West

There can be no more telling summary of the pre-2009 United States government’s view of the Iranian nuclear situation than President Bush’s summary in the 2006 National Strategic Study,

We may face no greater challenge from a single country than from Iran. For almost 20 years, the Iranian regime hid many of its key nuclear efforts from the international community. Yet the regime continues to claim that it does not seek to develop nuclear weapons. The Iranian regime’s true intentions are clearly revealed by the regime’s refusal to negotiate in good faith; its refusal to come into compliance with its international obligations by providing the IAEA access to nuclear sites and resolving troubling questions; and the aggressive statements of its President [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad] calling for Israel to “be wiped off the face of the earth.” (Strategic Studies Institute - U.S. Army, March 2006, p. 25)

Drs. Özcan and Özdamar of Turkey’s TOBB-University of Economics and Technology agree that the tense relations between the United States and Iran are the direct result of Iran’s willingness to support radical groups such as Hamas, its partnership with Syria, and its

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1 Personal comment: So much of this language sounds suspiciously like the rhetoric the Bush Administration used in relation to Iraq’s alleged WMD’s in 2002 and 2003!
demonization of Israel. (Özcan & Özdamar, 2009). In the United States in particular there is a sensationalistic fear of Iran’s nuclear ambitions, and, as Professor Milani puts it, “mad mullahs driven by apocalyptic delusions and a martyr complex” (Milani, 2009). These fears have, to a certain degree been fueled by U.S. government pronouncements such as those expressed in the 2006 National Strategic Study above.

The U.S. insistence that Iran forego nuclear weapons and open its nuclear facilities to full inspection by the IAEA prior to beginning any direct negotiations has been a stalwart of American policy. At the same time that it was derailing the possibility of negotiations, the Bush Administration was engaged in saber-rattling of the most dangerous sort. As Dr. Ben-Meir points out, “[t]he [Iranian] clergy are terrified of American military power, particularly in the wake of the Iraq war” (Ben-Meir, Spring 2009). The Bush Administration did nothing to allay those fears. In fact, it has been reported that there was, at one time, a plan afoot to attack Iran in the event of another 9/11 type attack:

In Washington it is hardly a secret that the same people in and around the administration who [sic] brought you Iraq are preparing to do the same for Iran. The Pentagon, acting under instructions from Vice President Dick Cheney’s office, has tasked the United States Strategic Command (STRATCOM) with drawing up a contingency plan to be employed in response to another 9/11-type terrorist attack on the United States. The plan includes a large-scale air assault on Iran employing both conventional and tactical nuclear weapons. (Giraldi, 2005).

To date, President Obama has indicated a willingness to negotiate with the Iranian government without pre-conditions. As Dr. Ben-Meir points out, “[t]he Bush administration’s refusal to negotiate directly with the Iranian government . . . deepened Iran’s distrust of the United States” (Ben-Meir, 2009). It is his belief that only direct negotiations will remove the hurdles that have hampered a settlement of the situation. (Ibid.)
A Resolution to the Situation?

There is no shortage of plans for resolving the impasse between the United States and Iran over the issue of nuclear development. It appears that most scholars writing on the subject agree that a military strike by the United States is, at best, a last resort and one that should only be considered in the certainty that Iran is likely to have a nuclear weapon available in short order. However, some feel that it is important that Tehran understand that the United States will not tolerate a nuclear-armed Iran, because it would upset the security equilibrium in the area, and will act militarily to prevent such an eventuality. In addition, Tehran must know that any attack on Israel, whether nuclear or not, will be considered an attack on the United States and will bring to bear the full weight of America’s military force in the region against not only targets related to Iran’s nuclear program, but any legitimate military target in Iran, such as air defense systems, etc. (Ibid.)

Given that a nuclear-armed Iran is not an option, negotiations are the only path to a settlement of the situation. Dr. Entesser believes that the Iranians have lost trust in the sincerity of western negotiators, and that trust must be re-established (Entessar, 2009). President Obama has indicated a willingness to negotiate directly with the Iranian regime and, in his address to the Iranian people on the occasion of the festival of Nowruz stated, “[m]y administration is now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us” (BBC News, 2009). Direct negotiations, with its implied recognition of the legitimacy of the Iranian regime, should help re-establish trust and allow for progress toward a rapproachment between the U.S. and Iran.

Before any negotiations begin, the U.S. must first obtain the support of the other four permanent members of the U.N. Security Council (Britain, France, Russia and China) because if,
after a full-faith effort, the negotiations fail to convince Iran to forego nuclear armament, serious sanctions, up to and including military force, will be required against Iran (Ben-Meir, 2009).

Once negotiations begin, they must first address the long-standing grievances of the parties. The Iranians have distrusted the U.S. for six decades and the Americans still remember the 52 hostages held for 444 days by the Iranian regime. Once these issues are behind them, the parties can then move on to the current and critical issues relating to nuclear power.

Secondly, the U.S. and the other western powers must be prepared to offer Iran a meaningful package of incentives to be a *quid pro quo* in return for Iran’s giving up its nuclear ambition. The previous incentives offered that amounted to little more than the U.S. promise of some parts for airliners and Iran’s membership in the WTO (World Trade Organization) was seen as an insult by the Iranian regime (Entessar, 2009). Meaningful incentives might include a western agreement to partner with Iran in the development of peaceful nuclear power, and an unfreezing of Iranian assets in the United States (Ibid.)

Thirdly, the U.S. must engage Israel in any negotiating process. Israel must be convinced that a rapprochement with Iran will not affect the U.S. commitment to Israel’s security. In addition, Iran must be made aware that, unless there is a positive outcome from the negotiations, Israel would not rule out a military strike against Iran’s nuclear facilities, with or without U.S. acquiescence (Ben-Meir, 2009).

In conclusion, despite the enormous complexities of the issues involved, there is an opportunity for a peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue. It requires that both sides recognize the legitimate grievances, and needs, of the other and that both sides negotiate in good
faith with the understanding that failure might result in a regional conflagration that could have catastrophic consequences.
Part II

Introduction

As can be seen from history, President Obama’s administration, represented by Secretary of State, John Kerry, and along with several NATO allies and Russia and China, engaged in meaningful negotiations with Iran. These negotiations resulted in an agreement by which Iran, in return for a lifting of major sanctions, agreed to forego its nuclear military ambitions and allow United Nations inspections of its nuclear facilities. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has verified that Iran has been complying with the agreement (Arms Control Association 2018). Despite this, the current U.S. administration has revitalized the “cowboy” diplomacy of the Bush Administration and has abrogated the agreement. This part will trace how the Iran Nuclear Deal came about, the advantages and disadvantages of the deal, and the rationale of the Trump administration in abrogating the deal.

The Origins of the “Deal”

The relationship between the United States and Iran has been strained. Beginning with the 1953 CIA backed coup against Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh, which strengthened the rule of the tyrannical Pahlavi regime. The Iranian Revolution in 1979, which ended the U.S. backed Pahlavi rule, further exacerbated the situation when the Iranians held 52 American diplomats and civilians hostage for 444 days.

In the late 1980’s, Iran re-activated its nuclear research, begun under the Pahlavi regime, after it had been suspended following the Revolution due to the opposition of Ayatollah Khomeini, and the flight of Iran’s nuclear talent following the revolution (Sterio 2016). “While Iran [had] always maintained that its nuclear work was peaceful and that any nuclear programs
undertaken were for civilian purposes, United States’ intelligence agencies suspected Iran of using the civilian nuclear program as a cover for clandestine nuclear weapons development” (Sterio 2016). This suspicion continued, and strengthened, throughout the succeeding U.S. governments under the Bushes and Clinton administrations. The only action taken by the U.S. was veiled, and not so veiled, threats of military action if Iran actually developed a nuclear weapon.

The first attempts, by the United States, to find a diplomatic method of preventing a nuclear Iran came in 2013. In March of that year, U.S. and Iranian officials began a series of secret meeting in Oman (Sterio 2016). Thus began the serious negotiations between Iran and the group of countries called ‘E3/EU+3’, consisting of the United States, Great Britain, Russia, France, China, and the European Union. These talks resulted in an interim agreement reached on November 23, 2013 (Sterio 2016). “The parties reached an initial deal framework on April 2, 2015 in Lausanne, Switzerland; under this framework, Iran tentatively agreed to accept restrictions on its nuclear program for at least a decade, and to submit to an increased international inspections regime” (Sterio 2016). This was followed by continuous, and sometimes contentious negotiations until the final, and current, agreement was signed on July 14, 2015. In June of 2016 there was a telephone conversation between President Barack Obama and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. This was the first conversation between the leaders of the two countries since 1979 (Sterio 2016).

The Iranian Nuclear Agreement

This Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) limits nuclear proliferation and lifts punishing UN, multilateral, and certain national sanctions against Iran’s 80 million citizens. For its part, “Iran reaffirms that under no circumstances will Iran ever seek, develop, or acquire any nuclear weapons,” while asserting its right
to nuclear power autonomy under the Non-Proliferation Treaty—that is, the right to develop an exclusively peaceful, indigenous nuclear program, just as any other non-nuclear weapons state is free to do (Shank n.d.).

Under the JCPOA, Iran will be effectively blocked from any attempts to build nuclear weapons for 15 years. In addition to requiring that Iran reduce the number of its centrifuges by two-thirds, they will be required to give up 98% of its stores of enriched uranium.

Furthermore, the agreement delays the introduction of more advanced centrifuges; bans any enrichment at Fordow for the duration of the agreement; requires the destruction of the core of the heavy-water reactor at Arak; and puts in place intrusive verification measures that go far beyond what was possible under the Non-Proliferation Treaty and even the Additional Protocol to its International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards agreement, effectively blocking a covert path to the development of a nuclear weapon (Bohlen 2015).

These are some of the highlights of the Agreement:

- Iran’s supply of uranium will be reduced to 300 kg for fifteen years.
- Iran will be limited to installing no more than 5,060 older, less efficient centrifuges at its Natanz facility for fifteen years.
- Iran will only be allowed to conduct research and development at its Natanz facility.
- Iran will redesign its heavy-water nuclear facility at Arak so it cannot produce weapons grade plutonium, and will ship all of its spent fuel out of the country.
- Iran will be prohibited from building any new heavy-water facilities or accumulate any excess heavy water until 2031.
- Inspectors from the IAEA will be allowed to inspect and monitor Iran’s nuclear sites to verify that no material is being moved to another location where it could be used in developing a weapon.
- Iran would gain access to over $100 billion in assets frozen overseas.
- Iran would be permitted to sell oil on the international market.
- Iran would be able to utilize the global financial markets to enhance its trading capabilities (BBC News 2018).
The Pro-Agreement Argument

There have been many politicians, statesmen, and intellectuals who have weighed in on the Iranian Nuclear Agreement, some pro, some con, and these arguments, for the most part, have validity.

The main argument in favor of the agreement is that it heads off, at least for a period of time, what many believe to have been Iran’s quest for a nuclear weapon.

It also served to prevent a pre-emptive strike, by either the United States or Israel, on Iran’s nuclear facilities. Such a strike could have set off an expanded regional, if not worldwide, conflict. As Gregory Shank writes in the journal, Social Justice, the Agreement, “represents a de-escalation of threats of aerial bombings of Iranian facilities, covert CIA and Joint Special Operations Command actions aimed at inciting potentially restive minorities within Iran to bring about regime change, and other disguised forms of warfare” (Shank n.d.). Mr. Shank adds, “The accord represents a watershed moment by removing preventive war as a legitimate tool of anti-proliferation, at least in the near term” (Ibid.)

Further, to at least some degree, the Agreement represents a lessening of tensions in the volatile Middle-East, and an opportunity to continue a dialog between the West and Iran of a host of issues affecting that area of the world; issues such as Iran’s support for terrorist organizations, its support of the Syrian regime of Assad, and its bellicose attitude toward Israel. It is also possible that a lessening of tensions between Iran and the West could portend cooperation on a number of other issues as well; such as progress on Kurdish and Palestinian desire for sovereign homelands. As former Assistant Secretary for Arms Control, Avis Bohlen, commented, “the agreement does, in fact, have the potential to open up the frozen dialogue
between the US and Iran and permit a broader discussion of urgent regional issues. This potential unblocking of the relationship could be one of the agreement’s great rewards” (Bohlen 2015).

The Anti-Agreement Argument

Probably the most criticized factor of the Agreement has been its duration. It is said that President Obama, in entering into the Agreement has simply kicked the can of Iran’s nuclear ambitions down the road to burden some future administration. It is true that the agreement only commits Iran to cease any weaponisation of its nuclear capabilities for a period of only fifteen years, and that “is a short time both by the Islamic Republic’s standards and by those of slow-motion, incremental nuclear programmes such as Tehran’s” (Tertrais 2015). But even given its limited duration one can believe that while “the Agreement only postpones Iran’s ability to manufacture a nuclear weapon by fifteen years, . . . this result is nonetheless more advantageous than the pre-Agreement situation, where Iran may have been just months shy of having a nuclear arm” (Sterio 2016).

Mr. Tertrais also believes that there is some reason to doubt Iran’s sincerity in carrying out the agreement. As he puts it, “There is no reason to believe that Tehran will change its strategic behaviour. Based on what it has been doing since the mid-1980s, one can bet that the Islamic Republic will test the West’s resolve over and over, re-interpreting the agreement’s clauses, procrastinating and showing goodwill on some sites only to better hinder access to others. Even if Mr. Tertrais is correct, it cannot be forgotten that, should Iran reneg on its obligations under the agreement, the U.S. and its allies can reinstitute sanctions or, as a last resort, retain the right to use military force to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran.

Another factor is the belief among many that the verification processes are not strict enough to ensure that Iran cannot clandestinely conduct research and development in nuclear
weaponry in locations not covered under the inspection and verification protocols of the agreement. This, despite the fact that these verification measures “go far beyond what was possible under the Non-Proliferation Treaty and even the Additional Protocol to its International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards agreement, effectively blocking a covert path to the development of a nuclear weapon” (Bohlen 2015).

The Trump Rationale

Noam Chomsky wrote, “The deal was welcomed with relief and optimism almost everywhere. The glaring exceptions were the United States and its regional allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia, though the latter reluctantly tempered its criticism. The Republican majority in Congress opposed the deal with the kind of unanimity that is impossible in a genuine political party, though it is familiar in such organizations as the old Communist Party” (Chomsky 2015).

Donald Trump opposed the deal from the beginning, whether from a skewed understanding of the geo-political ramifications of the agreement, or out of spite to President Obama for having negotiated it. In either case, he was committed to abrogate the deal from the very start of his administration, despite the fact that the International Atomic Energy Agency, the group responsible for inspection and verification of Iran’s adherence to the terms of the agreement, reported that Iran was in compliance with the requirements of the deal.

On May 8, 2018, Mr. Trump gave a speech to the American people. During this speech, he referred to what he called a “disastrous” deal; which “lifted crippling economic sanctions on our end in exchange for very weak limits on the regime’s nuclear activity and no limits at all on its other maligned behavior.” Lumping nuclear development for peaceful purposes with the development of nuclear weapons, he stated, “the deal allowed Iran to continue enriching
uranium,” without comment on the limitations on that enrichment embodied in the deal that would restrict it to levels unsuitable for manufacturing nuclear weapons.

He then proceeded to provide a laundry list of Iran’s activities that had nothing to do with the parameters of the agreement. The agreement was designed to stop any Iranian development of nuclear weapons. It was not designed to control all Iranian behavior that did not coincide with our notion of what that behavior should be.

He railed against Iran’s supposed duplicity in Iran’s assurances that it was using its nuclear research solely for peaceful purposes citing Israeli intelligence, hardly an unbiased source, to the contrary without taking into account that the supposed Israeli intelligence pre-dated the agreement.

With that, and after more attacks on Iran’s actions, Trump proceeded to announce that the United States would withdraw from the agreement. He also stated that he would be willing to negotiate a new agreement if it was inclusive of all areas of Iran’s behavior and military development, whether nuclear or not (Trump 2018).

Fortunately, our allies failed to go along with the actions of Mr. Trump and pledged to remain in the agreement, and Iran itself pledged to continue to adhere to the terms of the agreement.

“After the announcement Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said Iran would remain committed to a multinational nuclear deal. “If we achieve the deal’s goals in cooperation with other members of the deal, it will remain in place... By exiting the deal, America has officially undermined its commitment to an international treaty” (Rouhandi 2018)

Other participants in the agreement also reacted to the U.S. decision:

“We urge the U.S. to ensure that the structures of the JCPOA (deal) can remain intact, and to avoid taking action which obstructs its full
implementation by all other parties to the deal,” the statement provided by Prime Minister Theresa May’s office read.

French President Emmanuel Macron said France would work on a broader agreement covering Iran’s nuclear activity, ballistics program and regional activities.

“We will work collectively on a broader framework, covering nuclear activity, the post-2025 period, ballistic activity, and stability in the Middle-East, notably Syria, Yemen, and Iraq,” Macron said on Twitter moments after Trump spoke, which were all concerns Trump spoke about Tuesday about the deal (Global News 2018).

Conclusion

With the U.S. withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Deal, we have returned almost to the status quo ante. By rejecting the agreement now, with a view to a better deal at a later date, the U.S. puts the risk of eventual Iranian withdrawal from the agreement much higher, and opens the possibility that Iran will, in short order, develop a nuclear weapon, and thus enhance the threat of conflict between a nuclear armed Israel and a nuclear armed Iran. One can only dread the consequences of such a conflict.
References


