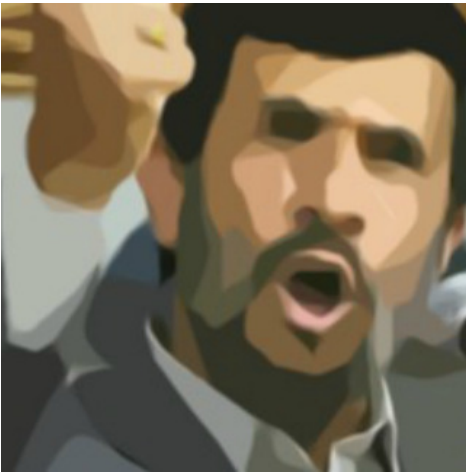


Transnational Threats Report

U.S. Strategies in Response to Iranian Nuclear Development





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U.S. Strategies for a Nuclear Iran

Introduction

“Iran's leaders should understand that I do not have a policy of containment; I have a policy to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon,” U.S. President Barack Obama told the America Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in March 2012. “And as I have made clear time and again during the course of my presidency, I will not hesitate to use force when it is necessary to defend the United States and its interests.”

As pressure from Israel builds and international sanctions against Iran continually weaken the Iranian economy, President Obama has repeatedly asserted

his policy to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran and his willingness to use force if necessary. In light of this policy, what is the best strategy to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran, and how should the U.S. pursue this strategy? To answer this question, this analysis evaluates U.S.-led military action, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorized use of force, and the dual-track strategy of sanctions and negotiations. Given the high costs of military action and the inability of the UNSC to authorize the use of force against Iran, maintaining a dual-track strategy is the best strategy for the U.S. to pursue to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran.

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U.S. Strategies for a Nuclear Iran

Background on Iranian Nuclear Development

The international community has engaged Iran on its nuclear program since 2003, with the latest talks in 2012 between Iran and the P5+1 (also known as the E3+3: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States, along with Germany), ending without any substantive agreement. The UNSC has adopted six resolutions condemning Iran's nuclear program and establishing sanctions against Iran, the most recent being Resolution 1929 in June 2010. Passed unanimously after tough bargaining between the U.S. and the opposition of China and Russia, Resolution 1929 required Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment program and its heavy-water reactor project and imposed harsher sanctions directed at Iran's ability to acquire nuclear and military technology.² The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report from August 2012 showed that Iran has continued to defy these resolutions, contributing to international suspicion of a possible military dimension to Iran's nuclear program.³

In July 2012, the Obama administration, along with the European Union, imposed sanctions against Iranian oil and financial institutions that do business with Iran, and garnered support from other countries to reduce their imports of

Iranian oil.⁴ Russia and China have demonstrated strong opposition to these sanctions, with Russia declaring that it would not support additional sanctions in the UNSC,⁵ and China vowing to maintain its Iranian oil imports.⁶

U.S. officials have repeatedly stated that they do not believe Iran has a nuclear weapon nor that it has made the decision to build one.⁷ Given the extensive monitoring capabilities of the IAEA, satellite surveillance, and signals intelligence, the U.S. would likely detect an Iranian effort to 'dash' for the bomb and have at least one month before Iran enriched enough weapons-grade uranium (WGU) to make one weapon.⁸ Once produced, the WGU could be easily transported and thus significantly more difficult to target than the already identified nuclear facilities. Iran would need another year to turn this WGU into a nuclear weapon, and two years to produce a nuclear warhead that could be delivered via missile.⁹ Israel has pressured the U.S. to declare the negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran as a failure, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly urged the Obama administration to set a "red line" for Iran's nuclear program that could prompt the use of force.¹⁰ In August 2012, President Obama

stated that diplomacy still has "time and space" to address Iran's nuclear program without resorting to military action.¹¹

Although Iran has limited potential to attack the American homeland, the U.S. views a nuclear-armed Iran as a dangerous threat to its security interests. Most importantly, the U.S. is committed to its partnership with Israel and views Iranian nuclear weapons as perilous to Israel's security. The U.S. is opposed to nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, and a nuclear-armed Iran could provoke other regional actors, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, to seek their own nuclear weapons. Considering Iran's historical state sponsorship of terrorism, the U.S. fears that a nuclear-armed Iran would transfer nuclear material to terrorist groups. The U.S. is also concerned that nuclear weapons would provide Iran with a powerful deterrent against possible U.S. or Israeli attacks, and may embolden Iran to increase its sponsorship of terrorism, militancy, and covert actions against Israel and the U.S. Finally, nuclear weapons would likely ensure a more formidable Iranian commitment to protect the Assad regime in Syria or Hezbollah in Lebanon.¹²



U.S. Strategies for a Nuclear Iran

Preventing a Nuclear-Armed Iran

As President Obama indicated at the March 2012 AIPAC conference and reiterated throughout his 2012 presidential campaign, his administration has a resolute policy of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. In September 2012, the U.S. Senate passed Senate Joint Resolution 41 (S.J. Res. 41), stating that Congress “strongly supports United States policy to prevent the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability; rejects any United States policy that would rely on efforts to contain a nuclear weapons-capable Iran; and joins the President in ruling out any policy that would rely on containment as an option in response to the Iranian nuclear threat.”¹³ Reliance on a

strategy of containment would aim to restrain Iran’s external behavior by isolating it with defensive alliances, non-communication, deterrence, and sanctions, rather than attempting to influence activities within Iranian borders, such as political opposition to the Iranian regime or the development of the nuclear program.¹⁴ By supporting the Obama administration’s policy and rejecting a strategy dependent on containment, S.J. Res. 41 further demonstrates the U.S. opposition to any outcome where Iran acquires a nuclear weapon.

Kenneth Waltz, a well-known international relations scholar, disagrees with the policy of preventing a nuclear-armed Iran,

arguing instead that Iranian nuclear weapons would provide balance to Israel’s nuclear arsenal and result in greater Middle East stability.¹⁵ Although Waltz’s argument deserves consideration and debate, the policy decision with regards to Iran’s nuclear program has, for the time being, already been made. President Obama and the U.S. Senate have invested considerable political capital in a policy of prevention, and a reversal seems unlikely barring a significant shift in U.S. political climate. Instead of dwelling exclusively on the policy debate, this analysis examines possible strategies that support the U.S. goal of preventing a nuclear-armed Iran.



U.S. Strategies for a Nuclear Iran

U.S.-Led Military Action Against Iran

In September 2012, a number of foreign policy experts and retired general officers, under the aegis of the non-governmental organization The Iran Project, published a report describing the immense costs and likely limited effectiveness of military action against Iran's nuclear program.¹⁶ The Iran Project estimates that U.S. military strikes against Iran could delay its nuclear program by up to four years, whereas less effective Israeli strikes could delay the program by only two years.¹⁷

Only the U.S. military has the capability to wage an effective strike, which would entail a continuous multi-day air campaign targeting Iranian air defenses, command and control centers, ballistic missile facilities, and finally nuclear sites.¹⁸ Attacking the nuclear facility at Fordow, built 200-300 feet underground, would require a 30,000lb GBU-57 bunker-busting bomb, which the U.S. alone possesses.¹⁹ Israel's inability to deliver a decisive blow to Iran's nuclear program likely contributes to its hesitation in attacking Iran unilaterally, as well as its encouragement for the U.S. to heavily consider the military option. Whether conducted by the U.S. alone or in concert with other states, military strikes could only delay, not prevent, Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Definitive, long-term prevention of a nuclear-armed Iran is possible only through regime change, which would require more resources and personnel than the U.S. has expended during the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan combined.²⁰

The most immediate and obvious benefit of U.S.-led military action would be the

damage inflicted on Iranian nuclear facilities and military capabilities. It would also likely serve as a deterrent to further nuclear proliferation, reassurance to U.S. allies in the Gulf region, and a demonstration of American (or international) resolve.²¹ On the other hand, the costs of U.S.-led military action far outweigh the benefits. According to The Iran Project, it would likely trigger an Iranian ballistic missile retaliation against Israel and U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf, a disruption of shipping in the Strait of Hormuz with a massive impact on oil flows, a strengthened Iranian desire to obtain a nuclear weapon for defensive purposes, an enhanced ability of Islamist groups to recruit new members and spread propaganda, and indirect reprisals against Israel and U.S. targets by Iranian proxies such as Hezbollah.²² U.S. and Israeli responses to Iranian retaliation could provoke further reprisal and result in a spiral of violence potentially escalating to a full-scale regional war.²³

The costs would be even higher if the U.S. acted without a UNSC authorization of force. Such an operation would undermine the UNSC, resulting in high reputational costs for the U.S., and unravel the global solidarity against Iran that has developed over the last five years. Russia, China, and some U.S. allies in Europe would likely condemn the attack and criticize the U.S. for violating international law, usurping the authority of the UNSC, and engaging in another preventive war like that against Iraq in 2003. International support for the sanctions regime against Iran would likely diminish, allowing Iran to emerge stronger and less isolated after recovering from the attacks.

U.S.-led military action would also erode the IAEA's ability to conduct future inspections of Iranian nuclear sites. The unilateral strikes against Iraq by the U.K. and U.S. in 1998's Operation Desert Fox resulted in Saddam Hussein's refusal to allow the UN inspection regime in Iraq to continue.²⁴ Similarly, an unauthorized use of force against Iran may cause the Iranian regime to view the UNSC as illegitimate and refuse future IAEA inspections. If the U.S. attacked Iran without the legitimacy of the UNSC, it would likely have to be content with the damage done to Iranian facilities and forego the benefits of future IAEA monitoring.

The policy of Congress and the Obama administration is to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, not to delay it from doing so. While U.S.-led military action could achieve this policy in the short-term, it would likely fail to effectively prevent a nuclear-armed Iran in the long-term. The potential termination of the IAEA inspection process in Iran would create uncertainty over the status of Iran's nuclear program, and the U.S. would have to rely solely on its intelligence capabilities to assess ongoing Iranian nuclear activities and determine the need for subsequent attacks. Due to its high costs and limited effectiveness at preventing a nuclear-armed Iran, U.S.-led military action is not a useful strategy for achieving the Obama administration's policy. However, the threat of this strategy serves as a powerful deterrent against Iranian provocation, and remains an important tool of last resort should Iran directly threaten U.S. security interests.



U.S. Strategies for a Nuclear Iran

A UNSC Authorized Use of Force Against Iran

If evidence of an Iranian nuclear weapons program is revealed, whether by the IAEA or an intelligence agency, the U.S. could potentially negotiate with other members of the UNSC to pass a resolution authorizing the use of force against Iran. A UNSC-authorized military operation against Iran would largely rely on U.S. military capabilities, and could be expected to look similar in scope and targeting to the U.S.-led military action discussed above.

A UNSC authorization of force could diminish some of the long-term costs of military action²⁵ and, most importantly, would give military action legitimacy and authority under international law. By demonstrating restraint in deference to the authority of the UNSC, the U.S. would bolster the credibility of the UN's institutional mechanisms, and set an example for other states to follow in the future. This approach would preserve the global consensus against Iran, discrediting Iran's attempts to gain sympathetic support and portray itself as the victim of American aggression. A UNSC resolution authorizing force could serve as a unified message to the Iranian people that the international community seeks to end their regime's nuclear ambitions. This might complicate the regime's efforts to vilify the U.S. and Israel as the sole proprietors of Iranian suffering. Additionally, a UNSC authorization could generate a more

favorable perception among the Arab public across the region, and would avoid directly reinforcing the Islamist narrative that the U.S. has imperial ambitions to dominate the Muslim world.²⁶

Finally, while not guaranteed, a UNSC-authorized use of force would more likely result in continued IAEA inspections of Iranian nuclear facilities. After the attack, the Iranian regime may feel betrayed by the UN, and seek to punish the international community and extricate itself from international obligations. However, this outcome seems improbable, as Iran would have little to gain from continued provocation of the international community and much to lose from increased isolation. A UNSC authorization of force would require unanimity among the P5 and strong international solidarity against Iran, so Iran would likely struggle to find allies to support any post-strike defiance. By refusing to cooperate with the IAEA, even after UNSC-authorized military action against its nuclear facilities, Iran would only further damage its relationship with the international community and invite further sanctions, isolation, and possible military attacks.

Given that military strikes can only delay, not destroy, the Iranian nuclear program, continued IAEA monitoring would be critical following military action to ensure that Iran does not resume suspicious nuclear activities. As the aftermath of

Operation Desert Fox suggests, the loss of a UN inspection regime can lead to dangerous speculation over weapons development activities, and possibly result in future military action based on incomplete intelligence.

As noted earlier, delaying the Iranian nuclear program with military strikes would not achieve the Obama administration's policy of preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. If the U.S. could obtain a UNSC authorization of force against Iran, it would provide a greater chance for continued IAEA inspections and give this strategy a critical advantage over U.S.-led military action. Rather than relying only on clandestine intelligence and satellite surveillance to decide if Iran restarted its nuclear program, the U.S. could also refer to the IAEA's regular reports on Iran's nuclear activities. If necessary, the U.S. could support another round of UNSC military strikes to force Iran's compliance with UNSC resolutions and prevent it from developing nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, a UNSC authorized use of force would still suffer from many of the short-term costs associated with U.S.-led military action, such as Iranian retaliation and regional instability. Furthermore, for this strategy to be effective, the UNSC must pass an authorization of force against Iran. As the following section will discuss, this outcome is extremely unlikely.



U.S. Strategies for a Nuclear Iran

Obstacles to an Effective UNSC Authorization of Force

Three obstacles to a UNSC authorization of force against Iran make it an unrealistic strategy for preventing a nuclear-armed Iran. The first is the strong degree of evidence required to convince members of the UNSC that Iran has begun a nuclear weapons program. The Iran Project identifies an Iranian withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), expulsion of IAEA inspectors, and enrichment of uranium past 20% as key indicators that Iran has decided to make a dash for the bomb.²⁷ The clarity and significance of these indicators would undoubtedly be disputed, which would frustrate the P5's unanimity regarding Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon. The international community remembers former Secretary of State Colin Powell's presentation in 2003, in which he offered the UN fallacious evidence of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and urged the UNSC to adopt a resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq. The memory of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, as well as the often ambiguous nature of intelligence, will undercut the ability of the U.S. to convince the P5 that Iran has begun a nuclear weapons program.

The second obstacle is the length of time required for debate and deliberation among the P5. Upon deciding to produce a nuclear weapon, Iran would need one to four months to produce enough WGU for one bomb.²⁸ Any military action would have to strike in this limited window of time before Iran could move the payload of WGU from known nuclear facilities to a more clandestine location. Even if Russia

and China signaled that they might cooperate on a resolution authorizing the use of force, the UNSC could take months to debate the language of the resolution and build the support it would need to pass. While the UNSC acted quickly on authorizations of force in Somalia and Libya, cases like Kosovo illustrate that the resolution process can be long and difficult to anticipate.²⁹ Additionally, coordination and logistical problems for multilateral military action would delay a UNSC response, as well as controversy over what military force would execute the strikes, as Russia would likely oppose a purely NATO intervention.

The third obstacle is overcoming the Chinese and Russian vetoes of a resolution-authorizing force. A strong respect for national sovereignty has led Russia and China to historically oppose foreign intervention in states' internal affairs,³⁰ and continues to drive their voiced opposition to the use of force in Iran. Over the last 20 years, both Russia and China have provided Iran with nuclear and military technology, to include nuclear reactors and sales of advanced missile systems.³¹ Chinese leaders have repeatedly affirmed Iran's right as a signatory of the NPT to pursue peaceful nuclear energy under IAEA monitoring,³² and Russian leaders have agreed, provided that there are absolute guarantees that Iran's nuclear program will not result in nuclear weapons.³³ As indicated by UNSC Resolution 1929, both China and Russia oppose a nuclear-armed Iran, however, they do not believe that military force is a necessary measure.

While Russia and China are united in these aspects of relations with Iran, they have distinct strategic interests that would lead them to veto an authorization of force for their own reasons.

Russia values the respect that Iran has historically afforded to its sphere of influence, and views Iran as an important counter to U.S. interference in the former Soviet states and the Middle East.³⁴ Russia relies on Iran's restraint in supporting the Islamist insurgency in the North Caucasus region, and wants to minimize its conflict with Iran over access to Caspian resources.³⁵ Russia seems content with the status quo and its position as an intermediary in U.S.-Iranian competition, as it is able to leverage both NATO countries and Iran for concessions on issues unrelated to Iran's nuclear program.³⁶ For example, in 2009 NATO implemented the Russian-favored 'Phased Adaptive Approach' to the U.S. antiballistic missile system in Europe in order to encourage Russian cooperation on a new round of sanctions against Iran.³⁷ Through this strategy of selective cooperation, Russia benefits from limited acquiescence to the West without causing irreparable harm to its Iranian relations. Finally, Russia fears the unpredictable outcome of military action against Iran, the political instability and potential for Islamist radicalism that would follow,³⁸ and the resulting political alienation with Washington.³⁹ For all of these reasons, Russia can be expected to veto the use of force against Iran, and continue the negotiation process to keep the possibility of military action off the table.⁴⁰ Overall,

there do not seem to be any feasible concessions that the U.S. could offer Russia that would cause it to withhold its veto.⁴¹

While China has historically aligned with Russian actions on the UNSC, the U.S. should not expect China to march in lockstep with Russia on Iran due to its differing economic and strategic interests.⁴² China is Iran's number one trading partner and largest oil customer.⁴³ China's \$40 billion worth of trade with Iran overshadows Russia's \$4 billion,⁴⁴ and the sanctions regime that has prevented Western firms from trading with Iran has increased Iran's reliance on China to a greater degree than it has on Russia.⁴⁵ In May 2011, China signed a \$20 billion agreement with Iran to bolster cooperation in the mining and industrial sectors, and plans to increase bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2016.⁴⁶ Iran's underdeveloped oil and natural gas reserves provide a long-term source of energy for the growing Chinese economy. The unilateral sanctions by Western states better position Chinese firms to secure these resources and exploit gaps left behind by Western firms.⁴⁷ Military action against Iran, or political transformation that results in a more democratic government, could put China's economic interests at risk.⁴⁸ China sees strategic value in partnering with Iran to offset U.S. power in the Middle East and serve as a foothold for continued Chinese influence.⁴⁹ To avoid jeopardizing these interests with military action, China would veto the use of force against Iran and, like

Russia, will favor continued negotiations to resolve tensions over the Iranian nuclear program.

Given the obstacles to obtaining a UNSC authorization of force against Iran, the U.S. should not view UNSC authorized military action as a viable strategy for dealing with Iran's nuclear program. In the event that the U.S. was able to convince the P5 that Iran had commenced a nuclear weapon program, it would be almost impossible for the UNSC to move fast enough to strike Iran's nuclear facilities before the WGU is moved out of known locations. Regardless, Russia and China would not be willing to sacrifice their Iranian relations to allow UNSC authorized force against Iran.

Even if Russia and China saw advantages to strikes against Iran's nuclear program, they would likely veto the use of force in the UNSC, publicly oppose a military strike, and manifest their acquiescence to U.S.-led military action in passive or private ways. This strategy could preserve their relations with Iran, and signal to the U.S. that they would tolerate American-led military action to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.⁵⁰ If Russia and China pursue this strategy of opposing military action and exploiting the U.S.-led delay of the Iranian nuclear program, the UNSC would be unable to authorize force even if all members of the P5 viewed it favorably.

The U.S. has previously encountered similar dilemmas in the UNSC, and has

pursued military action without UNSC authorization with questionable results. Operation Desert Fox in 1998, the 1999 NATO offensive in Kosovo, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the 'coalition of the willing' demonstrate the U.S. willingness to circumvent the UNSC yet still attempt to gain international legitimacy *ex post facto*.⁵¹ In these three cases, the U.S. advanced its cause as far as possible within the UNSC framework, bypassed the UNSC with unauthorized military action, and then returned to the UNSC for approval after major military operations had concluded.⁵² A similar work-around strategy could be employed should Iran pursue a nuclear weapon. Faced with Chinese and Russian vetoes on the UNSC, the U.S. could strike unilaterally and then seek international approval with a retroactive legal or moral justification based on Resolution 1929. Prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, French ambassador to the U.S. Jean-David Levitte told his U.S. counterparts in December 2002, "We understand that you will push for war. We think it's a big mistake, but don't add another mistake. Just do what we did for Kosovo - act on the basis of existing resolutions, and you go. And then it will be easier after the war to come together."⁵³ However, as demonstrated by the outcome of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, such a strategy cannot achieve the reputational and institutional advantages associated with a UNSC authorized use of force, as well as the international community's involvement in post-conflict operations.



U.S. Strategies for a Nuclear Iran

The Dual-Track Strategy

Given the high costs of military action against Iran and the inability of the UNSC to authorize the use of force against Iran, the dual-track strategy of negotiations and sanctions is the best strategy to achieve the Obama administration's policy of preventing a nuclear-armed Iran. Despite the saber-rattling and bellicose political rhetoric from both Israel and Iran, there is room for optimism that negotiations will succeed and Iran will stop short of developing a nuclear weapon. First, Iran is not expected to take any action that would provoke a military strike due to the uncontrollable consequences of an attack on the Iranian homeland.⁵⁴ Despite the costs, U.S. and Israeli threats of military action provide some degree of assurance that Iran will suffer severe consequences if it brazenly advances its nuclear program. Additionally, both Russia and China have incentives to restrain Iran from provoking the West, as the uncertain outcome of military action against Iran would jeopardize their economic and geopolitical interests.

Second, there is room for cooperation with Russia and China to further pressure Iran. Both Russia⁵⁵ and China⁵⁶ agree that a nuclear-armed Iran would be destabilizing, and both have encouraged Iranian leaders to accept a negotiated settlement. Since 2010, they have established a precedent of substantive cooperation in pressuring Iran on its nuclear program. The passage of Resolution 1929, although hotly contested, demonstrated that Russia and China were willing to make significant

sacrifices in their Iranian relations to cooperate with the U.S. and increase pressure on Iran. The most prominent of these sacrifices came when Russian President Dmitri Medvedev signed a decree in September 2010 banning the sale of S-300 surface-to-air missile systems to Iran,⁵⁷ citing the sanctions of Resolution 1929 and dealing a significant blow to Russo-Iranian relations. In 2012, Russia and China participated in the P5+1 negotiations in Baghdad, Istanbul, and Moscow, pressuring Iran to halt 20% uranium enrichment, close the underground Fordow nuclear facility, accept a comprehensive monitoring regime, and address suspicions of past efforts to design a nuclear weapon.⁵⁸ By negotiating through the single voice of the P5+1, Russia and China continue to show their willingness to cooperate with the West on Iran, albeit short of further UNSC sanctions and the military option.

Along with this precedent of cooperation, Russia and China value their relations with the U.S. far more than their relations with Iran, and can be expected to pressure Iran toward a negotiated settlement to avoid unbearable costs to their U.S. relations. China is reluctant to grow too close to Iran for fear of precipitating a break in its economic ties with the U.S.⁵⁹ China's \$389 billion of trade with the U.S. is nearly 10 times greater than its trade with Iran.⁶⁰ Whereas China values the potential of Iran's untapped energy resources, its oil imports from Iran reached a high in July 2012 of only 12% of total oil imports.⁶¹ Russia's \$29 billion of trade with the U.S.⁶² also overshadows its trade with Iran,

and stands to grow significantly following its August 2012 accession into the World Trade Organization and the November 2012 vote in Congress to establish permanent normal trade relations with Russia.⁶³ More importantly, Russia is concerned that Iran's nuclear ambitions are pushing NATO countries to develop missile defenses that could potentially diminish Russia's nuclear deterrent.⁶⁴ As indicated in 2009-10, Russia views concessions from the U.S. on missile defense as more important than its protection of Iran in the UNSC. As tension between the U.S. and Iran worsens, Russia's and China's delicate balancing act of preserving relations with the U.S. without alienating Iran will grow more difficult, and may increase their willingness to cooperate with U.S. efforts to pressure Iran.

The U.S. could pursue a number of strategies to widen the cooperative space with Russia and China. As Brandon Fite with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) summarizes, "If the U.S. is to be more successful in isolating Iran, it will need to convince both countries that Iran poses a greater threat to their interests than they now perceive, seek the help of the Arab Gulf states and other powers to influence China and Russia, and develop a more powerful mix of incentives and penalties to encourage Chinese and Russian cooperation."⁶⁵ To enhance cooperation with Russia, the U.S. could encourage ties between Russia and Israel, further integrate Russia into the existing world order to diminish the duality between

Western and non-Western states, and leverage energy competition between Russia (the world's largest natural gas producer) and Iran (which has world's second largest gas reserves).⁶⁶ To improve cooperation with China, the U.S. could reduce China's reliance on Iranian energy by promoting oil supply guarantees from other Gulf states, sanctioning Chinese firms that conduct business with both the U.S. and Iran, and working to prevent the development of Iran's energy sector potential.⁶⁷ While these efforts would not cause Russia and China to support an authorization of force against Iran, they could be helpful in achieving Russia and Chinese cooperation in sanctions and negotiations, the two components of the U.S. dual-track strategy.

Another reason for optimism regarding the dual-track strategy is the increasingly heavy toll of the sanctions regime on the Iranian economy, and the possibility it will create more productive bargaining space in future negotiations. The U.S. and EU sanctions imposed in July 2012 have contributed to significant inflation of the Iranian currency, the rial, and precipitous drops in Iranian oil exports. In September 2012, the value of the rial fell by 40% in one week,⁶⁸ prompting Iran's president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to blame the U.S. and currency speculators and plead with Iranians to stop exchanging their rials for dollars.⁶⁹ Daily oil production in Iran fell to its lowest level since 1988,⁷⁰ further diminishing the rial's foreign exchange rate and Iran's ability to import products. In October 2012, riot police clashed with protestors in Tehran who were angry over

the rial's plummet and its effect on purchasing power.⁷¹ During this same period, serious tensions emerged between President Ahmadinejad and the heads of Iran's parliament and judiciary, as various factions blamed others for the ongoing economic maladies despite calls for unity from Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei.⁷² While these pressures may cause Iran to rethink its cost-benefit analysis in future P5+1 negotiations, it's important to note that the history of sanctions regimes shows that sanctions are rarely effective at achieving international political goals.⁷³ Nevertheless, the current sanctions developed in 2012 against Iran are unprecedented in their breadth and international adherence,⁷⁴ and have clearly shifted Iranian attitudes toward a more cooperative position.⁷⁵

In the UN General Assembly in September 2012, Iranian officials suggested a proposal to suspend the production of uranium in exchange for sanctions relief, indicating that Iranian leadership is still willing to negotiate, although not yet on Western terms.⁷⁶ Iran insists on sanctions relief prior to phasing out uranium enrichment, whereas P5+1 negotiators continue to demand Iran stop its enrichment of 20% uranium prior to any sanctions relief. In an interview with Bernard Gwertzman of the Council on Foreign Relations, Daryl Kimball, Executive Director of the Arms Control Association, argued that identifying a "mutually beneficial initial confidence-building step" is an important starting point for moving forward in

negotiations.⁷⁷ Kimball suggested that Iran could agree to stop production of 20% enriched uranium in exchange for fuel for the Tehran medical research reactor. Adopting the Additional Protocol to the NPT, which allows for enhanced IAEA inspections of nuclear facilities, could be another confidence-building measure from Iran. An example of a recent confidence-building measure was in October 2012, when Iran converted over one-third of its 20% enriched uranium into oxide form for fuel plates for the Tehran research reactor, which produces medical isotopes for cancer treatment.⁷⁸ In doing so, Iran took a small step in addressing international concerns over its growing stockpile of 20% enriched uranium. Given Iran's obstinacy in recent negotiations, such confidence-building steps will be needed to further demonstrate and encourage Iran's commitment to the negotiations process.

The Guardian newspaper reported in October 2012 that the P5+1 has plans for a reformulated proposal that will offer Iran limited sanctions relief in exchange for limitations on the level of enrichment of its uranium stockpile.⁷⁹ This proposal will reportedly focus on phased confidence-building measures that will sequence concessions in an attempt to overcome the mutual distrust that undermined previous negotiations. For this approach to succeed, the P5+1 will have to accept an end state that is substantively different than it sought to achieve when negotiations began in 2006. Permanently stopping all uranium enrichment in Iran is no longer a feasible

objective for the P5+1.⁸⁰ The NPT states that all signatories have the right to peacefully use nuclear technology, which enables signatories to develop their civilian nuclear programs up to the point where they may only need a few months to develop a nuclear weapon. While this elicits apprehension, from Western powers in regards to Iran, 120 countries from the Non-Aligned Movement, including Iran's regional adversaries in the Gulf Cooperation Council, unanimously affirmed Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy and ownership of the full nuclear cycle.⁸¹ A long-term solution will likely acknowledge Iran's nuclear rights to some degree, and the P5+1 should accept this as an eventual end state.

Future negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran could take a number of forms, all focused on the following sequence of concessions. The P5+1 would grant de facto recognition of Iran's nuclear rights in exchange for a 5% cap on uranium enrichment, an unrestricted IAEA inspection regime, and limitations on the installment of new centrifuges at Iranian nuclear facilities.⁸² To meet Iran's need for uranium beyond the 5% threshold, fuel swaps between Iran and the international community would then occur. This would involve Iran providing its current stockpile of 20% enriched uranium in exchange for nuclear fuel provided by donor countries. If Iran abides by these terms, adopts the Additional Protocol, and accepts restrictions on the underground facility at Fordow, the P5+1 would then phase out sanctions and provide other incentives, such as investment in a new research

reactor on Iranian soil, or incentives unrelated to Iran's nuclear program, such as economic aid or technology for energy sector development. Should this negotiated solution materialize, it would satisfy the U.S. policy of preventing a nuclear-armed Iran while avoiding the disadvantages of military action.

Identifying the substance and sequencing of proposals, however, has not been the primary impediment to achieving a long-term solution in negotiations. Instead, as Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, et al. of the Oxford Research Group conclude, "The main obstacle, as in the past, will prove to be domestic factors and a lack of political will."⁸³ The political rhetoric in both the U.S. and Iran has placed leaders in a difficult position to compromise without suffering domestic political costs. With regards to Iran, as the authors explain, "The Supreme Leader has invested significant political capital in the nuclear programme, and seems unlikely to capitulate without a deal which could be sold domestically as a 'victory' and an acknowledgement of Iran's 'inalienable rights'."⁸⁴ On the U.S. side, "A considerable swathe of the Washington political elite have in the past been relatively unreceptive, if not outright hostile to establishing a meaningful dialogue with Iran that addresses the latter's concerns... Republican presidential candidates have expressed a tenacious hostility to the prospect of diplomacy, and openly called for a military solution to the 'Iranian nuclear problem'."⁸⁵ The effect of these domestic political factors can be seen in the

outcome of past negotiations. For example, political instability following the controversial reelection of President Ahmadinejad in 2009 is thought to have influenced Iran's rejection of a fuel swap compromise, despite its initial acceptance of the agreement, in order to make Iran appear strong by defying the West.⁸⁶

Due to the powerful influence of domestic politics on negotiations, a solution must include face-saving measures to allow both the U.S. and Iran to claim "victory" and satisfy their respective publics. Given the harsh stance on Iran from some vocal Republican critics, the Obama administration cannot afford to accept a solution that appears too conciliatory to Iran. This should not be problematic, as any foreseeable solution will likely include practical assurances that Iran will not have the capability to produce a nuclear weapon. Face-saving is far more relevant to Ayatollah Khamenei, who has invested significant political capital in the Iranian nuclear program,⁸⁷ and, to some extent, has made it a symbol of national pride. He has issued a fatwa, or religious decree, stating that nuclear weapons are forbidden under Islamic law, while also conveying commitment to Iran's civilian nuclear ambitions.⁸⁸ The P5+1 should recognize the Supreme Leader's domestic political costs of accepting restrictions on the nuclear program and appearing to surrender to Western demands. Concessions must be articulated with positive rhetoric and incentives to allow Khamenei to sell the negotiated solution as a positive outcome for the Iranian people.

Domestic political factors also influence the timing of negotiations. Resolution from the June 2012 talks in Moscow was delayed by the November 2012 U.S. presidential elections, as Iranian leaders did not want to strike a deal with a lame-duck U.S. president. Negotiations may be further delayed due to Iran's upcoming presidential elections in June 2013, when President Ahmadinejad will step down in August after completing his allowed two terms in office. Ayatollah Khamenei does not want to give Ahmadinejad the opportunity to claim credit for the success of negotiations, and will likely delay any comprehensive solution until after the election.⁸⁹

Unfortunately for the P5+1, further delays to negotiations give Iran more time to expand its nuclear program and improve its bargaining position. Time has played to Iran's advantage, as Iran continually seeks to negotiate from a current and updated position instead of the starting point of negotiations.⁹⁰ As Iran has expanded its nuclear program, its stockpiles of enriched uranium have grown, as have the levels of enrichment. What started as negotiations to limit 3% enriched uranium now concern 20% enriched uranium, and this trend threatens to continue. By the Iranian presidential election in June 2013, Iran will possess significantly more enriched uranium, and capacity for enriching uranium, than it did during the P5+1 talks in Moscow one year earlier. This development could embolden Iran to increase its demands and frustrate Western objectives for future

negotiations. The P5+1 should maintain its demands from the 2012 negotiations and refuse to adjust the uranium threshold to accommodate any new developments in nuclear capacity. While continued nuclear development strengthens Iran's bargaining positioning, further delay in the negotiations process is not an excuse to abandon the dual-track strategy in favor of military intervention.

An important consideration for the dual-track strategy is the adverse second and third order effects of the sanctions regime on Iranian oil customers and the Iranian people. One of the key factors in cutting off Iran's oil exports was a requirement in the 2011 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that implemented extraterritorial sanctions against foreign financial institutions that conduct business with most Iranian banks, including the Central Bank of Iran. The law provides exemptions for financial institutions in countries that make 'significant' reductions in their Iranian oil purchases, yet leaves 'significant' undefined, allowing the Obama administration to negotiate cooperative agreements with Iran's oil customers.⁹¹ Thus far, 20 countries have cut their purchases enough to qualify for exemptions from the U.S. State Department.⁹² Among these countries are China, India, Japan, and South Korea, which, in recent years, have relied on Iranian energy and accounted for 60% of Iran's oil exports.⁹³ Finding alternative energy sources exposes these countries to greater risks of potential disruptions in

the oil market and increasing oil prices, and could create downward pressure on their energy-hungry economies.⁹⁴ As sanctions continue, the sacrifice made by these countries to avoid purchasing Iranian oil will grow increasingly burdensome. If negotiations suffer from prolonged delays, the U.S. may have to reconsider the international political costs of maintaining the tight sanctions on Iran, and determine if the sanctions regime is worth the pressure on its Asian trading partners.

The U.S. should mitigate the negative effects of Iranian oil cuts by continuing to encourage other Gulf oil-producers, such as Saudi Arabia and Iraq, to increase production. In August 2012, Iraq reached its highest oil export level in 30 years, overtaking Iran as the second-largest oil producer in the Organization for Petroleum Exporting States (OPEC).⁹⁵ Such increases will be critical in enabling Iran's largest oil customers to maintain their reductions of Iranian oil without strangling their economies. This will also generate political and economic benefits as other Gulf countries gain Iran's former market share.

Despite Western attempts to design smart and targeted sanctions directed at the Iranian regime, sanctions have still produced negative effects for the Iranian people. The U.S. and EU sanctions against Iran's banking system have not only affected Iran's ability to sell oil and purchase military technology, but also to complete the financial transactions necessary for importing other goods, such

as medicine and food.⁹⁶ The resulting medicine shortage affects as many as 6 million Iranians, who suffer from a range of diseases that require foreign-made medicines no longer available in Iran.⁹⁷ To avoid a humanitarian crisis, the U.S. and

EU should expand the sanctions exemptions on medicine and foodstuffs to also include financial transactions on these products. While this change may be difficult to design and implement, failure to revise the sanctions will enact brutal

costs on the Iranian people, and may generate more resentment against the West than against the policies of the Iranian regime.



U.S. Strategies for a Nuclear Iran

Conclusion

Years of negotiations between Iran and the international community have failed to end Iran's nuclear program. Never before, however, have the sanctions regime and international solidarity against Iran been so resolute. Military action against Iran will not stop its nuclear program, and will involve high costs and uncertain outcomes. A UNSC

authorization of force, which could provide military action some long-term benefits, is most likely unattainable. These factors, plus the pervasive law of unintended consequences, demonstrate the necessity to reserve military force as an instrument of last resort. The policy goal of preventing a nuclear-armed Iran cannot be guaranteed by military action,

and is best achieved by a carefully calculated continuation of the dual-track strategy. While the threat of force is an important deterrent, the U.S. should focus on sanctions and negotiations unless Iran leaves American leaders with no recourse other than military action.



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