

INTRODUCTION

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Considering the latest Iranian nuclear developments, one might question whether a study now on how best to restrain Tehran is simply one that's come too late. To be sure, estimates vary as to when Iran could build its first bomb. Some believe Tehran could do it before the end of 2005; others think Iran would only be able to do so by the end of the decade. In either case, though, the die seems cast: If Iran wants, it has all that it needs eventually to build a bomb on its own. Certainly, trying to deny Iran further nuclear technology in the hopes that this will prevent it from getting nuclear weapons is no longer a credible strategy.

The questions this edited volume addresses are whether or not any strategy can prevent Iran from going nuclear, what the proper goals of such a strategy might be (detering use, keeping Tehran from deploying weapons, getting it to dismantle its nuclear program, etc.), and what other nonproliferation goals ought to be attempted (including trying to dissuade other nations from following Iran's example). The answers this volume offers are: 1) in the long-run Iran will gain little from going nuclear, and 2) much can be gained by enforcing the nonproliferation rules Iran agreed to and spelling out the costs to Iran of its continuing acquisition of nuclear weapons-related capabilities.

The book's seven chapters were commissioned as the first of a two-part Nonproliferation Policy Education Center (NPEC) project on Iran supported by the Smith Richardson Foundation and the Office of Net Assessment within the Department of Defense. The project's interim conclusions and policy recommendations are contained in this book's first chapter, "Checking Iran's Nuclear Ambitions." The key point made here is that whatever is done to keep Iran from proceeding with its nuclear program should be done with a eye toward deterring other states, including Iran's neighbors, from following Tehran's example of using the NPT and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to get within weeks of having a large

arsenal of nuclear weapons. The details of just how Iran has been able to do this are spelled out in the book's second chapter, "Iran's 'Legal' Paths to the Bomb," by former U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commissioner Victor Gilinsky. In this chapter, Mr. Gilinsky details how Iran can use Bushehr and its "civilian" uranium enrichment program to come within weeks of having dozens of bombs even while being intrusively inspected by the IAEA.

Would Iran ever actually deploy nuclear weapons though? Much depends on one's read of just how long-lived and truculent the current regime is. These issues are taken up in the volume's next two chapters. In "Iran's Internal Struggles," Genieve Abdo, an internationally recognized observer of Iranian politics, argues that the revolutionary government is unlikely to be overthrown anytime soon and that it will persist in its hostile foreign policies. Rob Sobhani, a leading American-Iranian commentator, however, argues that with sufficient U.S. support of the right sort, the current government in Iran could give way to a far more liberal and peaceable regime. But what is the "right" kind of support? Abbas William Samii, Radio Free Europe's Iranian broadcast analyst, explores this question in chapter 5, "Winning Iranian Hearts and Minds." Although Mr. Samii does not rule out speedy regime change, he warns that it is not likely and that for that reason, the United States needs to have a long-term outreach program that will encourage a more favorable opinion of the United States among the general Iranian population.

This, then, raises the question of timing. If favorable regime change may not come before Iran acquires nuclear weapons or the ability to quickly acquire them, what other course of action might the United States and its allies take to influence Iranian decisionmakers? One course would be to try to cut Iran a deal. As former U.S. National Security Council staffer and Nixon Center Middle East expert Geoffrey Kemp explains in chapter 6, the history of such efforts has been mixed. Mr. Kemp, though, argues that circumstances now might actually be ripe for fruitful negotiations. And what if they are not? In the book's final chapter, Michael Eisenstadt, the Washington Institute's Gulf security analyst, raises the veil on what might be the last resort--military action. In his chapter, "The Challenges of U.S. Preventive Military Action," Mr. Eisenstadt details the various risks

associated with both overt and covert military attacks against Iran's nuclear program.

None of the most popular policy options, in short, are sure bets; all are fraught with dangers. This is why it is critical to make sure that Iran at least understands that it will not be rewarded or given a pass on its pursuit of worrisome nuclear activities. In the first instance this means that the United States and its allies must make full use of existing restraints against nuclear weapons proliferation--the IAEA and the NPT--to make sure Iran does not become a model of how to exploit the rules, but rather an example of what happens to states that bend or flaunt them. Beyond this, the United States and its allies must make clear what Iran can expect if it continues its nuclear power program--even if within the legal letter of the IAEA Statute--and how much better Iran's future would be if it terminated its program and cut its ties to terrorists, who might otherwise gain access to the nuclear know-how Iran has already mastered.

In the end, of course, diplomacy is meaningless unless it is backed by the prospect of force. Cooperative military planning, creating new security arrangements, covert military actions, defense cooperation and transfers that are aimed at limiting the harm Iran's nuclear activities might otherwise pose will all soon become urgent matters. What specifically needs to be done will be more fully detailed upon completion of this project's second phase, later in 2004.