



The William S. Cohen Center for International Policy & Commerce

***Nuclear Weapons and the Middle East Region:
A New Round of Proliferation?***

Conference Proceedings*

On March 6-7, 2007, the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University in partnership with the William S. Cohen Center for International Policy and Commerce at the University of Maine and the Near East-South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, organized a major international conference to examine the prospects for wider proliferation of nuclear technology and weapons in the Middle East. Regional, policy, and technical experts from the United States and the Middle East focused their attention on the models for achieving nuclear weapons status, Iran's nuclear ambitions, the likelihood that Iran's progress would stimulate a new generation of proliferators, and options for U.S. and regional policymakers to deter future proliferators.

The conference was opened by former Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, who reminded the participants that we live in a world where non-state actors have access to weapons of mass destruction, and, not just nation states. "Deterrence," he noted, "works with other super powers, but deterrence doesn't work against terrorists." He called on policymakers to expand the perimeter of American security by adopting defensive measures to promote counter-proliferation, work on vaccines to counter biological attacks, and if Iran achieves nuclear weapons, create a web of security assurances in the Gulf to increase regional cooperation. He also called for offensive measures, including an increase in our capabilities to share and gather intelligence both within the U.S. and with partners overseas, and increased application of pressure on Iran through the United Nations. "The U.S. needs the UN to back up its resolution, because the U.S. cannot go it alone," he warned, "U.S. credibility and legitimacy are already in jeopardy around the world."

Lessons Learned on the Path to Proliferation

Over the past decade the U.S. has attempted to prevent, counter, roll-back, or at least delay efforts by states determined to acquire nuclear weapons capability. To create effective countermeasures, several questions need to be answered. What causes states to pursue a nuclear weapons capability? What lessons are to be learned from the "successes" of those who have already crossed the nuclear threshold? How are U.S. nuclear policies and actions

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toward proliferators regarded by those who have the capability and those who want it? One proliferation specialist doubted much could be learned from past lessons on pathways to proliferation, because each situation is unique. Countries seek nuclear weapons on the belief that they are essential for national interests. This means security primarily, but also status and prestige. For Israel, Pakistan and North Korea, nuclear weapons are seen as necessary to deter existential threats. For Libya and Iraq, nuclear weapons were seen as a means to assert national pride, secure the regime, dominate a region, and enhance national stature. External pressure (Taiwan), a change in leadership (South Africa and Brazil), or a calculation that the risks are too costly can change a government's decision to acquire nuclear capabilities.

Most conference participants expressed the view that prestige and regional influence are important factors in Iran's determination to acquire nuclear status. Iranian officials and experts, however, say the primary reason is defensive. One participant reported that in his private conversations with Iranian officials, Japan is used as the example, "we need to be a country with an advanced civil nuclear program that has a latent nuclear weapons capability." Several participants noted that Iran believes nuclear weapons are necessary to assert its status as a great civilization and a great power and to make the Islamic republic more popular with the Iranian people. Achieving status as a nuclear power not only develops national pride; it provides the bargaining power necessary for survival.

Another expert described *India* as a unique case because, unlike most Middle Eastern countries (apart from Israel), it is not party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. India's strong scientific establishment and the rise of the conservative Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party to power led India to change its policy and develop nuclear weapons. India accepted short-term condemnation in exchange for long-term prestige. Two years after testing the bomb, President Clinton made an official visit to India and, more recently, the U.S. used the fact that India has not violated the NPT, to which it never belonged, as a rationale for exploring improved bilateral relations and award India a civilian nuclear deal. India, she concluded, has accrued a number of privileges since declaring itself a nuclear power but, she warned, it has not fully realized all the responsibilities inherent in being a nuclear power. Iran might think that it can break out of perpetual second-class nation status as India did, but then Iran would be ignoring the way the U.S. has drawn a careful distinction with India.

A specialist on *Pakistan's* nuclear programs noted that arguments in favor of attaining nuclear weapons become myths within a society. Some myths are insidious and hard to uproot, such as nuclear weapons bring security, status, prestige and, most troubling of all, a tool for populist governments to win popular support. Other myths suggest you can influence and thereby delay development; these include the myth that nuclear weapons are useable politically and strategically. A highly motivated state will develop nuclear weapons if it believes in their political utility and can get away with it. In Pakistan, the myth of the strategic utility of nuclear weapons was suppressed until the major loss in the 1971 war with India coupled with Bangladeshi independence. After that, so much became invested in nuclear myths that no one could turn back. Pakistan's experience in initiating, developing, overseeing, and ultimately losing control of its nuclear weapons program provides important lessons for efforts to understand and counter Iran's attempt to develop nuclear weapons.

Have these myths become institutionalized in Iran, the Pakistan researcher wondered. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey have not yet reached that threshold, so now is the time to influence those countries. Once a country has turned that corner, the more foreign pressure you apply, the more a country's nuclear program goes underground, the more they will rely on secrecy, compartmentalization, deception and denial, and the more opportunities are lost to turn them around. Today's arms race, he opined, is not in terms of quantity of armaments, but rather in terms of survivability. This expert warned, "When a country feels under international pressure, it seeks out individuals and entrusts them with compartmentalized secrets." This was the case of A.Q. Khan, who paid higher prices on the black market but obtained for his government the nuclear weapons it was determined to have. The Pakistan government placed great trust in Khan, and the result was a loss of control over his activities. You could, he concluded, have this problem with Iran.

North Korea was the final model examined. A scholar described North Koreans as proud and nationalistic. They believe that no nuclear state has ever been attacked by another state, and they fear an American invasion. Moreover, they saw the attention and prestige the United States granted India and Pakistan in the late 1990s. Today, North Korea appears to have a nuclear arsenal, and there is probably little the international community can do to change its assumptions or patterns of behavior. In her opinion, North Korea will always value a nuclear deterrent. The international community—including Japan, the U.S., China and South Korea—failed to establish "red lines" with North Korea, so the best that can be hoped for today is to pay North Korea to (temporarily) freeze its program. Ultimately, she concluded, neither China nor anyone else can truly pressure North Korea, because the North Korean people are used to abject poverty and the government feels no qualms about starving the people.

Factors Driving Iran's Nuclear Ambitions

Iran's nuclear research plans and programs are more than 20 years old, but it is only in the last few years that evidence has surfaced of how much progress Iran has made and what Iran wants to accomplish once it has mastered the full nuclear fuel cycle, particularly uranium enrichment. Most experts agree that the Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to possess the entire process, which would make it, at minimum, a virtual nuclear power. Would a non-Islamic Republic of Iran pursue nuclear weapons? How strong is popular support for an Iranian bomb? What disincentives could dissuade Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons? What broader strategic trends should we anticipate over the next decade?

Scholars of Iran defined four strategic goals in the country's pursuit of nuclear power: to neutralize the ability of the U.S. to isolate or contain Iran; to create spheres of influence in the neighborhood and the wider Middle East; to protect Iranian political independence and territorial integrity; and to enable the regime to survive. They agreed that decision making in the Islamic Republic is by consensus and that there is no single perspective on this critical issue. Rather, most see two competing trends: the extreme nationalist approach, as represented by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who seems to prefer constant confrontation with the world; and the pragmatic approach personified by Expediency Council head and former President Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, who argues that Iran should be a normal member of the international community. When the Iranians decided to start uranium enrichment, Supreme Leader Khamenei, Rafsanjani, and even reformist

President Khatami made it clear the nuclear decision was a collective decision. Neither the President nor the Supreme Leader can unilaterally change policy; even if Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad disagree on the tactics of nuclear policy, they will not make their differences public. Iran has no territorial ambitions, but it does have a vision of its indisputable role as an emerging world power, the most important player in the greater Middle East, and the most important source of energy in the world. A senior Iranian official stated this in blunt terms earlier this year when he said, “Today, Iran’s identity has become intertwined with the region. The U.S. seeks to contain Iran. It is our undisputed right to become a regional power.”

The scholars described Iran’s political system as “organized chaos.” Clerics and non-clerics in government do not trust each other. More importantly, Iran’s political clerics, such as the Supreme Leader, his associates and the majority of Parliament, know that the public, which is young and increasingly secular, has no memory of the revolution and no respect for the clerics.¹² They are, in fact, moving away from cleric-dominated politics. Iran’s leaders see the nuclear issue reversing this trend and building consensus among their young secular critics. One scholar described this as “nuclear nationalism” and said the imagery of Iran as a nuclear power is fast becoming an institutionalized myth; speakers in elementary school talk about nuclear programs and students are assigned homework on nuclear enrichment. Iran’s leaders also feel threatened by the perception of weakness. They see the image of Iran as a world-class nuclear power as a positive achievement that signals that the regime is strong and will survive. At the same time, the regime seeks to isolate its domestic critics and promote its supporters according to their stance on the nuclear issue.

Iran’s leaders, according to the speakers, see Iran as a beleaguered state and the United States as an existential threat. They see the violence in Iraq, the spread of sectarian conflict to the predominantly Sunni provinces of Kurdistan, Baluchistan and Khuzestan, and the rise of anti-Shia Wahhabi or Sunni Arab *salafiyism* as part of a grand U.S. conspiracy to overthrow their regime and prevent Iran from becoming a regional power. According to one scholar, Iran’s armed forces and the Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) in particular, take the threat from the U.S. very seriously and believe the only way to fight back against the U.S. is to develop nuclear power. If there is a plan to build a bomb, this scholar says, it is motivated by fear of the U.S. and not national pride. The scholar warned that the U.S. should not underestimate the Iranian potential desire to develop a nuclear bomb for purely security concerns.

Iran’s leaders, in this expert’s view, are determined to break the trans-Atlantic alliance against its nuclear ambitions and to make its domestic opponents pay a high price for concessions. Ahmadinejad is transforming the issue into a matter of national pride so that no future government will be able to back down from nuclear power. An example is a new paper currency with a picture of Ayatollah Khomeini on one side and the nuclear symbol on the other.

Regional Responses to a “Nuclear-Ready” Iran

¹ Nearly 60 percent of Iran’s population is under the age of 30.

How will other regional states react to a nuclear-ready Iran? What are the choices—get our own, ignore Iran, seek protection from outside the region and over the horizon, or live with it? Would the reaction differ if they believed Iran’s goal was nuclear energy rather than nuclear weapons? What incentives or disincentives might persuade a government from pursuing nuclear energy or arms capabilities?

A specialist on counter-proliferation measures noted that since the 1950s, 18 governments have agreed to roll-back their nuclear programs while 5 governments became nuclear capable. Shifts in nuclear intentions are neither inevitable nor accidental. They are triggered by many factors, foreign pressure, loss of security, impediments to development, personal leadership, careful management by allies, and a strong U.S. presence in the process. A perceived shift in U.S. policy can trigger increased interest in nuclear weapons and U.S. intelligence and international monitoring expose covert nuclear weapons activities. Rollback is a process, not an outcome. Countries use “hedging” to keep options open and establish interim decision points.

Citing a study of potential proliferators by the NDU Center for the Study of Counter-proliferation, the expert identified Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Turkey as being the most likely to opt for nuclear development.³ Spokesmen for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) say nuclear power plants could be in the GCC countries by 2009; the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) says Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt are interested in nuclear energy. These potential proliferators would be reacting to a sense of increased risk from Iran as well as to moves by each other. Other factors affecting governments’ decisions to acquire nuclear weapons include waning U.S. influence in the region and popular support for nuclear programs. She speculated that the new proliferators could form nuclear partnerships with each other and other nuclear powers and suppliers, such as North Korea, China, and Pakistan.

Not all the regional experts agreed with the conclusions of the NDU study. One scholar said that states in the region fear an Iran that has coercive power with nuclear weapons at the same time they see U.S. influence decreasing. He believes some of the governments of the 6 GCC countries will pursue nuclear weapons because their domestic security situation is deteriorating. Absent a transformation of the regional security environment, one scholar observed, states in the region will arm even if it undermines them. Three issues affect the nuclear debate in the GCC states: the absence of mechanisms to address regional conflict; the existence of nuclear armed states in the neighborhood; and GCC states’ conventional military weakness despite investing copious amounts of money in military hardware. The last is particularly significant; prodigious expenditures on military hardware has not resulted in credible conventional military capabilities because of the well-founded fear that the creation of a capable military institution produces an alternative power structure to the familial and tribal patronage institutions that dominate politics in these societies. A strong

³ The study focused on nuclear rollback and examined capability and intent assessments of all states that have pursued and abandoned nuclear weapons programs. It used a combination of traditional research and computer-based decision tools to collect and analyze expert opinion to determine the factors likely to influence states to pursue or forgo nuclear weapons over the next five years. The cases studies included Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Libya, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

military can create an alternative internal power structure, one scholar noted, but it can also create incentives for a nuclear program.

Domestic constituencies in *Saudi Arabia* are pushing King Abdullah to make Saudi Arabia a bulwark against Iranian and Shia ambitions and to distance the country from the U.S.'s failing policies, lack of regional leadership, and eroding position in the region. As in the case of Iran, energy specialists and politicians think Saudi Arabia is posturing on nuclear power to pressure the U.S. But what if this assumption is wrong? For example, water will run out soon in all the GCC countries and desalinization plants are a massive drain on energy sources.

Turkey is also changing its views on how best to meet its security needs, according to a Turkish scholar. A pro-Western, Sunni country with a secular political tradition since 1923, Turkey should be strongly opposed to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Turks, however, increasingly resent the European Union because of members' growing opposition to Turkish accession, and demands that Ankara institute widespread political reforms. Turks believe that at most they will be offered second-class "privileged partnership" in the EU, which would be neither a privilege nor a true partnership. They also fear that the EU will support Kurdish demands for civil rights and even autonomy in Turkey, which many Turks believe will lead to the country's partition.

At the same time, Turkey's relations with its long-time ally, the United States, are deteriorating because of U.S. policy in Iraq, Iraqi Kurdish aspirations, and the possible passage of a Congressional resolution recognizing the Armenian genocide of 1915. The inability or unwillingness of the U.S. to curb Iraqi Kurdish ambitions or contain PKK terrorists operating from northern Iraq could result in Turkish loss of trust in the U.S. and a foreign policy less in line with U.S. interests. One expert claimed that within some elite circles in Turkey, the talk is more about closer relations with Russia and the Middle East, as a counter-balance to the West. In his opinion, these shifts in the Turkish worldview reflect growing nationalism, not a surge of Islamist thinking. Turkey has little interest in enforcing international sanctions against Iran. In the near term, most Turks are less concerned about Iranian development of nuclear weapons than they are about the impact of possible U.S. military strikes that would destabilize Iran and create greater Kurdish problems. In addition to \$7 billion trade with Iran and a pipeline deal, senior Iranian officials have proposed a joint military operation against the PKK in northern Iraq. Turkish leaders profess no interest in a nuclear weapons program, and support a nuclear-free Middle East.

Syria has a strategic alliance with Iran and supports its nuclear efforts under Article 6 of the NPT, which allows development of peaceful, nuclear energy. According to an expert on Syria, the country does not perceive any threat from a nuclear-armed Iran, but it does feel a threat from Israel and views a nuclear Iran as an effective deterrent to Israel. Damascus first developed a nuclear program in the 1980s, but it was too costly financially and was soon abandoned. Instead, Damascus is widely believed to have developed an advanced chemical and small biological weapons programs, producing significant amounts of sarin gas, VX mustard gas, and anthrax. Syria has paid a high price for its chemical weapons, including U.S. sanctions, but is unlikely to give them up so long as Israel possesses nuclear weapons. Syria has learned one lesson, however, that *fait d'accomplis*

produce a superior bargaining position. The primary incentive for Syria to stop producing chemical weapons is a peace with Israel that leads to Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. This assessment could change if the Asad regime were replaced by a Sunni-radical, Muslim Brotherhood government.

Left unspoken was the likelihood that *Iraq* would once again seek nuclear weapons. The ostensible reason for Iran's embarking on a nuclear weapons program in the 1980s, few now see Iraq as a potential proliferator. This may be short-term conventional wisdom, but in the long-term, when Iraq has stabilized and resumed a unitary national existence, then the possibility that Baghdad would once again seek nuclear weapons increases, especially if Iran and the other neighbors are nuclear powers.

Egypt cannot disregard what Iran is doing, according to an Egyptian scholar. Iran and Egypt have had troubled relations since 1979. In his view, Iran's actions are a threat to Egyptian national security, but he admitted there is no consensus in Egypt on this. Some Egyptian public opinion polls see Iran as a threat, others as an ally. He described dialogue with Iran as "very strange."

"We meet in academic dialogues on occasion. The Iranians want to talk about things like 'Egypt and Iran are the two oldest powers of the region and we need to divide up our influence in the Gulf.' We tell them we want to meet to discuss strategic issues, and instead they simply offer us visitor tours of their nuclear facility. We met very moderate people in the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but it seems that there are many different groups and no one group seems to represent those who are making the decisions. You can't find anyone who represents Iran truly."

The scholar noted that Egyptians are talking about reactivating their nuclear program in light of Iranian advances. He also said Egypt would not want to be left behind again if there were a new wave of civilian nuclear proliferation. Egypt also faces rising oil prices, increased energy subsidies, and a weak economy, and some see civilian nuclear programs as solving Egypt's economic woes. Like his Syrian counterpart, he voiced concern about what might happen if a group like the Muslim Brotherhood took power in Egypt.

Israeli Strategic Perspectives and Tactical Options

Israel sees a nuclear-armed Iran as an existential threat to its survival. The specter of an Israeli pre-emptive strike on Iranian nuclear targets haunts many in the region. How will Israel respond to its neighbors' quest for technologies and capabilities similar to those of Iran? Is Israel's only option pre-emptive military attack? What incentives might change Israeli determination to prevent Iran or any other country from "going nuclear?" Is the Begin Doctrine of "Never again" still an operational policy? Would a different government in Jerusalem have a different nuclear outlook and policy?

In the event of a nuclear armed Iran, *Israel* will have two challenges: to convince Iran of the destructive nature of nuclear warfare in order to deter Iran, and to deal with the strategic political repercussions of a nuclear-armed, religiously-fanatic regime in Iran,

according to an Israeli researcher. Nuclear ambiguity has served Israel well over the past five decades, but Israel may need to abandon its ambiguous nuclear status for an overt one to convince Iran that it has a second-strike capability. This researcher admitted that it is hard to ignore the language of Iran when it threatens Israel and hard to see Iran considering striking a country that is considered to have nuclear weapons.

The Israeli specialist described two theories about state behavior once it acquires nuclear capabilities. One theory states that a nation moderates its policies as its leaders come to understand the responsibilities of having nuclear weapons. The other theory says that nuclear capability increases self confidence and creates feelings of impunity which lead to more aggressive policies and actions. He predicted that a nuclear-armed Iran acting with increased confidence and a sense of impunity would be much more aggressive with Israel. He agreed with the Iranian scholars that it was most likely Iran would use proxies and asymmetric warfare if it were attacked.

What are Israel's options? The researcher noted that the Begin Doctrine of *Never Again* (applied to the Israeli preemptive strike on Iraq's nuclear facility in 1981) is still valid but is not an automatic response. Factors such as feasibility of an attack, chance of success, military capabilities, and the risk that an attack will only delay in their program need to be considered. It is one thing to consider the consequences of a nuclear Iran, but quite another to act if, say, Egypt were to acquire nuclear weapons. Would Israel attack Egypt? He thought not.

Deterrence remains Israel's most viable option, according to this presenter. U.S. security guarantees would be necessary should Israel decide on a pre-emptive attack on Iran, but Israelis see the U.S. as only one additional factor in its strategic thinking. Such guarantees are expensive and may not be worth the effort. Israel has no confidence in Iran participating honestly in a Weapons Free Zone, so the time is not right to discuss the idea. The researcher speculated that the Arab states will have a tough time knowing that the only two nuclear powers in the region are non-Arab. He noted that some in Israel support the idea of Israel joining NATO, but in his opinion, extended deterrence is just not credible. Would the U.S. risk New York, or would NATO risk London or Berlin, for Tel Aviv?

Israel may have one additional option—cooperation with moderate states in the region. Turkey, Israel and some Arab states are already talking, the researcher claimed, and Israel understands it will have to pay price to facilitate cooperation. He listed some positive incentives Israel could offer, including giving up control over some aspects of the Palestinian conflict and concluding an agreement with Syria, to get greater cooperation from Saudi Arabia, Turkey and other Arab countries in countering proliferation and the Iranian threat. A nuclear-armed Iran will enjoy increased popularity on the Arab street, he predicted, and Iran will be in a better position to strengthen its proxies against Israel.

Finally, the researcher did not see an arms control agreement or declaring the region a nuclear-arms free zone as options for Israel. Israel, he said, does not think about nuclear disarmament. Its strategy has been based on nuclear weapons as a deterrent to hostile states. He suggested, however, that Israel reconsider supporting a fissile material cutoff agreement, which in his opinion would stop production and increase monitoring. He reminded the participants that in Israel nuclear policies are not a partisan matter. Although

the Israeli government at present is weak, he did not see any political changes having meaningful effect on how the state deals with a nuclear-armed Iran.

A Look Ahead: Change of Policy or Change of Regime?

How should the U.S. react to decisions by non-nuclear Middle East governments to acquire nuclear “capability” (including weapons)? What are American options: learn to live with this situation, expand defense agreements and security guarantees, or seek to isolate the offending government with sanctions and threats of regime change? What are Iran’s options? How can we monitor or ensure compliance by those in the region who have nuclear capability and those wanting it? Under what circumstances might the U.S. be able to live with a nuclear-armed Iran and nuclear-arming neighbors?

Experts on American non-proliferation policy expressed great consternation over the options facing Washington and Tehran and how well these options are understood in each capital. The declared public policies seem clear enough, they stated, but uncertainty reins in the debates within both governments regarding options and actual intent. Both the United States and Iran are determined to pursue what they see as their rightful, legitimate, and national security interests. Washington has said all options are on the table and it will not tolerate a nuclear-armed Iran, a statement that might allow for civilian nuclear energy programs but clearly not a nuclear weapons program. Iranian leaders state clearly that no one can deny what is Iran’s national right to provide for its people and its defense. In Iran, one group of policy-makers and Khamenei’s advisor on these issues recently said that “everything can be negotiated.” The issue in both capitals is compounded by the nature of the internal political debate and looming presidential and parliamentary elections in both countries in 2008.

One expert on American non-proliferation policy noted that the U.S. Administration has confused tactics and strategy with regard to Iran because it cannot decide whether to work to change Iran’s policies or change the regime. Shortly after 9/11, the Bush Administration stated explicitly that deterrence will not work against rogue states willing to transfer WMD to non-state actors. Bush Administration linkage of nuclear threat to regime type, with the threat deriving from the character of the regime, redefined U.S. proliferation policy; coercive regime change rather than non-proliferation strategies became the means to keep capabilities out of the hands of irresponsible states and non-state actors. This new pre-emption strategy placed the emphasis on coercive non-proliferation through regime change rather than on non-proliferation. But, the expert argued, a country’s intention, not its type of regime, is the key factor in proliferation.

In the past few years, the scholar continued, we have seen non-proliferation through regime change in Iraq and non-proliferation from policy change (not regime change) in Libya. U.S. policy ambivalence is further reflected in the recent deals with North Korea and India. Iran’s program is not as far along as North Korea, but it is considered the greater threat. Can these examples provide any guidance for future policy? Probably not, according to this scholar. American military options are constrained and conditions that obtained in 1981 when the Israelis attacked the Iraqi Osirak nuclear facility—i.e., good intelligence and no Iraqi retaliatory capability—are not present in this case. He argued that the option of economic sanctions while taking regime change off the table would put more

pressure on Iran to change policy. So long as the U.S. keeps threatening regime change, he noted, Iran will never be fully isolated in the international community. Iran is vulnerable to economic coercion, but international support for tough measures is not possible if regime change is on the table. He suggested that the U.S. test Iran by offering credible assurances of regime security. He was uncertain, however, if after years of talk of coercive policy, any such assurances would be credibly viewed in Tehran.

Another proliferation expert argued that it was still possible to head off the Iranian bomb and he believed U.S. action would help Iranian leaders think twice about nuclear weapons. He questioned what Iranians meant by acquisition and what their decisions on deployment, control and doctrine, and usage really signify. It is clear, he said, “that countries build the bomb and work out the doctrine afterwards.” Will Iran use its new nuclear bomb for low level actions (as Pakistan did over Kashmir); will it be a security blanket (as the Israelis say, “The bomb is warm comfort on cold nights.”); or will it be used for political advantage, as a means of influence over neighbors (as the Soviet Union used the bomb in the 1950s).

This expert defined the U.S. strategy as containment of Iran’s adventurism and proliferation, isolation to make Iran pay in terms of sanctions, and engagement to work with Iran for deterrence. “The U.S.,” he argued, “can not live in a world where small nations use nuclear threats against the U.S. or its friends.” We need to make clear, he said, that “we will stand by our allies, we will hold Tehran responsible for any attack and we will respond with overwhelming force.” Iran has to be punished for violating the NPT. This scholar suggested letting Pakistan work with Iran to teach it how to secure its arsenal and maintain control over arms; strengthening NATO and re-affirming Article 5 (mutual support) to include any Iranian threat to Turkey. The U.S. needs to provide quiet and private assurances to our Arab allies and to Israel. He also urged the U.S. to visibly deploy military assets, nuclear and non-nuclear, demonstrate their capabilities, be prepared to escalate decisively in case of an Iranian threat, and engage in nuclear disarmament with the Russians and Chinese.

Another scholar expressed the view that the Administration does not want war with Iran, but is creating cross-signals that may be undercutting its efforts. The broad carrot and stick approach is working, he said, even if the Administration is not forthcoming in defining the carrots and does not limit the sticks. “We and our allies do not have the will to take away Iran’s program,” he claimed, “so our only option is to convince Iran to give it up.” Even limited sanctions are forcing leaders in Tehran to choose between nuclear weapons and their economy. But he did not expect Tehran to give up its program, and he conceded that the U.S. “may have to fall back on granting Iran a pilot program and work on an inspections regime. After that, we can fall back on having to live with a nuclear Iran.” Because Iran does not pose an existential threat to the U.S., he suggested the Administration think harder about containment as well as some sort of security architecture, like the OSCE, with Iran and the Middle East region that could possibly lead to arms control talks.

The first step, this expert argued, would be “a comprehensive peace between Israel and the Arab states just to get to the goal of the Arabs talking with us.” He agreed that all options, including the military option, ought to be on the table even while we pursue a containment

policy. If Iran does not want to participate, then this security architecture becomes a method to contain Iran. In the end, the far right wing of the political spectrum in Tehran has to lose the nuclear debate in that country, but in his opinion, that part of Iran's political spectrum will never give up nuclear ambitions. He noted in closing that economic sanctions seem to be convincing other parts of the Iranian political spectrum, and suggested, "Our strategy has to be to capture enough of the political spectrum so that they isolate the right wing and they lose the debate." There is the potential for a very intrusive inspections regime to keep up enough pressure, coupled with sanctions, all of which could lead to a political reversal on proliferation.

The experts agreed that Iran's preferred option is to have all the necessary technology on hand to produce a nuclear weapon at will overnight. This goal will, in their collective opinion, take years to develop, but Iran is gaining confidence in its international dealings and would no longer accept a deal involving suspending or rolling back its programs. One expert speculated that Iran might accept international inspections, but if faced with severe external pressure, it would go further underground and rush the program. He also thought that getting Iran to accept intrusive inspections is hardly possible when the U.S. is in such a weak bargaining position. Once a country has nuclear weapons, he opined, "It is impossible to get it to give them up. I don't think there's any way to convince the public to limit their program." Demanding Iran completely stop its nuclear activity before any negotiations take place is also a complete non-starter for Iran, the experts said.

With the possible exception of the Israelis, the participants did not believe a nuclear-armed Iran would attack Israel. The Iranian specialists agreed that if attacked by Israel or the United States, Iran would retaliate at a time and in a place of its choosing. They predicted a calculated, decisive, protracted, and asymmetric retaliation that would not use conventional weapons. One scholar warned, "There can be no limited war with Iran. Either all-out or not at all. If there is an attack, young Iranians will form a new movement as a reaction that will be more aggressive than the current Islamic Republic." Another scholar described Ahmadinejad's calculated strategy; Ahmadinejad, he observed, is trying to provoke Israel into a massive blunder, such as a pre-emptive military strike. Negotiating through European intermediaries is over. Europe has exhausted what it can do and lost credibility. The U.S., one scholar concluded, has to offer direct negotiations. Another scholar concluded, "I don't think Iran has made the strategic decision to make the bomb. I think they are close to making that decision. The longer we wait, the harder it will be for Tehran to decide to halt the program."

What could go wrong?

In closing, a senior Middle East expert with policy making and intelligence experience, noted what could go wrong with the assumptions of conference participants. He focused on 5 issues:

- ***Intelligence:*** "It is difficult to get intelligence right," he observed. Assumptions on when Iraq would have nuclear weapons were wrong and preparations for nuclear tests in India were missed by intelligence analysts. Most experts who look at Iran's program believe there is a secret military effort underway alongside the civilian effort, but none have much knowledge about this secret

military program. Everyone agrees that better intelligence gathering on Iran is urgently needed. The good news is that the Director of National Intelligence has made Iran a top intelligence priority. The bad news is that the last 10 Directors of Central Intelligence also made this a top priority.

- ***Terrorism.*** Most people probably assume that an Iranian terror operation against the U.S. is unlikely right now. Why, they ask, would Iran attack the U.S. at a time when the risk of confrontation is already high? But we need to ask why Iran attacked the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996, and why Iran supported Hizballah operations against Israeli targets in Buenos Aires in 1992? Did they really think that by sponsoring these operations, they could drive the U.S. out of the Middle East and get us to abandon our relationship with Saudi Arabia? Or consider the possibility that today al-Qaeda might launch a false flag operation intended to implicate Iran. Who in Washington would say that Iran had nothing to do with it? How would the U.S. respond to such a provocation except in military terms? Should such an event happen we would need to have 100 percent certitude. In the Khobar Towers event, it took more than 12 months before we had proof of Iranian involvement; in the Pan Am 107 operation, we spent an entire year investigating the wrong country.
- ***Iraq:*** Here, the dominant issue is not what could go wrong; it is what won't go wrong. If Iraq continues to descend further into civil war and partition, will the U.S. and Iran be able to avoid confrontation in dealing with that reality. Iran's primary goal in Iraq is to see America fail. If Iran is supplying Iraqi insurgents with large numbers of weapons, then it may have decided to ensure that failure happens. Can the U.S. respond to increased Iranian meddling in Iraq without destroying the Maliki government in the process? It is no accident that the Maliki government pleaded for an international conference on Iraq as soon as the U.S. started making allegations of Iranian involvement in the civil war.
- ***Israel.*** There are circumstances in which Israel may decide that it will have to act unilaterally. Chances of such a decision increase if a hard-liner becomes the next prime minister but, in any case, we have to consider how any Israeli government thinks about American intentions and resolve. Can you imagine a debate between those saying time is running out and it is better to attack Iran now when 200,000 American troops are on Iran's borders, then to wait to 2009, when the most likely winning candidate in the presidential election will be bringing the troops home? Israel, in other words, needs to think about many windows of opportunity and not just its estimate on when Iran will get a nuclear bomb.
- ***War between the U.S. and Iran:*** Assuming we know where most of Iran's nuclear program is, a military campaign will require weeks or months, and not days. It would entail significant damage to Iran's nuclear program and other important parts of its military infrastructure. Iran has considerable capacity to retaliate for such a military operation, most easily in Iraq, but also in Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf, the wider Middle East region, Europe and probably in the United States. Collateral damage would also be considerable.

Certainly, any Shi'a government in Baghdad would collapse within hours of the beginning of such a war; it simply could not decide which of its 2 most important allies to support; oil prices would spike even if not one oil tanker were hit or obstructed; and we would probably see a resumption of war in the Galilee and serious instability in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, and other parts of the Persian/Arabian peninsula where Shi'a populations are concentrated and unhappy.

There are, the speaker continued, some important lessons from history. If the Shah had survived the 1978 revolution and turned power over to his son in 1980, then the Pahlavi dynasty would still rule in Tehran and Iran would almost certainly have nuclear weapons by now. The Shah began the nuclear program in the 1950s and 60s, ordered the reactors we've been trying to prevent Iran from getting, and almost certainly would believe nuclear weapons as being in Iran's strategic interests. There is a very good chance that Iran would have tested nuclear weapons in the 1980s, as it saw Iraq's program mature or at latest in 1988 when it saw its neighbor Pakistan test. History reminds us that Iran wants nuclear weapons for strategic and geopolitical reasons that transcend time and regime change. It also tells us that the chances of stopping Iran's nuclear weapons program are slim. "Delay is possible," the speaker opined, "but absolute denial is impossible. Almost any conceivable government in Iran will want a nuclear deterrent or be able to get one quickly if it ever is in extremis."

Finally, every president since 1979, from Carter and Reagan through Bush and Clinton, has pursued a policy of containment and engagement with Iran. They did not all call it engagement and containment but, in practice, they all carried it out. If you examine our policy over the last 30 years, we have not done badly. The Islamic revolution has been contained in Iran and Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons has been delayed. Time has not yet finally run out, but the U.S. needs to be realistic on what the end game is going to be. No Iranian government is going to forswear completely the possibility of having the Japanese option, which is to be able to put a bomb together overnight if they really have to do so.

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