

5

MOVING BEYOND COERCIVE DIPLOMACY: A NEW POLICY APPROACH TOWARD IRAN'S NUCLEAR AMBITIONS

Brandon M. Boylan

This article reviews recent coercive measures taken by the United States in order to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons and argues that an engagement policy is more likely to achieve success. Coercive approaches have included threatening a military strike, levying UN sanctions, and supporting EU economic offers, but they have not been successful in encouraging Iran to change its present course. Although the current administration is pursuing an engagement policy, it is more likely to achieve success if it articulates its approach with more substance and precision. This should consist of two dimensions. Firstly, the United States should encourage Russia to be at the forefront of diplomatic efforts since its strategic position to both the United States and Iran makes it an appropriate mediator on the nuclear issue. Secondly, the United States must strengthen its democracy promotion efforts directly among the Iranian people, which will reinforce the democratic movement in Iran in the long run.

INTRODUCTION

Iran's nuclear brinkmanship cannot be sustained much longer. The Iranian

Brandon Boylan is a Ph.D. Student in the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh.

government continues to evade nuclear inspections, reject incentive packages, and test missiles while driving forward its nuclear program. Moreover, the outcome of the June 2009 elections has guaranteed that President Ahmadinejad's power will not wane soon, diminishing hopes for a change in the status quo. Meanwhile, the international community remains in the dark about Iran's nuclear development and how to proceed in a way that will deliver desirable results. How long will it take Iran to construct a nuclear weapon? What should be done about it? And who should do it? The Bush administration was unable to assemble a strategy that rendered solutions—or even progress. From threats of a military attack to diplomatic force, no approach proved effective. Though the Obama administration is willing to advance a new agenda, it must first reconcile past missteps without appearing soft on the issue.

The United States cannot expect to rope Iran back into the world's good graces if it continues to place its relationship with the Iranian government at the forefront of the resolution process. For example, an opportunity emerged for the two administrations to work together when the National Intelligence Council (2007) concluded with "high confidence" that Iran had discontinued its weapons program, but Washington hardliners squandered this opportunity by continuing to advocate coercive measures, preventing the possibility for progress. Because Iran views the European Union (EU) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as proxies for U.S. interests, their efforts have been unsuccessful as well. The Obama administration's decision to abandon coercion is a step toward reaching cooperation, but its engagement strategy must be developed with more substance and precision. This approach should include expanding the role of Russia, Iran's ally, in the negotiation process. Russia is in a better position to achieve progress with the Iranian government, and developments in U.S.-Russian relations provide incentives for Russia to work with the West. Also, the United States must strengthen its efforts to foster democracy directly among the Iranian people. Shifting attention from the Iranian administration to the citizenry will help bolster the people's effort for administrative reform in the long term. Current efforts at engagement are more likely to achieve success if they embrace these two strategies.

REVISITING IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM: MOTIVATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

In August 2002, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an Iranian opposition party and U.S.-designated terrorist organization, declared that Iran was concealing nuclear activities. The IAEA corroborated,

and uncovered 18 years of hidden nuclear experiments. Since this initial discovery, no agency or nation has been able to determine with certainty if the program is for military or civilian purposes. But the U.S. government has assumed the worst. The Department of Defense (2006, 28) states, "The pursuit of weapons of mass destruction by Iran is a destabilizing factor in the region." Fearing this to be the case, nations have aimed to bring the Iranians back into compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Though Iran does not currently possess a nuclear weapon, evidence indicates that it is in the process of building one. After inspecting facilities in 2006, the IAEA (2006, 5) concluded that it was unable to determine if the government revealed all facets of its program, stating, "Iran has not addressed the long outstanding verification issues or provided the necessary transparency to remove uncertainties associated with some of its activities." If Iran's program is benign, why does the government choose to hide certain activities? Moreover, Iran's relationship with A.Q. Khan further justifies suspicion. Khan is the father of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program and directed an underground market of nuclear expertise and equipment transfers until 2004. Iranian officials confirmed 13 meetings with Khan's representatives in the 1990s (Powell and McGirk 2005). Was there an exchange of nuclear technology? According to an unclassified CIA document, Khan exchanged designs for Iran's weapons components (Jehl 2004). Khan's network specifically provided Iran with centrifuge technology and likely gave Iran a list of suppliers for essential equipment (Cirincione, Wolfsthal, and Rajkumar 2005, 303). The Iranian government guarantees it has nothing to hide, but its cooperation with inspections has been limited.

Iran's refusal to cooperate with the United States and motivation for nuclear weapons is best understood in historical context (Chubin 2006). In 1953, the CIA led a coup against Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq, establishing a shah monarchy sympathetic to U.S. interests, but repressive toward its own people. When rebels took U.S. embassy employees hostage during the 1979 Islamic Revolution, relations became so tense the United States backed Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War, selling millions worth of military arms to Saddam Hussein (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute). During the war, a Navy cruiser, the U.S.S. Vincennes, shot down an Iranian passenger plane in the Gulf, killing everyone on board. Throughout the 1990s, the U.S. government sanctioned Iran. In 2002, the Bush administration named it a member of the "axis of evil" and during its tenure, applied coercive means in an attempt to protect

its security interests in the region. In contrast, the Obama administration has offered to engage Iran, but Iran's leadership views criticism of the June 2009 elections as further intrusion into its domestic affairs. As a result of this history, the government is likely constructing a nuclear deterrent to prevent future U.S. interference.

Iran also resents the current U.S. presence in the Middle East and South Asia (Bahgat 2007). Occupying Afghanistan to Iran's east and Iraq to its west, the United States also maintains strong ties with Iran's other neighbors, Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and India. Thus, the United States virtually surrounds Iran, prompting it to consider a nuclear weapon. This behavior follows Sagan's (1996) "security" model, which specifies that states pursue nuclear weapons to defend their national security against foreign threats. Sagan notes, "Because of enormous destructive power of nuclear weapons, any state that seeks to maintain its national security must balance against any rival state that develops nuclear weapons by gaining access to a nuclear deterrent itself" (1996, 57). Iran believes that without nuclear weapons, the United States will continue to influence its region.

U.S. approaches to Iraq and North Korea may also influence Iran's nuclear decisions. After the "axis of evil" speech, the United States chose to invade Iraq, which did not have nuclear weapons, but not North Korea, which does. LaFranchi (2006) comments, "Western leaders suspect Iran of trying to emulate North Korea's secretive development of nuclear weapons. And as both nations continue to command international attention for their nuclear programs, it's clear the two countries watch each other for 'how to' lessons in nuclear diplomacy." Like North Korea, Iran considers nuclear weapons the only means that will prevent the United States from interfering with its national prerogatives.

Iran's nuclear objectives are not exclusively a reaction to U.S. policy. The Iranian government also aims to increase its influence over other countries in the region, especially Israel and Pakistan. With over 100 nuclear weapons and several medium-range ballistic missiles to deliver them, Jerusalem poses an enormous threat to Tehran (Cirincione, Wolfsthal, and Rajkumar 2005). As a result of this threat and other factors, President Ahmadinejad has commented that Israel "must be wiped off the map" (BBC 2005). But Pakistan also poses a risk. Chouet (2007, 5) argues, "Iran would like to be able to place its relations with Pakistan, whom it perceives as a United States ally and lackey of Saudi Arabia, in the context of nuclear dissuasion." Pakistan's cooperation with the U.S. effort in Afghanistan threatens Iran, and the Iranian government may quickly find Pakistan to be a hostile neighbor in the event that U.S.-Pakistani relations continue to improve.

Moreover, India, Israel, and Pakistan possess nuclear weapons but are not signatories to the NPT and are not under international pressure to be so. Many, including Iran, consider this a double standard, believing that the United States overlooks these non-compliant states because they are allies. Campbell and Einhorn (2004, 323-325) further explain that some states may choose to pursue nuclear weapons because they perceive that the nuclear non-proliferation regime is in decline and want to protect their interests in the event that other states develop nuclear weapons. This may clarify why Iran refrains from complying with international standards, hoping the “keepers” of the NPT will overlook its non-compliance with the treaty, as they have with other states.

What are the consequences for the United States should Iran develop nuclear weapons? Iran and Israel would likely enter a nuclear stalemate, which means the United States would have to rethink its commitment to the Israelis in the event of an attack. Iran would have considerable support from states in the region, which would strain relations between the United States and its Middle Eastern allies. A U.S. counterstrike on behalf of Israel would also be risky given current commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A nuclear Iran would also influence the political decisions of other states in the region, especially Syria and Iraq. Laipson (2004, 84) claims, “Syria will always be sensitive to its position relative to other major states on its borders and just beyond, and any change in its calculation about the desirability or feasibility of acquiring nuclear weapons will be driven not only by security imperatives but also by its perception of its status in the region.” Moreover, if a Shi’a government leads post-occupation Iraq, it would likely strengthen relations with Iran, a fate Noam Chomsky calls “a nightmare for the United States” (Shank 2007). The two nations may capitalize on shared interests, consolidate resources, and garner enough momentum to strike Israel. Iran could also give militant organizations, Hezbollah and Hamas, more leverage. Their activities against Israeli and U.S. targets in the region could increase since Iran’s nuclear shield would provide the necessary latitude for these armed groups.

RECENT POLICY: THE COERCIVE TRACK

The U.S. *National Security Strategy* identifies strengthening non-proliferation efforts to prevent adversaries from acquiring nuclear technology for unconventional weapons as a key national security initiative (The White House 2006, 18). Regarding the Iranian case, the U.S. government has aimed to achieve this objective by exercising coercive diplomacy. According

to George (2003, vii), “Coercive diplomacy . . . employs threats of force to persuade an opponent to call off or undo its encroachment – for example, to halt an invasion or give up territory that has been occupied.” Coercion consists of threats of military force, economic sanctions, and diplomatic pressure. The United States has employed all of these types in an attempt to achieve its goals vis-à-vis Iran.

Striking militarily has been one consideration. This requires strong political tenacity – a quality the Bush administration did not lack. President Bush (2006) said, referring to Iran, “I made it clear, I’ll make it clear again, that we will use military might to protect our ally, Israel.” The United States may have already contemplated a strike. Some view the Israeli attack on Lebanon in summer 2006 as a joint effort to clear the path for an invasion of Iran. Chomsky, for example, argues, “I presume part of the reason for the U.S.-Israel invasion of Lebanon . . . was that Hezbollah is considered a deterrent to a potential U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran. . . . the goal I presume was to wipe out the deterrent so as to free up the United States and Israel for an eventual attack on Iran” (Shank 2007). A military attack could include an air or naval strike on Iranian nuclear reactors, missile facilities, and airfields. The Air Force could target these sites from bases in Turkey or Kyrgyzstan, and the Navy is in position to launch cruise missiles from its Fifth Fleet in the Persian Gulf.

Though an air strike is possible, it may not achieve the goal of destroying Iran’s nuclear facilities. Iran spans a large geographic area and is likely to have operating facilities in undisclosed locations throughout; that all reactors would be hit is highly doubtful. An air strike on the primary centrifuge plant in Natanz may be especially ineffective since the facility is entirely underground. Hersh (2006) comments, “the conventional weapons in the American arsenal could not insure the destruction of facilities under 75 feet of earth and rock, especially if they are reinforced with concrete.” Although an attack may frustrate Iran’s operations, it would unlikely eliminate them.

Many would view an attack on Iran as yet another act of U.S. aggression on a Middle Eastern country. Allies and enemies alike will make comparisons to the Iraq invasion. In “Fool Me Twice,” Cirincione (2006) highlights the similarities between Iraq and Iran:

The vice president of the United States gives a major speech focused on the threat from an oil-rich nation in the Middle East. The U.S. secretary of state tells congress that the same nation is our most serious global challenge. The secretary of defense calls that nation the leading supporter of global terrorism. The

president blames it for attacks on U.S. troops. The intelligence agencies say the nuclear threat from this nation is 10 years away, but the director of intelligence paints a more ominous picture. A new U.S. national security strategy trumpets preemptive attacks and highlights the country as a major threat. And neoconservatives beat the war drums, as the cable media banner their stories with words like “countdown” and “showdown.”

Many believe that a strike would further damage the U.S. reputation in the world. Zunes (2005), for example, argues that it would provoke increased anti-American and anti-Israeli intolerance in the region, even within areas sympathetic to the West. Hezbollah or Hamas may intensify attacks against Israel in retaliation, and Iranian troops might raid Coalition Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Sharp (2007) points out that “Iran could attack U.S. naval forces and commercial oil tankers operating in the Persian Gulf, especially in the Strait of Hormuz.” Retaliatory strikes could bring about conflict throughout the region. A strike would also further motivate Iran to require weapons. A high-ranking U.S. official has commented, “if the United States does anything militarily, they will make the development of a bomb a matter of Iranian national pride” (Hersh 2006). Among others, Nasr and Takeyh (2008) argue that “military deployment . . . is not a tenable strategy.” Iran is determined to have a nuclear program and a strike would only reinforce its resolve.

Another policy option has been to impose UN sanctions in an attempt to force Iran to suspend its nuclear activities and grant IAEA inspectors complete access to facilities. The Security Council first sanctioned Iran in December 2006 for failing to suspend enrichment activities. These sanctions prevented nations from trading nuclear materials with Iran and froze the finances of persons that supported its nuclear activities (United Nations 2006). However, since Russia and China ensured that these sanctions lacked the power necessary to compel Iran to conform to international standards, their impact was minor. Stricter sanctions were approved in March 2007 in a second attempt to induce Iran to forgo its program. In particular, they restricted arms sales to Iran and put a hold on additional assets (United Nations 2007), but Iran did not acquiesce. A third round of sanctions approved in March 2008, including cargo inspections and travel restrictions (United Nations 2008), also did not yield expected results.

More UN sanctions are unlikely to work in the future. Pape (1997) argues that sanctions cannot achieve major foreign policy objectives, contending that the Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliot (HSE) database, which provides empirical support for the effectiveness of sanctions, is flawed. In

his analysis, he cites two examples that illustrate the failure of U.S. sanctions on Iran. Firstly, in 1951, the United States boycotted the purchase of Iranian oil after Prime Minister Mossadeq nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. When the boycott failed, the U.S. administration chose to lead a military coup to restore the status quo. Secondly, after Iranian students took U.S. embassy employees hostage during the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the United States applied trade and financial sanctions, including a ban on purchasing Iranian oil. The embargo backfired and the United States had to succumb to Iran's economic and political demands. He observes that this is "an instance of successful Iranian coercion of the United States, not of successful U.S. economic pressure on Iran" (Pape 1997, 130). In addition to the failure of recent sanctions, these historical cases suggest that future sanctions will be ineffective in persuading Iran to comply with international standards.

Levying sanctions on Iran is a way to take action without high risks. But from Tehran's perspective, the cost of sanctions does not outweigh the benefit of maintaining a nuclear program. Iran, at least in the short-term, can withstand even significant shocks to its economy. With an estimated GDP of \$345 billion, its economy ranks 28th in the world; this is stronger than some developed countries, including Denmark, Finland, and Ireland (IMF 2009). It is also the fourth largest oil producer in the world (Department of Energy 2007). As a result, temporary sanctions are unlikely to shake Iran's economic posture, especially since Russia and China will ensure that they do not contain much strength.

The European track has been a third approach to resolving the nuclear challenge. In October 2003, the "EU-3" (Great Britain, France, and Germany), Javier Solana (the EU's foreign policy chief), and Iranian diplomats began negotiating a settlement, eventually reaching a grand bargain. The Europeans offered economic concessions in exchange for Iran's unconditional cooperation with the IAEA and accession to the Additional Protocol. By summer 2004, however, the Iranians began to manufacture parts for centrifuges and enrich uranium again. Iran rebuffed later incentives and the United States, Russia, and China joined the European effort in an attempt to strengthen negotiations. The new initiative, the "EU3+3," threatened to impose UN sanctions if Iran did not cooperate. Policy makers branded the November 2007 round of negotiations a "last-ditch" effort for reconciliation (Burns 2007). However, both the 2007 and the follow-up 2008 meetings did not achieve any measurable results. In addition, European-Iranian relations recently further deteriorated when Iranian authorities arrested several British embassy employees, accusing them of

spurring protests after the June 2009 elections.

Brenner (2007) argues that the European approach has failed because the Iranians did not receive what they wanted most out of the bargain – “a strategic deal that guaranteed Iran's security from American attack, gave Iran a voice in shaping the future of the Persian Gulf, and restored its full international standing.” Until Europe can meet these objectives, the probability that Iran will discontinue its nuclear activities remains low. The Iranian administration, furthermore, does not face any real repercussions for refusing the European package. Though the arrangement specifies deadlines, it has no recourse if Iran chooses not to cooperate.

Coercive policies, including military threats, UN sanctions, and EU incentive packages, have not achieved success for theoretical reasons as well. George and Simons (1994) argue that the application of coercive diplomacy is more complicated for an alliance of states rather than a single government. Though the United States has directed the coercive approach, others, including key European allies, have also advocated and implemented coercion in their own ways. This has resulted in a fragmented strategy since those who advocate coercion disagree over how to apply it. George and Simons also contend that a successful coercive strategy against a state should be backed by a domestic populace in the target country, as well as a large cohort of strong international actors. The United States has failed on both counts. Although domestic opposition to the current Iranian regime is apparent, support for sanctions has been minimal. On the other hand, because Russia, China, and others remain sympathetic to Iran for their own national and trade interests, sanctions remain an ineffective strategy.

The degree of urgency that the United States has attached to the Iranian predicament has also vacillated over the years, depending on other foreign policy commitments. The U.S. government has not been able to garner an adequate amount of domestic support for its coercive policies toward Iran, especially since it maintains occupations in two other countries in the Middle East and as a result, the military is currently overstretched. Moreover, Art (2003, 402) contends that the coercive strategy is difficult to execute and has a low success rate, specifically noting that the possession of military superiority over the target state does not guarantee success. These conclusions may explain why the U.S. military advantage over Iran has not produced the results expected from its coercive strategy.

CURRENT POLICY: TRANSITIONING FROM COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

Coercive diplomacy has not achieved success in resolving the nuclear challenge, and is unlikely to work in the future (Fitzpatrick 2007; Kemp 2003; McFaul, Milani, and Diamond 2006-07). Though the Obama administration is offering to negotiate directly with the Iranian government, the transition from coercion to engagement must proceed with more substance and direction. This should include two components. Firstly, the United States should encourage Russia to lead the negotiation process. Russia is in a better position to achieve progress because of its relationships with both Iran and the West. Secondly, the United States must shift more attention from the Iranian government to the Iranian people, promoting democracy directly among the latter, so that Iran may change its position on nuclear weapons in the long run. That Iranians value social and economic change over the acquisition of weapons should especially encourage the United States to pursue this path (Milani 2005).

Russia and Iran may be more likely to reach cooperation on the nuclear issue since they share economic and security interests. Trade between the two countries, for example, has increased significantly – from \$661 million in 2000 to \$2.02 billion in 2005 (Badkhen 2006). Continued economic growth not only fosters political cooperation, but also deters Russia from agreeing to strict sanctions. Furthermore, Russia does not attempt to hinder Iran's defense efforts. Iran receives more of its arms from Russia than from any other nation, according to statistics from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). The value of arms trade agreements between the two nations, for example, increased from \$300 million between 1998 and 2001 to \$1.7 billion between 2002 and 2005 (Beehner 2006). Iran may work with Russia on the nuclear weapons issue in order to avoid jeopardizing these trade relations.

Russia also believes that Iran is entitled to a civilian nuclear energy program. In 1995, Russia committed to finishing the nuclear power plant that Germany started in Bushehr in an \$800 million contract (Peterson 2005). Though delays dogged the construction of the facility, Russia and Iran completed the reactor in 2009, which is expected to become fully operational upon completion of nuclear tests. As part of the arrangement, Russia consents to supplying fissile material for the reactor on the condition that Iran will return spent fuel rods. This aims to prevent Iran from reprocessing them into weapons-grade fissile material. Russia understands that Iran has the political resolve to become a nuclear energy state. Thus,

it takes steps to ensure the program is peaceful, rather than advocate for its complete elimination. This may encourage Iran to agree to inspections, especially if Russia is involved in the process.

Equally, Russia agrees with the United States that Iran should not possess nuclear weapons. It has consistently consented to all three rounds of UN sanctions and participated in the EU diplomatic track, indicating its commitment to the West's stance. Freedman (2006) observes, "Moscow has been on the horns of a dilemma on the Iranian nuclear issue because it does not want to alienate Iran, but neither does it want to alienate the EU or the United States, nor does it wish Iran to acquire nuclear weapons." Thus, Russia's position could benefit the United States. Russia maintains close economic relations with Iran yet shares core beliefs on the matter with the West. The United States should capitalize on this arrangement and encourage Russia to spearhead the denuclearization effort, instead of marginalizing it for its proximity to Iran's interests. This, however, will not be easy. Current U.S.-Russia relations are somewhat strained. In particular, Russia strongly objects to U.S. plans to place radar units in the Czech Republic and interceptor missiles in Poland for a missile defense system. Also, Russia is highly critical of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) plans to allow Ukraine and Georgia become new members.

Despite these challenges, however, the United States and Russia have recently also proven to be capable of cooperation. For instance, the United States and Russia have just reached compromise on two important security issues: the U.S. war in Afghanistan and reduction of nuclear weapons stockpiles. In February 2009, Russia agreed to allow the U.S. military to ship non-lethal equipment to Afghanistan through its territory. In July 2009, it further granted the United States permission to begin to transport personnel and supplies, including lethal equipment. This is especially advantageous since routes through Pakistan are becoming more dangerous (Al Jazeera 2009). Moreover, at the July 2009 Moscow summit, Presidents Obama and Medvedev signed an initial agreement to reduce U.S. and Russian warheads and missiles by at least one-third, setting the groundwork for more reductions in the future (Fletcher and Pan 2009). Many, including the Center for American Progress, view these arrangements as a thawing of relations between the two countries, especially since the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict (Charap and Grotto 2009).

These areas of progress provide the foundation necessary to cooperate on Iran. However, Russia will need a stronger incentive to pursue Iranian denuclearization on behalf of the West. Thus, the United States should agree to back off positioning its missile defense system in Eastern Europe

in exchange for Russia's leadership in negotiations with Iran. This is an option to which the Obama administration seems amenable. In February 2009, President Obama secretly contacted President Medvedev suggesting that he would not proceed with the interceptor system if the Russian government persuaded Iran to stop its nuclear program (Fletcher 2009). In July 2009, President Obama (2009a) publically, albeit indirectly, offered a similar deal:

I know Russia opposes the planned configuration for missile defense in Europe. And my administration is reviewing these plans to enhance the security of America, Europe and the world. And I've made it clear that this system is directed at preventing a potential attack from Iran. It has nothing to do with Russia. In fact, I want to work together with Russia on a missile defense architecture that makes us all safer. But if the threat from Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile program is eliminated, the driving force for missile defense in Europe will be eliminated, and that is in our mutual interest.

As mentioned above, Russia vehemently opposes the missile defense program, and offering to back away from it may be incentive to persuade Russia to encourage Iran to forgo its nuclear weapons program. Yet, in proceeding with this option, the United States cannot be too obliging or naïve. It must not agree to a mere effort by Russia to achieve reconciliation, but instead, must insist on complete IAEA inspections, other compliance measures with the NPT, and steps toward denuclearization. Otherwise, the United States can reaffirm to Russia and the rest of the international community that fear of Iran's nuclear program justifies the need for the missile defense system.

In addition to creating the space to allow Russia to work with Iran, the United States must also continue to encourage democracy directly among the Iranian people in an attempt to eliminate the government's desire for a nuclear weapons program over time. This is especially important in light of the outcome of the June 2009 elections. Although President Obama acknowledged the controversy over the elections and condemned Iran's abuse of dissidents, he failed to question the legitimacy of the elections or to demand an investigation of the situation. Unlike German Chancellor Merkel and others, who demanded a recount, President Obama refused to put pressure on the Iranian government to provide evidence for President Ahmadinejad's victory. Despite some support for the voters, he emphasized, "The Iranian people can speak for themselves" (Obama 2009b).

The outcome of the elections necessitates a renewed effort to reach out to the Iranian people and encourage democracy. Nader (2009) argues that “Ahmadinejad’s re-election and subsequent crackdown on the demonstrators suggest that the Iranian political system is moving in a new and potentially dangerous direction.” To reverse this movement, the United States should strengthen its relationship with the Iranian citizenry. McFaul, Milani, and Diamond (2006-07, 127) contend that “We [the United States] should stress our admiration for Iranian history and culture, our respect for the Iranian people, and our sincere desire to have a thriving and mutually beneficial relationship.” A democratic Iran would likely have an open debate over the costs and benefits of a nuclear weapon and would consider abandoning desires for a nuclear weapons program.

Milani (2005, 42) believes that in contrast to other Muslim countries, Iran has a “viable, indigenous democratic movement,” which is important, he states, because democracies are more likely than dictatorships to roll back nuclear programs. To foster democracy, Milani specifically argues that the United States should:

- 1) revise sanctions so that they target Iranian policy makers instead of citizens;
- 2) change its rhetoric to single out Iranian officials and not the Iranian people;
- 3) provide technical assistance to media outlets;
- 4) commit to ensuring a free, independent, and transparent media in Iran, which focuses on democracy and human rights;
- 5) grant notable Iranian artists the opportunity to publish their works in the United States;
- 6) reach out to the Iranian people and establish a relationship with them on their own terms as to preclude the Iranian government from shaping the public’s perception of the United States; and
- 7) apply pressure to the Iranian government when it abuses human rights.

Adopting these recommendations would considerably advance relations between the United States and the Iranian people. Revising sanctions is of immediate concern since economic restrictions do not work effectively in compelling a nation to adopt a desired course of action (Pape 1997). On the contrary, they often harm citizens more than policy makers in the target country (Henderson 1998). U.S. officials should also differentiate between Iranian politicians and Iranian citizens in speeches. This will

help relieve Iranians from pressure intended for their government while elevating the level of support that the United States extends to the people. Moreover, promoting private press outlets would help create a more balanced representation of the United States, especially since the Iranian government influences the image the Iranians now receive. This should be accompanied by a push for more academic and cultural exchanges in an attempt to provide Iranians with first-hand opportunities to better understand U.S. culture. “Soft power” approaches can achieve progress where coercive measures can not. As Nye (2004, 68) puts it, “The image of the United States and its attractiveness to others. . . . depends in part on culture, in part on domestic policies and values, and in part on the substance, tactics, and style of our foreign policies. . . . these three resources have often produced soft power – the ability to get the outcomes America wanted by attracting rather than coercing others.”

The United States must directly engage the Iranian people, but pursuing this path will not be without complications. Bremmer’s (2006) “J-Curve” is instructive in clarifying the challenges that Iran will face in moving toward democracy. The J-Curve explains the relationship between a country’s stability and its openness. On a graph, stability lies along the y-axis and openness along the x-axis. The relationship between the two is patterned as a “J.” Some states, like North Korea and Zimbabwe, maintain stability because they are closed societies, preventing their citizenries from accessing information. These states fall along the far left side of the curve. Though they are stable regimes, small shocks to these systems may cause countries to plunge into chaos. On the contrary, other states, like Scandinavian countries, are stable precisely because they are open, allowing them to form and support institutions and absorb shocks to the international system. These states constitute the far right side of the curve. States between the ends are in transition. Moving from the left side of the curve to the right signifies increases in openness, but depending on the stage, can also signify decreases in stability. Bremmer (2006, 103) affirms that Iran is a stable and closed regime, but that it is slipping toward instability and openness, thus, he concludes, “American foreign policy should be designed to take advantage of every opportunity to help Iranians to pry open their own society and to manage the difficult transition toward a future of Iranian participation in global politics and markets.”

A precursor for the United States to engage the Iranian people directly is to determine the extent to which they are willing to receive its support. At face value, it may seem that the United States would face a mixed reception. *Terror Free Tomorrow* (2008), a public opinion center

in Washington, finds that the opinion of more than half of Iranians (55.7 percent) would “not significantly” or “not at all” improve if the United States worked to spread democracy inside Iran. This may appear discouraging, but a closer look reveals Iranians are fairly dissatisfied with their government on certain issues and may be willing to receive U.S. support for specific activities. Firstly, Iranian citizens want fair elections and a free press. The organization discovered that 81.5 percent think that ensuring free elections should be a long-term objective for the government. Moreover, 78 percent feel that guaranteeing a free press is important in the long run. Secondly, Iranians want to establish stronger educational and economic relations with the United States. Terror Free Tomorrow found that the opinion of 63.4 percent of Iranians would improve if the United States increased the number of visas for Iranians to study or work in the United States. Thus, by promoting democratic institutions and ideals and facilitating exchanges, the United States should be able to attract more support from the Iranian people over time.

Terror Free Tomorrow also polled Iranians on the nuclear weapons issue. Its results are heartening. Most Iranians want social and economic development rather than weapons. Over two-thirds would prefer the government to comply with full nuclear inspections and guarantee to abstain from obtaining nuclear weapons if other countries offered: a) trade and capital investment to create more jobs; b) trade and capital investment in energy refineries to lower the price of gasoline; c) technical assistance to develop a peaceful nuclear energy program; or d) medical, educational, and humanitarian assistance to help Iranian people in need. If the United States constructs a foreign policy that benefits the Iranian people, the desire for nuclear weapons would decrease substantially.

Developing a relationship with the Iranian citizenry could institute democratic reform in Iran and encourage future administrations to abandon aspirations for nuclear weapons. The United States needs to continue to make a clear distinction between Iran’s leaders and citizens, and reach out to the latter if it wants to make progress on the nuclear issue. Although the Obama administration should avoid direct interference with Iran’s domestic politics, it should not abandon Iran’s people in the process. It needs to commit to reaching out to Iranians in public rhetoric, by protesting the government’s human rights abuses, and through educational, cultural, and business exchanges.

CONCLUSION

U.S.-Iranian relations have been strained for decades, and the prospect that Iran will become a nuclear weapons state has only exacerbated circumstances. But the Iranian government is not against cooperation entirely. After the November 2007 release of the National Intelligence Estimate, President Ahmadinejad said, "If one or two other steps are taken, the issues we have in front of us will be entirely different and will lose their complexity, and the way will be open for the resolution of basic issues in the region and in dealings between the two sides" (CNN 2007). More recently, he offered President Obama the opportunity to discuss these issues in front of international media at the United Nations (CNN 2009). Although direct talks between the two leaders are unlikely to achieve substantial progress, the Iranian government has reached a point where it could continue its current course or cooperate with diplomatic efforts. The United States should seize the latter and rectify past mistakes by pursuing a well-specified engagement policy.

Moving beyond coercion has been a sensible first step, but the context in which engagement is carried out now matters most. This involves more than an open invitation for negotiations. Russia should lead the cooperation effort. It is in a position to deliver what the West wants without making Iran out to be the loser. Russia should be willing to cooperate if other security concessions can be made, including a commitment to abandoning plans for a missile defense system in Eastern Europe. Under this arrangement, Iran is more likely to comply with international expectations because it sacrifices too much with an important ally if it refuses. Moreover, the United States must also strengthen its democracy promotion effort directly among the Iranian people in order to spur change in the long run. The United States has the resources to foster democracy in Iran, and would find a receptive population if it helps bring to the people what they want most: social and economic reform. As the Obama administration moves forward with Iran, it must develop an engagement policy if it expects to see the outcomes it most desires.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Al Jazeera*. 2009. NATO Terminal Attacked in Pakistan. March 28.
- Allison, Graham. 2004. *Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe*. New York: Owl Books.
- Art, Robert J. 2003. Coercive Diplomacy: What Do We Know? in *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy*. eds. Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin. Washington:

- United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Badkhen, Anna. 2006. Russia's Ties to Iran a Roadblock to U.S.: Trade, Geopolitical Interests Trump Sanctions Effort. *San Francisco Chronicle*. September 10.
- Bahgat, Gawdat. 2007. Iran and the United States: The Emerging Security Paradigm in the Middle East. *Parameters*. 37,3. pp. 5-18.
- BBC. 2005. Iran Leader's Comments Attacked. October 27.
- Beehner, Lionel. 2006. Russia-Iran Arms Trade. Council on Foreign Relations. November 1.
- Bremmer, Ian. 2006. *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Brenner, Michael. 2007. CFSP: The Iran Test. October 16. <http://www.pitt.edu/~mbren/Papers.htm>. (accessed on April 2, 2009).
- Burns, John F. 2007. Iran Offers No Concessions in Nuclear Talks. *The New York Times*. December 1.
- Bush, George W. 2006. President Discusses War on Terror and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Renaissance Cleveland Hotel, Cleveland, Ohio. March 20. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/03/20060320-7.html>. (accessed on December 9, 2007).
- Campbell, Kurt M. and Robert J. Einhorn. 2004. Avoiding the Tipping Point: Concluding Observations. in *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices*. eds. Kurt M. Campbell, Robert J. Einhorn, and Mitchell B. Reiss. Washington: Brookings Institution Press.
- Charap, Samuel and Andrew J. Grotto. 2009. The Real Breakthrough at the Russia Summit. Center for American Progress. July 9.
- Chouet, Alain. 2007. Why Iran Will Have the Bomb. European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center. March 5.
- Chubin, Shahram. 2006. *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Cirincione, Joseph. 2006. Fool Me Twice. *Foreign Policy*. March 27.
- Cirincione, Joseph, Jon B. Wolfsthal, and Miriam Rajkumar. 2005. *Deadly Arsenals: Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Threats*. Second Edition. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- CNN. 2007. Iran President Calls U.S. Report 'A Positive Step.' December 11
- CNN. 2009. Report: Ahmadinejad Says He Wants Public Talks with Obama. July 4.
- Department of Defense. 2006. Quadrennial Defense Review Report. February 6.
- Department of Energy. 2007. Top World Oil Producers, 2007. Energy Information Administration.
- Fitzpatrick, Mark. 2007. Can Iran's Nuclear Capability Be Kept Latent? *Survival*. Vol. 49,1: 33-58.

- Fletcher, Michael A. 2009. Obama Makes Overtures to Russia on Missile Defense. *The Washington Post*. March 3.
- Fletcher, Michael A. and Philip P. Pan. 2009. U.S. and Russia to Reduce Arsenals. *The Washington Post*. July 7.
- Freedman, Robert O. 2006. Russia, Iran and the Nuclear Question: The Putin Record. Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College. November.
- George, Alexander L. 2003. Foreword. In *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy*. eds. Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin. Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- George, Alexander L. and William E. Simons. 1994. Findings and Conclusions. In *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy, 2nd Edition*. eds. Alexander L. George and William E. Simons. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Henderson, David R. 1998. Why Economic Sanctions Don't Work. *Hoover Digest*. Vol. 4.
- Hersh, Seymour M. 2006. Annals of National Security: The Iran Plans. *The New Yorker*. April 17.
- International Atomic Energy Agency. 2006. Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Report by the Director General. August 31.
- International Monetary Fund. 2009. World Economic Outlook Database. April 2009 Edition. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2009/01/weodata/index.aspx>. (accessed on July 18, 2009).
- Jehl, Douglas. 2004. C.I.A. Says Pakistanis Gave Iran Nuclear Aid. *The New York Times*. November 24.
- Kemp, Geoffrey. 2003. How to Stop the Iranian Bomb. *The National Interest*. Vol. 72: 48-58.
- LaFranchi, Howard. 2006. Is Iran Studying North Korea's Nuclear Moves. *Christian Science Monitor*. June 23.
- Laipson, Ellen. 2004. Syria: Can the Myth Be Maintained without Nukes? in *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why State Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices*. eds. Kurt M. Campbell, Robert J. Einhorn, and Mitchell B. Reiss. Washington: Brookings Institution Press.
- McFaul, Michael, Abbas Milani, and Larry Diamond. 2006-7. A Win-Win U.S. Strategy for Dealing with Iran. *The Washington Quarterly*. Vol. 30,1: 121-138.
- Milani, Abbas. 2005. U.S. Foreign Policy and the Future of Democracy in Iran. The Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. *The Washington Quarterly*. Vol. 28, 3: 41-56.
- Nader, Alireza. 2009. Iran's Real Winners: The Revolutionary Guards. Rand Corporation. June 22.

-
- Nasr, Vali and Ray Takeyh. 2008. The Costs of Containing Iran: Washington's Misguided New Middle East Policy. *Foreign Affairs*. January/February.
- National Intelligence Council. 2007. Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities. November.
- Nye, Joseph. 2004. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- Obama, Barack. 2009a. Remarks by the President at the New Economic School Graduation. Gostinny Dvor, Moscow, Russia, July 7. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-The-President-At-The-New-Economic-School-Graduation/. (accessed on July 18, 2009).
- Obama, Barack. 2009b. Press Conference by the President. James S. Brady Press Briefing Room, Washington, D.C. June 23. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Press-Conference-by-the-President-6-23-09/. (accessed on July 18, 2009).
- Pape, Robert. 1997. Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work. *International Security*. Vol. 22, 2: 90-136.
- Peterson, Scott. 2005. Russia Fuels Iran's Atomic Bid. *Christian Science Monitor*. February 28.
- Powell, Bill and Tim McGirk. 2005. The Man Who Sold the Bomb. *Time*. February 6.
- Sagan, Scott D. 1996-97. Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb. *International Security*. Vol. 21,3: 54-86.
- Shank, Michael. 2007. Chomsky on Iran, Iraq, and the Rest of the World. *Foreign Policy in Focus*. February 16.
- Sharp, Travis. 2007. Risky Business: Why Attacking Iran Is a Bad Idea. Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation. April 12.
- Slackman, Michael. 2008. Warmth for Americans in Once Hostile Tehran. *The New York Times*. February 13.
- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. SIPRI Data on Arms Transfers. http://armstrade.sipri.org/arms_trade/values.php. (accessed on April 2, 2009).
- Terror Free Tomorrow. 2008. Results of a Nationwide Public Opinion Survey of Iran. <http://www.terrorfreetomorrow.org/upimagestft/TFT%20New%20Iran%20Survey%20Report%20March%202008.pdf>. (accessed on April 2, 2009).
- United Nations. 2006. Security Council Imposes Sanctions on Iran for Failure to Halt Uranium Enrichment, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1737. Department of Public Information, News and Media Division. December 26.
- United Nations. 2007. Security Council Toughens Sanctions against Iran, Adds Arms Embargo, with Unanimous Adoption of Resolution 1747. Department of Public Information, News and Media Division. March 24.

United Nations. 2008. Security Council Tightens Restrictions on Iran's Proliferation-Sensitive Nuclear Activities, Increases Vigilance over Iranian Banks, Has States Inspect Cargo. Department of Public Information, News and Media Division. March 3.

White, Gregory L. and John Miller. 2009. Russia Changes Its WTO Strategy. *The Wall Street Journal*. June 10.

The White House. 2006. The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. March. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/nss.pdf>. (accessed on July 18, 2009).

Zunes, Stephen. 2005. The U.S. and Iran: Democracy, Terrorism, and Nuclear Weapons. *Foreign Policy in Focus*. July 26.