

PREFACE

In his introduction to the September 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States, President George W. Bush wrote, "The gravest danger our Nation faces lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology. Our enemies have openly declared that they are seeking weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and evidence indicates that they are doing so with determination. . . . Terrorists are organized to penetrate open societies and to turn the power of modern technologies against us."

Iran is the poster-child for the nexus of terrorism and WMD. It is the world's foremost state-sponsor of terrorism, as well as one of the countries most actively pursuing nuclear weapons. Washington is vigilant about Iran's support for a network of Islamist terrorist organizations and persistent in pressing Iran to end its financial, political, material, and operational support to them. At the same time, the United States has to come up with effective strategies to ensure that Iran does not acquire nuclear weapons. Were Iran to acquire nuclear weapons, there is a grave risk it would be tempted to provide them to terrorists. After all, mass casualty terrorism done by proxies has worked well for Iran to date. Iranian assistance to the terrorists who blew up the U.S. and French barracks in Beirut in 1983 was a grand strategic success, forcing the United States, and for a while France, out of Lebanon while not bringing any retaliation down on Iran. Similarly, the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers barracks in Saudi Arabia caused the Saudis to make a strategic reconciliation, and, once again, Iran faced no retaliation.

The fear about what Iran might do with nuclear weapons is fed by the concern that Tehran has no clear reason to be pursuing nuclear weapons. The strategic rationale for Iran's nuclear program is by no means obvious. Unlike proliferators such as Israel or Pakistan, Iran faces no historic enemy who would welcome an opportunity to wipe the state off the face of the earth. Iran is encircled by troubled neighbors, but nuclear weapons do nothing to help counter the threats that could come from state collapse in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, or Azerbaijan. Instead, Iranian acquisition of nuclear

arms could set off a chain reaction—increased U.S. assets directed against Iran, active Israeli planning for Iran contingencies, and quite possibly nuclear proliferation by Iranian neighbors such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey—which would leave Iran worse off than if it had never developed nuclear arms. Instead of starting an arms race that it is certain to lose, Iran would be much better off strategically if it pressed for agreements to limit arms throughout the Gulf: to restrict the size of the new Iraqi army, to freeze and reduce the size of the Arab Gulf monarchies' militaries, and to phase down the size of the U.S. force in the area. However, Iran's leaders seem remarkably impervious to careful strategic thinking about international security; put another way, perhaps they are more driven by considerations of national prestige or domestic politics.

Hopefully European and American leaders will agree on how to proceed about Iran's nuclear program. To date, European leaders seem to concentrate on significant incentives ("bigger carrots") for responsible behavior to the near exclusion of threatening painful, punitive measures ("bigger sticks") for continued irresponsible behavior, while Americans do the reverse. It would be progress if each side more openly acknowledged that the most promising approach combines both carrots and sticks, and if each side more bluntly stated that it was prepared to consider using both instruments. That said, it is at least possible that, in the end, Europe will take the lead in offering Iran incentives while the United States takes the lead in threatening punitive measures.

Achieving trans-Atlantic consensus on how to respond to Iran's nuclear program will be difficult. This is a remarkably bad time for the international community to face the Iran nuclear problem, because the tensions about the Iraq WMD issue still poison relations and weaken U.S. ability to respond. Nevertheless, Iran's nuclear program poses a stark challenge to the international nonproliferation regime. The intelligence about the Iran threat is coming from a United Nations agency—namely, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)—and there is no doubt that Iran is developing worrisome capabilities. If the world community led by Western countries is unable to prevent Iranian proliferation, then it is unclear that there is much meaning to global nonproliferation norms.

Iran's nuclear program raises stark shortcomings with the global nonproliferation norms. The basic deal behind the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is that countries are allowed to acquire a wide range of troubling capabilities in return for being open and transparent. The NPT gives Iran every right to have a full closed fuel cycle, with large uranium enrichment facilities and a reprocessing plant that can extract substantial amounts of plutonium—capabilities which would permit Iran at any time to rapidly “break out” of the NPT, building a considerable number of nuclear weapons in a short time. Had Iran been fully transparent about its nuclear activities, then even if Iran had gone so far as to operate a full closed fuel cycle, the international community would have been split deeply about how to react. It is fortunate indeed that Iran decided to cheat on its NPT obligations by hiding some of what is doing, because that has made much easier the construction of an international consensus that Iran's nuclear program is troubling. But the experience with Iran should lead to reflection about whether the basic NPT deal needs to be revisited.

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