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**THESIS**

**NATIONAL SECURITY TO NATIONALIST MYTH:  
WHY IRAN WANTS NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

by

Charles C. Mayer

September 2004

Thesis Advisor:  
Co-Advisor:

Peter R. Lavoy  
James A. Russell

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WHY IRAN WANTS NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

Charles C. Mayer  
Major, United States Air Force  
B.A., University of Minnesota, 1989  
M.B.A., Touro University International, 2003

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**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
September 2004**

Author: Charles C. Mayer

Approved by: Peter R. Lavoy  
Thesis Advisor

James A. Russell  
Co-Advisor

James J. Wirtz  
Chairman, Department of National Security Affairs

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## **ABSTRACT**

Throughout twenty-five years of strained relations, U.S. policy efforts have delayed but not thwarted Iran's clandestine nuclear weapons program, largely because Washington has failed to influence Iran's motivations for acquiring nuclear weapons.

There are three main motivations behind Iran's nuclear program. First, at the systemic level, external threats drive Iran's perceived need for a nuclear deterrent. Second, at the individual level, well placed governmental elites propel the nuclear security myth to spur nationalistic support for nuclear weapons. Third, at the state level, institutional bureaucracies, created to build Iran's nuclear infrastructure, now compete against other organizations for their own self interests, which are closely associated with the continued development of nuclear weapons.

The thesis recommends three policy tracks, addressing causal factors at each level. First, the United States should try to create a new Gulf Security organization, including Iran and the new Iraqi government, to build a collective security environment without nuclear weapons. Second, Washington should build a multilateral coalition to contain Iranian proliferation activities while offering economic incentives for Iranian disarmament. Third, the United States should work to discredit Iran's nuclear security myth by fostering a public debate within Iran on the costs of nuclear weapons, using U.S.-run media.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Why do states acquire nuclear weapons? Many political models attempt to explain why states proliferate, each focusing on a specific level of analysis for its explanatory power. The variables at each level are different; to form one, all-encompassing model of proliferation would really explain nothing because it was purported to explain everything. To be useful, a model must identify a specific process, or critical juncture at a particular analytic level, that sets it apart from other models. Scott Sagan writes that the conventional wisdom for proliferation is security driven.<sup>1</sup> In this model, threats in the international system drive states to proliferate; if there are no threats, the state will stay a non-nuclear state.

The most complete view of proliferation will likely identify some motivations on each analytical level. An aspiring proliferant will have international system, state level, and individual level motivations. Each level of analysis can offer specific insight to a part of a state's motivation for nuclear weapons. Taken together, system, state, and individual level motivations can provide a fairly complete picture of a particular proliferation case. Identifying the conditions at each analytical level can also be instructive as to nonproliferation policy measures that could work for a similar case in the future. Linking specific policy measures to particular motivations can help proliferants opt for alternatives to nuclear weapons.

After twenty years of varying international policies of sanctions, isolation, and confrontation, the Islamic Republic of Iran is still pursuing nuclear weapons. For all the international effort, through the auspices of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty (NPT) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), near daily revelations about Iran's nuclear program cast considerable doubt as to its peaceful intentions.<sup>2</sup> Iran claims it is threatened by Israel and the United States, but in reality those two states would not attack

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<sup>1</sup> See Scott Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (Winter 1996/97): 54. Sagan writes, "States will seek to develop nuclear weapons when they face a significant military threat to their security that cannot be met through alternative means."

<sup>2</sup> See "Timeline: Iran Nuclear Crisis," *BBC News, UK Edition*, (27 November 2003); [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/3210412.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3210412.stm); accessed September 2004.

Iran unless it was developing or in possession of nuclear weapons.<sup>3</sup> Given the probable detrimental effects to Iran's international status, economy, and regime security if a covert nuclear weapons program were uncovered, the logical question is why its government would risk so much for seemingly so little return?

Through the lens of the international anarchic system of self-help, developing a punitive deterrent to neighboring states that possess nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons seems logical, but examining complementary levels of analysis reveal a fuller picture of state motivations. This thesis examines the Iranian nuclear program from three different perspectives. Analysis at the systemic level shows Iran has legitimate security concerns, but has foregone exploration of alternative security solutions in favor of a nuclear deterrent.

Deeper analysis at the state and individual levels reveals additional, more compelling reasons for Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. When Iran was embroiled in its bitter war with Iraq, a coalition of political and military leaders convinced Ayatollah Khomeini to reverse his direction on a nuclear weapons program. These nuclear security myth makers developed a following inside Iran's government and within the organizations charged with operating the program. The bureaucratic organizations that run Iran's nuclear program now sustain it for parochial self-interests; they want to avoid consideration of alternative security solutions.

Insights into Iran's motivations at the three analytic levels can help policymakers address the causal factors for Iran's nuclear weapons program. To be successful, any coherent U.S. policy aimed at preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons must address the reasons Iran wants them. Further, they must identify a means to influence the actors on each analytic level.

## **A. MAJOR QUESTIONS AND ARGUMENT**

This thesis addresses the interests that compel the Islamic Republic of Iran to pursue nuclear weapons. To support the broader investigation, this thesis looks at three perspectives of Iran's nuclear program, each addressing a specific level of analysis. First,

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<sup>3</sup> See George Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Challenge*, (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 8; <http://www.ceip.org/files/projects/npp/pdf/Iran/iraniannuclearchallenge.pdf>; accessed September 2004.



I examine Iran's desired military doctrine based on propositions predicted by political realism. Second, I look at the individuals that perpetuate Iran's countervailing nuclear myths, one idealizing nuclear security, and the other nuclear insecurity. Third, I analyze Iran's bureaucratic inertia in pursuing nuclear weapons and the parochial self-interests that now dominate any discussion of whether to continue. In each analysis, I identify policy measures that target the causal motivations at that level. My motivation for examining these three levels lies in George Perkovich's observation that, "for all its efforts to staunch flows of nuclear technology, materiel, and know-how into Iran, the U.S. government never has publicly and objectively assessed Iranian leaders' motivations for seeking nuclear weapons and what the U.S. and others could do to remove those motivations."<sup>4</sup>

The main political relationship I see in Iran's program follows this logic: Balance of power reasoning was the impetus for Iran's nuclear weapons program. Nuclear myth makers convinced the ruling mullahs of the nuclear solution to that threat. Bureaucratic inertia is keeping the program alive despite changes in Iran's strategic landscape.

### **1. System Level of Analysis**

A nuclear-armed Soviet Union encroached through Afghanistan then receded, taking its nuclear weapons out of central Asia as it left. Iraq proved itself as Iran's foremost threat with vicious chemical attacks in a protracted war. The 1990s saw the rise of Pakistan and India as nuclear-armed states. Iran lives in a dangerous neighborhood, but why does Tehran think that developing nuclear weapons will minimize that danger?

The thesis starts by looking at Iran's strategic environment and how it has shaped Iran's military doctrine. By identifying the doctrine Iran appears to be adopting, whether it is offensive, defensive, or deterrent in nature, one can deduce why it desires nuclear weapons. Iran has chosen a defensive doctrine against threat nations equipped with nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, and a deterrent doctrine against states with formidable conventional military capabilities. Once Iran can build a survivable second strike capability, it will use a deterrent doctrine overall. Realism would predict Iran would develop nuclear weapons based on its strategic environment in the 1970s and early

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<sup>4</sup> Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Challenge*, 3.

1980s, but as strategic threats have been mitigated or neutralized, Iran has not changed its doctrinal objectives. Balance of power considerations were the impetus for nuclear weapons, but bureaucratic politics are ensuring the program continues.

## **2. Individual Level of Analysis**

Iran's leaders mistrust western guarantees and feel compelled to regain all the political power and independence they perceive is present in controlling a private nuclear arsenal. Looking at the individual level of analysis, this thesis argues that Iran's leaders are locked onto particular self-interests of which they will be very reluctant to let go. Borrowing from a proliferation model advanced by Peter Lavoy, the thesis looks at the individual "myth makers" that have convinced bureaucratic and state leaders of the overwhelming utility of nuclear weapons to secure Iran's status as a regional hegemon.<sup>5</sup> Nuclear myth makers are societal elites that convince governmental leaders of the "military security and political power" provided by nuclear weapons.<sup>6</sup> The thesis also looks at how Iran uses the nuclear insecurity myth to assure the international community that Iran is not pursuing nuclear weapons; that they are against the Islamic faith; that they would only make Iran more vulnerable; but that Iran has the right to develop all forms of civilian nuclear energy. Nuclear myths appeal to nationalism and popular will and convince leaders of the security imperative that can only be answered by developing or possessing nuclear weapons.

## **3. State Level of Analysis**

Analysis of Iran's security environment as it has evolved over the last thirty years reveals that interest pursuits begun in the 1970s are difficult to reverse in the face of different security landscapes today. *Bureaucratic politics* refers to a sub-national model of policy formation based on the machinations of agencies and coalitions to determine state policy consistent with their own parochial interests. The theoretical foundation for sub-national analysis rests with the pioneering work of Graham Allison.<sup>7</sup> By establishing

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<sup>5</sup> See Peter R. Lavoy, "Nuclear Myths and the Causes of Nuclear Proliferation," in *The Proliferation Puzzle: Why Nuclear Weapons Spread and What Results*, ed. Zachary S. Davis and Benjamin Frankel (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 199.

<sup>6</sup> Lavoy, "Nuclear Myths," 199.

<sup>7</sup> See Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*; (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 162-184.

the extent to which the Iranian nuclear weapons program is sustained by bureaucratic political competition, the study then examines policy considerations that must be addressed to effectively deal with Iran's bureaucratic inertia. If balance of power considerations provided the impetus for nuclear weapons and bureaucratic politics are sustaining the program, then there must be individuals within the Iranian government that propel the "myth" of nuclear security that sustains bureaucratic and systemic beliefs.

#### **4. Policy Relationships**

Given specific considerations at each analytic level, the policymaker must tailor policy choices to address concerns at each stop. The larger challenge is to ensure any policy measure aimed at counterproliferation objectives is synchronized with the overall national policy strategy for that country. Overturning Iran's nuclear program would do little good if it lost leverage on other priority agendas, such as Iran's sponsorship of terrorist groups against Israel. The thesis's conclusions recommend centers of gravity U.S. policy need to address at each level of analysis to coerce Iran to not develop nuclear weapons. The utility of identifying specific policy interests at each level of Iran's international relations will give policy makers a more comprehensive view of issues that need to be addressed in any rational calculation to coerce Iranian pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Table 1 illustrates the progression of my argument along the analytic level continuum. Note that for clarity, I have arranged the analytic levels in descending order, but that the thesis proceeds from system to individual, then to state level of analysis to trace the thread progression among them. The table relates the key relationships I find through each particular analytic lens on Iran's nuclear program. For instance, when looking at Iran through the eyes of the international system using a balance of power perspective, I find that Iran is isolated, with no large-power alliance options to protect it against Israel and the United States—the two largest threats as Iran perceives its threat environment. Iran's strategy to deal with isolation against Israel and the United States is to develop a deterrence doctrine with nuclear weapons at the fore. Tailored policy measures for this level include reducing Iran's threat perception by working to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict and to work toward a Gulf security organization that would include Iran and the new Iraqi government (see Table 1).

<b>Level of Analysis/ Analytic Model</b>	<b>Key Relationships–Iran’s Nuclear Weapons Program</b>	<b>U.S. Policy Measures</b>	<b>Thesis</b>
<b>International System:</b>  Balance of Power	Perceives U.S. and Israeli Threats No Alliance Options—Self-Sufficiency Striving for Deterrent Doctrine	<b>Reduce Threat Perceptions:</b> Minimize U.S.-Israeli Posture Encourage Gulf Security Org.	Ch. II
<b>State:</b>  Bureaucratic Politics	Competitive Bureaucratic Coalitions Resist Devolution at Expense of Others Sustain Nuclear Weapons Program	<b>Cooperative Containment:</b> Subvert Nuclear Coalition Empower Rival Bureaucracies	Ch. IV
<b>Individual:</b>  Nuclear Myth Makers	Nuclear Myth Makers in Key Positions Nuclear Security vs. Insecurity Myths Institutionalizing of Myths	<b>Discredit Security Myth:</b> Foster Internal Debate Educate Internal Debate	Ch. III

Table 1. Levels of Analysis Resultant/Policy Relationships

## 5. Prospects for Policy

The conventional wisdom is that the reassertion of conservative control over the Iranian government, begun in the February 2004 parliamentary election, is meant to allow the conservatives to approve popular governmental reforms while denying credit for such reform to the so-called reformers.<sup>8</sup> The widespread belief is that the parliament, or *Majlis*, will not take any reform action until after the presidential election scheduled in February 2005, when a conservative replacement for reformist president Khatami is expected. Once the conservatives have firm control over every aspect of the Iranian government, they will have two main choices: they can enact reforms and moderate the Islamic Republic’s position, or, they can crack down and reassert revolutionary values for an Islamic society governed by strict interpretations of Islamic law, or Sharia. Given the popular emergence of the 60 percent of the population under age twenty five, the conservatives face formidable challenges to their authority and a possible counterrevolution if they do not enact social reforms.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran’s Nuclear Challenge*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Jahangir Amuzegar, “Iran’s Theocracy Under Siege,” *Middle East Policy* 10, no. 1 (Spring, 2003): 139. For a more detailed analysis of the potential impact of the Iranian youth movement on the

Amid these developments, the best thing the United States can do is to continue isolating the conservative government and seek to not ignite Iranian nationalism, which serves to strengthen the conservatives' position within Iranian society and within the government. Worse yet, if the United States engages the conservatives, offering economic aid and unfreezing Iran's pre-revolutionary assets without securing the concessions it has demanded for the past twenty-five years, the younger generation will view the United States as complicit in the conservatives' extended hold on power and reject any future U.S. overtures for normalized relations with the replacement government they shall represent.

## **B. EVOLUTION OF IRAN'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM**

### **1. The Shah's Program**

Iran's civilian nuclear energy program began while Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was still in power, buying a five-megawatt research reactor from the United States in 1967. Having been one of the first to sign and ratify the NPT in 1970, the shah's nuclear energy program was supported by several Western powers. The United States, France, and West Germany all provided Iran with reactors and technical training.<sup>10</sup> The shah's "motives were a fusion of Iranian national ambition and concern for the direction of the neighborhood."<sup>11</sup> Scholars assume the shah also directed a parallel weapons program, using the openly declared civil nuclear power program as a springboard for developing weapons grade fuel and as a cover to develop the technical know-how for weapons design and manufacturing, which ended upon his overthrow in 1979.<sup>12</sup> Because the United States wanted the shah to rise to the role of Gulf protectorate, U.S. leaders looked the other way on Iran's early nuclear foray.

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conservative-led government, see also Bahman Baktiari and Haleh Vaziri, "Iran's Liberal Revolution?" *Current History*, (January 2002).

<sup>10</sup> See Chris Quillen, "Iranian Nuclear Weapons Policy: Past, Present, and Possible Future," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6, no. 2 (June 2002): 17.

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Kemp and Walter Lippmann, "How to Stop the Iranian Bomb," *The National Interest*, no. 72 (Summer 2003): par. 10.

<sup>12</sup> See Brenda Schaffer, "Iran at the Nuclear Threshold," *Arms Control Today*; Arms Control Association, (Washington, D.C.: Nov 2003); [http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2003\\_11/Shaffer.asp?print](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2003_11/Shaffer.asp?print); accessed July 2004. For a comprehensive review and relative timeline of Iran's nuclear weapons programs under the shah and the Islamic Republic, see also Anthony H. Cordesman, *Proliferation in the "Axis of Evil: North Korea, Iran, and Iraq*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2002), 27-37.

## 2. Rebirth after the Iran-Iraq War

After Ayatollah Khomeini's ascendance, Iran's nuclear program lay dormant until 1984, when the Islamic Republic was embroiled in its bitter war with Iraq.<sup>13</sup> Having sustained fearsome losses, many from Iraq's use of chemical weapons (which was largely ignored by the international community), the Iranian regime was forced to find a balancing capability and nuclear (along with chemical and later, biological) weapons, appeared to be that balance.<sup>14</sup> Because of the U.S.-led arms embargo (as a result of the revolution's takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran), Iran felt isolated from the international community while Iraq enjoyed economic and military aid from Europe and the Soviet Union. According to Geoffrey Kemp, "these memories continue to generate bitterness among Iranians" and are prime motivators in the regime's "strong anti-colonialist nationalism" as it strives for self-sufficiency in every respect, including its nuclear program.<sup>15</sup>

In 1989, Iran announced it had discovered uranium ore deposits near Saghand, and it intended to begin mining operations in 1990, followed by enrichment facility construction by 1994. In 1992, Russia announced it had signed an agreement with Iran to assist in construction of a light-water reactor in Bushehr, on the southwest coast as well as a bilateral agreement to provide nuclear fuel support.<sup>16</sup> The international community accepted this progression of events, albeit with suspicion, based on Iran's appearance of conforming to IAEA protocols, although the United States is still pressuring Russia to abandon its assistance to the Islamic Republic.

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<sup>13</sup> See Gregory F. Giles, "The Islamic Republic of Iran and Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Weapons," in *Planning the Unthinkable: How New Powers Will Use Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons*, ed., Peter R. Lavoy, Scott D. Sagan, and James J. Wirtz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); 82. For political background on the revolution that toppled the Shah, see Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921: The Pahlavis and After*, (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 192-249; Nikkie R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 214-62; and Sandra Mackey, *The Iranians: Persia, Islam, and the Soul of a Nation*, (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1998), 271-333.

<sup>14</sup> See Geoffrey Kemp and Walter Lippmann, "How to Stop the Iranian Bomb," *The National Interest*, no. 72 (Summer 2003): 48; and Giles, "The Islamic Republic of Iran," 81-82.

<sup>15</sup> Kemp and Lippmann, "How to Stop the Iranian Bomb," 48.

<sup>16</sup> Schaffer, "Iran at the Nuclear Threshold," 2.

If the light-water reactor was the limit of the Iranian program, then it may be true that Iran is only developing a nuclear power capability. The complications of reprocessing spent fuel from a light-water reactor make it unlikely that Iran would use upgraded uranium from such a process to develop nuclear weapons. In order to extract the material, the reactor must be shut down, which would be immediately noticed by IAEA and U.S. monitoring.<sup>17</sup> It would not make sense to risk such an easy discovery for such a small yield. But the United States and others believe Iran has been pursuing nuclear weapons all along.

### **3. Revelations**

After Washington received a tip from an Iranian opposition group about nuclear activities unknown to the United States and the IAEA, the United States released satellite photos showing two additional nuclear sites at Natanz and Arak.<sup>18</sup> In February 2003, Iran confirmed it was building a heavy-water reactor at Arak and a uranium enrichment plant at Natanz. The disclosure also admitted Iran had imported undeclared quantities of processed uranium from China in 1992, which would put it in violation of the terms of the NPT.<sup>19</sup> Also in February, Iranian President Khatami publicly declared that these facilities were designed to allow Iran to produce its own nuclear fuel. The complexity of the Iranian program suggests an advanced technological commitment and capability beyond civil power requirements.

The addition of a gas centrifuge enrichment plant of the size seen at Natanz plus a heavy-water reactor casts reasonable doubt on the intentions of the Iranian program. Both capabilities can produce more nuclear fuel than one commercial light-water reactor would need. IAEA environmental analysis of these centrifuges revealed the presence of enriched uranium even though Iran had claimed it had only tested the equipment with

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<sup>17</sup> See International Crisis Group, “Dealing with Iran’s Nuclear Program,” *Middle East Report* no.18, (Amman/Brussels, 27 October 2003), 5 and 8, <http://www.crisisweb.org/home/index.cfm?id=2330&l=1>; Internet; accessed 5 November 2003. The ICG report has a useful guide to nuclear technology terminology and requirements for the “non-expert.”

<sup>18</sup> See “Timeline: Iran Nuclear Crisis,” *BBC News, UK Edition*.

<sup>19</sup> See International Crisis Group, “Dealing with Iran’s Nuclear Program,” 6; and Kemp and Lippmann, “How to Stop the Iranian Bomb,” 2003, par. 16.

inert gases.<sup>20</sup> And here lies a troubling discontinuity: Iran first claimed the centrifuges were built indigenously, but then claimed the high-grade uranium contamination came from an unnamed country from which they purchased the equipment. Either Iran was upgrading uranium it claimed it didn't have with indigenous centrifuge equipment, or, it was transferring used, undeclared nuclear technology it claimed was indigenous. With the missile technology it has received from North Korea and China, the nuclear weapons production assistance Iran appears to be getting from Pakistan (suspected supplier of the gas centrifuges) portends a nuclear weapons threat to Israel and other U.S. interests in the region within two to four years.<sup>21</sup>

#### **4. European Three and the Additional Protocol**

Pushing the IAEA to declare Iran in "material breach" of its commitments to the NPT, the United States settled instead to support a proposal from Britain, France, and Germany (the European Three) to give Iran until the end of October 2003 to fully disclose nuclear activities and allow surprise inspections. The European Three proposal centered on negotiating an agreement whereby Iran would sign the additional protocol to the NPT. Pressured by Japan to sign the additional protocol as a contingent for a Japanese oil trade agreement and by the European Union as an inducement to conclude a trade deal Tehran wants very much, Iran agreed to suspend all uranium enrichment in October 2003, and sign the additional protocol.<sup>22</sup> The European Three ministers were able to capitalize on some desirable carrots to induce Iran to agree to the IAEA's demands for increased transparency and full cooperation, without intervention by the UN Security Council. This is instructive on how the Islamic regime sees itself and how it demands to be treated. Iran wants to be recognized as the regional hegemon and the leader of all Islamic nations.

Iran's provocative behavior in the summer of 2004 had the European Three foreign ministers in a panic. They had bargained in good faith, staving off the United

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<sup>20</sup> See International Crisis Group, "Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Program," 6.

<sup>21</sup> See Gary Samore, *Future of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime* (Brussels: International Institute for Strategic Studies, European Security Forum, 3 March 2003); <http://www.iiss.org/eusec/samore.htm>; accessed August 2004; also International Crisis Group, "Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Program," 8.

<sup>22</sup> Schaffer, "Iran at the Nuclear Threshold," 2003.



States and the UN Security Council, only to be cast aside by Iran's announcement in August 2004 that it would resume enrichment preparations. The European Three continued to convey the seriousness of resuming uranium enrichment, but Iran presented a unified face of defiance. The future of Europe's trade and cooperation agreement (TCA) with Iran is in doubt, barring a turn-around by Iran on the enrichment and inspections issues.

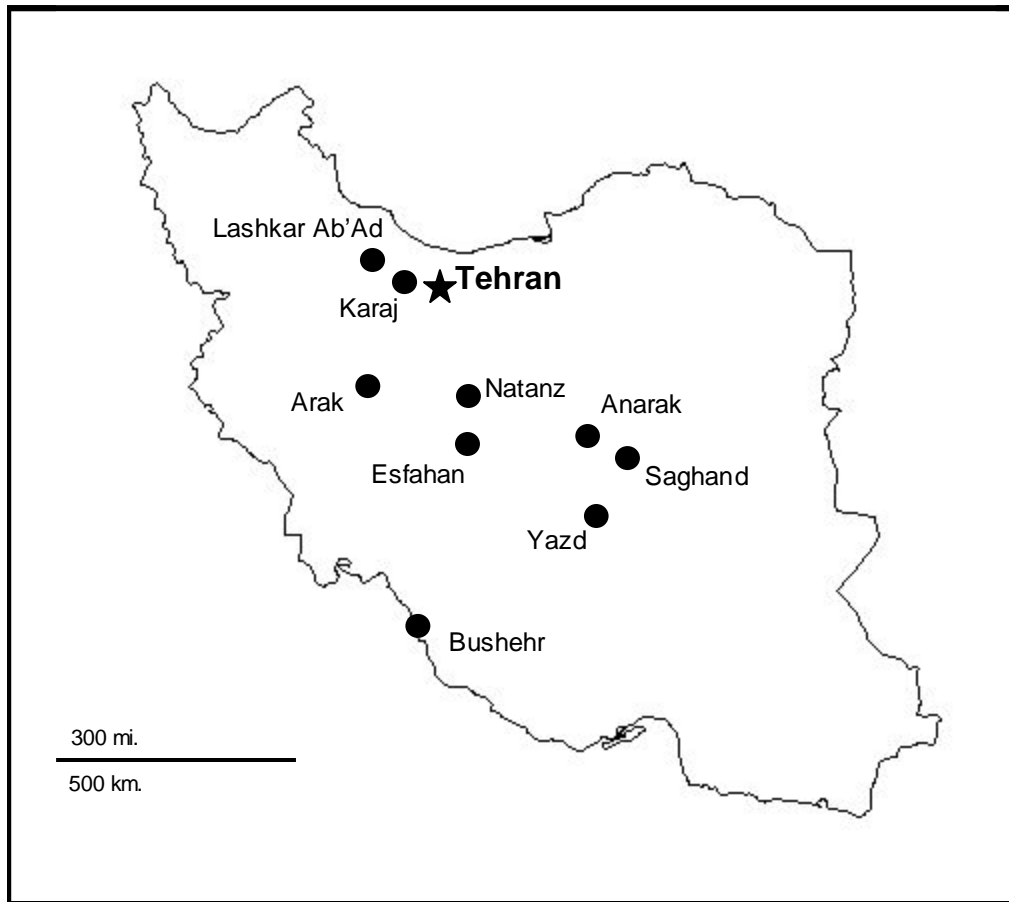


Figure 1. Map of Iran's Declared Nuclear Facilities<sup>23</sup>

Based on what Iran has admitted when confronted by the IAEA, it has a diverse nuclear program dispersed across the country at ten different locations. Figure 1 and Table 2 highlight these locations. Table 2 also provides some background on the activities at each site (see Figure 1 and Table 2).

<sup>23</sup> After: "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Report by the Director General*, GOV/2003/75, Annex 4. Map outline courtesy "Free Blank Outline Map of Iran," About Geography; <http://geography.about.com/library/blank/iran.jpg>; accessed September 2004.

## List of Facilities Relevant to the Implementation of IAEA Safeguards

LOCATION	CAPABILITY	STATUS
<b>TEHRAN NUCLEAR RESEARCH CENTER</b>	Tehran Research Reactor (TRR)	Operating
<b>TEHRAN</b>	Molybdenum, Iodine, and Xenon Radioisotope Production Facility (MIX Facility)	Constructed but not operating
	*Jabr Ibn Hayan Multipurpose Laboratories (JHL)	Operating
	*Waste Handling Facility (WHF)	Operating
<b>TEHRAN</b>	*Kalaye Electric Company	Dismantled pilot enrichment facility
<b>BUSHEHR</b>	Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP)	Under construction
<b>ESFAHAN NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY CENTER</b>	Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR)	Operating
	Light Water Sub-Critical Reactor (LWSCR)	Operating
	Heavy Water Zero Power Reactor (HWSPR)	Operating
	Fuel Fabrication Laboratory (FFL)	Operating
	Uranium Chemistry Laboratory (UCL)	Closed down
	Uranium Conversion Facility (UCF)	Under construction, some units operational
	Graphite Sub-Critical Reactor (GSCR)	Decommissioned
	*Fuel Manufacturing Plant (FMP)	In detailed design stage, construction was to begin in 2004
<b>NATANZ</b>	*Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant (PFEP)	Operating
	*Fuel Enrichment Plant (FEP)	Under construction
<b>KARAJ</b>	*Radioactive Waste Storage	Under construction, but partially operating
<b>LASHKAR AB'AD</b>	*Pilot Uranium Laser Enrichment Plant	Dismantled
<b>ARAK</b>	*Iran Nuclear Research Reactor (IR-40)	In detailed design phase
	*Hot cell facility for production of radioisotopes	In preliminary design phase
	*Heavy Water Production Plant (HWPP)	Under construction – Not subject to Safeguards Agreement
<b>ANARAK</b>	*Waste Storage Site	Waste to be transferred to JHL
<b>SAGHAND</b>	Uranium Mine	Operating
<b>YAZD</b>	University of Yazd Nuclear Research Department	Operating
* = Facilities newly declared in 2003		
All data current as of November 2003		

Table 2. Iran's Declared Nuclear Facilities<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> After: "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Report by the Director General, GOV/2003/75*.

### **C. ROADMAP**

Chapter II, *Iran's Military Doctrine and Nuclear Weapons*: This chapter examines Iran's desired military doctrine. By examining the strategic environment in which Iran now finds itself from a balance of power perspective, this chapter explains Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons as the technical requirement for its primary military doctrine. Military doctrine is the operational factor to help a state meet its grand strategy, so it follows that if a state perceives it must establish a particular doctrine to achieve the goals articulated in its strategy, it requires the military capabilities necessary to execute that doctrine. The "cause" then, for Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons is its perceived requirement to meet its chosen doctrine.

Chapter III, *Iran's Nationalist Myth Makers*: This chapter explores the role of political elites within the Iranian government that propelled and now sustain Iran's nuclear weapons program with the nuclear security myth. The chapter also examines Iran's use of the nuclear insecurity myth as deliberate cover of the nuclear weapons program. By discerning the major arguments advocated by Iran's myth makers, the chapter distills particular policy objectives the United States must address, either directly or through stable proxies, to discredit the security myth and compel Iran's leadership to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Chapter IV, *Iran's Nuclear Program and Bureaucratic Politics*: This chapter examines the internal machinery at work in the Iranian government and how that influences state interest perceptions. This chapter contends that Iran's nuclear weapons program is sustained by bureaucratic political influences; therefore policy prescriptions for Iran must undercut the nuclear lobby and empower rival groups such as energy and trade. This chapter addresses Iran's nuclear program on the sub-national level in two parts: part one examines the internal machinery at work in the Iranian government and how it influences state interest perceptions. The analysis contrasts bureaucratic politics considerations with those of the international balance of power model by illustrating inter-agency competition, power perceptions that drive state interests, and considerations for bureaucratic actors and processes. Having highlighted sources of bureaucratic influence within the Iranian government, part two identifies sub-national policy

considerations to subvert the nuclear weapons coalition while encouraging rival bureaucracies to step up for economic incentives.

Chapter V, Conclusions: Summarizes Iranian interests and motivations at each level of analysis and relates them to U.S. policy requirements to address or answer those interests if the United States is to succeed at preventing Iran from procuring nuclear weapons. This chapter arranges policy options, advocated in the scholarly literature, into a discernable spectrum of options at each level of analysis. Overall policy recommendations focus on a multilateral coalition to force the conservative government to either acquiesce to traditional U.S. conditions for multilateral economic incentives, or collapse under its own weight; then offer the same carrots to its replacement.

## II. IRAN'S MILITARY DOCTRINE AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Iran's strategic environment today is vastly different than it was when it re-launched its nuclear program in 1984.<sup>25</sup> The intervening years witnessed the ebb and flow of bordering military powers, culminating in a growing U.S. presence throughout the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. Today, Iran faces a disarmed Iraq, a shattered Afghanistan, economic competitors in the Caspian states, and strained relations with nuclear-armed Pakistan while it engages India. Focused on Israel and the U.S. military presence in the Gulf, Iran's nuclear program is, ironically, designed to counter threats that exist only in reaction to its own weapons programs and support for terrorism.<sup>26</sup>

This chapter examines Iran's systemic motivations for nuclear weapons. I argue that Iran is a status quo state that is building a self-reliant military capability, emphasizing a minimum deterrence doctrine to dissuade potential aggressors. The chapter looks at whether Iran's grand strategy reflects its strategic environment and how its military doctrine is designed to support that grand strategy. Iran is pursuing a grand strategy for which it was better suited twenty years ago. Striving to become self-sufficient against the varied threats that once surrounded it, Iran has yet to notice that most of those threats no longer exist, while others are overstated. Meanwhile, Iran is progressing toward fulfillment of a deterrence doctrine, wherein nuclear weapons promise the required punishment to potential threats. The "cause" for Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons is its perceived requirement to meet its military doctrine.<sup>27</sup>

Using the baseline realist propositions established in *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars*, I address Iran's nuclear program motivations on the systemic level in three parts. In the first part, I

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<sup>25</sup> For a comprehensive discussion on the progression of Iran's nuclear weapons programs under the shah and the Islamic Republic, see Cordesman, *Proliferation in the "Axis of Evil,"* 27-37.

<sup>26</sup> See Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30 (January 1978): 169-73. This constitutes the classic security dilemma, where measures taken to increase one's security decrease the security of the other. For a perspective on the circular nature of Iran's threat perception of Israel and the United States, see Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Challenge*, 8.

<sup>27</sup> See Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1984), 13-14.

provide an overview of the theoretical basis for this analysis, as presented by Barry Posen and refined by Scott Sagan. In the second part, I analyze Iran's strategic environment and identify Iran's primary threat perceptions. In the final segment, I identify three policy considerations the United States must address on the systemic level in any effort to dissuade Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Because Iran perceives itself as isolated against Israel and the United States, with no alliance options, it is pursuing nuclear weapons to deter Israel and U.S. forces in the region. To change Iran's threat perceptions, the United States must work to reduce its own threatening rhetoric, revive the Israeli peace process, and encourage a new Gulf security organization that includes both the new Iraqi government and Iran.

#### **A. BALANCE OF POWER AND MILITARY DOCTRINE: THE THEORY**

Neorealist theory predicates that states existing in an anarchic international system must help themselves to maintain their security and protect their interests. Because of the overwhelming power of nuclear weapons, a state threatened by another that possesses nuclear weapons must balance that threat by developing its own nuclear arsenal. If it does not possess the resources for nuclear weapons, the threatened state must enter a military alliance with a state that can provide a nuclear security guarantee.<sup>28</sup> In this regard, strong states do "what they can" to maintain their security and weak states do "what they must."<sup>29</sup> Strong states use their capacity to develop a self-sufficient nuclear deterrent while weak states look for a security guarantor to provide their defense. When two competing powers balance each other internally, each makes the other feel less secure with each balancing measure. This is the essence of the balance of power security dilemma, blamed for instigating and sustaining arms races. Sagan points out that nuclear

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<sup>28</sup> See what Scott Sagan notes is the "seminal text of neorealism," Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 117-120. Here, Waltz deduces the basics of balance of power before testing the theory. For a discussion of rational actors and cost-benefit analysis in the security dilemma, see Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," 170. For alternate discussions on causes of proliferation, see Richard K. Betts, "Paranoids, Pygmies, Pariahs and Nonproliferation Revisited," in *The Proliferation Puzzle: Why Nuclear Weapons Spread and What Results*, ed. Zachary S. Davis and Benjamin Frankel (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 100-124. Betts observes that weak states invite preemption by larger powers if they get a bomb: "weak nations have no reason to fear that a superpower would attack them with nuclear weapons; conventional forces could do the job alone." See also Benjamin Frankel, "The Brooding Shadow: Systemic Incentives and Nuclear Weapons Proliferation," in *The Proliferation Puzzle: Why Nuclear Weapons Spread and What Results*, ed. Zachary S. Davis and Benjamin Frankel (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 37-78.

<sup>29</sup> See Scott D. Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?," 57.

weapons can also be used as a deterrent against overwhelming conventional capabilities or to act as “coercive tools” to change the status quo.<sup>30</sup> However, realism cannot predict the actual role a state’s nuclear arsenal will play in its grand strategy without accounting for the state’s strategic goals. Do states desire “security” or “maximization of power?” The answer is found in a state’s grand strategy.

### **1. Applying Realism to Military Doctrine**

Developing realism’s themes further, Barry Posen extrapolated thirteen propositions of balance of power theory that predict the doctrinal roles of states’ military forces, based on the strategic environment in which they reside.<sup>31</sup> Posen differentiates among offensive, defensive, and deterrent military doctrines to further define the military role required to support the state’s grand strategy. Grand strategy is defined as the military “means-ends chain” that comprises the state’s theory of its own security. Military doctrine is the “subcomponent” of grand strategy that deals with *which* military means should be employed and *how* they should be used to meet the state’s strategic goals (ends).<sup>32</sup> An offensive doctrine endeavors to destroy an enemy’s military forces and disarm it. A defensive doctrine seeks to deny an enemy’s military objectives. A deterrent doctrine aims to punish an aggressor, raising the cost of aggression to an unacceptable level and prompting it to not pursue attack. Posen’s version of balance of power is loosely derived from Waltzian neorealist thinking, but his hypotheses are meant to explain the causes of doctrine, not general behavior.<sup>33</sup>

Whether a state should balance a threat externally or internally is largely determined by cultural, economic, and political factors. In the pre-nuclear era, states that did not have the technological infrastructure or financial resources to engage in an arms race looked outside for an alliance to provide security guarantees. In the era of nuclear

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<sup>30</sup> See Sagan, “Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?,” 57

<sup>31</sup> See Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, 59-79.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> See Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 121-123. Waltz distinguishes theories of international politics from theories that explain foreign policy. He reasons that balance of power theory explains “the constraints that confine all states. The clear perception of constraints provides many clues to the expected reactions of states, but by itself the theory cannot explain those reactions.”

weapons and nonproliferation regimes, states not officially in the nuclear club must align themselves with a nuclear patron or work outside the normative international system. Balance of power theory predicts politically “isolated states” will look for internal balancing in a multipolar system.<sup>34</sup> Although whether the current international strategic environment is multipolar may be debated, it is clear that from a strategic, military perspective, the nuclear powers are essentially balanced against each other, creating a pseudo multipolar environment. In the modern construct of security regimes, politically isolated states pose the greatest risk for working outside the regimes and procuring nuclear, or other unconventional weapons, to create an internal balance. Given Iran’s twenty five-year history of political isolation, it is a prime candidate for developing covert asymmetrical warfare capabilities.

Probably the most important factor allowing states some choice of doctrine within this list of predictions is the rational actor calculus, wherein a state will construct a doctrine that preserves its interests at the lowest possible cost. This caveat trumps nearly all other considerations. If a state has a predicted interest in an offensive doctrine but lacks the economic and military resources to support such a doctrine, then that state can tailor its doctrine to the capabilities it *can* manage. This may be why status quo strategies are the rule among states, and expansionist strategies are the exception.<sup>35</sup>

## **2. Seven Propositions**

Posen offers thirteen predictive propositions of military doctrine, seven of which apply to Iran:<sup>36</sup>

- States predisposed to conquest and expansion will prefer offensive doctrines.
- States will try to pass the costs of war on to others, meaning states will prefer to fight on the adversary’s territory.
- States without allies will prefer offensive doctrine

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>36</sup> Posen’s remaining six propositions pertain to large patrons and hegemonic states with established nuclear capabilities and alliance systems, not applicable to an aspiring nuclear power such as Iran. The text of each of these propositions is summarized directly from Posen’s book. See Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, 69-74.



- States surrounded by bordering threats especially prefer offensive doctrines to prevent multi-front wars and to defeat multi-state threats sequentially
- Small states may choose a deterrent doctrine because their capabilities are insufficient to support either an offensive or defensive doctrine
- Status quo states will generally prefer defensive doctrines if geography or technology makes such a doctrine attractive
- Status quo states may prefer defensive doctrines because they know they will not strike the first blow

These seven propositions frame this chapter's analysis of Iran's military doctrine, while looking at the likely threats Iran faces in its strategic environment.

- States Predisposed to Conquest and Expansion will Prefer Offensive Doctrines.

If Iran's grand strategy was to export the revolution and expand its territory to create a greater Islamic Empire as a home for disaffected Shi'a Muslims from around the world, this proposition would indicate an offensive military doctrine to facilitate such expansion. However, even in 1979-1980, when the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary rhetoric was at its apogee, Iran's regular military (or, *Artesh*), was undergoing a brutal consolidation into the Islamic Republic. The officer corps was purged by as much as 45 percent, mostly by firing squad, and the remainder was enveloped by clerical commissars embarked on an aggressive "Islamization" of the military.<sup>37</sup> What remained of the "revolutionary fervor" among the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was tested hard by the eight year defensive war with Iraq in the 1980s.<sup>38</sup> Iran has spent a significant amount of its efforts since then to rebuild the IRGC and the *Artesh* into a defensive force to prevent more invasions. Posen's proposition for expansionist states does not fit Iran.

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<sup>37</sup> Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2000), 68; as quoted in Daniel L. Byman, Shahram Chubin, Anoushiravan Ehteshami, and Jerrold Green, *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era* (Washington, D.C.: Rand National Defense Research Institute Publications, 2001), 32.

<sup>38</sup> See Byman et al, *Iran's Security Policy*, 43-44.

- States will try to pass the Costs of War on to Others, Meaning States will prefer to Fight on the Adversary's Territory.

This is evident in Iran's extensive missile program. Determined to be self-sufficient on every level of military equipment and training, Iran has invested much of its defense budget over the last twenty years in increasingly capable surface-to-surface and ballistic missiles. Iran created a manufacturing capability to produce its own versions of the North Korean No Dong medium range ballistic missile, the Shahab-3, with a 1,300 km (800 mi.) range, and is developing longer range models. The Shahab-4 is estimated to have a 1,900 km/1200 mi. range and the Shahab-5 could reach continental Europe.<sup>39</sup> Aside from the cost advantages of a fleet of missiles over a new fleet of combat aircraft, missiles launched into the adversary's territory ensure the costly destruction of modern war occurs on territory away from the homeland.

- States without Allies Prefer Offensive Doctrine.

Iran is politically isolated and without a state-level ally, but it lacks the military wherewithal to adopt an offensive doctrine. Offensive doctrines using conventional military forces require closely coordinated employment, integrating air, land, and sea forces.<sup>40</sup> Iran is largely incapable of highly coordinated, joint military operations. Iran's air force is in poor shape: short of spare parts, most of its aircraft are not combat capable. The army is in similar condition, short of battle tanks and serviceable artillery. The Islamic Republic spends a great deal of resources trying to acquire or produce required parts and munitions through clandestine channels.<sup>41</sup> Analysts estimate Iran lost as much as 60 percent of its conventional military capability in the closing battles of the Iran-Iraq war, and has not been able to effectively replace much of that in the sixteen years since.<sup>42</sup> Ironically, the Iranian military posed a larger regional threat under the shah. Neighboring

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<sup>39</sup> See Peter Jones, "Iran's Threat Perceptions and Arms Control Policies," *The Nonproliferation Review* 6, no. 1 (Fall 1998): 48-9.

<sup>40</sup> Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, 14.

<sup>41</sup> See Shahram Chubin, *Iran's National Security Policy: Capabilities, Intentions, and Impact*, (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 1994): 29-31. Chubin also points out that a "decade of buying whatever was available was a logistical nightmare—nine types of tanks, seven types of antitank missiles, and a motley assortment of weapons systems of varying sophistication, generation and provenance—enormously complicating maintenance and support."

<sup>42</sup> Jones, "Iran's Threat Perceptions," 45-46.

Gulf States agree that Iran, today, does not pose much of an offensive, conventional military threat.

- States Surrounded by Bordering Threats Especially Prefer Offensive Doctrines to Prevent Multi-Front Wars and to Defeat Multi-State Threats Sequentially.

This seems especially plausible for Iran, as it views the landscape around its own borders to be unfriendly. The removal of Iraq as an existential threat in 2003 may merely mean, from Iran's point of view, that the United States moves in its place. However, as much as Iran, and the Iranian military institutions, may wish for the capability to establish an offensive military doctrine, it is too far out of reach until it can procure newer conventional military hardware, or elevate its military into an asymmetric force with unconventional weapons and reliable delivery systems.

- Small States May Choose a Deterrent Doctrine Because Their Capabilities are Insufficient to Support Either an Offensive or Defensive Doctrine.

Given the assumptions of the two previous propositions, this would seem to describe Iran's position fairly accurately. But as Scott Sagan points out in his realist propositions (articulated below), an effective nuclear deterrent is dependent on the ability to survive a first-strike counterforce engagement. Without a second-strike nuclear capability, the best for which an aspiring nuclear power can hope is to encounter a "mutual deterrent."<sup>43</sup> It is likely, however, that Iran views its chemical and biological warfare capabilities as a standing deterrent against neighboring conventional military threats.<sup>44</sup> Gregory Giles points out in his work on Iran's unconventional weapons doctrine, that Iran's use of chemical weapons at the end of the war with Iraq indicated a "no first-use" posture. Instead, it appeared as if Iran was maintaining a second-strike doctrine to deter follow-on unconventional attacks.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See Scott D. Sagan, "The Origins of Military Doctrine and Command and Control Systems," in *Planning the Unthinkable: How New Powers Will Use Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons*, ed. Peter R. Lavoy, Scott D. Sagan, and James J. Wirtz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 25.

<sup>44</sup> Giles, "The Islamic Republic of Iran," 92.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

- Status Quo States will Generally Prefer Defensive Doctrines if Geography or Technology Makes Such a Doctrine Attractive.

Iran can rightly be viewed as a status quo state. Despite the early revolutionary rhetoric and the occasional polemic today, Iran's actual behavior matches that of a status quo state. Iran's only open military conflict since the revolution was its eight year war with Iraq, which Iraq began with its invasion of Iran in 1980. Further, Iran's geography gives it great strategic depth, allowing it to take the time required to analyze threats thoroughly before counter attacking, since any invader must traverse a long distance before threatening any of Iran's major cities.<sup>46</sup> Although a ballistic missile threat renders this point moot, Iran's previous conduct hints that the Islamic Republic, overall, considers itself a status quo power with a defensive mindset. In its only war, it was a defensive force, having suffered an invasion from a foreign power (status quo). Iran has implemented a rigid, centralized command and control regimen for its chemical weapons that demonstrates no real-time urgency, suggesting a dependence on conventional defenses to hold off attackers until the supreme leader can authorize the use of chemical munitions.<sup>47</sup>

- Status Quo States May Prefer Defensive Doctrines Because They Know They will not Strike the First Blow.

Having established that Iran is a status quo state, this prediction could fit Iran, if it could be believed to also employ a defensive doctrine. A subtle, yet telling nuance by the chairman of the Expediency Council, former president Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, may have revealed Iran's underlying doctrinal goal. In an impromptu harangue during the Friday prayers in December 2001, while highlighting the Islamic world's intent to stand up to the "imperialists" and Israel, Rafsanjani also "invoked a hypothetical Muslim nuclear capability. Importantly, he seemed to posit such a capability as a second-strike deterrent *against pre-emptive attacks* by Israel or the United States against Iran."<sup>48</sup> Although there is a fine line between deterrence and defense, Rafsanjani attaches the telling caveat to this statement with his emphasis on a second-

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 98-99.

<sup>48</sup> See Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Challenge*, 6.

strike capability to act as a deterrent to Israel and the United States. This may indicate Iran, like China before its 1964 nuclear weapon test, is planning for a nuclear deterrent capability in the long term, but as a nascent nuclear power may be willing to settle for a defensive doctrine in the interim.<sup>49</sup> In either case, Rafsanjani seems to be highlighting a fundamental position to be able to absorb a first-strike while maintaining a credible second strike capability. From the fifth, sixth, and seventh propositions, I conclude that Iran envisions itself as a status quo state, with ultimate aspirations for a nuclear deterrent doctrine but willing to settle for a defensive doctrine while it builds its arsenal to a survivable quantity.

### 3. Nuclear Doctrine Theory: A Second Cut

Building upon Posen's work and adapting his propositions to explain unconventional weapons doctrine, Scott Sagan articulated four of his own balance of power propositions for selecting doctrine.<sup>50</sup> Sagan's four proposals are:

- Realism suggests leaders of stronger military powers, when confronting a weaker military power, will consider preventive war to stop unconventional weapons development.
- Maintenance of a "secure retaliatory capability" is a requirement for deterrence.
- There is disagreement as to whether a balanced race between two powers increases or decreases the likelihood of conventional military aggression.
- Realism suggests that first use of unconventional weapons is plausible to defend exposed allies that cannot be protected other ways.

Sagan's contribution with these propositions is to update Posen's work to account for specific constraints in nuclear balance of power theory, as opposed to general realism, dealing with the conventional military doctrines Posen studied in *Sources of Doctrine*. Sagan's theoretical predictions can help the analyst understand doctrinal evolution among established nuclear weapons states when their strategic environment changes as potential adversaries begin their own programs and eventually achieve nuclear parity. Another

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<sup>49</sup> See Avery Goldstein, "Understanding Nuclear Proliferation: Theoretical Explanation and China's National Experience," in *The Proliferation Puzzle: Why Nuclear Weapons Spread and What Results*, ed. Zachary S. Davis and Benjamin Frankel (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 227-30. Although China arrived at a self-reliance solution differently than has Iran, the Chinese developed an incremental approach to maintain a strong conventional defense while it built a nuclear weapons deterrent force as well.

<sup>50</sup> See Sagan, "The Origins of Military Doctrine," 25-26.

consideration is if, say, Iran were to break out of the NPT and evolve its nuclear doctrine as a deterrent shield to change the status quo. In this scenario, Iran would be essentially blackmailing its neighbors with a nuclear deterrent to access whatever objective it attached to it, such as claiming drilling or petroleum infrastructure rights in the Caspian. While this scenario is not entirely out of the question, Iran's state pronouncements thus far do not support the quick development of an expansionist, offensive conventional doctrine shielded by a nuclear deterrent; nor does its economic and military readiness capabilities.

Three of Sagan's propositions pertain to Iran's case:<sup>51</sup>

- Leaders of Stronger Military Powers, When Confronting a Weaker Military Power, will Consider Preventive War to Stop Unconventional Weapons Development.

If the leader rejects preemptive war, it is because of a rational calculation of cost exceeding benefit, not because of any "moral qualms." Since Iran is not an established nuclear power and is not engaged in a mutual deterrence situation, this proposal is only relevant in a discussion about how the United States might react to Iran if it is publicly discovered to be developing nuclear weapons. How the United States might respond is complicated by the fact that Iran is a signatory to the NPT and NPT nuclear states are not permitted to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear NPT signatories in "good standing."<sup>52</sup>

- Maintenance of a "Secure Retaliatory Capability" is a Requirement for Deterrence.

The state may need to accept "mutual deterrence" until such time as it can produce a survivable, second strike capability. This proposition reveals a likely difficulty for Iran if it is hoping to develop a nuclear deterrent posture; if it cannot guarantee the survival of its nuclear weapons in a first-strike, it cannot have an effective deterrent. Because of Iran's relatively large size and rugged terrain, it could protect its force by

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<sup>22</sup> See Sagan, "The Origins of Military Doctrine," 25-6. Sagan's fourth proposition, "first use of unconventional weapons is plausible to defend exposed allies that cannot be protected in other ways," refers to a large nuclear patron responsible for the security guarantee of multiple satellite states in discontinuous locations. This case does not apply to Iran and has been omitted from the discussion.

<sup>52</sup> Jones, "Iran's Threat Perceptions," 41. Jones notes that Iran is not convinced any of the NPT nuclear powers will honor this obligation, especially after its experience with Iraq violating its obligations to the 1925 Geneva Convention on chemical weapons use during its war with Iran in the 1980s.

disbursing its weapons production, storage, and assembly facilities. The mountainous terrain throughout the southwest and southeast could provide survivable underground shelters; similar to those North Korea has built.<sup>53</sup> The engineering effort and the cost for such a basing strategy would make it a long-term project to complete.

- Does a Balanced Race Between Two Powers Increase or Decrease the Likelihood of Conventional Military Aggression?

If, for instance, two states that have a second strike capability and maintain a balanced mutual deterrence, does the fear of nuclear escalation make conventional war more or less likely? This leads into “the stability/instability paradox,” coined by Glenn Snyder, wherein states with a stable, mutual deterrence use their unconventional arsenal as a shield for conventional-based expansionism.<sup>54</sup> Iran’s weapons production capacity, especially at first, would make it difficult to achieve a “balanced race” with either Israel or the United States. If Iran could achieve nuclear parity with Pakistan, however, Iranian alternatives open for dealing with Pakistan’s Sunni-Shi’a violence. Since the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the IRGC has monitored anti-Shi’a violence within Pakistan and along the Iranian border.<sup>55</sup> The IRGC assumes itself as protector of the world’s Shi’a; if Iran no longer felt deterred by Pakistan’s nuclear forces, it could feel more confident to intervene on behalf of Pakistan’s Shi’a, or to deal with anti-Iranian groups operating out of Pakistan. From Iran’s perspective, the United States has proven averse to challenging states militarily once they have declared a nuclear capability, but it is more aggressive to states displaying nuclear intent. The principal lesson Iran seems to have drawn is that U.S. policy favored diplomacy for North Korea and regime change for Iraq.<sup>56</sup> Iran may view nuclear weapons as the key ingredient for Iran to deter the United States and wield greater political leverage for its agenda within the Persian Gulf region.

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<sup>53</sup> See Cordesman, *Proliferation in the “Axis of Evil,”* 2, 5, 9.

<sup>54</sup> Glenn Snyder, “The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror,” in *The Balance of Power*, ed. Paul Seabury (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965), 184-201, as quoted in Sagan, “Origins of Military Doctrine,” 26.

<sup>55</sup> See Byman et al, *Iran’s Security Policy*, 72-3.

<sup>56</sup> See Ray Takeyh, “Iran’s Nuclear Calculations,” *World Policy Journal* 20, no.2 (Summer 2003): 23; and Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran’s Nuclear Challenge*, 7. Perkovich writes: “If the U.S. is actually deterred from striking North Korea, this deterrence stems from North Korea’s ability to devastate Seoul with *conventional* artillery . . . Iran lacks [this] peculiar deterrent ‘attribute.’”

#### 4. The Case for Iran

The strategic environment created by the nuclear neighborhood in which Iran resides creates incentives for Iran to adopt a deterrence doctrine through an asymmetrical unconventional weapons advantage. Unable to secure balancing alliances or security guarantees during its war with Iraq in the 1980s, Iran found itself in the ultimate “self-help” situation for systemic state security. Although Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini scrubbed the shah’s nuclear program in 1979, lackluster international outrage to Iraq’s use of chemical weapons on Iranian forces persuaded Khomeini to approve development and use of chemical weapons followed by expansion into biological and nuclear weapons programs.<sup>57</sup> Iran’s grand strategy is to be a status quo state capable of deterring potential aggressors while it works to improve its own economic conditions. To support this strategy, Iran is growing its military capabilities to fulfill a deterrence doctrine, once it can assure a secure second strike capability.

#### B. IRAN’S THREAT PERCEPTIONS

Forced to balance against regional threats by itself (rather than through alliances), Iran developed its grand strategy to ensure its survival through self-reliance. Mistrustful of international organizations, Iran is now reluctant to jeopardize self-reliance in favor of any form of collective security. Iran’s strategic environment no longer resembles what it did after the Iraq war, yet Tehran is reluctant to alter its strategy for fear of losing power.

Iran embarked on the nuclear deterrence path to maintain its sovereignty, but also to assert political power within the region. Such political power is often referred to as “prestige,” without an adequate definition of what prestige means in this context.<sup>58</sup> George Perkovich suggests that nuclear weapons may be seen by Supreme Leader Khamenei and his advisors “as an almost magical source of national power and autonomy.”<sup>59</sup> Given Iran’s strategic position linking the Persian Gulf and the Caspian

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<sup>57</sup> See Giles, “The Islamic Republic of Iran,” 91-93.

<sup>58</sup> Prestige is commonly cited as a nuclear weapon motivation for Iran in the current literature without a clear meaning of the reference. Richard Betts comes closest to a working definition (citing shah-era Iran and Brazil as the best examples of the ‘status and prestige’ incentive) stating that “the desire for prestige is the desire not to be in the position of either victim or supplicant.” See Betts, “Paranoids, Pygmies, Pariahs and Nonproliferation Revisited,” 107. For more on the “fuzzy” qualities of the prestige concept, see Peter R. Lavoy, “Nuclear Myths,” 197-8.

<sup>59</sup> Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran’s Nuclear Challenge*, 4.



Sea, it is conceivable that Iran seeks to be the political equal of other regional nuclear powers and still remain a status quo state. Although Iran's war with, and the preeminent rise of, Iraq was a formative motivation for nuclear weapons, losing Iraq as a direct threat does not remove its interest in nuclear weapons. As each normative threat to Iran has been redressed, Israel and the United States have grown more prominent in Iran's security calculations to fill the void.

### **1. Caspian Region and Central Asia**

Afghanistan is mired in reconstruction and civil war, as are many of the Caspian states. The major threat to Iran's northern and eastern frontier is centered on rival sectarian violence, drug smuggling, and other illicit trade activities. From its shared borders with Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan, Iran faces no more of a threat than black market or drug cartel thugs with small arms.<sup>60</sup> Turkey is a conventional force with interests in controlling Kurdish groups in northwest Iran, but no territorial aspirations that constitute an existential threat. Russia's assistance to Iran's nuclear energy program virtually assures Iran will stay out of Russian disputes with Chechnya and other Caucasus states; none of those internal struggles overtly threaten Iran. Especially in the cases of Pakistan and Turkey, however, ascendance of a nuclear-weaponized Iran might trigger frictions that currently do not exist. That is, Iran's mere possession of nuclear weapons could spur a new round of proliferation (Turkey) and escalation (Pakistan).

### **2. The Gulf States**

Most of the Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia, are in economic free-fall and political survival mode. None have a coherent military capability that presents a serious threat to Iran. Moreover, Iran has cultivated strengthening relationships with many of the smaller Gulf States, such as Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar have all expanded economic relationships with Iran since the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988. Even Iran's island territory dispute with the Emirates has begun to fade, but the sudden emergence of a Nuclear Iran will send the Gulf States clamoring to the United States for a

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<sup>60</sup> See Shahram Chubin and Robert S. Litwak, "Debating Iran's Nuclear Aspirations," *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (Autumn 2003): 101-3; and Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Challenge*, 8-9.

greater security guarantee that will elevate U.S.-Iran tensions even further.<sup>61</sup> The likely American response would be an even larger military presence in the Gulf, aimed specifically at Iran. This is an outcome “Iran seeks to avoid” more than virtually any other, as it would increase the U.S. military presence and undermine the Gulf relationships it has worked so hard to grow. Further, Gulf States that doubt the U.S. commitment to their security could also acquire nuclear weapons to add an arms race dynamic within the region for which Iran is not prepared.

### **3. Vague Threats**

Balance of power only really applies in the context of *existential* threats to the state; in Iran’s case, George Perkovich reduces this realm to “four vague threats.”<sup>62</sup> Written as Operation Iraqi Freedom was under way, Perkovich’s four include Iraq, Pakistan, Israel, and the United States. With the U.S.-imposed regime change in Iraq, Baghdad can no longer pose such a threat to Iran. Pakistan may have assisted Iran in its nuclear program as a tacit assurance that Pakistan’s nuclear weapons are meant solely for India.<sup>63</sup> Even if there is no bilateral understanding, Pakistan is too preoccupied with India to have grand designs against the Islamic Republic. That leaves Israel and the United States as the only remaining existential threats to Iran.<sup>64</sup>

Israel, for its part is mainly interested in Iran as it evolves as a nuclear power. Iran has avoided direct confrontation with Israel, choosing instead to fund and support proxy conflict with Israel through pro-Palestinian terrorist organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas.<sup>65</sup> Israel has restrained itself from reacting directly to Iran, but the potential introduction of nuclear weapons into a terrorist relationship changes Israel’s outlook. Israel is now acquiring aircraft and submarines with the range and capabilities to hold

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<sup>61</sup> Jones, “Iran’s Threat Perceptions,” 44; and Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran’s Nuclear Challenge*, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran’s Nuclear Challenge*, 4-7.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>64</sup> Chubin and Litwak, “Debating Iran’s Nuclear Aspirations,” 8-9; and Takeyh, “Iran’s Nuclear Calculations,” 21-22.

<sup>65</sup> Jones, “Iran’s Threat Perceptions,” 46; and Takeyh, “Iran’s Nuclear Calculations,” 22.

Iranian targets at risk.<sup>66</sup> As suggested earlier, the irony for Iran is that if not for its nuclear program, ostensibly to counter Israel and the United States, it would not be a target at all. Even its support of terrorist organizations is unlikely to make Iran the target possessing nuclear weapons would. Short of terrorist action conducted directly from Iranian territory against Israel or the United States, the West is likely to continue dealing with Iran's terror connections diplomatically. The weapon Iran proclaims will at last bring it security is likely the one program that will make it the least secure.

The U.S. influence in the Gulf has grown considerably since 2001. With forces stationed in Afghanistan, South Asia, Turkey, many Gulf States, and now Iraq, U.S. military power has virtually encircled Iran. This "massive projection of American power" and the continued rhetorical confrontation between Washington and Tehran "constitute Iran's foremost strategic dilemma."<sup>67</sup> Although Iran's actual security has been increased by the removal of Iraq and Afghanistan as sectarian, if not existential threats, it feels more threatened than at any time since the end of the war with Iraq. Even though Iraq represented a much more realistic threat to Iran's security than the United States, it was still a *non-nuclear* Iraq. Now to be surrounded by what is arguably the world's rising hegemonic power, supported by unprecedented conventional and nuclear capabilities changes the security dynamic with what Iran views as a double standard. Iran feels a need to assert itself as the regional hegemon, in the great Persian tradition, yet the United States is there, seemingly arbitrarily deciding who may possess nuclear weapons and who may not.<sup>68</sup> This inflated threat perception is supported by Iranian statements and media. Although the United States may not pose a direct threat, Iran's perception is fueled by rampant nationalism every time a U.S. official talks about the "axis of evil," or "regime change." As Iran's former finance minister under the shah, Jahangir Amuzegar warns, "any U.S. strategy that even remotely raises the specter of

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<sup>66</sup> See Kori N. Schake, and Judith S. Yaphe, *The Strategic Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran*, McNair Paper 64 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for National Security Studies, National Defense University, 2001), 42. The authors note the points they make here were gleaned from interviews with "senior Israeli military officers." See also Jones, "Iran's Threat Perceptions and Arms Control Policies," 44.

<sup>67</sup> Takeyh, "Iran's Nuclear Calculations," 23.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

foreign interference in Iran is doomed to fail.”<sup>69</sup> Iran will act on its threat perceptions. The United States should do what it can to not enhance the perception of itself as a direct military or indirect diplomatic threat to the regime in Tehran or it risks cementing Iran’s nuclear doctrine and pushing Iran across the nuclear threshold.

### **C. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

By examining the predicted outcomes for Posen’s seven doctrinal propositions against Iran’s strategic environment, we are able to gain a better understanding of Iran’s military doctrine aspirations which in turn, identify certain “levers” on the systemic level that U.S. policy must address to be successful. The following list of three policy suggestions is not inclusive, but is highlighted by Iran’s threat perceptions and apparent strategic goals. U.S. policy should foster an Iranian reevaluation of its threat environment so Tehran can conclude on its own that it should opt for another security solution. This is easier said than done on the systemic level. In order to effect systemic change diplomatically, Iran has to be willing to reciprocate. Aside from the trade and cooperation agreement Iran and the European Union have negotiated, Iran has responded to few diplomatic entreaties. The following tracks can help set the stage for further talks and openings for policy initiatives aimed at sub-national levels.<sup>70</sup>

#### **1. Reduce Threat Perceptions**

International discourse impacts the threat environment. Post September 11<sup>th</sup> U.S. policy has rightfully concerned Tehran: U.S. president George Bush’s “axis of evil” speech characterized Iran in terms difficult to overcome. Separate promises to change any regime affiliated with terrorist organizations undercut any incentive for Iran to comply with U.S. demands to abandon its nuclear program. What Jahangir Amuzegar calls “unsubstantiated accusations and implied threats” have prevented U.S. policymakers from dissuading Iran from building nuclear weapons because they undermine their own efforts by offering alternative sticks, without offering any carrots.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Jahangir Amuzegar, “Iran’s Crumbling Revolution,” *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 1, (Jan/Feb 2003): par. 13.

<sup>70</sup> Many of these policy recommendations have their roots in journal articles by Ray Takeyh, Shahram Chubin, George Perkovich, and others. I have given credit through citation to specific ideas throughout this section.

<sup>71</sup> Amuzegar, “Iran’s Crumbling Revolution,” par. 34.

First, the United States must not appear so imposing on Iran. Specifically, public pronouncements advocating regime change and Undersecretary of State John Bolton's remark to "draw the appropriate lessons from Iraq," stoke fiery Iranian nationalism and "buttress the position" of Iran's hardliners.<sup>72</sup> Resurgences in Iranian nationalism merely breathe new life into the ruling conservatives, prolonging their crumbling grip on power.<sup>73</sup> This does not mean that the United States should end any of its current missions in the Persian Gulf or South Asia; it means that the United States needs to go publicly silent with aimless, inflammatory rhetoric.

Second, the United States should lead a new multilateral coalition on a hard diplomatic tack against Iran.<sup>74</sup> By enlisting the EU, Russia, Japan, and as many Gulf States as possible, the coalition would take away Iran's ability to play one nation against another to forestall referral to the UN Security Council, or worse. Such a coalition would even out the threat posture of each state; the United States would no longer be seen as the sole "bad cop" to Europe's "good cop," for instance.

The new coalition would be positioned to enact multilateral containment or award multilateral carrots, depending on Iran's response. This means that hard talk should be reserved for bilateral and multilateral diplomatic communications and it should clearly spell out a carrot and stick relationship. Some Iranian diplomats are afraid that even if they ratify the NPT additional protocol, "more demands will be forthcoming and that such concessions will open the door for the U.S. to seek regime change."<sup>75</sup> The U.S.-led coalition must demonstrate good faith by not using Iran's acquiescence to one set of conditions as a departure point for more demands, but it must also unwaveringly hold the line on Iran's nonproliferation commitments.

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<sup>72</sup> Takeyh, "Iran's Nuclear Calculations," 27.

<sup>73</sup> Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Challenge*, 11.

<sup>74</sup> The idea of "cooperative containment" through a "new coalition of the willing" has been advanced by several scholars. See Schaffer, "Iran at the Nuclear Threshold," par. 52; Kemp and Lippmann, "How to Stop the Iranian Bomb," par. 39; and Takeyh, "Iran's Nuclear Calculations," 27.

<sup>75</sup> Chubin and Litwak, "Debating Iran's Nuclear Aspirations," 112. On this theme, they write, "The U.S. must signal that it will accept Iranian compliance and not pocket concessions from Tehran as a prelude to making further demands."

## 2. Minimize Israeli Threat Posture

The United States must address Iran's threat perception of Israel. Iranian leaders have quietly hinted that they would also accept any settlement the Palestinians were willing to accept. President Khatami remarked that the Palestinians themselves must "determine their future." Addressing why Iran would never directly intervene in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Supreme Leader Khamenei declared that the Palestinian issue "is simply not Iran's Jihad."<sup>76</sup> The United States should play on this sentiment and do all it can to revive the Israeli peace roadmap. Removing the Israeli-Palestinian question from the Iranian debate should be a top priority for the United States. The U.S.-led coalition should also pressure Iran to publicly support the process to signal the Palestinian Authority and Hezbollah that it is time to end the stalemate.

The United States can also do more to "equalize" its security guarantee among the Arab states and Israel. By applying a more even hand in supporting the Gulf States and Israel, the United States can reduce the impression of a double standard. This is not to say Washington should curb its support for Israel. But it must appear to give Israel the same treatment as all its other allies; special treatment for Israel calls into question the utility of any U.S. security guarantee for the other states.

Iran is also concerned about what it perceives as an Israeli nuclear deterrent. Whether or not Israel has nuclear weapons is irrelevant: Iran perceives such a threat, and that is its reality. The United States must clarify the role of Israel's entire military capability in relation to the region's overwhelming conventional capabilities arrayed against Israel. This must include gentle articulation that no form of Israeli deterrent can be removed until Iran (and others) publicly renounces support for anti-Israeli terrorist organizations and acknowledge Israel's right to exist. This does not mean Iran and the Arab states cannot oppose Israeli policies, or must "abandon the Palestinians;" but they cannot expect to change the strategic environment by covertly threatening Israel while also demanding Israel disarm.<sup>77</sup> Here also the new coalition must convince Iran that any

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<sup>76</sup> Shahram Chubin, "Iran's Strategic Environment and Nuclear Weapons," in *Iran's Nuclear Weapons Options: Issues and Analysis*, ed., Geoffrey Kemp (Washington, D.C.: The Nixon Center, 2001), 26-7.

<sup>77</sup> Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Challenge*, 14.

continued Arab opposition will only be accepted in diplomatic realms, and Iran can lead the Arab states in the discussion.

### **3. Encourage a Gulf Security Organization**

To reassure Tehran that there is no preplanned agenda against it, the United States should clearly articulate its plan for post-Saddam Iraq and encourage formation of a new Gulf Council working group. Such a working group would lay a foundation to establish new cooperative norms and mechanisms for collective security and common defense that includes an active Iran. The group would include all the Gulf Cooperative Council member states plus authorities from the new Iraqi government and Iran. Joseph McMillan, of Washington's National Defense University, points out "the lack of an enduring political basis for cooperation has been the Achilles heel of previous efforts" in this regard.<sup>78</sup> Still, by helping re-establish Persian leadership in the region, the United States could find ways to decrease its Persian Gulf military commitments. The United States should minimize its visible presence in these proceedings, ensuring its perspective and interests are represented by proxy through Gulf or European allies. This would do much to allay fears among Gulf States and Iran about the direction of their regional strategic environment.<sup>79</sup>

These three broad proposals may be difficult to start, but they each would do much to begin sculpting the regional strategic environment and allow Iran to make an honest reassessment of its threat perceptions. Only then can the systemic forces that influence Iran's military doctrine begin to change its strategic requirements.

## **D. CONCLUSIONS**

Iran views itself as a target of the United States and Israel. Iranian officials make public announcements that illustrate or hint towards how Iran views its strategic environment, and how it views its military doctrine. In some instances, Iranian officials use the terms "defensive" and "deterrent" interchangeably, but it is clear they understand the difference when Chairman Rafsanjani articulates a "deterrent capability" able to withstand a first-strike to act as a deterrent to further attack. Iran's strategic situation—

<sup>78</sup> See Joseph McMillan, "The United States and a Gulf Security Architecture: Policy Considerations," *Strategic Insights* III, no. 3 (March 2004): par. 10; <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2004/mar/mcmillanMar04.asp>; Internet, accessed March 2004.

<sup>79</sup> Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Challenge*, 11.

its relative size, economic and industrial power, neighboring threats—help identify it as a “small, status quo state.” As such, it fulfills the doctrinal role predicted by Posen and Sagan in their respective balance of power models.

It is evident that Iran views the security threats in its region differently than the rest of the world does; but in that context, Iran sees itself as an aspiring great power with a status quo strategy, supported by a defensive military doctrine. Because the nature of the threats Iran perceives, namely a nuclear United States and Israel, a defensive doctrine can only be successful with a counter-force or counter-value nuclear weapon capability. What we can infer from prominent Iranian pronouncements, is they view their doctrine as defensive, but they hope or plan to develop that doctrine into a strategic deterrent when they can support it with the appropriate number of weapons systems.

Iran is not likely to change its strategic view unless it perceives a demonstrable change in the environment. The fall of Ba’thist Iraq may be one such change; progress on the Israeli peace process may be another. By working towards the policy implications identified in this study, the United States and Israel can subtly change the strategic landscape and help Iran to reassess its threat perceptions. Only then can Iran reach its own conclusions for its security requirements and alter its strategy, and by extension, its military doctrine. Once it changes its strategy, Iran can then readdress its security approach; to emphasize collective security or defensive alliances and obviate a “need” for nuclear weapons.



### III. IRAN'S NATIONALIST MYTH MAKERS

Iran's public nuclear face is contradictory. Ministers within the Islamic government invariably proclaim Iran's peaceful intentions for its nuclear power program. However, when international rhetoric hints at a threat to Iran's sovereignty, one or another hardliner will promise a military reprisal that would be impossible without a weapon of mass destruction.<sup>80</sup> Even without admitting to having such a weapon, the hardliners betray their faith in overwhelming technological military capability to assure Iran's security. Recurring references to overwhelming military power, real or imagined, illustrate two inner beliefs among the ruling hardline conservatives. First, that such capabilities will provide the security worthy of Iran by holding Israeli and U.S. forces at risk with equal capabilities, and second, such statements reveal a political insecurity, an envy, they believe can be overcome only by being in the "nuclear club." For individual beliefs to influence Iranian policy individual actors within the government must be important; their contributions must "matter." Examination at the individual level of analysis yields a model that shows how individual actions influence state behavior in the international realm.

Iran is torn between two competing nuclear weapons myths, functionally allowing the supreme leader to hedge his nuclear ambitions. In this chapter, I argue that these two nuclear myths influence Iran's consensus-building and decision making. Individual beliefs and attitudes toward Iran's security have taken hold at different governmental levels to inspire Iran's nuclear power and nuclear weapons programs. The chapter explores Iran's two nuclear myths and the individual myth makers that perpetuate them to drive Iran's nuclear weapons program. First, I define the relationship of nuclear myths to proliferation. Second, I illustrate how Iran employs two countervailing myths to

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<sup>80</sup> For a recent example, see "Iranian Defence Minister Ali Shamkhani has warned that Iran might launch a pre-emptive strike to prevent an attack on its nuclear facilities," *AlJazeera.Net* (Tehran: Al Jazeera TV, 19 August 2004); <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/B19236FC-6A23-4FB4-B499-E7AF900949DE.htm>; Internet, accessed August 2004. Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani remarked on Al-Jazeera TV, in response to rumors of an impending Israeli preemptive strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, that "we will not sit with arms folded to wait for what others will do to us;" while IRGC General Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr warned "If Israel fires one missile at Bushehr atomic power plant, it should permanently forget about Dimona nuclear center, where it produces and keeps its nuclear weapons, and Israel would be responsible for the terrifying consequence of this move."

simultaneously inspire the nuclear program and to insulate it. Finally, I explore policy options to discredit Iran's security myth by fostering and educating an internal debate within Iran.

The precarious balance Iran employs with its dual myths protects administrators and scientists within the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI),<sup>81</sup> as well as Iran's nuclear technology suppliers. By publicly embracing the "nuclear insecurity" myth and affirming its support of the NPT, Iran is able to continue its relationship with its chief suppliers, Russia and China, while obviating public debate over the utility of nuclear weapons. Lying underneath outward appearances, though, the "nuclear security" myth is the inspiration for military leaders and technicians secretly working on the weapons program to succeed for the greater good of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Because the Iranian government has also perpetuated the insecurity myth, U.S. policy should try to exploit anti-nuclear inertia within the Iranian debate without appearing to be dictating Iran's interests or position.

Iran's nuclear weapons program is too complex to have spontaneously generated. As chapter II details, the strategic environment in which Iran found itself in the mid-1980s was dominated by Iraq on one side and the threat of Soviet expansion beyond its war with Afghanistan on the other. Iraq's ruthless use of chemical weapons against the ill-prepared Iranian forces was a formative experience for Iran. By the end of the war in 1988, several governmental and military leaders were advocates of acquiring and using nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. Chapter IV relates how a coalition of ruling clerics and military officers convinced Ayatollah Khomeini to resume a nuclear weapons program in 1984, reversing his 1979 decree that nuclear weapons are un-Islamic.<sup>82</sup> The core of Iran's nuclear myth makers evolved from that coalition in 1984. Abu Mohammed Asgar-Khani and Hashemi Rafsanjani were part of the governmental coalition that led the transformation. Having cultivated international isolation, Iran had little luck generating international sympathy for its plight in its war with Iraq. Unable to overcome shortages

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<sup>81</sup> The literature variously refers to the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran as "AEOI," or "IAEO." I have adopted "AEOI," the form used by the IAEA, except where quoting other sources. See "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Report by the Director General*, GOV/2003/75.

<sup>82</sup> See Giles, "The Islamic Republic of Iran," 92.

of conventional military hardware and spare parts, Iran was forced to transform itself into a self-sufficient military power to provide its own defense. Iran's nuclear myth makers provide the inspiration to succeed in Iran's clandestine weapons and delivery system programs.

#### **A. NUCLEAR MYTHS, MYTH MAKERS, AND PROLIFERATION**

Noted nuclear strategy specialist Peter Lavoy developed the "nuclear myths" model to explain individual-level causes of proliferation, which forms the theoretical basis for this analysis.<sup>83</sup> Used in this context, nuclear myths are "unverifiable beliefs about relationships between a state's nuclear weapons and security." Nuclear myths are unverifiable because they rely on perceptions of what creates security: "they can be believed but not known." Because there is no modern experience with nuclear warfare or how a state can prevail within it, these perceptions are theory-based rather than empirically-based.<sup>84</sup> Lavoy describes nuclear myth makers as "individuals who assert these myths and try to persuade others of their validity." They are societal elites that convince governmental leaders of the "military security and political power" provided by nuclear weapons.<sup>85</sup>

In aspiring proliferant states, Lavoy contends that myth makers can persuade government decision makers to "go nuclear" by "exaggerating security threats to make a 'myth of nuclear security' more compelling." The security myth emphasizes a state's international standing with respect to nuclear security alliances and the threatening nature of its strategic environment. If "well-placed" individuals can convince state leaders their security and political power will be enhanced by nuclear weapons, the state is likely to acquire them. This formula is also prescriptive for nonproliferation. Governmental insiders can emphasize and foster a consensus on the "insecurity myth" of nuclear weapons to influence leaders to not seek nuclear weapons.<sup>86</sup> The insecurity myth

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<sup>83</sup> See Lavoy, "Nuclear Myths and the Causes of Nuclear Proliferation," 192-212.

<sup>84</sup> See Philip Tetlock and Charles McGuire, Jr., "Cognitive Perspectives on Foreign Policy," in *Political Behavior Annual 1*, ed., Samuel Long (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1986), 159-61, as quoted in Lavoy, "Nuclear Myths," 206. In note 7, Lavoy compares his definition of myth to concepts used in cognitive psychology.

<sup>85</sup> Lavoy, "Nuclear Myths," 199, 206.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

emphasizes the vulnerabilities to which a state opens itself when it produces nuclear weapons, such as industrial and ecological erosion; the financial burdens for security, testing, development, maintenance, and disposal; and the political vulnerability to attack by larger nuclear states simply because the first government's acquisition constituted a new threat to the larger power.

### **1. Myth Making Assumptions**

The operational utility of this model depends on three assumptions germane to individuals and national policy development:<sup>87</sup>

- Individual beliefs matter for foreign policy making.
- Policymakers' beliefs in nuclear weapons are particularly important.
- Talented and well-placed individuals can help create, diffuse, and perpetuate nuclear myths.

These assumptions do not necessarily run counter to other theories of international relations (e.g., realism, bureaucratic politics). Rather, they are instructive of how leaders decide specific policy paths; supplementing insight where other analytical lenses cannot define the same events through its resultant filter. In nearly every state-level decision, the individual leader has final authority on the course of action. His decision is influenced by his perceptions, understanding (or lack of it), and beliefs about “the political and military characteristics” of nuclear weapons.<sup>88</sup> Lavoy proposes that individual beliefs in foreign policy can explain why different leaders in similar situations acted “differently,” or why people in different situations acted “similarly.”<sup>89</sup>

Policymakers' beliefs are particularly important because much of nuclear political interaction depends heavily on perception and intuition. The realm of nuclear brinkmanship is fraught with nuance, as opposed to the “brute force” of conventional military battles. Modern political outcomes depend on “highly subjective assessments;” miscalculations can cost the political leader his entire societal context—he could lose the population he is entrusted to defend.<sup>90</sup> Nuclear myths influence the cost-benefit calculus

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 199. Here I list Lavoy's assumptions directly from his text.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 200.

behind the decision to proliferate. If a state breaks out from the NPT, it must recognize the cost the regime can impose for noncompliance.

Finally, “well-placed” myth makers can have tremendous influence when policy makers recognize they do not possess the required understanding to make an accurate judgment. “Even when national leaders feel confident in their strategic beliefs, experts can influence the process of policy making.”<sup>91</sup> When experts have the access and the wherewithal to influence government leaders, the leaders shape their own beliefs based on the advice they receive. If the myth maker is persistent and convincing, he can shape the national strategic direction.

## **2. Applying the Assumptions to Iran**

Iran’s governing style is particularly susceptible to influential elites, perhaps more so than in democratically run institutions. Even though Iran is autocratic, its decision making is dependent on consensus building and political horse trading within complex informal networks. There is no open political process with procedural checks to limit the ruling elites’ options. Iran’s foreign policy decision making is often the result of compromises among the overlapping security institutions and their overseeing bureaucrats.<sup>92</sup> Once a decision is made, it is enforced with authoritarian efficiency, but the process is open to private discussion where certain elites can hold tremendous sway.

Individuals and administrators all vie for influence at the highest levels, depending on personal networks and affiliations through family, school, religion, or military service. Most ministers are appointed based on personal influence, rather than merit. Given a general lack of experience in many decision making positions, these bureaucrats can be slow to render decisions and are likely to seek advice from trusted colleagues. What decision makers believe and what they are told by trusted associates bears greatly on the policies they shape.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>92</sup> For more on Iran’s consensus decision making and the influence of personal networks, see Chap. IV. See also Byman et al, *Iran’s Security Policy*, 21-8.

Tehran University Professor Nasser Hadian writes that Iranian nuclear decisions are made at the “ideological intersection of Islam and nationalism.”<sup>93</sup> Iran’s leaders may be growing more pragmatic, but issues that resonate with popular nationalism help them maintain their grip on power. The nuclear myth makers appeal to nationalism and popular will while convincing leaders of the security void only nuclear weapons can fill. Iran’s nuclear myth makers exaggerate the balance of power security imperative for national self-help and transform industry bureaucracies into parochial survivalists which sustain the security myth for their own self-preservation. Most importantly, individual beliefs and the placement of experts within the regime are the critical combination to influence Iranian policy decisions.

## **B. IRAN’S COUNTER OPPOSING NUCLEAR MYTHS**

Lavoy illustrates two opposing nuclear myths. Iran is successfully employing both simultaneously. Targeted to two different audiences, Iran uses variations of both the security and the insecurity myths to achieve complementary ends. The security myth is closely guarded, known mainly to those decision makers inside Supreme Leader Khamenei’s inner circle and the few workers who know to what end their labor is contributing. On the other hand, the insecurity myth is invoked regularly by every minister involved with the AEOI and the present debate about Iran’s role in the NPT.

### **1. The Nuclear Security Myth**

The Iranian version of the security myth stresses the need for Iranian self-reliance. From its own perspective, Iran’s greatest rhetorical threat is Israel, followed by its “imperialist sponsor,” the United States.<sup>94</sup> The security myth emphasizes, by way of exaggeration, the danger posed by these two nuclear powers against the Islamic republic. Iranian security myth makers are rarely heard outside closed door sessions. However, there have been enough “leaks” from influential personalities to suggest they are not accidental. Such “leaks” may be intentional messages to administrators or bureaus within

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<sup>93</sup> See Nasser Hadian, “Iran’s Nuclear Program: Contexts and Debates,” in *Iran’s Bomb: American and Iranian Perspectives*, ed., Geoffrey Kemp (Washington, D.C.: The Nixon Center, 2004): 56.

<sup>94</sup> By rhetorical threat, I refer to how Iran features Israel, or “the Zionist regime” as the primary threat in its rhetoric, even though it may have previously viewed Iraq, or now Pakistan, as larger threats. Although other states may present a more realistic security threat, Iran can get more mileage by isolating the Jewish state opposite the Muslim world. See Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran’s Nuclear Challenge*, 5-6.

the Iranian government, but are publicly dismissed as inconsequential loose talk. Iran's security myth has four elements:

- Iran is at risk from Aggressive Zionist/Israeli and American nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.
- Iran has no great-power alliance options, no nuclear umbrella, and cannot rely on international treaties or norms for protection.
- Iran is descended from the great Persian society and is destined to be the leader within the Persian Gulf region.
- Self-reliance producing nuclear weapons is the only way to ensure Iran can meet the threats posed by Israel and the United States.<sup>95</sup>

Among Iranians, there is a nuance to the nuclear question. Some circles only see a need for Iran to develop the capability to produce nuclear weapons without actually doing it unless a more definitive threat looms.<sup>96</sup> Other circles think Iran should develop and stockpile nuclear weapons to ensure an existing military capability for its security. The security myth serves both of these positions equally, since the capacity to produce weapons also satisfies the requirement of self-reliance.

## **2. The Nuclear Insecurity Myth**

The Iranian version of the insecurity myth also has four elements, the fourth being more of a legitimacy clause for Iran's right to produce civilian nuclear energy. Most reformist politicians repeat the insecurity myth at every opportunity. The underlying role of the insecurity myth is to keep all parliamentarians and ministers "on message" as to Iran's nuclear intentions:

- Nuclear weapons go against Islam; their possession will weaken the Islamic republic's ideological standing and erode its regional leadership claim.
- Nuclear weapons will undermine Iran's international commitments, arouse suspicion, and invite animosity from its neighbors and competitors. The economic cost of nuclear weapons, from lost trade and actual expenses to maintain the stockpile, outweighs their benefit in a wartime role.

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<sup>95</sup> These themes are consistent with Shahram Chubin's propositions of Iranian nuclear weapon motives. See Chubin, *Iran's National Security Policy*, 53-4. See also Shahram Chubin, *Whither Iran? Reform, Domestic Politics and National Security*, Adelphi Paper 342 (New York: Oxford, 2002), 74.

<sup>96</sup> See Hadian, "Iran's Nuclear Program," 61-3. Hadian discusses three sub-options: independent fuel cycle for reactor; capability to produce a bomb if necessary; and actually producing a nuclear stockpile.

- Rather than provide security against other nuclear weapons powers, Iran's nuclear weapons will in fact make it vulnerable to external attack merely because it has such weapons.<sup>97</sup>
- Because it is not Iran's purpose to develop nuclear weapons, but it is their right under the NPT to develop civilian power production, Iran must be allowed to develop an indigenous fuel cycle to prevent dependence on any foreign source for its electrical power.<sup>98</sup>

The insecurity myth has the larger following of the two myths in Iran because it is the foundation to official government policy: nonproliferation while developing an indigenous fuel cycle capability for a civilian atomic energy program.

### **3. Iran's Nuclear Strategy**

Iran's overall nuclear strategy is to publicly disavow any interest in nuclear weapons while developing every allowable capability under Article IV of the NPT.<sup>99</sup> Reacting to IAEA and U.S. allegations of cheating on its NPT obligations, Iran is adopting whatever tactic will work to stall and divert attention away from its program. The longer Iran can stall the IAEA, the more of its fissile material upgrade production it can develop. The real goal for Iran appears to be to hedge nuclear weapons development until a time that Leader Khamenei deigns appropriate to fully cross the nuclear threshold. The evidence for this mounts while Khamenei appears to be aloof, indecisive, or supremely clever.

The myths help keep Supreme Leader Khamenei from having to commit to a specific path until he feels Iran is ready. Iran's official position is to support its NPT obligations, but there is evidence that Iran is clandestinely trying to reach a weapons capability. Former Iranian foreign minister under the shah, Ardeshir Zahedi, recently wrote that "the present regime in Tehran is strategically committed to developing a

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<sup>97</sup> See Hadian, "Iran's Nuclear Program," 60-61.

<sup>98</sup> See "Iran is Determined to Develop Nuclear Technology: Mohammed Khatami," *Iran Press Service* 15903, (Tehran: 15 September 2004); [http://www.iran-press-service.com/articles\\_2003/Sept-2003/iaea\\_iran\\_15903.htm](http://www.iran-press-service.com/articles_2003/Sept-2003/iaea_iran_15903.htm); accessed August 2004.

<sup>99</sup> "Treaty On The Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," *IAEA Information Circular*, INFCIRC/140 (Geneva: 22 April 1970), 3. Article IV assures all states party to the NPT can develop all aspects of peaceful nuclear power.



nuclear ‘surge capacity’ if not a full arsenal of weapons.”<sup>100</sup> In April 2004, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) reported that Iran has convened a secret nuclear weapons effort, functioning outside the IAEA and under control of the Iranian military. The group’s summary states that the Iranian government views the United States as having no choice but to “go soft on Iran,” because of U.S. preoccupation with Iraq.<sup>101</sup> The report further claims that Iran is trying to rush completion of a nuclear weapon in less than two years. The NCRI is the same group that reported the secret facilities at Natanz and Arak in 2002, which were confirmed by the Iranian government to the IAEA in 2003; although this latest claim has yet to be confirmed, the group’s proven record lends credibility to the story.

An unrelated report in August 2004 from an Israeli daily paper, *Ma’ariv International*, seemed to confirm the NCRI allegations.<sup>102</sup> The Israeli paper reported it had confirmed through “Western intelligence sources” that Tehran has decided to risk a “showdown” with the United States rather than concede any nuclear capabilities. The report details an elaborate scheme by Iranian leaders to quickly produce enough highly enriched uranium to produce a bomb by stalling the IAEA. The report alleges that a special meeting of top Iranian leaders, including former president Hashemi Rafsanjani, concluded that the Europeans will favor appeasement over confrontation. Further, Tehran intends to exploit Europe’s “lack of will” while exerting pressure on the United States with renewed Shi’a resistance fighting in Iraq, led by Shiite cleric Moqtada al Sadr. The report asserts the Iranian leadership deliberately used Ayatollah al Sistani’s medical treatment in London as a “window of opportunity” to instigate an escalation by al Sadr’s private militia against U.S. forces in Iraq.

Iran’s underlying nuclear weapons strategy is to hedge: to shield capabilities development behind the NPT until it decides to withdraw from the NPT and go nuclear or it decides to rollback nuclear weapons capabilities in favor of collective security and

<sup>100</sup> See Ardeshir Zahedi, “Iran’s Nuclear Ambitions,” *Wall Street Journal* (25 June 2004): A10. As the shah’s foreign minister, Zahedi signed the NPT on behalf of Iran.

<sup>101</sup> See David Ensor, “Iran ‘Rushing to Build Nuke Bomb,’” CNN.com (27 April 2004), available from: <http://www.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/04/27/iran.nuclear/>; Internet, accessed August 2004.

<sup>102</sup> “Western Intelligence Sources Confirm to Israel Daily Iran Set on Showdown,” *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (FBIS) GMP20040812000083 (12 August 2004).

economic arrangements.<sup>103</sup> Israeli nuclear scholar Ariel Levite argues that a hedging strategy allows state leaders to pursue weapons capabilities without making a final decision regarding acquisition or abandonment until political conditions dictate.<sup>104</sup> In fact, any final decision whether to actually develop a bomb may not happen until the very last minute for either course of action. Inherent deniability gives the regime bargaining power for any negotiations while allowing Iran's nuclear suppliers to continue to legally assist the state in its nuclear development under the terms of the NPT.

### C. IRAN'S NUCLEAR SECURITY MYTH MAKERS

Iran's myth makers are particularly effective because of their longevity in government, their extensive interpersonal network, and their ideological devotion. Unlike India or Pakistan, whose myth makers were scientists, Iran's myth makers are clerics turned politicians. Iran's scientists do not have the continuity within government to have the influence required of a myth maker. In fact, many of Iran's scientists fled the country after the revolution and Tehran has spent the last fifteen years educating a new generation of scientists and technicians.

Most of the ruling clerics have been involved in the Islamic government since before the revolution and have held several positions within the Majlis or various other councils. Their political longevity ensures each have broad personal networks with which to negotiate consensus and peddle influence. Further, each of these myth makers have cultivated an ideological reputation on which their followers have come to depend when discussing policy. I have identified three primary figures that fulfill the security myth maker role inside Iran: Chairman of the Expediency Council Ayatollah Akbar

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<sup>103</sup> See Geoffrey Kemp, "Iran's Nuclear Options," in *Iran's Nuclear Weapons Options: Issues and Analysis*, ed. Idem. (Washington, D.C.: The Nixon Center, 2001), 14. Kemp calls this a "nuclear insurance strategy . . . to seek to develop the infrastructure and personnel to permit it to develop weapons grade material if and when 'extraordinary events' convince Iran that it has no option but to produce the bomb."

<sup>104</sup> See Ariel E. Levite, "Never Say Never Again: Nuclear Reversal Revisited," *International Security* 27, No. 3 (Winter 2002/03), 59–88. Levite contends, "Would-be proliferants rarely make formal decisions to acquire the bomb or for that matter to give it up before they absolutely have to (e.g., before they are on the verge of attaining or eliminating a nuclear capability), if then. National leaderships are usually reluctant to make a formal commitment to acquiring nuclear weapons (even if the intent is clear) until the technical feasibility, affordability, and political (internal as well as external) viability of this undertaking have been ascertained. Such premature decisions are widely seen as politically risky and, perhaps more important, politically and strategically unnecessary, because the absence of such a formal decision does not usually preclude development of a standby capacity to produce nuclear weapons, under the rationale of creating a nuclear 'option.'"

Hashemi Bahramani Rafsanjani, Former Prime Minister Doctor Abu Mohammed Asgar-Khani, and IRGC Commander in Chief Yahya Rahim-Safavi. Each are uniquely positioned to wield influence over separate segments of the Iranian government, yet each also fills a role that gives them access and influence with Supreme Leader Khamenei, arguably the final authority for any nuclear weapons decision.

### **1. Chairman of the Expediency Council Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani**

Chairman Rafsanjani has been a revolutionary insider from the beginning. One of Ayatollah Khomeini's closest advisors after the revolution, Rafsanjani co-founded the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) which was the cornerstone of Iranian politics until 1987.<sup>105</sup> He was the speaker of the Majlis from 1980 – 1989 when, near the end of the Iraq war, Khomeini selected Rafsanjani to be the chief of the regular armed forces where he was instrumental in ending the wasteful human wave attacks.<sup>106</sup> He rode his success after the war to two terms as Iran's president, where he built a reputation as an economic reformer, stimulating the first growth and construction within Iran since the revolution. Since 1997, Rafsanjani has been the Chairman of the Expediency Council, considered to be the number two position to Ayatollah Khamenei.

The Iraq war left a major impression on Rafsanjani; after the war he became the most consistent proponent of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. In an address to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in October, 1988, right after the war, he proclaimed:

Chemical and biological weapons are poor man's atomic bombs and can be easily produced. We should at least consider them for our defense. Although the use of such weapons is inhuman, the war taught us that international laws are just scraps of paper. With regard to chemical, bacteriological, and radiological weapons training, it was made very clear during the war that these weapons are very decisive . . . We should fully equip ourselves both in the offensive and defensive use of chemical,

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<sup>105</sup> See "Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani ranks among the most influential politicians in Iran," *BBC Profile: Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani* (4 July 2003), available from: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3034480.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3034480.stm); Internet, accessed August 2004.

<sup>106</sup> See Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War: 1980 – 1988* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 59.

bacteriological, and radiological weapons. From now on you should make use of the opportunity and perform this task.<sup>107</sup>

While reciting Friday prayers in December, 2001, Rafsanjani updated his public commitment to nuclear weapons and their use: “If a day comes when the world of Islam is duly equipped with the arms Israel has in possession, the strategy of colonialism would face a stalemate because application of an atomic bomb not leave anything in Israel but the same thing would just produce damages in the Muslim world.”<sup>108</sup>

Rafsanjani’s unparalleled access to and influence with Supreme Leader Khamenei ensures he is always in position to keep the security myth alive with the leader; and his access to virtually all aspects of Iran’s governing functions also means he can focus the “troops” in any crisis. Rafsanjani is unquestionably the lead security myth maker in the Islamic republic.

## **2. Former Prime Minister Doctor Abu Mohammed Asgar-Khani**

Doctor Abu Mohammed Asgar-Khani was Prime Minister from 1980-1989; now a Tehran University International Relations Professor. He is considered in many circles to be “The father of Iran’s nuclear program.” Asgar-Khani had been thought of as a pragmatist, he is “one the very few Iranians to state publicly that it is in Iran’s national interest to develop nuclear weapons.”<sup>109</sup>

In an opinion piece that appeared in a Beirut paper in September, 2003, Asgar-Khani addressed his opinion on the IAEA inspections at the newly discovered uranium processing plants in Natanz and Arak; and unabashedly reasserted his position that Iran should develop nuclear weapons:

. . . Iran should invoke Article 10 of the NPT and consider those tests as “an extraordinary event” against the “supreme interest” of Iran and therefore should render notice to step out of the NPT before the NPT and

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<sup>107</sup> Cited in Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iran’s Military Forces in Transition: Conventional Threats and Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1999), 234; as quoted in Schake and Yaphe, *The Strategic Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran*, 3.

<sup>108</sup> “Rafsanjani Says Muslims Should Use Nuclear Weapon Against Israel,” (Tehran: Iran Press Service, 14 December 2001); [http://www.iran-press-service.com/articles\\_2001/dec\\_2001/rafsanjani\\_nuke\\_threats\\_141201.htm](http://www.iran-press-service.com/articles_2001/dec_2001/rafsanjani_nuke_threats_141201.htm); Internet, accessed August 2004.

<sup>109</sup> See International Crisis Group, “Dealing with Iran’s Nuclear Program,” 20.

the CTBT monitoring systems and inspections regimes are in place. Iran failed to do so. That opportunity was lost and Iran has to pay the price . . . If you ask me if Iran needs to nuclearize itself, I would say this is a must for Iran's strategy of survival. A nuclear Iran must not be seen as a threat to its neighboring countries or to Israel. The weapons would serve as a minimum deterrence for self-defense in a world of uncertainty. It is necessary not only as a substitute for fossil energy but also for Iran's social cohesion and prestige . . . I would now argue that, only by becoming a nuclear weapons state, can Iran consolidate its social coherence. Iran needs both soft and hard power to regain its national identity and prestige. I strongly believe that if the underlying cause of conflict between Iran and the US the Palestinian-Israeli issue is resolved, those three outstanding issues would be irrelevant in the eyes of Americans.<sup>110</sup>

Asgar-Khani was on the front-line of Iran's reversal on nuclear weapons in the mid-1980s, while he was the prime minister. His entrenched views reveal a hard-line attitude toward the security myth. His credibility, access, and influence place him as the number two myth maker.

### **3. IRGC Commander in Chief Yahya Rahim-Safavi**

Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Yahya Rahim Safavi is in a particularly strong position to influence IRGC and regular military commanders with his hard-line views of nuclear weapons. Most alarming to western analysts is the presumption that he is nominally in charge of not only Iran's missile force, but also the command and control of all nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons systems.

In May, 1998, Safavi's remarks to IRGC commanders in a private session were leaked to the Iranian press. Safavi's candor can only reveal the conservatives' impatience with President Khatami's reformist agenda, which was largely blocked by the Council of Guardians. Addressing Khatami's foreign policy, Safavi ranted,

Can we withstand American threats and domineering attitude with a policy of detente? Can we foil dangers coming from America through dialogue between civilizations? Will we be able to protect the Islamic Republic from international Zionism by signing conventions to ban proliferation of chemical and nuclear weapons?<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Abu Mohammed Asgar-Khani, "Iran, Sept. 11 and the Repercussions of 'Regime Change,'" *Daily Star* (Beirut: 15 September 2003).

<sup>111</sup> Michael Eisenstadt, "Iran Under Khatami: Weapons of Mass Destruction, Terrorism, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *Statement before the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on*

Michael Eisenstadt, commenting on Safavi's remarks toward the chemical weapons convention (CWC) and the NPT noted that "in both cases, it would seem that Safavi's preference would be to clandestinely circumvent these treaties, one way or another. It remains to be seen if he will carry the day."<sup>112</sup> In his role as IRGC commander, Eisenstadt wondered if Safavi's opinion could be the decisive vote for any future Iranian venture away from the NPT.

#### **D. THE NUCLEAR INSECURITY MYTH MAKERS**

Iran's insecurity myth makers are the "Hired Gun" myth makers to shield the clandestine nuclear weapons program from international scrutiny. It is not possible to know if these myth makers are kept in the dark about the clandestine side of the weapons program, or if they are calculated liars. Still, many of these figures manage to sound sincere and are always "on message" with the insecurity myth and pro-NPT talking points. As a rule, the insecurity myth makers are reformists, as opposed to conservatives, but that distinction is a fine one. They are staunchly loyal to the concept of the Islamic republic, but the reformers are more pragmatic in their views on foreign relations and economics. I have identified three insecurity myth makers, based on their position, influence, and consistency in public statements: President (Hojjatoleslam) Mohammad Khatami, Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia and Oceania Mohsen Aminzadeh, and Gholam Reza Aqazadeh.

##### **1. President (Hojjatoleslam) Mohammad Khatami**

Khatami has been president since 1997 and was the Director of the National Library from 1992-97. His rise in Iranian politics came when he was the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance in the cabinets of both President Rafsanjani and Prime Minister Mirhossein Mousavi, from 1981-92. Shahram Chubin judges him to be a moderate reformist.<sup>113</sup> As president, Khatami has been the most consistent to deny any Iranian nuclear weapons program and speak firmly in favor of staying in the NPT and signing the additional protocol. Khatami's reformist agenda was largely blocked during both his terms as president, but he maintains an optimistic outlook while striving for a *Near East and South Asian Affairs* (Washington, D.C.: 14 May 1998); Federation of American Scientists online: [http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/congress/1998\\_h/s980514-eisen.htm](http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/congress/1998_h/s980514-eisen.htm); accessed August 2004.

<sup>112</sup> Eisenstadt, "Iran Under Khatami," par. 14.

<sup>113</sup> See Chubin, *Whither Iran?*, 7.

rapprochement with the West. He was able to successfully negotiate a much needed trade agreement with Europe and another with Japan. Khatami seems to view the nuclear weapons issue as a side show that serves to block the Islamic republic from progressing with more important issues. On this point he is squarely at odds with the conservative clerics that run the Councils of Guardians and Expediency. After the February 2005 presidential election, expect to see Khatami assume a quieter role within the Iranian government, where he will not be able to challenge the hardline conservatives on foreign policy issues.

At the height of the additional protocol debate in September 2003, Khatami made almost daily pronouncements reaffirming Iran's intent to live up to its NPT responsibilities. His denials of a weapons program focused primarily on the religious and right to technology elements of the insecurity myth. Commenting to IRGC officers on 14 September 2003, Khatami said, "It is [an] integral part of the fundamental duties of the Islamic Republic, and one of its most basic principles, to become more and more equipped with science and technology, including nuclear technology. We don't want nuclear arms, no, no, no, this is against our policy and our faith, but we want to be strong and being strong means to have technology, and nuclear technology is the most advanced . . ." <sup>114</sup> Keeping strictly to his talking points, Khatami avoided making any direct comments on the 12 September 2003 IAEA ultimatum to sign the additional protocol.

In August 2004, Khatami responded to Israeli missile tests, reiterating Iran's position on the NPT and nuclear weapons: "Due to our ideological beliefs, we can't acquire nuclear weapons . . . we can't use nuclear weapons even if they are used against us." Khatami said Iran was willing "give all the necessary guarantees" that it will not produce nuclear weapons. He asserted, however, that Iran would not give up its nuclear power program and is "entitled to obtain capabilities to go through the full nuclear fuel cycle, from extracting uranium ore to enriching it for use as reactor fuel . . . We don't want anything beyond this. It's our legitimate right and no country can prevent us from

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<sup>114</sup> "Iran is Determined to Develop Nuclear Technology: Mohammed Khatami." *Iran Press Service Online* 15903.

achieving it."<sup>115</sup> Again, Khatami was able to stay on message, and reiterate the Islamic prohibition for nuclear weapons, while reaffirming Iran's right to exploit nuclear technology for civilian purposes. It is likely he will continue in his role as religious apologist for the Iranian nuclear energy program after he steps aside as president in 2005.

## **2. Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia and Oceania Mohsen Aminzadeh**

Mohsen Aminzadeh is a little more obscure than Khatami within the Iranian government, but his role for Iran's relations with Asia is crucial for maintaining the trade agreement Iran signed with Japan in 2002. A reformist, Aminzadeh ties national security to the domestic agenda; to him they are not separate concerns. His remarks in September 2003 emphasized the economic costs and security vulnerability themes from the insecurity myth:

Those with nuclear weapons capability are not necessarily more powerful than the ones without. In the past century, when military capability was considered the main basis of power, this was true. But today such a view has no meaning. Pakistan has accomplished a nuclear weapons test. But this test has done nothing to enhance Pakistan's position in the world. Instead it has created problems for this country. If India had not tested, Pakistan would not have tested either, given the great problems associated with [nuclear testing]. India's nuclear testing did not lead to its enhanced [global] position either; rather it has implied a kind of extremist and baseless competition. If India's standing in the world is improving, this is due to her rapid economic, scientific, industrial progress and her political and social situation. This is also true of Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Australia and other countries that do not have nuclear weapons...The Cold War and its military competition is over. Military balance no longer has the same strategic position as before and having [nuclear] weapons does not bring immunity for us. The Soviet disintegration showed that a superpower armed to the teeth with the best arms, if without superior economic and social indicators will move towards total disintegration and military capability can be of no help.<sup>116</sup>

Aminzadeh's post gives him much visibility with states important to Iran's economic future; his ability to relate Iran's security questions with its economic concerns helps him keep the Islamic Republic's friendly façade at the fore. On a trip to Japan in

<sup>115</sup> "Khatami Says Iran Ready to Pay Price for Pursuing Its Peaceful Nuclear Program," Ali Akbar Dareini (AP Worldstream: 12 August 2004).

<sup>116</sup> *Iran Daily*, 23 September 2003, as quoted in Farideh Farhi, "To Sign or Not to Sign? Iran's Evolving Domestic Debate on Nuclear Options," in *Iran's Bomb: American and Iranian Perspectives*, ed., Geoffrey Kemp (Washington, D.C.: The Nixon Center, 2004): 45.



July 2004, Aminzadeh did not miss a chance to reinforce the theme that Iran will remain true to its NPT agreements' telling Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi "we intend to sincerely cooperate with the IAEA . . . we will make every effort to resolve the issue in a transparent manner."<sup>117</sup> Aminzadeh seems to project a calming demeanor to external audiences, and this is likely Khamenei's calculation: reassure the international community that Iran does not think of the insecurity myth as a myth.

### **3. Gholam Reza Aqazadeh**

Soon after his election to president in 1997, Khatami replaced the reportedly incompetent Reza Amrollahi as head of the AEOI with Aqazadeh. Reaction among Iran observers was guarded: Aqazadeh built a reputation as an aggressive and accomplished administrator while serving as the oil minister before his appointment to the AEOI.<sup>118</sup> Aqazadeh immediately pledged to not only continue but expand Iran's atomic power program, announcing a plan to purchase "several" new reactors after completing the light water reactor at Bushehr. Nearly as staunch a defender of Iran's civilian nuclear program as Khatami, Aqazadeh has been heard to say numerous times that "peace and stability cannot be achieved by means of nuclear weapons."<sup>119</sup> This theme echoes the second and third elements of the insecurity myth, that nuclear weapons will undermine Iran's international standing and subject it to external attack.

In a May 2003 presentation to the IAEA headquarters in Vienna, Aqazadeh boldly defended Iran's development of fuel cycle production facilities. Hinting at the double standard for dual use technologies Iran has long claimed, Aqazadeh bristled at international allegations that Iran's uranium enrichment facility is designed to develop nuclear weapons. He defended Iran's right to produce and use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes arguing, "I should say that at present over twelve countries are engaged in uranium enrichment activity . . . can one then claim that all these countries are working to develop nuclear weapons? Can advances in chemistry or microbiology be

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<sup>117</sup> "Japan urges Iran to follow IAEA," *Japan Times Online* (9 July 2004): B5; <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/getarticle.pl5?nn20040709b5.htm>; accessed September 2004.

<sup>118</sup> See Eisenstadt, "Iran Under Khatami," par. 10.

<sup>119</sup> See Ray Takeyh, "Iranian Options: Pragmatic Mullahs and America's Interests," *The National Interest* (Fall 2003): 56

construed as a tendency to develop chemical or microbiology weapons?”<sup>120</sup> Aqazadeh’s aggressive defense put the emphasis on Iran’s right to develop peaceful technology, a key element of Iran’s insecurity myth. Aqazadeh seems to be well suited to be the bulldog defender of the AEOI; a requirement to remain competitive within Iran’s bureaucracy and as a consumer of international aid.

## **E. POLICY LEVERS TO DISCREDIT THE SECURITY MYTH**

Within the myth maker model, Lavoy provides prescriptions to counter the security myth. Many of them have to do with reinforcing norms, such as the nuclear taboo, and not rewarding proliferators for their successes.<sup>121</sup> These are long-term policy goals that must be enacted on national and international levels. The challenge for discrediting the security myth is to change individual minds and outlooks; to foment change from within the state. Targeting policy measures to subnational processes is difficult; trying to influence state decisions on the individual level even more so. Nevertheless, U.S. and allied policymakers need to work issues on the individual level simultaneously with system level efforts. To engage the Iranian population in the nuclear weapons issue, the United States needs to help foster an internal debate and help educate that debate. Any attempt by the United States to influence the political and public debate within Iran must obviously be handled indirectly and discretely. Discovery of American meddling in Iranian political discourse would kill the debate and ignite the fierce nationalism I discuss in chapter II.

### **1. Foster an Internal Debate**

The first step to discrediting the nuclear security myth within Iran is to help shape an educated, public debate about nuclear weapons. Despite the fact that Iran is an authoritarian state, recent years have seen a widening capacity within the press to entertain public policy debates. There are still dangers in this pursuit; since 2000, more than eighty Iranian newspapers have been summarily shut down and “dozens” of

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<sup>120</sup> H. E. Mr. Reza Aghazadeh, “Iran’s Nuclear Policy: Peaceful, Transparent, Independent,” Presentation to IAEA Headquarters (Vienna: 6 May 2003); [http://www.projectsipri.se/expcon/iran\\_iaea0305.htm](http://www.projectsipri.se/expcon/iran_iaea0305.htm); par. 28.

<sup>121</sup> See Lavoy, “Nuclear Myths,” 204-5.

journalists thrown in jail.<sup>122</sup> Still, the Iranian populace seems to want more transparency in its governmental processes, and it is increasingly willing to speak out on issues of concern. Shahram Chubin and Robert Litwak point out that until recently, what little policy debate occurred in the press was domestic in nature. That changed in 2003 when the mainstream media began publishing widening view points opposed to the state's carte blanche support of the Palestinians.<sup>123</sup> Chubin and Litwak observe that "Iran has a vibrant, restive, and skeptical public, which is increasingly given to criticism, debate, and scrutiny of a regime that has squandered its political legitimacy."<sup>124</sup>

Even with a growing trend of more daring media debate, a nuclear weapons debate in Iran is difficult. First, Iran's public expertise on nuclear weapons is low; any discussion on nuclear weapons tends to degenerate to nationalistic slogans and anti-Israeli or anti-American polemics. Second, it is difficult to sustain a debate about a topic that is technically moot. Since Iran is a signatory party to the NPT, it is officially not seeking nuclear weapons. Third, a debate begun before there is any real expertise on the anti-proliferation side is prone to be hijacked by "extremists" that can "argue more persuasively the merits of an asymmetrical strategy to deter the United States."<sup>125</sup> The United States and European countries should leverage members of the Iranian diaspora to write letters or post questions to websites to start a new debate. In order to steer public discussion within Iran, the United States cannot be seen as dictating or lecturing. American media outlets can provide the fora, but Iranians must provide the voices.

## **2. Educate the Internal Debate**

For an Iranian nuclear weapons debate to be useful, it must be informed. Without thoughtful, educated points of view, such a debate will devolve into emotional taunts. In order to get an educated debate, U.S. organizations need to penetrate Iran's authoritarian veil and get meaningful materials to individual people. The most promising avenues are through nongovernmental sources that provide factual, educational materials. The easiest

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<sup>122</sup> Wendell Steavenson, "Iranian Dissident Jailed for 5 Years is Pardoned," *News Telegraph Online* (Tehran: 11 June 2002); <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main>; accessed September 2004.

<sup>123</sup> Chubin and Litwak, "Debating Iran's Nuclear Aspirations," 104.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

access to individual Iranians is through the Internet; even the Iranian security organizations cannot keep track of the multitude of web-based resources Iranians are increasingly accessing. Other avenues are radio and television. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage highlighted in his remarks to the U.S. Senate in October 2003, that Radio Farda operates twenty-four hours a day, along with Voice of America.<sup>126</sup> The U.S. State Department also operates a Persian language website, with more than three thousand “hits” per day.

The intent is to feed the Iranian public debate by providing non-political and non-threatening scientific information on nuclear weapons. Particularly useful would be educational data that illustrates the economic and social costs of nuclear weapons.<sup>127</sup> Other materials could be scientific in nature, explaining the physics and effects of nuclear weapons. Historical accounts of economic and political challenges other nations have faced could follow, to put the politically “neutral” material in perspective. By focusing Iranian attention on factors other than security and nationalism, the insecurity myth can begin to take hold.<sup>128</sup>

## **F. CONCLUSIONS**

Iran is successfully employing both the nuclear security myth and the insecurity myth to at once inspire a nuclear weapons program and to cover it up. Iran’s myth makers are different kinds of experts than other nuclear states had. Rather than scientific experts, Iran has political experts who have the longevity and influence within the government to make the myths hold. The security myth makers are experienced politicians that were on the ground floor of the Islamic Republic’s resurgent nuclear weapons program, during the war with Iraq, in 1984. The insecurity myth makers, in contrast, tend to be reformist politicians who can put a good face on the Iranian atomic energy program while they systematically lie to cover up the weapons program. Time

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<sup>126</sup> See Richard L. Armitage, “U.S. Policy and Iran,” *Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* 25682 (Washington, D.C.: 28 October 2003), par. 16-17; <http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/25682.htm>; accessed August 2004.

<sup>127</sup> See Lavoy, “Nuclear Myths,” 204-5.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

will tell if the insecurity myth makers will have the influence to remain after the last of the reformers is out of government in 2005.

The remaining question is whether it is too late to reverse the security myth. Has the security myth become institutionalized at every level of bureaucracy? This is the topic for chapter IV, where I look at the competing bureaucratic structure within the Iranian government and how the nuclear institutions have taken on lives and constituencies of their own. As the United States continues to try to convince Iran to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons, it needs to enlist the support of the Iranian people, themselves. By first fostering, then educating an Iranian internal debate on nuclear weapons, the United States can help the Iranian people wrest the issue from the supreme leader's secretive inner circle. If the ruling clerics lose control of the debate, no amount of suppression can put the issue back in the bottle. The advent of the Internet and Iranians' natural skepticism are the best tools available to unglue the Iranian nuclear security myth.

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#### IV. IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM AND BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS

In the latter stages of the Iran-Iraq war, a group of Iranian government and military leaders recognized the strategic threat Iraq posed with its chemical weapons. Seizing the opportunity, this ad hoc coalition convinced Ayatollah Khomeini to reverse his previous decision to freeze Iran's nuclear program, based on Iran's need for self-reliance in the face of international isolation. The nuclear infrastructure developed since the late 1980s now has a parochial self-interest; a decision to abandon the nuclear option would end the bureaucracy's purpose.

This chapter explores Iran's competing bureaucratic politics in two parts. In part one I contend Iran's nuclear weapons program is sustained by parochial politics within the bureaucratic agencies charged with managing the program. In part two, I offer policy recommendations, adapted from the current literature, to subvert Iran's nuclear weapons coalition while inducing its rival bureaucracies to expand and compete against nuclear weapons.

Iran's strategic environment dictated a self-reliant balance against Iraq and other regional threats, nuclear myth makers institutionalized Iran's nuclear security myth, and now the program exists to maintain the status of the agencies that run it. Tension between the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the regular military, or *Artesh*, is centered on which commands more power. Since the establishment of the IRGC as a professional fighting force instead of an ideologically fanatic militia, the IRGC has sought to eclipse *Artesh* influence by controlling Iran's "special" arsenals. Similarly, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) competes with the IRGC for resources, even while managing research projects for the military under front companies. Further, the AEOI has a running rivalry with the Iranian parliament and other energy organizations because of its preferential treatment by the supreme leader and his inner circle.

I argue that the best way to combat these bureaucratic inertias is to continue counterproliferation agendas on a broader, multilateral scale while simultaneously

appealing to competing bureaucracies with economic incentives. Subverting the nuclear organization within Iran will help erode its power while buying time for economic and energy initiatives to take hold.

## **A. IRAN'S BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS**

### **1. Bureaucratic Politics Theory**

*Bureaucratic politics* refers to a sub-national model of policy formation based on the interactions of agencies and coalitions to determine state policy consistent with their own parochial interests. The theoretical foundation for sub-national analysis rests with the pioneering work of Graham Allison.<sup>129</sup> Allison developed sub-national analysis into two distinct models to explain state behavior as either pre-determined outcomes of entrenched organizations, or as the bargained outcomes of competing political institutions. This chapter focuses on the model Scott Sagan developed from Allison's work.<sup>130</sup> Sagan's "Domestic Politics Model" is similar to Allison's "Model III," in that it "focuses on the domestic actors who encourage or discourage governments from pursuing the bomb."<sup>131</sup>

Allison countered traditional realist theory with two alternative models. His "model II," based on organizational processes, posits that state policy is the result of predetermined outputs, governed by standard operating procedures of the relevant governmental sub-organizations. To study Iranian policymaking with this model, however, would require a more detailed understanding of Iran's organizations' standards, programs, and repertoires than is possible for an outside observer to know.<sup>132</sup> More pertinent to the study of Iran and its nuclear program is a derivative of Allison's model III. In this model, Allison coins the phrase "governmental politics," which has evolved into "bureaucratic politics."<sup>133</sup> In the bureaucratic politics model, the basic unit of

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<sup>129</sup> See Allison, *Essence of Decision*.

<sup>130</sup> See Sagan, "Why do States Build Nuclear Weapons?," 54-86.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>132</sup> See Allison, *Essence of Decision*, 78-82.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-175.



analysis is “governmental action as political resultant.”<sup>134</sup> The “resultant,” in this case, is not a “chosen” decision, but rather the result of factionalized maneuvering, bargaining, and compromise among the bureaucratic sub-components of which the government is comprised. The relative power of each component determines its level of influence, setting the policy direction by manner of the strongest wielded influence within the bureaucracy.<sup>135</sup>

The Iranian bureaucratic structure is even more complex and redundant than it looks on paper. The players understand the formal and informal power structures about which outsiders can only guess. Within the military establishment, influence is brokered by personal networks among officers familiar with each other through family, religion, and education affiliations. Family ties also link prominent officers with civilian officials and bureaucrats in key positions. This allows close coordination and consensus building before contentious issues can be debated within the parliament, or *Majlis*, or in the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC).<sup>136</sup> The tangled relations within the IRGC, or *Pasdaran*, and *Artesh* officer corps is a microcosm of governmental power affiliations in general.<sup>137</sup> These personal networks can be stronger than institutionally grounded power. The balance to competing power centers within the state decision-making apparatus is that the major agencies all report directly or indirectly to the supreme leader.<sup>138</sup>

The model Allison developed and Sagan recast is distinguished from the individual level of analysis by the degree to which each individual player is intertwined with the role he plays as the leader of a specific bureaucracy. The “chiefs” must represent the interests and priorities of their “Indians.” The bureaucracy’s parochial interests combined with the leader’s personal outlook determine each participant’s position with respect to particular issues. Although individual pronouncements matter in

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 162

<sup>136</sup> See Byman et al, *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 28;

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>138</sup> See Schake and Yaphe, *The Strategic Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran*, 1, 3.

bureaucratic politics, the agency makes the man as much as the man makes the agency.<sup>139</sup> For instance, the strong influence former Iranian president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani brings to his current position as head of the Expediency Council helps make that forum very influential with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei. However, if Rafsanjani were merely an independent clerical scholar, it is doubtful he would still command such attention by the supreme leader. The combination of Rafsanjani's forceful personality and the legitimacy of his position on the Expediency Council give him a synergistic power neither he nor the council would possess alone. Rafsanjani's placement within the leader's inner-circle allows him to be the lead nuclear security myth maker, as I outline in chapter III.

Developing Allison's Model III into a specific structure for nuclear proliferation, Sagan sub-titles his model as "Nuclear Pork and Parochial Interests."<sup>140</sup> Sagan's model is based on the internal, political forces that serve their needs with nuclear weapons programs, regardless if nuclear weapons serve the larger state interests. In this realm, bureaucratic actors from civilian scientific institutions, special military units, and political arms often form "coalitions" strong enough to control the governmental decision making process, through either controlling information or by direct political power.<sup>141</sup> The important distinction of the bureaucratic politics literature is how it portrays the bureaucratic actors not as "passive recipients of top-down political decisions," but rather as active participants that create "conditions" which favor proliferation to counter perceived threats.<sup>142</sup>

The "bottom-up view" of this theory attributes power and influence to the sub-national actors involved in security policy and weapons procurement decisions. Because the individual agencies that are involved in weapons programs depend on budgetary support to survive, they have an inherent interest to expand their role and importance to

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<sup>139</sup> Allison, *Essence of Decision*, 176. Here, Allison emphasizes the concept that "where you stand depends on where you sit," meaning the individual's position within the bureaucracy determines his priorities and allegiances, whether those be aligned with his personal political beliefs or not.

<sup>140</sup> Sagan, "Why do States Build Nuclear Weapons," 63.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

the state's overall policy strategy to continue to operate. There is compelling evidence that the IRGC, long assumed to be in charge of the military component of Iran's nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons programs, has formed a close relationship with the civilian technical institutions responsible for developing and manufacturing the technology required for such weapons. Gregory Giles argues the web of inter-organizational cooperation developed for Iran's chemical warfare program is a probable model for its nuclear weapons research as well. Giles reveals how, since the IRGC "initially lacked the technical and industrial base" to develop these weapons, the Defense Industries Organization and commercial agencies in the National Industries Organization colluded to develop research and production plans.<sup>143</sup> Adding bureaucratic redundancy and depth to the project, the state also created Revolutionary ad hoc organizations to help meet production demands during the Iran-Iraq war. According to Giles, there were more than a dozen such agencies operating throughout Iran by the early 1990s, "each representing a key constituency."<sup>144</sup> Having created so many agencies with overlapping responsibilities, the state infused natural competition among them for limited resources, influence, and recognition. Giles argues that this bureaucratic competition to survive and prevail may drive "production push," rather than relying on "consumer demand."<sup>145</sup>

Sagan suggests sub-organizations form coalitions to control information available to decision makers and cast security solutions that support their interests as necessary to state survival. Sagan's model, like Allison's before him, challenges the automatic imperative of proliferation predicted by balance of power theory advocates. Such an insight into the bureaucratic forces within the Iranian government can help explain why Ayatollah Khomeini prevented further nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons development when he took power, contrary to what realism would predict. Because Khomeini viewed nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons use "inconsistent" with Islam, it took considerable effort for the chemical warfare lobby, mainly civilian research arms aligned with the *Artesh*, and the IRGC, to convince him to fight back in kind with

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<sup>143</sup> See Giles, "The Islamic Republic of Iran," 87.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

the Iraqi army.<sup>146</sup> Had Iraq not used its chemical weapons to such devastating effect in the 1980s, the conservative clerics may have succeeded in preventing any nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons program development in Iran to this day.

The ability of a bureaucratic coalition to change the Supreme Leader's position in this instance lends merit to the model on the question of Iran's unconventional weapons and in particular, nuclear, programs. In this case, as Sagan suggests, nuclear weapons are not an obvious solution to a strategic challenge, they are a ready-made solution in search of a problem that will justify their existence.<sup>147</sup> Security threats are the natural problem on which parochial interests jump, but not the catalyst to sustained weapons program decisions, in this model. It can be similar to acquiring a new weapons system, then developing the doctrine it is meant to support.

Given that bureaucratic leaders maintain intertwining networks to influence competitors, it is likely they eventually view security issues—outwardly—similarly to each other. This is especially so in autocratic Iran; once the leader endorses a policy, the governing ministers obey orders, with little room for dissent. Since decision making in the government is influenced heavily by “horse trading” and mutual concessions to form a consensus, security issues are viewed as the reason for the state's existence, distracting the populace from domestic economic problems.<sup>148</sup> This need for consensus is an ingrained, cultural norm. Although the *Artesh* has constitutional authority for security planning, policy outcomes are “compromises of the security community and its political masters.”<sup>149</sup> This makes “rogue operations” among the security organizations very unlikely: privately, agency leaders plot against each other, but will rarely directly challenge one another. The “institutional structure” ensures adequate oversight.<sup>150</sup> The IRGC has its own “red lines,” for autonomous action, however. If the guards' corps

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>147</sup> Sagan, “Why do States Build Nuclear Weapons,” 65.

<sup>148</sup> Chubin, *Iran's National Security Policy*, 73.

<sup>149</sup> Byman et al, *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 21.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 22.

perceived a threat to the regime, or to revolutionary ideals, it would likely act on its own to preserve the state.<sup>151</sup>

In order to derive Iran's nuclear weapons policy decision making from the outside, we can trace the rise and fall of the prominent security agencies' relative influence with the Supreme Leader's inner circle of clerics and trusted advisors. An example of such a rise and fall of prominent influence within the Islamic Republic bureaucratic structure lies with the IRGC.

## 2. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps

The IRGC was formed to provide the clerical leadership of the Islamic Republic a reliable instrument to ensure the success of the revolution and balance the *Artesh*, which the mullahs mistrusted from the start. The early tasking of the IRGC was to provide security for the leadership and maintain public order. The IRGC was mainly employed as a counter-insurgency force to maintain state control. Born as an instrument of the revolutionary leaders and employed extensively as its body guards, the IRGC was the arm of choice to lead the war against Iraq after its 1980 invasion of Iran. Growing during the Iraq war from ten to fifty thousand in 1982 and two hundred fifty thousand by 1985, the IRGC was forced to reorganize itself into military units.<sup>152</sup> Part of this reorganization included designation of the *Pasdaran's* own ministry and equipping as a parallel navy, army, and air force to those forces of the *Artesh*. Brandished as the heroes of the Iraqi war, the IRGC was given control of Iran's surface to surface missile units and "right of first refusal" for all newly procured military equipment, including Iraqi armor and artillery captured on the front.<sup>153</sup>

In 1989, the establishment of the Ministry of Defense put the IRGC under the same organizational structure as the *Artesh*, scrapping the IRGC ministry. Although this represented a shift in power towards the *Artesh*, it was still minor. The defense ministry may have had one commander, but he was drawn from the IRGC and not the *Artesh*. As the IRGC transformed into a professional fighting force in the early 1990s, the regime

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 51-2.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 33-34. See also Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 33-42.

<sup>153</sup> Byman et al, *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 33. See also Chubin, *Iran's National Security Policy*, 30-32.

seemed to acknowledge lessons from the costly casualties in the Iraqi war: “revolutionary fervor” was no match for modern technology employed by a professional military. Iran was thus motivated for complete technological self-reliance in developing a deterrent to any potential enemy, especially Iraq, Israel, and the United States.<sup>154</sup> Because the IRGC was conceived of political functionality; it has long been prone to public displays of political orientation. In contrast, the *Artesh* has always been more pragmatic, reserving public pronouncements of political importance for the political leadership.

Consistently displaying quiet professionalism during President Khatami’s tenure has likely helped shift the power balance between the IRGC and the *Artesh* back in favor of the *Artesh*. The most prominent public event to mark this shift was a public attack by the IRGC commander on President Khatami, blaming his “liberal policies” for the student riots of 1999 and 2000.<sup>155</sup> The IRGC general was forced to retract his statements and the IRGC officer corps was required to reaffirm its allegiance to the president, after the *Artesh* publicly rebuked its rival for indulging in a public political attack.

But what can this influence mean for Iran’s decision to pursue nuclear weapons? Publicly and privately, active officers in the *Artesh* do not see a need for nuclear weapons. But that line of thought is consistent with the official position of the Islamic Republic, which is a signatory member of the NPT. Privately, however, many retired officers proclaim their support for nuclear weapons as the best “equalizer” for Iran’s small military against larger conventional and nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons equipped enemies.<sup>156</sup> This is a significant statement, given the influence the retired officers still hold over the active officers and their civilian sponsors and mentors. Because the Iranian tradition of consensus networking doesn’t end at retirement, it is a safe assumption the retired officers’ attitudes represent the underlying attitudes, if not the policy, of the highest reaches of Iranian leadership. The current officers cannot subvert or contradict Iran’s stated policy to not pursue nuclear weapons, but the retired officers are not under such restrictions.

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<sup>154</sup> Chubin, *Iran's National Security Policy*, 28.

<sup>155</sup> Byman et al, *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 46-47.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96.

It is likely that the military establishment, along with the Council of Expediency, and led by the supreme leader—unarguably the most influential power broker in the government—see several benefits to nuclear weapons and are keeping their options open by developing the technical know-how and industrial capacity to support a fully functional, indigenous nuclear weapons capability. Chief among these benefits are continued nationalistic fervor among the population, “bolstering the regime standing in the eyes of Iranians and throughout the Arab and Muslim world,” and gaining leverage over the United States and its allies in any future confrontation or crisis.<sup>157</sup>

### **3. The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran**

Since the Islamic Republic began its present nuclear weapons program in 1984, it has developed a network of laboratories and suppliers to research and develop nuclear technologies. The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, or AEOI, supervises most of this activity. The AEOI rose in prominence throughout the 1990s, as Iran built its nuclear infrastructure. Responsible for the bilateral contract with Russia for finishing the light-water reactor at Bushehr, the AEOI had tremendous autonomy. In the political ebb and flow of influence and prominence, the AEOI reigned autonomously for fifteen years without authoritative oversight by the *Majlis*.<sup>158</sup>

The AEOI is an all-encompassing organization that manages all aspects of atomic research, energy production, fuel production, education, and regulatory safety. Formed by the shah in 1973, the AEOI is an internationally recognized official body representing Iran’s civil nuclear program.<sup>159</sup> The largest AEOI project is the seven-thousand megawatt light-water reactor at Bushehr, followed by the one-hundred thousand square meter uranium enrichment plant at Natanz, and a heavy-water reactor in Arak. The Bushehr light-water reactor has been plagued with delays, which the AEOI claims are

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<sup>157</sup> Schake and Yaphe, *Strategic Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran*, 6.

<sup>158</sup> “Iran Daily Views Lack of Majles Involvement in Nuclear Decisions, Negotiations,” FBIS IAP20040323000082; translated text of Elahe Kula’i, “Who is Answerable?” *Tehran Nasim-e Saba*, in Persian (11 March 2004).

<sup>159</sup> See M. Ghannadi-Maragheh, “Atomic Energy Organization of Iran” (London: World Nuclear Association Annual Symposium, 4-6 September 2002); <http://www.world-nuclear.org/sym/2002/pdf/ghannadi.pdf>; accessed September 2004.

related to difficulties making Russian components work with parts left in the original portions of the reactor complex, when a German company was building the site.<sup>160</sup>

The head of the AEOI, Iran deputy president Gholam Reza Aqazadeh, is responsible for implementing plans that the foreign ministry or the SNSC order, based on each ministry's priorities. The problem can be to resolve differences between the two. The foreign ministry is responsible for deciding issues with international partners and suppliers, such as the Russians working on the Bushehr light-water reactor; while the SNSC is responsible for prioritizing secret projects within Iran, such as the Natanz uranium enrichment facility.<sup>161</sup> While Aqazadeh is fairly open, now, about the uranium enrichment plant at Natanz, it was a secret project covered by front companies until it was exposed by an Iranian opposition group in 2002.

Hoping to prevent a U.S.-Iranian agreement on backing Iraq's Shi'a during the impending U.S. invasion of Iraq, an Iranian opposition group revealed to Western intelligence sources the nature of the construction in Natanz and Arak.<sup>162</sup> The documents the group provided detailed who the project leaders are and where they came from. Further, the documents outlined the names, nature, and reporting lines for the front companies used to conceal the AEOI activity and funnel money for payroll and contracting.<sup>163</sup> When confronted with this information, including photos, in early 2003, Iran admitted the existence and nature of the projects in Arak and Natanz.<sup>164</sup> Given the proven reliability of that portion of the document, it is interesting to note that the group asserts the Kan Iran company is a front for the AEOI "military program."<sup>165</sup> This

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<sup>160</sup> "Iran: Atomic energy Chief says Suspension of Uranium Enrichment Problematic," FBIS IAP2003121200042, *Tehran Iranian Students News Agency World Wide Web*, text in Persian (23 December 2003).

<sup>161</sup> "French Website Details Iran's 'Clandestine' Nuclear Arms Program," FBIS EUP20021024000363, *Paris Intelligence Online* (24 October 2002).

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> John R. Bolton, "Iran's Continuing Pursuit of Weapons of Mass Destruction," Washington, D.C.: Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security; Testimony before the House International Relations Committee Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia (24 June 2004); <http://www.state.gov/t/us/rm/33909.htm>; accessed August 2004.

<sup>165</sup> "French Website Details Iran's 'Clandestine' Nuclear Arms Program," FBIS EUP20021024000363.



suggests that the AEOI is involved in or coordinating more than enrichment activities; it appears to be researching weapons related applications for military laboratories.

The AEOI has close working relationships with many of Iran's technical universities, research institutions, and military industrial organizations. These communities have developed a co-dependence that helps sustain the influence and power of each institutional base. The power and parochial nature of the scientists' self interests came to light in the fall of 2003, while the European Three additional protocol debate heated up. In an open letter to the government, more than five hundred students and two hundred fifty faculty members from Sharif Technical University, in Tehran, wrote that any agreement by Iran with the IAEA to forego uranium enrichment, or otherwise curtail Iran's nuclear program would be "treason."<sup>166</sup> The students' and scientists' immediate concerns centered on accepting a concession with the IAEA that would prevent these organizations from "achieving their goals of survival and 'logical' expansion."<sup>167</sup> This episode illustrates an expectation among the workers and scientists that the state will maintain their livelihood, regardless of other state interests. This is the parochialism that imbeds itself into political attitudes in favor of nuclear technology and nuclear weapons in order to sustain the status quo.

#### **4. Other Bureaucratic Rivalries**

Because the AEOI was traditionally co-managed between the SNSC and the foreign ministry, it was able to operate without much, if any, oversight by the Majlis. Many Majlis ministers resented the AEOI attitudes; when debating key appropriations bills for the AEOI, agency officials would refuse to testify or show the Majlis accounting documentation.<sup>168</sup> Although the AEOI, and Aqazadeh, answered to the SNSC, the Majlis betrayed resentment for the slights at every request for cooperation. At the same time,

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<sup>166</sup> Hadian, "Iran's Nuclear Program," 58.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> "Iran Daily Views Lack of Majles Involvement in Nuclear Decisions, Negotiations," FBIS IAP20040323000082. In a virtual polemic, Elaheh Kula'i rants that the AEOI has delayed or denied information to the Majlis: ". . . Information on the technical dimensions and strategies of Iran's nuclear activities was made available in the Majlis when it had already been disclosed in a more complete form on international media news sites."

the oil and energy ministries were subject to Majlis oversight but had declining roles in Iranian planning.

In an apparent bid to check the power of the AEOI, the Majlis voted in April 2004 to merge the atomic organization with both the oil ministry and the energy ministry, forming one new organization known as the energy ministry.<sup>169</sup> By naming the new organization as the *energy* ministry, the Majlis appears to be de-emphasizing the AEOI. This may be to make its clandestine functions easier to hide, within a larger bureaucratic shell; or it may actually be a power play by the Majlis to exert more control over the organization that has frustrated it and the other energy ministries for so long. Regardless, being subordinated to the energy ministry represents a loss of prominence and influence for the AEOI. If the Majlis ratification is not blocked by the Council of Guardians, the merger is scheduled for early 2005. Time will tell if that means a vote of no-confidence by the government, if aspects of the nuclear program are being transferred to military organizations to prevent further leaks, or if it is a bureaucratic power play by the energy ministry and its Majlis sponsor.

From this model and the supporting evidence framing Iran's previous unconventional weapons processes, one can conclude that at least part of Iran's motivation to continue its nuclear weapons program is rooted in bureaucratic competition and self-preservation. Strategically, the only existential threats to Iran remaining after the fall of Iraq are Israel and the United States. These states form a circular threat, however; if not for Iran's nuclear weapons program, neither the United States nor Israel are likely to attack Iran.<sup>170</sup> In twenty-five years of Iranian terrorism sponsorship, neither country has acted militarily against Iran for terrorism. Because bureaucratic inertia is part of the reason Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons, the United States must consider a policy strategy that addresses counterproliferation avenues at the sub-national level, working to find levers that can influence the pull of bureaucratic coalitions within the Iranian government. The best strategy for this is to undercut or subvert the nuclear bureaucracy, while encouraging rival organizations, such as energy or economic coalitions, to grow.

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<sup>169</sup> "Iranian Official Says Various Ministries to be Merged," FBIS IAP20040425000062,

<sup>170</sup> See Chubin and Litwak, "Debating Iran's Nuclear Aspirations," 113.

## **B. LEVERS FOR U.S. POLICY**

The majority of the literature recommends some level of engagement in order to ease the pressure on Iran and allow it to decide that improved economic relations are preferable to a nuclear standoff with the West. These recommendations range from unilaterally ending the U.S. trade embargo, to releasing the Iranian assets frozen in U.S. accounts since the 1979 revolution, to providing aid for energy infrastructure development.<sup>171</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that Iran would have to accept this engagement, these recommendations may be too conciliatory for no real return on U.S. demands over the last twenty-five years. However, there are two areas on the sub-national agenda the United States can address through a new strategy of “cooperative containment:” Subvert Iran’s nuclear weapons bureaucratic coalition with multilateral sanctions and empower rival economic bureaucracies through trade incentives.<sup>172</sup>

### **1. Cooperative Containment**

The United States has been holding onto the “dual containment” policy since 1995, when U.S. president Clinton attempted to simultaneously deal with Iraq and Iran. Unfortunately, the attempt to unilaterally contain both countries did not work. In Iran’s case, the European Union and Japan each negotiated separate trade agreements with Iran, undercutting U.S. efforts to keep Iran isolated. Similarly, U.S. indirect sanctions on materiel suppliers since 1996 have slowed but not stopped Iran’s acquisition of nuclear-related technology.

For a containment strategy to work against Iran, it must be multilateral. Any sectors within Iran that have been slowed by unilateral U.S. action have been balanced by other nations ready to fill the void. This is a real concern; part of Russia’s unwillingness to abandon bilateral agreements with Iran is because it does not want to see the same

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<sup>171</sup> See for example, Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran’s Nuclear Challenge*, 13; Schake & Yaphe, *Strategic Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran*, 66; and International Crisis Group, “Dealing with Iran’s Nuclear Program,” iii.

<sup>172</sup> See Kemp and Lippmann, “How to Stop the Iranian Bomb,” par. 39. “The United States needs to pursue a concerted policy of ‘cooperative containment.’” In this section, I adapt several overlapping ideas from the current literature to propose a new angle to disparate thoughts.

contracts fulfilled by another country.<sup>173</sup> If another state fills the contract, Russia loses the financial reward and hurts its standing for a follow-on contract, while Iran has beaten the intent of the sanction in the first place. A unilateral Russian move can be undercut as easily as an American action.

In the wake of Iran's defiant stand against the IAEA, the international mood is ripe for a multilateral agreement on Iran. Having agreed to fully disclose all aspects of its fuel cycle and sign the additional protocol, Iran has inflamed the European Three with its announcement in the summer of 2004 to resume uranium enrichment.<sup>174</sup> A multilateral "coalition of the willing" could impact Iran's nuclear program on the state level by undercutting the nuclear bureaucratic coalition's need for technological supplies and raw materials while simultaneously encouraging rival bureaucratic organizations, such as the energy, economic, and import sectors.

If the nuclear coalition is forced to continually extend its timeline because it lacks the required materials to meet program milestones, or its secrecy veil is compromised, its credibility and power will erode. If its competitors see an opportunity to seize power, they will. If economic interdependence in the energy and oil sectors were to provide a sense of security that the AEOI cannot, there would be a predictable power shift. The challenge is to find policy levers *within* the Iranian government upon which the United States can act without triggering a nationalism fire-storm that "buttresses" the hard-liners' positions that the only way to counter the United States is with nuclear weapons.<sup>175</sup>

## **2. Subvert Nuclear Weapons Bureaucratic Coalition**

To undermine the Iranian nuclear bureaucracy means to disclose, deny, and delay its activities in order to force the ruling mullahs to conclude that the cost for nuclear weapons exceeds the benefits. By exposing secret projects, denying fuel alternatives, and

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<sup>173</sup> See Schaffer, "Iran at the Nuclear Threshold," par. 48. Schaffer writes that the United States must corral the EU to ensure "no European firms supplant Russian companies in Iran."

<sup>174</sup> See Ardeshir Zahedi, "Iran's Nuclear Ambitions," A.10. Zahedi writes, "The three wise men of Europe only have themselves to blame for their real or feigned disappointment at what they see as 'erratic Iranian behavior.'" How they came to believe that a regime that violates its own constitution every day might honor an agreement signed with the 'infidel' remains a mystery."

<sup>175</sup> Takeyh, "Iran's Nuclear Calculations," 27.

delaying weapon production progress, a multilateral coalition can affect sub-national conditions and the bureaucratic power associated with the AEOI and IRGC. An international effort should focus on enhanced intelligence and counterproliferation strategies, including interdiction and indirect sanctions.

The most meaningful breakthroughs in discovering the dimensions of Iran's nuclear weapons program have come through intelligence. The Iranian confirmation of the secret facilities at Natanz and Arak came only after an Iranian opposition group revealed their existence to Western intelligence agencies. As Iran gets closer to controlling an entire fuel cycle, counterproliferation strategies require increased intelligence efforts to expose prohibited activities and confront Tehran. To keep pressure U.S. and European intelligence agencies need to cultivate human intelligence sources within Iran and even within the program. Russia can provide immense intelligence support, with its hundreds of technicians and engineers working throughout the program.<sup>176</sup>

There is much debate about the effectiveness of pursuing supply side counterproliferation strategies. Strained relations with Russia have complicated previous U.S. agreements to limit nuclear-related aid, and recent revelations about covert assistance from Pakistan indicate that it is impossible to stop the flow of technological assistance in every instance.<sup>177</sup> Still, the overall effort has been successful in keeping Iran from completing every aspect of design and production of nuclear weapons, and should continue.

Russia has the largest capability to influence the Iranian nuclear program. The multilateral coalition should pressure Russia to enforce its fuel agreement at Bushehr and "check other avenues of proliferation."<sup>178</sup> Russia has the leverage to pressure Tehran to abide by its nonproliferation agreements; without the strategic backing of Russia and the technical support of Russian firms, the light-water reactor at Bushehr cannot operate. To prevent the Bushehr reactor from becoming a proliferation avenue, Moscow cannot allow

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<sup>176</sup> Schaffer, "Iran at the Nuclear Threshold," par. 46.

<sup>177</sup> See Takeyh, "Iran's Nuclear Calculations," 3.

<sup>178</sup> Schaffer, "Iran at the Nuclear Threshold," par. 46.

spent fuel to accumulate within Iran; it must promptly collect all spent fuel and hold Iran accountable for all fissile material it provides.<sup>179</sup>

The U.S. congressional sanctions against individual companies that provide banned support to Iran need to be expanded. With multilateral backing, it will be more difficult for individual corporations to ignore “American” sanctions. Any violations discovered by the IAEA should be reported to the UN Security Council. The more partner governments are in the “coalition,” the better the chances of avoiding competitive undercutting of abandoned contracts and real support of counterproliferation measures.

### **3. Empower Rival Economic Bureaucracies**

The United States must look at economic stimuli to entice rival Iranian bureaucratic factions. Iran is interested in increased trade opportunities, energy infrastructure investment, and expanded markets for petroleum exports. Europe, Japan, Russia, India, and the United States can offer heavy investment in Iran’s markets and petroleum infrastructures, but such an incentive needs to be set with strict conditions. First, the United States should communicate to Iran, through its European partners, the conditions for any future economic engagement. These conditions should remain as they have been: Iran must publicly and demonstrably disavow its support and training of terrorist organizations, any pursuit of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons inconsistent with the regime protocols to which it is a signatory, and it must renounce its stated purpose to assist the Arab states destroy the state of Israel.<sup>180</sup>

The United States can remove hurdles for Iran to assimilate into the community of nations, but they must be attached to Iranian retrenchment on terrorism, nuclear weapons, and Israel. George Perkovich advocates unilateral economic incentives, to cast them as detached from nuclear or terrorism concerns. He proposes the United States drop its objection to Iranian membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and unilaterally end economic sanctions.<sup>181</sup> The danger with such a move is that Tehran could pocket the cash injection and continue—or expand—its support for terrorist

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., par. 46.

<sup>180</sup> See Kemp and Lippmann, “How to Stop the Iranian Bomb,” par. 48.

<sup>181</sup> Perkovich, *Dealing with Iran’s Nuclear Challenge*, 13.

organizations and its nuclear program. The United States *should* endorse Iranian membership in the WTO, but only pending verifiable concessions from Iran in its terrorism support and unconventional weapons obligations. Similarly, unfreezing the shah's assets and ending the trade embargo are on the table, pending verifiable agreement to international conditions.<sup>182</sup>

Iran's economic state is so bad, that a real proposal from the international body for WTO membership and increased investment would create a favorable motivation for Iran's economic bureaucracy to pursue conditions for market reform. Trade bureaucracies could push for trade liberalization, financial deregulation, increased privatization, and copyright protections.<sup>183</sup> The old mercantilists of the bazaar would oppose opening trade barriers and expanding markets. The new bazaar, however, is very interested in expanding imports and managing foreign investment for privatizing Iranian industry and banking.<sup>184</sup> A genuine promise of such opportunities would motivate the new bazaar to lobby for Iranian concessions on terrorism, proliferation, and Israel at the expense of the ruling elite and especially the nuclear bureaucracy.

Similarly, the oil and natural gas organizations would push for greater production and exports. Iran is rumored to vent off enough natural gas equivalent to the annual power production of the Bushehr reactor.<sup>185</sup> Reinvigorated petroleum infrastructure and refinery facilities would allow Iran to increase oil and natural gas production, refining capability, and export potential while reducing its gasoline import requirements.

### **C. CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter connects the bureaucratic nature of Iran's motivation to continue its pursuit for nuclear weapons to relevant policy options that act on the sub-national level in order to influence Iran to stop its weapons program and seek rapprochement with the West. Iran's threat environment has changed since it began its nuclear weapons program. With Iraq essentially eliminated as a strategic threat, Iran's nuclear coalition is avoiding a

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<sup>182</sup> Kemp and Lippmann, "How to Stop the Iranian Bomb," par. 48.

<sup>183</sup> Amuzegar, "Iran's Crumbling Revolution," par. 29.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid..

<sup>185</sup> Chubin and Litwak, "Debating Iran's Nuclear Aspirations," 107.

realistic reevaluation of its threat environment. Iran's nuclear weapons program is sustained by bureaucratic inertia and competition within the military and industrial complex in order to maintain the prominence of those agencies.

These policy recommendations are pertinent to the bureaucratic politics model of action because they target the mini-coalitions within the Iranian government that vie for power and resources. Empowering competing lobbies to the nuclear weapons bureaucracy makes internationally acceptable interaction more likely while hindering proliferation efforts. Economic and energy reform would do more to add to Iran's stability and security than a nuclear weapon. The challenge is to get the right bureaucrats to reach that conclusion, with the power to enact the vision. By plainly communicating the requirements for releasing frozen assets and economic aid, the ruling mullahs will have a clear choice: they can reform and renounce, or face economic failure and spiraling unrest at home.

In order to successfully persuade Iran to stop its nuclear weapons program, the United States needs to enact policies that address bureaucratic relationships. The difficulty for a foreign government to act at a sub-national level mandates the United States engage proxies and allies to carry messages and information to the Iranian leadership, press, and population at large. Nothing recommended in this chapter advocates giving Iran a free pass on its historic misdeeds. Each of these initiatives is predicated on Iran fulfilling its nonproliferation obligations and renouncing all forms of terrorism and support for terrorist organizations. Doing so can only help Iran look inward and either reform on its own or collapse of its own dead weight. Either outcome offers hope for a non-nuclear Iran, but the United States must be ready to offer immediate and significant carrots to influence any future relationship.



## V. CONCLUSIONS

Why does Iran want nuclear weapons? This thesis looks at the causal reasons for Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons on three analytic levels: the system level, state level, and individual level. Interestingly, the findings on each analytic level are interrelated in ways that make the causal factors at each equally important. Iran has legitimate strategic security concerns. It also has strong-willed individuals who have propelled the myth that self-reliance and nuclear weapons are the only means to solving those security issues. And, after twenty years of developing a nuclear infrastructure, Iran has an entire class of bureaucrats, managers, and technicians that have built careers on the nuclear program and are unwilling to lose their standard of living.

Mixed in at each level is a fiery nationalistic pride. Iran sees itself as the natural leader of the Persian Gulf; for security, trade, culture, and religious ideology. Iran's ruling mullahs believe that deploying nuclear weapons will magically wield great political power and influence; and that nuclear weapons will provide a cost-effective deterrent capability against all regional and international threats. They hope for national security while believing in the nationalist myth.

This chapter reviews the main findings at each analytical level to relate the causal factors to the policy levers they reveal. A concerted policy strategy aimed at preventing a nuclear Iran must be multilateral, comprehensive, and account for the motivations at the different action levels to have a chance at success. The growing political unrest in Iran will not amount to a revolution or regime change any time soon. The best hope for preventing a nuclear Iran is to hold it to its nonproliferation responsibilities while offering economic carrots for a comprehensive renouncement of terrorism, nuclear weapons, and hostility toward Israel.

### A. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

#### 1. System Level

Iran's strategic environment has changed sharply in the last twenty years. Iran began its nuclear program while engaged in a bitter struggle against Iraq. Uncertain of the Soviet Union's intentions beyond Afghanistan while politically isolated and facing

ruthless chemical attacks by the Iraqi army, Iran's leaders embarked on a self-reliant rearmament plan. Among the regional threats arrayed against Iran, Iraq was paramount. Iran's top priority was to develop a deterrent against any further invasion and especially use of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons against it.

As a small status quo state, Iran has no overt military ambitions beyond its borders. Its grand strategy is to foster a Gulf leadership role while providing a credible deterrent to any future attack. To support that strategy, Iran adopted a deterrence doctrine. Facing nations with nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, Iran sees nuclear weapons as the only tool available to provide an adequate deterrence. Nuclear weapons are the technical requirement to fulfill Iran's military doctrine.

As the 1990s began, the landscape changed. The Soviet Union collapsed and the nuclear weapons based in central Asia went away. Afghanistan fell into continuous civil war, while Iraq was emasculated by UN sanctions and U.S.-led containment in the form of no-fly zones. In order to maintain the appearance of a strategic threat to Iran, it elevated the status of Israel and the United States to fill the void left by Iraq. Rhetorically, casting Israel as the main threat to Iran, and to Islam, resonated with Iran's nationalistic populace. It also helped Iran mend relations with many of the Gulf Arab states and subtly moved Iran back towards a Gulf leadership role.

Iran set a course for nuclear weapons as a self-reliant means of attaining a credible deterrent. The only remaining strategic threats to Iran are inflated; the United States and Israel do not pose a strategic threat to Iran except for its nuclear program. Over a twenty-five year period of Iranian support to terrorist groups that have attacked Israeli and American interests, neither Israel nor the United States has acted militarily against Iran. Nothing indicates that would change, barring a clearly directed attack against vital interests of either country.

If Iran deploys nuclear weapons, it risks greater security problems than those it would have solved. The Gulf States would run closer to the United States for a security guarantee. Pakistan and even India would be forced to account for Iranian capability, changing the focus from each other to Iran. Israel would take a greater interest in Iran, if it had nuclear weapons, as would the United States. Some larger Arab states may be

pushed to proliferate in response, also. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and perhaps Egypt are all candidates for proliferation as a response to a successful Iranian breakout. All of these possibilities ensure a greater American presence in the region; all are outcomes Iran wishes to avoid. An Iranian bomb makes Tehran more vulnerable than it is without it. Iran's strategy is based on a strategic environment that no longer exists. It is reluctant to reevaluate security options in the new environment because it believes in the nationalist myth of nuclear security.

## **2. Individual Level**

Iran is engaged in a nuclear hedge strategy. It is developing the capability to develop nuclear weapons, but the supreme leader may not have made the final decision to cross the nuclear threshold. The opacity under which the program is proceeding allows plausible deniability so Iran's nuclear suppliers can assist while still conforming to the restrictions of the NPT. While it builds the technological infrastructure and industrial base required to produce nuclear weapons, Iran is institutionalizing competing myths to propel the program.

Well-placed elites, with political influence at the highest levels, are perpetuating the nuclear security myth to inspire Iran's nuclear weapons program. Simultaneously, the Iranian government is employing the nuclear insecurity myth as a public front to conceal the opaque weapons program. Moderate and reform-minded politicians systematically lie to promulgate the insecurity myth. The security myth makers are rarely heard outside closed door sessions with the leader's inner circle.

When the veil of secrecy is occasionally lifted, outside observers can glimpse the four elements of Iran's security myth: Iran is at risk from Zionist and imperial American nuclear weapons; Iran has no great-power alliance options; Iran's destiny is to lead the Persian Gulf; and a self-reliant deterrence is the only way to meet the Zionist/imperialist threat. The primary security myth maker is former president and current secretary of the expediency council Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani.

With precise regularity, the insecurity myth makers appear in public to deny Iranian efforts at proliferation and are always on message, stressing the four key components of the insecurity myth: nuclear weapons are un-Islamic; nuclear weapons

will undermine Iran's international commitments; possessing nuclear weapons would make Iran more vulnerable to external attack; and although Iran is not pursuing nuclear weapons, it is its right under the NPT to develop all aspects of non-military uses of nuclear power. The lead nuclear insecurity myth maker is President Mohammad Khatami.

Iran's myth makers are effective because of their continuity in government since the formative days of the current nuclear program. Unlike other nuclear powers, Iran's myth makers are not scientists but politicians. Iranian politicians have the required continuity within the governing system and the interpersonal networks to exert the required influence for the myth to have an effect. Iran's scientists lack the continuity. Iran treats its scientists like black boxes: they plug them into different programs and areas of expertise as required. They never acquire the necessary political connections to affect any serious political debate. Iran's countervailing myths help the bureaucratic institutions that support both the civil and military nuclear programs. The myths inspire the scientists, technologists, and workers that are pushing the programs forward.

### **3. State Level**

The bureaucratic organizations and coalitions that have formed within the nuclear weapons program exert tremendous influence within the Iranian government. The priority the Islamic Republic assigned to the nuclear program ensures it is well funded and well supplied. Accordingly, the managers and leaders of this bureaucracy expect to maintain their lifestyle. Iran's nuclear weapons program has become the solution looking for a problem. Nuclear bureaucrats use the nuclear myth to justify developing nuclear weapons and sustain the program. An honest reappraisal of Iran's threat environment would endanger the weapons program, so the weapons coalition pressures the state to avoid such an evaluation.

Among Iran's prominent bureaucracies, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has created the most animosity among the *Majlis*. *Majlis* members complain that the AEOI routinely ignores requests for information and auditing inquiries. The AEOI depends on the *Majlis* for funding, but it answers to the foreign ministry for external supplier and support issues; and the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) for clandestine projects. The AEOI is run by Iran's vice president, Gholam Reza Aqazadeh.

An aggressive and competent administrator, he commands fierce loyalty from his organization. The AEOI is charged with managing all aspects of Iran's nuclear energy program and some weapons-related work as well.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) is the military arm responsible for Iran's missile programs and chemical weapons. It is assumed to also head the military effort for nuclear weapons. Ayatollah Khomeini created the IRGC as a politically reliable security organization to counterbalance the regular military, or *Artesh*. The IRGC claimed a superior status to the *Artesh*, until the Iranian government enacted several equalizing measures in the late 1980s. The IRGC was converted from an ideological militia to a professional fighting force, instituting a formal rank structure and assuming traditional military missions. The natural tension between the *Artesh* and the guards rose as the IRGC assumed more of the secret missions within the Iranian military, but has waned in recent years as the *Artesh* has grown in favor among the *Majlis* and others.

The *Majlis* seemingly struck a blow at the AEOI in April 2004 when it voted to merge the organization with both the oil and energy ministries. Subjugating the AEOI to rival minister oversight may make future clandestine management difficult. It is unclear if the merger will occur, but it may signal a transfer of military-related nuclear programs to the IRGC. The AEOI has managed its clandestine programs through a maze of front companies to launder money and hide the connections of its projects. When an Iranian opposition group revealed the locations of two major nuclear projects, in Arak and Natanz, the AEOI scrambled to explain the nature of the programs to the IAEA. Such revelations have cast considerable light in places the Iranian government wants to keep dark. The future of the Iranian nuclear weapons program will include more military involvement as Iran gets closer to producing weapons. The power shift from the AEOI is underway.

Overall, the thesis finds a connecting thread among the three levels. Legitimate balance of power factors required a self-reliant power balance. A coalition of connected individuals convinced Ayatollah Khomeini to reverse a decision to halt nuclear research by using the security myth, exaggerating the balance of power threat. State bureaucracies

have vested interests in the nuclear weapons program and exert pressure to keep the program a priority to maintain the lifestyle to which they have become accustomed. Iran is motivated to produce nuclear weapons by elements from each of the analytical levels.

## **B. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

In each chapter, I adapted policy recommendations from the current literature to address the motivational factors at each level. For any of them to have an effect, they must all be employed together, as multi-layered strategy. The synergistic effects of efforts at the individual, state, and international levels outweigh the effects of a single measure at one level.

### **1. System Level**

- Reduce threat perceptions

The key to influencing Iran at the system level is to compel it to reevaluate its strategic environment in light of the reduced threat array in the region. The West must find a way to convince Iran there are alternative security solutions to nuclear weapons. To counter Iran's rhetoric about the Israeli and American threat to Iran, U.S. policy must work to reduce threat perceptions.

The United States needs to do what it can to stop stoking Iranian nationalism. Iranian discourse will always be nationalistic; Iranians are proud of their culture and think they deserve the same status and capabilities as any other nation. But talk of "axis of evil" and regime change from the U.S. administration unnecessarily elevated Iranian nationalism and undercuts legitimate diplomatic discourse and opportunities.

- Minimize Israeli threat posture

The United States can do much to reduce Israel's threat posture to Iran. Iran has signaled it would accept any Israeli peace plan the Palestinians would accept; the United States, therefore needs to make the Israeli-Palestinian roadmap for peace a top priority. No Iranian nuclear agreement can be reached without addressing Israel. The United States needs to place Israel's military capabilities into the context of a deterrent against all the Arab capability lined up against Israel. Iran cannot expect to make Israel disarm while also threatening Israel's very existence.

- Encourage Gulf Security Organization

The United States needs to encourage the Gulf States to reexamine the idea of a collective Gulf security organization to include the new Iraqi government and Iran. Although U.S. participation needs to be discreet, it needs to convey the message that the future security environment of the Gulf should be guaranteed by Gulf States; and that the United States wants to turn Gulf security missions over to the Gulf's natural leaders. Although the track record for previous attempts is discouraging, it should be a high priority to help Iran decide its strategic view is dated.

## **2. Individual Level**

- Discredit the Security Myth

If the nuclear security myth was the human impetus for Iran's nuclear weapons program, then nonproliferation policy needs to focus on discrediting the myth. Because the myth is essentially institutionalized within the atomic bureaucracies, U.S. efforts need to target the larger Iranian population to foster and inform an educated debate on the utility of nuclear weapons in the Iranian strategy

- Foster internal debate

First, the United States needs to help Iranians see the issue as an internal question that does not involve U.S. imperialism. Iranians are increasingly skeptical and willing to debate political issues in the daily newspapers. Despite the threat of jail time, Iranians continue to take opposing sides to the government to air out important issues. The United States needs to encourage Iranian expatriates and other nations to pose nuclear questions in daily letters columns, or on the internet, to spark debate.

- Educate the internal debate

Previous Iranian discussions of nuclear weapons were poorly informed. For the Iranians to have a meaningful nuclear debate, it must include accurate information and avoid emotional or nationalist rhetoric to hijack the argument. U.S. proxies, or non-governmental organizations can provide educational material on the physics of nuclear weapons, their destructiveness, or their financial, economic, and political costs. Such material can be broadcast on Voice of America, or posted on popular web sites. Once the

Iranian populace exhibits a willingness to debate the issue, the United States needs to disappear from view, and let the various Iranian factions discuss among themselves.

### **3. State Level**

- Cooperative containment

The United States should assemble a new coalition of allies to enact a multilateral containment. This cooperative containment would have two overarching goals: to undercut the nuclear weapons bureaucracy while simultaneously encouraging rival bureaucracies to expand and lobby for their own interests.

- Subvert nuclear weapons bureaucracy

Undermining the Iranian nuclear weapons program means to detect, delay, disrupt, and expose its components. The United States needs to use multilateral pressure to step up intelligence within Iran, prevent technology and raw material transfers, and confront Tehran over every violation exposed. The U.S. counterproliferation effort has succeeded in its primary goal, to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. More can be done with multilateral pressure on individual suppliers and other states. Unilateral U.S. sanctions should be expanded among the new coalition; and the member states should pressure Russia to hold Iran to the fuel agreement for the light-water reactor at Bushehr. Russia holds the most strategic leverage over Iran, since it has control over the Bushehr reactor; if Russia withdraws its support, Iran will have to find a new contractor and redesign the reactor for a third time.

- Empower rival bureaucracies

The most promising rival bureaucracies are oil, energy, and trade. The multilateral coalition needs to offer Iran significant economic incentives for renouncing nuclear weapons, terrorism, and ending militant opposition to the Israeli peace process. The oil and energy coalitions are desperate for foreign investment to improve infrastructure, create refinery capabilities, and open trade markets. Iran's new bazaar merchants want to open trade for foreign goods, and reform import licensing to make it easier to distribute imports. The promise of World Trade Organization membership and vast foreign investment in a wide variety of sectors could be a strong incentive for Iran to agree to the grand bargain.



### **C. FINAL THOUGHTS**

Taken together these policy measures can exert tremendous pressure on Iran by opening up a public debate that questions the contradictions of Iran's nuclear policy, the dangers of nuclear weapons, and demands market reforms to improve its standard of living. International pressure from above, combined with intra-state pressure from within, and popular pressure from below could make the economic incentives irresistible. If counterproliferation efforts delay progress for a bomb long enough, these other incentives may be seen as security enhancing in themselves, and find champions within the ruling party.

The United States and its coalition must not give up on Iran. As Iran gets closer to an indigenous, self-sufficient nuclear capability, sanctions and interdiction will have less of an effect. Policy focus then needs to shift to upholding the norms within the NPT and the costs of failing to abide by its provisions. Multi-layered, multilateral pressure needs to begin now to avoid a gap in effort when such a focus shift is required.

The ruling conservatives hijacked the Majlis in the February 2004 elections. Observers believe the 2005 presidential election will be similar. With the conservatives running all aspects of the Islamic Republic, there may be an opportunity for a grand bargain. If the conservatives realize they need to enact social and economic reforms, they may be waiting until the reformers are all out of government to ensure the conservatives get the credit.

Despite what many may hope, the present regime is firmly in control. The opposition and youth movements inside Iran lack the required organization to effect incremental change, to say nothing of regime change. The United States cannot wait and hope for regime change. Nor can it unilaterally give Iran something for nothing. If the United States is seen as complicit in extending the conservatives' grip on power because of a premature engagement, the next regime will hold Washington in as low regard as the present one. The embarrassment of the failed European Three initiative is fresh enough; the United States must strengthen a multilateral approach and keep the pressure on Iran until it agrees to the grand bargain. The West must act to show the mullahs that the ball is in their court.

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