Strategy to Prevent a Nuclear Iran

JINSA's Gemunder Center Iran Task Force

Co-Chairs Ambassador Eric Edelman and Ambassador Dennis Ross

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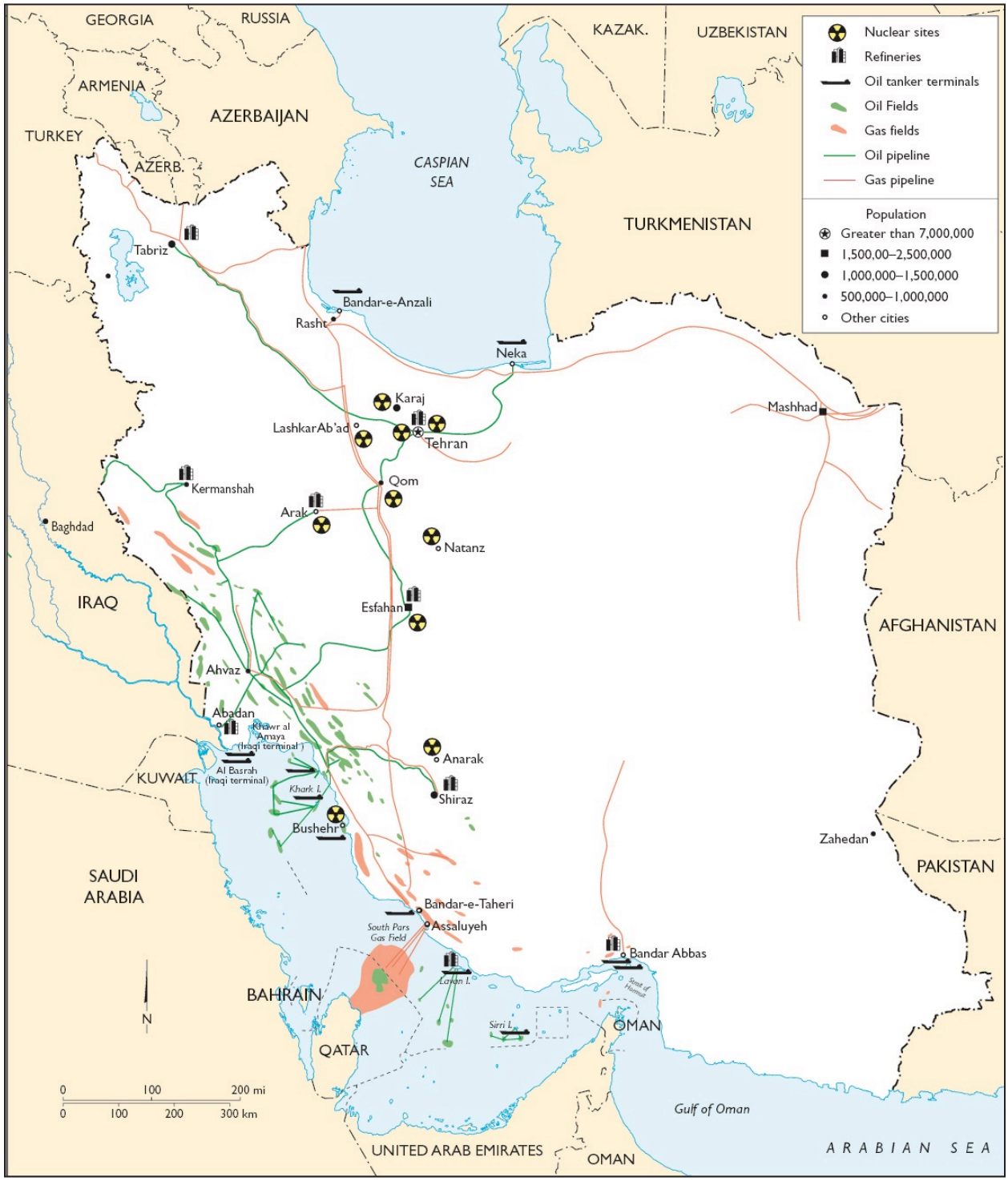

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Introduction

Three consecutive presidential administrations, of both parties, have declared a nuclear Iran unacceptable. Shortly after his election in 2008, President Barack Obama pledged, like his predecessors, to "use all elements of American power" to thwart Iran's nuclear ambitions. Since then he has made clear, repeatedly, that he is determined to "prevent, not contain," a nuclear Iran and that, in these matters, he "does not bluff." Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel spelled out the Administration's position even more clearly during a visit to Israel this spring: "all military options, and every option, must remain on the table in dealing with Iran."[1]

Indeed, stopping a nuclear-capable Iran is the gravest, most pressing national security threat facing the United States today. An Iran with nuclear weapons, which the ideologically fervent Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) would control, will trigger severe strategic and economic consequences and create an unstable situation that would likely lead to a regional conflict, possibly with nuclear weapons, almost certainly drawing in the United States. Unlike in the Cold War, it is not clear these consequences could be contained. If they could, it would only be with extreme difficulty and at great cost over a long period of time. This would be a tough order in an era likely to be marked by shrinking defense resources.

We have now arrived at a critical moment in the quest to thwart Tehran's nuclear ambitions. On the one hand, the election of Hassan Rouhani – a supposed moderate who, during the election, spoke of the possibility of a diplomatic agreement on the nuclear issue – as the next president of Iran might end the intransigence that has thus far defined Iran's negotiating position. The United States and its international partners would be wise to test Rouhani's sincerity immediately and try to make diplomacy work. But it should not do so at the cost of its national security interests. That is because the other dynamic at play is Iran's accelerating approach to an undetectable nuclear weapons capability – the ability to manufacture fissile material for a nuclear device in less time than will be required to detect and respond to such activity.

Designing a strategy that can successfully navigate between these twin imperatives of acknowledging the changing political dynamics in Iran and of not allowing Tehran to cross the nuclear threshold will require more than simply doubling down on the current policy.

While a peaceful, negotiated resolution has always been, and will remain, the best possible outcome, U.S. policymakers must now earnestly pursue other viable solutions to this challenge, as the limited window for diplomacy grows ever smaller. Sanctions, while a welcome means for pressuring the Iranian regime, are insufficient by themselves. Therefore, U.S. policymakers must prepare and develop the other elements of American power that can be brought to bear to prevent a nuclear-capable Iran: a very real military strike capability against Iran's nuclear and other strategic facilities, and an array of opportunities for pursuing political warfare against the Iranian regime.

In rhetoric and in action, President Obama and Congress must convey concretely the will to strike Iranian nuclear facilities as a last resort. We believe that the Iranian leadership, right now, perceives such will to be absent. But a credible military threat would provide an impetus to diplomacy that has heretofore been lacking. If negotiations ultimately fail to yield results, even after such pressure has been applied, U.S. policymakers must be prepared for military action and to consider regime change.

Below, we – a task force of former senior government officials, retired senior military officers and business leaders convened by JINSA's Gemunder Center in Washington, D.C. – examine and seek to provide answers to both the question of what success, if not victory, against Iran will look like, and what policy pathways are available for defusing the Iranian threat. More specifically, this paper: reviews current U.S. objectives toward Iran and the policies being used to achieve them; analyzes recent proposals from the policy community and their implicit assumptions about which policy options are likely to be most productive in stopping a nuclear Iran; argues that shortcomings of the "prevention" approach are impairing U.S. policy; and outlines an acceptable solution and possible tools for stopping a nuclear-capable Iran. This paper will serve as the foundation of reports that we will issue in coming months about the threat posed by a nuclear-capable Iran and how to stop it.

Iran's Elections: Opportunity for Diplomacy?

The victory of Hassan Rouhani in Iran's presidential election came as a surprise to most observers. Even though he had gained ground in the last days of the campaign, no one expected him to win in such a resounding fashion – garnering a majority of the ballots in the first round of voting. Ever since, a debate has been raging about the significance of his victory, both for Iran's political future and for the prospects of a nuclear deal. We are doubtful that it is possible to fully understand the political dynamics that led to this outcome. In a closed society it is extremely difficult to assess the attitudes of the public, and in an opaque theocratic tyranny, where the art of deception and dissembling are widely practiced and highly valued, it is even more challenging to gauge the motivations of the elites. Fully cognizant of these significant uncertainties, we provide two possible interpretations of Iran's electoral outcome. Both suggest a stronger approach will be needed if diplomacy is to succeed with this new president.

Collapse of Iran's Security Apparatus…

The first possible interpretation of Rouhani's victory is that Iran's security apparatus proved too weak to enforce its preferred outcome.

This narrative assumes – as almost all observers did before the election – that the establishment wanted a conservative, such as Saeed Jalili, who would unquestionably support the Supreme Leader's policies, to win the election. But, following the third debate among the candidates on June 7, Iran's leadership saw Rouhani gaining popular support. At this point, *Kayhan*, a mouthpiece for Khamenei, urged conservatives to unite behind one candidate and the rest to drop out of the race. This suggestion was ignored.[2]

Facing the possibility that no conservative could legitimately win the already skewed election, it is possible that Khamenei and his security services met to discuss how to proceed. One option was a reprise of 2009: simply declare their preferred candidate the winner, whether he had the votes or not. But the last such fraud unleashed massive popular unrest. Since then, the Arab Spring has sprung and, as the election was taking place, protests were rocking Turkey. In this context, the security services might have decided that they could not countenance another 2009.

If true, this would signify a potentially fatal weakening of Iran's security apparatus. A state, according to Max Weber, is defined by a monopoly on the use of violence in a given territory. An authoritarian state must also be able to successfully direct that violence against its own people. The moment that security services are no longer willing to kill for the state, its downfall begins. The regime might persist, but the moment its authority is tested seriously, it will collapse.

Rouhani's election, according to this interpretation, thus signifies the twilight, not the resurgence, of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Its leadership could not prevent what they wanted to prevent. If challenged, the regime will fail.

If this interpretation is accurate, now is the time for U.S. policymakers to go for broke. An aggressive sanctions policy will further fracture elite and popular consensus on the nuclear program. Either the regime will give it up to stay in power or it will face domestic pressure that will become its undoing. To opt for an arms control agreement in this scenario, however, would only lift pressure from the regime and prolong its lifespan.

…or Elite Accommodation?

Another possible interpretation is that Khamenei did indeed have the ability to enforce his preference, but either chose not to or Rouhani was it. Given the country's mood, he might have decided it was not worth perpetrating conspicuous electoral fraud again and, while Rouhani's resounding victory was an unwelcome indication of popular sympathies, it also served the regime's purposes.

There is no doubt that sanctions have significantly hurt Iran's economy. And the aftermath of the 2009 Green Movement and the continued lack of individual freedoms have created deep-seated, if rarely visible, discontent. In light of this, the Supreme Leader might have realized that even if he had not yet lost his grip on power, continuing further down this path would be dangerous to the regime's survival. Thus, the regime made a collective decision to try and alleviate both the domestic and external pressures threatening it in one fell swoop.

Rouhani offered an acceptable solution, since he is seen by the regime as a loyal, elite consensus-builder, who strongly supported the country's nuclear program, but is also a moderate face for Iranian society and the outside world. Moreover, the very unexpected nature of his victory helps bolster the regime's claims to democratic legitimacy – a useful pretense for restoring domestic calm and international negotiations.[3]

If true, this interpretation means that the Iranian regime sees itself as weakening, but not yet on the ropes. They allowed Rouhani's election – whether as their first choice or after coming to see any other scenario would prove more dangerous – precisely because they realize they need to stop the pain. Thus their strategy will be, as it has been all along, to try and use negotiations to buy time and extract concessions just for coming to the table. If this interpretation is right, an arms control agreement is possible, but most likely only if U.S. policymakers increase the pain Iran is already feeling. By tightening sanctions, they would send the signal to Iran that they will only stop hurting once they accede to an acceptable deal.

Moreover, the United States should not preemptively signal a willingness to lift sanctions during talks. According to Rouhani himself, in 2003 Iran used negotiations with the European Union

as cover to advance its nuclear program. Indeed, too much eagerness to ease pressure on Iran will only convince them to play the same old game: extracting concessions while still advancing their nuclear ambitions.

Way Forward

We do not yet fully understand the significance of Rouhani's election, but we need to clarify the situation quickly. Given their different conclusions about the state of the Iranian regime and their implications for policy, it is imperative that these two interpretations be tested. If Iran is merely hurting, a negotiated solution might be within reach; if its control of the means of coercion has evaporated, the United States should instead help the regime find its way into history's dustbin.

Diplomatic engagement – with an offer that would clearly and quickly test Iran's sincerity – remains the best way to determine what political dynamics led to this seminal moment. Regardless of which interpretation is true, such outreach must be accompanied by greater pressure.

Current Iran Policy and Status

The Obama Administration's policy toward Iran appears to define victory as preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, as opposed to acquiring nuclear weapons capability. It pursues that goal through a "dual-track" approach that visualizes a diplomatic agreement, with unspecified terms, as a pathway to its objective. It utilizes sanctions as the primary means for convincing Tehran to comply with international demands.

Nuclear Thresholds

A nuclear weapon consists of three main components: a delivery mechanism; the explosive device, or weapon; and fissile material. When President Obama vows to stop Iran from "acquiring a nuclear weapon," he is referring to the act of assembling all three components into a working device. As then Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta testified in January 2012, the Obama policy is predicated on the proposition that if "we get intelligence that they are proceeding with developing a nuclear weapon then we will take whatever steps necessary to stop it." Thus, by focusing on the actual weapon, not Iran's capability to produce one, the Obama Administration is creating an ambiguity about its red line, which the Iranian leadership might interpret as giving it room to produce weapons-grade uranium, master the technology for building nuclear warheads and develop a delivery vehicle, so long as it refrains from assembling those three elements into a working device.[4]

Diplomacy

Keeping Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon is a task best accomplished through diplomacy, according to President Obama.

During the 2008 electoral campaign and first days of his presidency, Obama distinguished himself by his willingness to engage directly with the Iranian regime. He told the audience in a Democratic primary debate he supported "opening dialogue" with Iran. Following this inclination, his first inaugural address offered to "extend a hand" to Iran if it was "willing to unclench [its] fist."[5]

This openness to dialogue has led to the most energetic diplomacy to date, conducted by the P5+1 group (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, plus Germany). Since President Obama took office in 2009, there have been multiple rounds of negotiations that have made progressively more generous offers to Iran.[6]

The last of these talks concluded in Almaty, Kazakhstan, this past spring without success. Yet, although President Obama has warned that the window for diplomacy is closing, it is widely expected there will be another attempt at negotiation now that the cleric and former nuclear negotiator Hassan Rouhani – a moderate only when compared to the other Supreme Leader-sanctioned candidates – has been elected Iran's president. Without a clear statement of what sort of diplomatic deal the United States would deem sufficient to address its concerns about Iran's nuclear program, there is a strong risk that diplomacy will be continued solely because no other policy pathway has been adequately developed, or that a deal will be reached which does not sufficiently safeguard U.S. interests.

Sanctions

The frequency of negotiations over the last four years has been inversely proportional to that of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions against Iran. As part of his "dual-track" approach, however, President Obama has pursued bilateral sanctions against Iran and pushed the European Union to do the same. The U.S. Congress has been even more aggressive, with additional sanctions regularly passing both houses with near unanimity. The European Union has passed even stricter sanctions targeting its members' imports of Iranian oil. As a result, today the United States and European Union are empowered to exact crippling measures against Iran's energy, shipping and financial industries, as well as those foreign governments and companies that do business with them.

These sanctions, according to the Administration, offer "the Iranian government a clear choice." It can "fulfill its international obligations," or it can expect to "face even more pressure and isolation." The unstated assumption is that sanctions can impose sufficient costs on the Iranian regime – whether by fomenting popular unrest that might threaten its grip on power or by targeting its leaders' sources of personal wealth – to provoke splits within the regime that compel it to change its calculus and conclude that giving up its nuclear program will bring it greater benefit than will continued defiance.[7]

While the U.S. sanctions regime is crippling in theory, in practice the Obama Administration has opted not to bring its full force to bear against Iran. There are few instances of non-Iranian companies actually being sanctioned. Moreover, the United States has given waivers to most consumers of Iranian oil, exempting them from sanctions in return for a "significant reduction" (interpreted by the Administration as roughly a 20 percent cut) in their energy imports from Iran. Twenty countries, which we estimate account for approximately 95 percent of Iranian oil exports, including the largest E.U. and Asian buyers, have been granted waivers.

The result has certainly been damaging to Iran's economy, though perhaps not as much as widely assumed and certainly not enough to change the regime's behavior. The value of Iran's currency, the rial, has fallen sharply, inflation is rampant and consumer goods are becoming harder to procure. Yet our analysis suggests that in 2012, Iran's oil exports to non-E.U. markets – 80 percent of total exports – fell only 25 percent year-on-year. More importantly, however, due to continued high oil prices, we estimate Iran's 2012 oil export revenue to be $60 billion – only a 17 percent decrease from a record-high five-year average for 2007-11, and its fourth-highest annual earnings ever. With money continuing to flow into the regime's coffers, the true target of sanctions – its nuclear program – has continued unabated, while Iran's economy and its people suffer.[8]

Other Elements of Iran Policy

Although officially defined as a "dual-track" approach, President Obama's Iran policy has also occasionally, but not often enough, found other means to pressure Tehran.

Through declarations of his determination "to use all elements of American power," President Obama has at times hinted that continued Iranian intransigence might provoke a U.S. military response. This third, military, track has also been supported by the development of the 30,000 pound Massive Ordinance Penetrator (MOP) bunker buster, deployment of additional air and naval assets to the Persian Gulf region and regional military exercises, including with various allies.[9]

The Obama Administration has also taken some notable steps to bolster the military capabilities of Israel (which has been vocal about the threat that a nuclear-capable Iran would pose to its existence), including Congress' proposed transfer to Israel of several KC-135 aerial refueling tankers. By extending the range of Israeli strike aircraft, these tankers add credibility to Israeli statements of its willingness to take matters into its own hands if other powers fail to stop Iran's nuclear program. However, the Administration has stopped short of Congress' call to also provide specialized munitions to further reinforce Israel's military credibility, namely GBU-31 bunker busters.

Ultimately, however, what matters are not just U.S. actions, but Iranian perceptions of what those actions signify about U.S. policy. The behavior of the regime in Tehran thus far would seem to indicate it does not take the Administration's signals seriously. If Iran's leaders believed that the United States was really prepared to go to war to stop its nuclear progress, we would likely not be witnessing such prolonged intransigence.

Other Proposed Iran Policies

Amid stalled diplomacy, proliferating sanctions and growing nuclear capability, multiple think-tank reports are calling for a diplomatic solution that involves recognizing Iran's right to enrich. Some argue that the best way to facilitate such a deal is to begin lifting existing sanctions and easing international pressure on Iran up-front, or at least not ramping up sanctions further, thereby giving Tehran the opportunity and incentive to reciprocate.[10]

At the heart of such proposals is a belief about the Iranian regime's motives for pursuing a nuclear weapon. The shared assumption – implicit in some reports, more clearly addressed in others – is that Tehran may be a revisionist state, but "nuclear weapons would probably reinforce Iran's traditional national security objectives, including deterring a U.S. and/or Israeli military attack."[11] According to this logic, Iran is only seeking the bomb to ensure its own survival, but not necessarily to intimidate its neighbors or overthrow the regional status quo.

Therefore, these reports reason, the simplest way to persuade Iran to give up its nuclear program is to make sure that the regime feels secure. Easing sanctions, the argument goes, would be a sign of good faith and a tacit declaration that the United States' non-proliferation concerns are not simply a Trojan horse for regime change. By this logic, additional sanctions would be counterproductive. Instead, offering a deal that accedes to Iran's self-declared right to enrich uranium would allow the regime to maintain both its pride and security, obviating Iran's desire for a nuclear weapon and helping build confidence for further agreements.

With their concern for affecting Iranian motives, these recent reports spell out, at least implicitly, an alternative to the current U.S. policy of prevention. Yet we would challenge the accuracy of this view of the Iranian regime, and with it the efficacy of the measures proposed. History suggests that, rather than responding reciprocally to compromise, Tehran exploits weakness and respects only strength. In 1988 Iran agreed to a ceasefire with Iraq only after top commanders warned Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini that the war's continuation could endanger the Islamic Republic's survival. In 2003, Iran's leaders suspended some nuclear activities, as outlined in the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's nuclear program, precisely because they feared they would be the next to be removed from power after the Taliban and Saddam Hussein.[12]

Iran's march toward nuclear weapons capability is also generating another body of literature, arguing that a nuclear Iran could be contained and deterred along the lines of U.S. policy toward the communist bloc in the Cold War. According to these reports, the dire consequences of a nuclear Iran could be still be prevented, even if prevention policy fails. This is because they largely share the perception of Iran's defensive motives in seeking a nuclear weapon, while making two additional salient assumptions, namely: that deterrence is fairly stable and automatic, given the prohibitive costs of nuclear war; and that the past successes of containment augur well for its future.[13]

We would dispute that the motives behind Iran's nuclear program are purely defensive, and caution against applying previous alleged lessons of containment to a world with a nuclear-capable Iran. History indicates that every state with a new nuclear capability, let alone one with Tehran's track record, is tempted to threaten its use for political ends. Trying to minimize the likelihood and consequences of such a situation is an inherently costly, uncertain and long-term commitment. Such difficulties would be magnified with Iran. The United States would lack the necessary credibility or proper capabilities to deter Iran's challenges to the regional status quo, likely prompting a proliferation cascade and raising the very real risk of a hair-trigger nuclear standoff between Iran and Israel.[14]

Prevention and its Discontents

It has been the policy of three successive U.S. Administrations to prevent a nuclear Iran. To this point, so far as Iran does not yet possess nuclear weapons, they could be said to have succeeded. Yet, given that Iran draws ever closer to a nuclear weapons capability, such a claim would be deceptive. U.S. policy towards Iran needs to be reformulated to pursue objectives that more effectively assure national security.

History of Nuclear Prevention Policies

The United States has consistently adopted nuclear prevention as a stated policy, declaring that it would not allow states pursuing nuclear weapons to obtain them. However, this approach failed repeatedly. Over the decades, U.S. officials have announced the threat to U.S. interests of the Soviet Union, China, India, Pakistan, South Africa and North Korea possessing or testing nuclear weapons.

The fact that U.S. intelligence agencies were often surprised by the progress of these and other nuclear programs – France, Iraq, Libya, Syria – clearly illustrates that basing a policy on the expectation that we will detect and act to prevent a nuclear breakout is myopic. The United States has likewise been unsuccessful in predicting when a country might conduct a nuclear test, as was the case when it was taken by surprise by both India and Pakistan in 1998. This also shows the difficulty of devising practical strategy in the aftermath of failed prevention policy. Tellingly, the United States struggled for years to address the challenges posed by the Soviet Union and China acquiring nuclear weapons. With overwhelming superiority in strategic forces, U.S. policymakers in both cases focused on extensive planning for a disarming nuclear strike to substitute for the lack of proactive policymaking. Therefore, despite its military advantages, the United States was often self-deterred, as it had few viable options between acquiescence and escalation.[15]

Critique of Prevention

The limitation of prevention as a policy objective is that it affords only a binary set of outcomes: either the end-state to be prevented is avoided or not. This focus on the status of Iran's nuclear program – does it have nukes yet or not? – ignores both changes in Iran's ability to cross the nuclear threshold and its motivations for wanting to do so. Moreover, it can create perverse incentives to pursue short-term political gains at the cost of successful long-term strategy.

There is no useful metric of advancement towards the goal of prevention, making such a policy appear to be effective even when it is not. This is certainly the case with U.S. policy toward Iran. Since November 2011, the time it would take Iran to produce 20 kilograms of HEU has fallen from roughly 180 days to 100. Iran is now 45 percent closer to nuclear weapons capability than it was 20 months ago. The amount of LEU produced by its enrichment program in the period between the last two IAEA reports is equal to the amount it produced in the three years prior to Obama becoming president. Yet, a policy of prevention risks obscuring Iran's advancing nuclear abilities to U.S. policymakers.[16]

Moreover, a policy of prevention can create moral hazard for those charged with enforcing it. The binary nature of prevention encourages short-term and politically-motivated tactics

– focusing on ensuring that a nuclear Iran does not appear before a certain (politically sensitive) event – at the expense of longer-term strategy. As long as Iran does not yet have nuclear weapons, political credit can be claimed for succeeding, regardless of how fast it is approaching that threshold.

Finally, a policy of prevention risks obscuring not only Iran's ability to obtain nuclear weapons, but also its motivations for obtaining them. To thwart Iran's nuclear ambitions it is not necessary to change, or even know, why it seeks such powerful weapons. It can continue to aspire to them, a policy of prevention dictates, so long as it does not actually fulfill that desire. Yet fundamentally, the U.S. concern with Iran is not just that it does not acquire nuclear weapons, but that this ideologically aggressive, murderous regime does not acquire them.

As Immanuel Kant wrote of the conditions for *Perpetual Peace*, "in order to be secured against hostility it is not sufficient that hostilities simply be not committed." So too, the absence of an Iranian nuclear weapons capability is not sufficient to secure U.S. national interests. It is Iran's bloody pursuit of regional hegemony, with or without a nuclear weapon, that already unsettles the region and threatens it with widespread sectarian war. To define U.S. policy toward Iran simply as preventing its acquisition of nuclear weapons is to ignore both myriad other ways in which it directly endangers U.S. interests and the ideology that will continue to drive the Iranian regime's destabilizing policies.[17]

Policy Statement

In light of the failings of a policy of prevention, and the shortcomings of other recent proposed policies, we recommend that the objective of the United States and its international partners should be a more proactive, strategic one designed to test Iran's sincerity and the political strength of its regime, with the ultimate goal of depriving Iran of the ability to pursue nuclear weapons.

Policy Objective

In the short term the United States should define its policy not negatively – preventing a nuclear Iran – but positively. This requires making it the stated objective of the United States to render Iran unable to develop a nuclear weapons capability, not just to acquire a nuclear weapon. By this logic, the U.S. red line should be Iran's ability to obtain enough fissile material for a nuclear device faster than the United States would be able to credibly detect and successfully preempt it. President Obama referred to this looming threshold in the 2012 presidential campaign when he said "we have a sense of when they would get breakout capacity, which means we would not be able to intervene in time to stop their nuclear program, and that clock is ticking."[18]

Despite that statement, U.S. declaratory policy emphasizes stopping Iran from making the decision to screw together all the parts of a nuclear weapon. But getting the intelligence necessary to stop Iran's assembly of a nuclear device will be incredibly difficult in the case of a regime as opaque as Iran's. Moreover, the actual act of assembly could be done quickly and discreetly, making it difficult to stop even if the intelligence was procured.

Instead, we argue that the pragmatics of prevention must determine U.S. policy toward Iran. The critical question is: at what point will it no longer be possible to prevent a nuclear-capable Iran? U.S. policy must be to preclude Iran's advance to this point. The appropriate threshold, we believe, is Iran's ability to manufacture fissile material for a nuclear device in less time than would be required to detect and respond to such activity. The production of fissile material is the technologically most difficult and most time-intensive part of a nuclear weapons program. Once Iran has enough fissile material for a weapon, it can easily transport and conceal it until ready to assemble a nuclear weapon covertly and present the world with a fait accompli. Unless Iran's nuclear progress is stopped before it attains an undetectable nuclear weapons capability, prevention will prove impossible.

The first step of such a policy is to seek proactively to halt Iran's acquisition of ever-greater nuclear capabilities. The second is to dismantle Iran's existing nuclear program until it is no longer able to realistically pursue a nuclear weapons capability. The effective pursuit of both these steps requires an expansive understanding of what constitutes Iran's nuclear capabilities. It will not suffice to focus on just one metric of Iranian nuclear progress, for example its stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium, as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has. Instead, a comprehensive assessment of all the variables that contribute to Iran's nuclear capability – enrichment level, stockpiles of enriched uranium, number and capability of centrifuges installed and operating, and total enrichment output – is needed.

Testing Iran

Determining how best to achieve this objective will require understanding the strength of the Iranian regime. Thus, U.S. policy should be designed to test which of the two viable interpretations of Rouhani's victory – the collapse of Iran's security apparatus or elite accommodation – is valid. If Iran proves responsive to engagement this time around, the United States should pursue a nuclear deal that both secures its national security interests and meets Iran's international legal obligations.

However, should Iran reject further U.S. diplomatic overtures, this would reinforce the need for the use of force and other pressures to set back or remove the threat of Iran's nuclear program.

Recommended Strategy

Below we propose different pathways that the United States might be able to follow to arrive at the above policy objective. Each poses its own risks and tradeoffs, but none should be pursued to the exclusion of the others. Instead, a comprehensive and robust strategy will seek to make sure that each of these pathways is followed as far as possible in pursuit of the ultimate objective of an Iran that is neither able nor willing to pursue nuclear weapons capability. We also propose policies that, although incapable of leading to this objective themselves, can accelerate progress toward it.

Policy Pathways

Testing Iranian sincerity will require the pursuit of diplomacy. But if this pathway fails to yield results, U.S. policymakers must be prepared to follow the two subsequent ones: military action and political warfare.

DIPLOMACY

The preferred method for depriving Iran of its nuclear capabilities would be a diplomatic agreement in which Iran agrees to address international concerns and comply with UNSC and IAEA resolutions, in return for gradual lifting of the sanctions that have been levied against it. But the attractiveness of this solution should not be mistaken for a warrant to engage in diplomacy for diplomacy's sake.

Negotiations can only be conducted so long as Iran has not yet crossed the threshold of an undetectable nuclear weapons capability, and only for the purpose of reaching a deal that promotes U.S. policy objectives and security interests. Another consideration in shaping U.S. proposals must also be the need for a definitive test of Iranian intentions. Tehran must be offered a deal that both secures U.S. interests, yet is palatable enough that a regime prepared to compromise would respond. Defining such an adequate diplomatic deal can be contentious; our own task force was not able to come to a unanimous conclusion.

All task force members agree that thorough and invasive inspections by the IAEA will have to be a necessary part of any deal, to create confidence that Iran is not cheating or pursuing a clandestine nuclear program. Further, we concur that the best option would be an agreement that permits Iran to keep a civilian nuclear power program but no enrichment facilities or capabilities.

Some believe, however, that a credible yet very limited enrichment option should be offered to Iran as a test of its true intentions. The objective of this approach is to see if the United States can prevent the Iranians from acquiring a nuclear breakout capability diplomatically, and to expose them if they are not prepared to accept a deal that is seen as credible by our partners in the P5+1. By presenting them with an endgame proposal that includes much of what Iran claims to want – civilian nuclear power and enrichment – U.S. negotiators would be giving them a chance to prove whether or not they are for real.

To ensure that Iran does not retain a breakout capability, such a deal would allow no more than 1,000 centrifuges total, operating, installed or stored, no uranium enrichment above 5 percent, and a stockpile not to exceed one bomb's worth of 5 percent enriched uranium and be accompanied by an inspections regime adequate to verify Iranian compliance with these restrictions. Additionally, such a deal would be predicated upon Iran first fulfilling the requirement set forth in six UNSC resolutions to cease its program for a restricted amount of time that would need to be defined.

If Iran rejected a deal that allowed it some enrichment, but not enough for a nuclear weapons capability, it would clearly signal to the world that its real interest is a weapon, not electricity generation. Moreover, there is greater support for such a deal among the United States' international partners. Therefore, if the United States were to offer such a deal to Iran and have it rejected, it would be much easier to make the case that Iran is unreasonable, diplomacy is impossible and stronger measures are necessary.

Others, however, believe that offering Iran a deal that allows it to retain any enrichment capability would represent an unwise retreat from the six UNSC resolutions' call for the suspension of all enrichment, and would have a counterproductive effect. The concern here is that allowing Iran some enrichment capability provides no clear logic to say how much is acceptable and how much is not. Such a slippery slope can lead to prolonged negotiations and discord among our diplomatic partners as we struggle to define how many centrifuges is too many or just enough.

Moreover, allowing Iran to maintain any enrichment would amount to a de facto acceptance of the "right to enrich" that Tehran continually claims, despite the clear absence of any such right in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (to which Iran is a signatory). The precedent set by such a deal would open the door to other nations having "peaceful" indigenous enrichment capabilities, thereby undermining the international non-proliferation regime.

Finally, the history of negotiating with Iran shows that its officials never give straight answers. Thus, it might be exceedingly difficult to use an endgame proposal to test, if not expose definitively, Iranian intentions. Rather than reject the offer, they would prevaricate and run out the clock, without giving the United States the satisfaction of a clear response with which to build the case for more aggressive measures.

Ultimately, therefore, the most important aspect of the diplomatic pathway – and one on which there is consensus within our group – is that it have a date of expiration. While it should be pursued aggressively and thoroughly, the United States should only enter into further negotiations with its eye on the clock. President Obama ought to be clear about the time limits on diplomacy, though he need not make his deadline public. Furthermore, it is vital that before placing any such offer on the table, the United States have a clear understanding with its key international partners – i.e., the other P5+1 players, as well as Israel – what the outside limits of any proposal will be, that its core elements will not be subject to further haggling and that there be a clear timeframe for Iran to respond in a meaningful way. Finally, the president must be resolute, both to our allies and to Iran, that once time runs out, other policies will be engaged to stop Iran's nuclear program.

MILITARY ACTION

Should diplomacy fail to produce an acceptable deal within those time limits, the United States should pursue military action as a last resort to ensure that Iran does not attain nuclear weapons capability. The U.S. military is capable of a precision air campaign that would deny Iran nuclear weapons capability in the short-term. It would accomplish this by destroying key nuclear and related military and regime targets: enrichment, weaponization, missile and related WMD facilities; and command-and-control installations, air-defense sites, IRGC installations and air and naval bases.

This would set back Iran's nuclear progress and degrade its ability to threaten its neighbors militarily. Post-kinetic action would be required to prevent or restrict Iran's ability to reconstitute its nuclear program and retaliatory capabilities, including a long-term monitoring mission, continuing sanctions and other measures. The delays and costs of a devastating strike on the pillars of its regime might make Tehran unwilling over the medium-term to continue pursuing nuclear weapons capability.

Military action is not without risks or costs. Iran's nuclear facilities are dispersed and buried, and some may be unknown to military planners. It could also lead Tehran to redouble its efforts to obtain a nuclear deterrent, and to further disperse and bury its facilities to better protect against follow-on strikes.[19] Additionally, Iran can retaliate directly and indirectly against U.S. and allied assets in the Middle East, which could in turn increase risk premiums on the price of oil.

Nevertheless, any such costs are far outweighed by those of a nuclear Iran. As President Obama stated last year, it "would threaten the elimination of Israel, the security of Gulf nations and the stability of the global economy. It risks triggering a nuclear-arms race in the

region, and the unraveling of the non-proliferation treaty." It could also prompt or accelerate a precipitous shift in the regional balance of power, with an emboldened Iran increasing its support for the Syrian regime, Hezbollah and other proxies. The economic consequences of this strategic instability would also be significant. Heightened tension would increase the risk premium on the price of oil even if no supply disruption occurred, which in turn would be projected to have negative long-term impacts on U.S. gasoline prices, gross domestic product (GDP), inflation and unemployment.[20]

POLITICAL WARFARE

Political warfare is an important tool that can be used both to encourage the existing regime to accept U.S. diplomatic proposals and, if it rejects them and U.S. policymakers decide it necessary, to change the regime itself.

Political warfare encompasses all activities short of military action to influence an adversary's will and thus alter its actions, including demoralizing an opponent through the manipulation of its perceptions – often labeled "propaganda" – and operations designed to critically undermine the cohesion between an adversarial regime and its citizens.

The United States should employ psychological or information warfare to make Tehran unwilling to acquire nuclear weapons capability. It can do so by raising the perceived likelihood of an effective surgical strike on its nuclear and military infrastructure. Specific measures could include strengthening U.S. declaratory policy, publicizing relevant U.S. military preparations and capabilities – including the newly available Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP) bunker buster – as well as engaging in an open debate among policymakers on U.S. options for preventing a nuclear-capable Iran. Additional, more concrete moves, such as closer cooperation with regional allies or efforts to mitigate the costs of Iranian retaliation, could have an added psychological effect on Tehran.

These are all methods for increasing pressure on the Iranian regime to demonstrate the seriousness of its peaceful intentions or face a disarming military strike against its nuclear program. As such, these tools of political warfare should be pursued in tandem with a diplomatic strategy.

If a diplomatic deal cannot be reached, a longer-term political warfare strategy could be to make Iran more adherent to international norms and peaceful behavior by encouraging fundamental political change within the country. Similar to U.S. programs to weaken communist regimes' appeal among their citizens during the Cold War, such efforts would attempt to tap into Iranians' deep-seated nationalism and growing alienation from the Islamic Republic's unaccountability, corruption, harsh social policies, economic mismanagement and general isolation from the international community. These policies would be indirect and largely covert; otherwise, they would risk becoming counterproductive if associated too closely with foreign influence.

Policymakers should also consider measures to raise Iranian public and elite concerns that a nuclear weapons capability in the hands of the current regime would be unlikely to deter, and in fact could encourage, nuclear attack against Iran. Strategic deterrence is widely assumed to be almost automatic between nuclear-armed countries, but little has been done to discuss or publicize the circumstances that could undermine such stability if Iran obtains nuclear weapons capability, including a regional proliferation cascade and a strong incentive for Israel to strike first in a nuclear standoff.

Because such efforts would confirm Tehran's ingrained misperception that the United States' real goal has always been regime change, and thus make the regime less likely to negotiate over its nuclear program, this policy should only be undertaken if (and after) Iran rejects a last-chance good-faith effort by the P5+1 to achieve an acceptable diplomatic solution. Tehran's refusal to accept a negotiated outcome would also underscore the regime's true intentions, thus making such a political warfare strategy more desirable and acceptable.

Ultimately, short of encouraging an abrupt, revolutionary transition of power to a more moderate and legitimate government – a risky and uncertain prospect in its own right – regime change is unlikely before Iran develops nuclear weapons capability. Thus, political warfare can only be employed as an integral element of a larger grand strategy toward Iran.

Policy Accelerants

These three pathways can be strengthened by what we are calling policy accelerants – three additional elements of American power to assist in rendering Iran unable or unwilling to pursue nuclear weapons. The options we support are traditional instruments of coercive diplomacy, namely: sanctions, credible military readiness activities and quarantine.

Each of these accelerants supports the pathways we propose. Like those pathways, they should be pursued as complementary instruments of a coherent overarching strategy, and none to the exclusion of the others. Furthermore, they too must have clear expiration dates. However, unlike diplomacy, military action and political warfare, policy accelerants are insufficient to prevent a nuclear-capable Iran on their own. This makes them susceptible to the pitfalls of prevention policy. They are counterproductive if pursued alone or too weakly, since they can lull policymakers into a false sense of progress even as Iran approaches nuclear weapons capability.

SANCTIONS

A series of wide-ranging sanctions have been enacted against Iran. A succession of UNSC resolutions have hampered, but not blocked, Iran's acquisition of WMD and other military technology and materials since it began enriching uranium in 2006. More recently, U.S. and E.U. sanctions have targeted the regime's primary revenue sources, particularly the country's energy sector.

These and additional measures can ease the United States' course along its policy pathways.

In terms of a diplomatic agreement, sanctions can affect Tehran's decision-making calculus by raising the costs of further intransigence. They can also sharpen its incentive to offer concessions on its nuclear program in exchange for gradual sanctions relief. Sanctions can prepare the groundwork for military action by limiting Iran's access to retaliatory capabilities (and the revenues to expand those capabilities). They can also support post-kinetic action by slowing Iran's ability to reconstitute its nuclear and other military capabilities.

Finally, sanctions also support political warfare. Inflicting economic pain on Iran, even at some cost to the United States and its allies, underscores Obama's declared determination to use all elements of U.S. power to prevent a nuclear Iran. Moreover, sanctions' economic and domestic political impact in Iran raises the potential for political turmoil, be it internal divisions among the regime's diffuse decision-making bodies over the course of the nuclear program, or popular

discontent with the current leadership. Indeed, sanctions have already provoked domestic criticism of some of the regime's more confrontational policies.

To truly accelerate progress toward U.S. objectives, however, sanctions must be implemented fully. Reliance on waiver authorities, combined with lax prosecution of major violators, limits the pressures facing Tehran and undermines the seriousness of stated U.S. intentions. Indeed, poor enforcement is currently making sanctions counterproductive: their impact is conspicuous enough to allow the Iranian regime to portray the United States as an aggressor, but they are still executed too weakly to compel Tehran to negotiate in earnest.

Overreliance on sanctions can lead to the same pitfalls as a policy of prevention, as it encourages policymakers to claim short-term victories – curtailing Iran's oil exports, for example – even as these accomplishments do little to slow Iran's nuclear program. Nor can sanctions on their own deny Iran the ability to pursue a nuclear weapons capability. They can only increase the costs to Tehran of continuing to do so, while decreasing the challenges to the United States of pursuing its policy pathways.

CREDIBLE MILITARY READINESS ACTIVITIES

Credible military readiness activities are efforts that, by preparing for an effective strike against Iran's nuclear program, communicate U.S. resolve to stop Iran's nuclear program by any means necessary. The deployment of additional air and naval assets to the Persian Gulf region, military exercises and steps to bolster Israeli military capabilities are key instances of such activity.

Military preparations can aid diplomacy by providing tangible examples of what U.S. policymakers mean when they say the window for an agreement is closing. This would help clarify the cost-benefit calculus of further foot-dragging for Iranian negotiators, especially if the added pressure was multiplied by complementary enforcement of sanctions. Such activities could also send a message to violators of sanctions, helping them realize that non-adherence to sanctions could lead to a military conflict that cuts off the supply of oil from much of Persian Gulf for an extended period of time. Military preparations also shorten the time needed to launch a military strike, making military action more viable in the event of an attempted Iranian nuclear breakout. To a greater extent than sanctions, they can also provide material for a political warfare campaign by intimidating the regime.

Credible military readiness activities have been pursued half-heartedly and sporadically, with visible but brief buildups during periods of tension (but not during negotiations). These are usually followed by drawdowns, and intermixed with statements downplaying the viability of military action. As with the pattern of sanctions enforcement, this lack of firm deadlines or steadily increasing pressure undermines Tehran's perceptions of U.S. resolve. They also engender an illusory belief in the effectiveness of U.S. policy, since such measures are not implemented as part of any long-term strategy, but instead each is trumpeted individually as an instance of U.S. resolve to prevent a nuclear Iran.

QUARANTINE

A quarantine is an operation to prevent vessels of all countries from delivering contraband goods to an adversary. This requires intercepting and inspecting any ship or aircraft destined for the adversary's territory, and turning away those found to contain prohibited materials. It is intended to compel that adversary to change its behavior by denying it access to this contraband, while otherwise maintaining the rights of freedom of navigation. It falls short of

blockade, however, by prohibiting only specific categories of goods. The United States has declared a quarantine once, during the Cuban Missile Crisis when it announced it would deny "all offensive military equipment" headed for Cuba. In the current case of Iran, a quarantine could enforce UNSC prohibitions on transfers of WMD or military materials to Iran. More expansive forms of quarantine could also target goods covered by U.S. and other unilateral sanctions, including Iranian oil exports, refined petroleum imports, or other materials for its energy, shipping or other industrial sectors.

As a policy accelerant, a quarantine would reinforce U.S. diplomatic efforts by raising the political and economic costs to Tehran of using negotiations to buy time for further enrichment. It would become a mechanism to enforce more effectively U.S. sanctions laws, and could lower the risks of military action by depriving the Iranian military of materiel and revenue. It would also enhance U.S. credibility in Tehran's eyes by conveying the gravity of U.S. intentions: the only other time the United States announced a quarantine, it did so in preparation to escalate to war should its adversary not comply. Finally, a quarantine could bolster political warfare by intimidating the regime, and by aggravating the internal conditions brought about by political infighting and public discontent.

As the indirect and passive nature of a quarantine suggests, however, it cannot deny Iran's ability to pursue a nuclear weapon or single-handedly force a change in the country's regime.

Moreover, there are concomitant risks and uncertainties. No clearly-agreed definition for quarantine exists in international law, which can make it difficult to justify as an act short of war. Though current U.S. Navy guidelines distinguish between the two, the practical application of a quarantine closely resembles the right of "visit and search." Similar to a quarantine, this procedure falls short of blockade because it interdicts contraband while allowing passage for exempted goods. It differs from a quarantine because it is recognized by international law, and because claiming this right acknowledges belligerence in an international armed conflict.[21]

As a de facto act of belligerence, implementing a quarantine could sharpen the risk of confrontation, both with Iran and other countries. By signaling U.S. willingness to escalate hostilities, it could prompt Iran to respond in kind. It also requires inspecting neutral vessels for contraband, which infringes more deeply than sanctions on third-parties' sovereignty, and thus expands the realm of potential conflict from diplomatic disagreement to include military confrontation. Ambiguity about what constitutes contraband or an enemy vessel can lead to crises that slowly but ineluctably spiral out of control, or to reprisals against U.S. warships, shipping and other targets. The world wars and the near-run standoff between the U.S. and Soviet navies in the Cuban Missile Crisis each illustrate these potential perils.

Appendices

Iran's Nuclear Progress

Over the last four years – despite sanctions and Stuxnet – Iran's nuclear program has progressed by leaps and bounds. It is now on the verge of being able to acquire an undetectable nuclear weapons capability.[22]

At the beginning of 2009, Iran had stockpiled 683 kilograms of 3.5 percent enriched uranium, which it was producing at an average pace of 47 kilograms per month using almost 4,000 centrifuges at the Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant.

Today, it has seven times as much 3.5 percent enriched uranium (4,300 kilograms), producing it three times as quickly (155 kilograms per month). Additionally, it is using more than twice as many centrifuges at Natanz (almost 9,000) and has begun installing next-generation centrifuges. More worryingly, Iran began in 2011 to enrich uranium up to 20 percent, first at the Natanz Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant and then at the reinforced and previously covert Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant near Qom. It has now amassed 124 kilograms of 20 percent enriched uranium, which it is producing at 10.5 kilograms per month.

That means that if it chooses to, Iran could produce 20 kilograms of highly-enriched uranium (HEU; uranium enriched above 90 percent) – enough for one crude nuclear device – in 20 to 101 days, depending on certain assumptions about the configuration of Iran's nuclear facilities. To be clear, Iran has not yet made the decision to go down this path. But it is dangerously close to a point that if it did decide to produce a weapon's worth of HEU, it could do so before the United States could detect it and respond.

Interestingly, Iran has in fact been slowing down one key aspect of its nuclear program recently: its stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium. Over the last year it has routinely drawn down this stockpile, sending a total of 95 kilograms of 20 percent enriched uranium to be turned into fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor. This seems to be a reaction to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2012, in which he literally drew a red line "before Iran completes the second stage of nuclear enrichment [amassing enough 20 percent enriched uranium] necessary to make a bomb."[23]

Though he did not state the precise amount he had in mind, it is widely believed that Netanyahu was threatening Israeli military action if Iran accumulated more than 155 kilograms of 20 percent enriched uranium. Iran could have crossed that line by now, but instead has been continually pushing it back. Nevertheless, there is some debate about how quickly Iran would be able to convert the reactor fuel it has made back into 20 percent enriched uranium for further enrichment. If this were possible to do in less than several weeks, which is uncertain, Iran would have to be considered to have already crossed Netanyahu's red line.

Regardless, Iran has been finding other ways to speed its approach to an undetectable nuclear weapons capability. It has been busy expanding its nuclear facilities with more centrifuges. In the last year it has added 4,000 of its existing IR-1 model centrifuges at Natanz and 2,000 at Fordow, completing that facility. Next-generation IR-2m centrifuges being installed at Natanz – about 700 to date, but at least 3,000 planned – could be between two and five

times as effective as the IR-1. To date, none of the recently-installed centrifuges have started enriching uranium. But the moment they come online, they could reduce the time needed to produce 20 kilograms of HEU by at least half, to 50 days. Iran could have an undetectable nuclear weapons capability as soon as it throws the switch on its new centrifuges.

History of Diplomatic Offers

Date	Party	Offer	Counteroffer and Result
March-May 2005	EU3	• No enrichment for ten years.	• Limited enrichment capability. • August 2005: Iran announces enrichment resumption.
June 2006	P5+1	• Suspend enrichment and resume implementing Additional Protocol. • Provide fuel for Bushehr, and various economic incentives.	• October 2006: Iran announces Natanz enrichment expansion.
October 2009	P5+1	• Iran transfers 1200 kg LEU to *P5+1* for conversion to Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) fuel. • IAEA inspectors visit Fordow.	• Transfer must occur in Iran and/or Iran staggers fuel transfer. • Iran begins enriching to 20 percent LEU, delays IAEA inspections.
May 2010	Brazil/ Turkey	• Iran transfers 1200 kg LEU to *Turkey* for TRR fuel conversion.	• Iran accepts, P5+1 rejects deal. • New UNSC/U.S. sanctions.
December 2010-January 2011	P5+1	• Iran transfers *1200+* kg LEU abroad for TRR fuel conversion (to account for 2010 stockpile growth).	• Transfer may only occur after sanctions are removed and Iran's right to enrich is recognized.
April-June 2012	P5+1	• Iran *stops* 20 percent enrichment and *shuts down* Fordow. • Transfer stockpile for conversion to TRR fuel. • Aviation technology and nuclear safety assistance.	• Transfer may only occur after sanctions are removed and Iran's right to enrich is recognized.
February-April 2013	P5+1	• Iran *significantly restricts* 20 percent enrichment, retains some LEU. • Transfer remaining stockpile for conversion to TRR fuel. • Six-month Fordow enrichment *suspension*, new inspections. • Reductions in U.S./E.U. sanctions.	• Offer enrichment suspension, UF6 gas conversion to oxide, no LEU transfer, no Fordow suspension, no new inspections. • P5+1 must reduce sanctions and recognize right to enrich.

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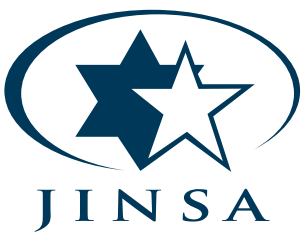

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