

DIPLOMACY AND HYPOCRISY: THE CASE OF IRAN

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A number of international conferences concerned with Iraqi security have been held across the Middle East over the past year. In mid-January, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki announced that representatives of his government will participate in one to be held in Kuwait in April. The United States and other Western powers will have representatives in attendance.² Issues on the agenda will surely include Tehran's regional interests and its uranium-enrichment program.

It is commonly accepted and openly admitted by Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, sometimes to the point of overstatement, that the Iranian government funds uranium enrichment. Nor is there any question that the Islamic Republic of Iran has a rigid political system. It is also significant that there have been important developments in the U.S.-Iranian dispute over the past year and a half, a trend away from preparing for war in favor of the pursuit of diplomatic engagement predicated on various forms of pressure. What is in question is whether this policy is in keeping with professed democratic ideals or if it is even practical.

THE BALANCE OF POWER

Balance-of-power politics is at the heart of U.S.-Iranian tensions. The state-run Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) was established in the early 1970s under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. As the shah was a staunch U.S. ally, a variety of powerful American and European corporations, to say nothing of the U.S. government, avidly supported his nuclear reactor and military-expansion programs.³ But after the shah's overthrow in 1979, support turned to alarm — at least publicly — as the new regime distanced itself from the United States. By 1995, when a Russian company began work on a light water reactor at Bushehr, Iran had become a rogue state in the eyes of U.S. policy makers.⁴

World opinion about Iran is not simplistic. In September 2006, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), composed of 118 states including all in the Middle East except Israel and Turkey, issued a communiqué crediting Tehran for cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The NAM document also endorsed all nations' "basic and inalienable right" to develop atomic energy for "peaceful purposes." Naming the IAEA as "the sole competent authority" for verifying

compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) — Iran is subject to it — the statement endorsed a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East and enjoined Israel to accept NPT and IAEA supervision.⁵ Last July, Omani Foreign Minister Youssef bin Alawi bin Abdullah said that Iran and Oman "have a common interest...to maintain stability and security in the region."⁶ Both nations share the Strait of Hormuz.

Most Americans think that Iran is defying the IAEA and the UN Security Council (UNSC) but the truth is more complex. IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei has claimed that Iranian technicians can make an atom bomb within three to eight years.⁷ Last May, he indicated that Tehran provided accurate information on "declared" nuclear materials as per obligations under the NPT and had not suspended uranium enrichment — which does not violate the treaty as long as it is for civilian nuclear power.⁸ But Iranian authorities are generally cooperative, according to the IAEA. While the IAEA's November 2007 report supplied details about foreign investment in AEOI projects, the fact remains that Tehran is in violation of UNSC resolutions passed since mid-2006 that demand a halt to all uranium enrichment and forbid foreign technical and financial assistance that "could contribute to" making nuclear material and rockets that bear nuclear warheads.⁹ Finally, after prolonged debate that pitted the Western powers against Russia and China, the permanent members and Germany accepted a third round of sanctions against Iran in January. There was little new in the draft, except the names of two more banks and assorted individuals.¹⁰ The full Security Council would debate the contents of the draft through the end of the winter.

THE ENDURING STOCKPILE

Any examination of U.S.-Iranian relations must acknowledge basic facts about current U.S. nuclear war strategy if only because the Bush White House has a clear position on the matter. For instance, during congressional hearings on the 2008 defense authorization bill last summer, White House cabinet secretaries issued a joint policy statement endorsing the Pentagon's "new triad of strategic capabilities, composed of non-nuclear and nuclear strike forces"¹¹ — this notwithstanding the fact that even the threat to use nuclear weapons violates what a 1996 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice called "international humanitarian law."¹²

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), there were nearly 10,000 warheads in the U.S. nuclear arsenal at the end of 2005, with about 5,500 in active service on ICBMs, bombers, submarines, and cruise missiles.¹³ If it is any consolation, the Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reductions signed by President George W. Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2002 calls for reducing each nation's active warheads stockpile to between 1,700 to 2,220 by the end of 2012.¹⁴ But Linton F. Brooks, then-head of the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration, was not keen on exact numbers when he appeared before Congress in 2004. "The numbers I'm prepared to use are 'almost in half' and 'smallest in several decades'," *The New York Times* quoted him as saying. While not citing exact numbers, the White House announced in December that the Enduring Stockpile is now "less than one-quarter its size at the end of the Cold War" (this would seem to bear out SIPRI's estimate).¹⁵

There are other little known features of the Enduring Stockpile, such as the

National Nuclear Security Administration's Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) program (RRW). Planners claim that RRWs, now evidently in the experimental stage, have greater longevity than warheads currently in use. Or take the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP), a bunker-buster bomb armed with a nuclear warhead. While banned by Congress in the 1990s and officially cancelled by the Pentagon in 2005, work on RNEP perhaps continues under another name. Congress has also turned down the administration's RRW appropriations research-and-development request for the current fiscal year.¹⁶ However, RRW and RNEP make sense when considered in the context of CONPLAN 8022 — the common name is Global Strike — developed by the Strategic Command in conjunction with the Air Force and the Navy. The idea behind Global Strike is that deterrence does not work, hence the need for offensive war-planning with nuclear and conventional weapons. As spelled out in public pronouncements and a series of declassified Strategic Command documents collected by the Federation of American Scientists, military planners now see nuclear warheads are part and parcel of the conventional arsenal.¹⁷

The degree of public ignorance about nuclear proliferation is startling. While the United States and Iran have signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty — neither has yet ratified it — the United States opposes most UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions that call for its full ratification.¹⁸ Other UNGA votes are also instructive. In December 2004, the world body voted 179 to 2 for a verifiable Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty that bans further production of weapons-grade uranium and plutonium. The no-votes were cast by the

United States and the Republic of Palau; the United Kingdom and the State of Israel abstained, while Iran voted yes.¹⁹ Nearly two years later, the United States, Britain and France opposed a UNGA resolution that endorsed the Central Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone. Russia, China, all Central Asian states and all Middle-Eastern nations except Israel and Turkey supported the resolution. The United States, Israel, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau opposed another UNGA resolution passed the same day that warned against nuclear proliferation in the Middle East. Iran voted for both resolutions.²⁰

The hypocrisy does not end there. The Single Integrated Operation Plan — the "overkill" plan — has had thousands of warheads trained on Russia for the past 50 years.²¹ A strategy document drafted by a Pentagon committee during the Clinton administration entitled *The Essentials of Post-Cold War Deterrence* argued that it is preferable that U.S. leaders appear to be "irrational and vindictive" because this better suits "the national persona... project[ed] to all adversaries."²² Two years ago, the White House and congressional leaders endorsed the Indian nuclear deal after professing concern about the tinder-box of South Asia. More recently, information has come to light about a multi-million-dollar U.S. program that protects Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. Various sources also claim that an illicit trade in weapons-grade nuclear material passes through Dubai and that there is incompetence in the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (this pales next to allegations made early this year in the London *Sunday Times* by a former FBI translator that a covert network has been stealing U.S. nuclear secrets over the past decade with the aid

of some high-ranking Federal officials).²³ Finally, *Military Times* disclosed last September that a B-52 flew live nuclear warheads over the central United States against Air Force regulations.²⁴ All of these episodes suggest that there is a double-standard in Washington's denunciations of Iranian nuclear proliferation.

Certain U.S. allies actively collaborate with the United States on nuclear proliferation, and not just with UN votes. Two examples are Britain and Israel. Like the Palau Islands in the Pacific, British-ruled Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean hosts U.S. military bases. Neither Washington nor the Crown considers Diego Garcia to be part of the decade-old African Nuclear Weapons Free Zone, even though Mauritius, a treaty signatory and ratifier, claims sovereignty over the atoll and the surrounding Chagos Archipelago. The Pentagon stores nuclear weapons on Diego Garcia, which military analysts see as a jumping-off point for an air assault on Iran as it was for Afghanistan and Iraq.²⁵

Israel has at least 100 nuclear warheads. Unlike the Islamic Republic, the Jewish state is not a signatory to the NPT. *The Sunday Times* revealed early last year that two Israeli Air Force squadrons were awaiting orders to drop bunker-buster bombs on nuclear sites in Iran.²⁶ According to Israeli press reports, the Ministry of Defense has put new spy satellites into orbit and conducted ballistic-missile tests.²⁷ U.S. military personnel often participate in Israeli missile tests. These actions have been justified or denied by past U.S. presidents; the Bush White House is no exception.²⁸ In Bahrain last December, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates drew laughter from Middle-eastern officials when he denied that

Israel's "nuclear program" poses a threat to them. At a think-tank conference the next day in Dubai, U.S. Ambassador to the IAEA Gregory Schulte declared that "Israel never signed the [Nuclear] Non-Proliferation Treaty, so [it] never violated the NPT."²⁹ He was apparently serious.

Iranian-American political scientist Trita Parsi believes that Israeli planners prefer the game of nuclear deterrence with Tehran, as a hot war would have dire consequences for Israel's security.³⁰ In fact, some high-ranking Israelis think this, despite the bellicose rhetoric of colleagues like Likud party head Benjamin Netanyahu and several members of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's governing coalition. However, in October, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni told the newspaper *Haaretz* that Iranian nuclear weapons would "not pose an existential threat to Israel."³¹ During an appearance at the Brookings Institution, former Mossad chief Efraim Halevy stated that "Israel has a whole arsenal of capabilities to make sure the Iranians don't achieve their result" of undermining Israeli supremacy in the Middle East. He added that Israeli diplomacy "must be much more sophisticated and nuanced" as "the mullahs" are primarily concerned with regime-survival.³² It is notable that neither Livni nor Halevy is a "dove."

STRATEGIES OF TENSION

The Bush administration holds that "all options are on the table" concerning Iran's nuclear program.³³ This includes public support for Security Council sanctions and threats of outright war as well as covert actions and propaganda. A useful conceptual framework for analyzing U.S. pressure on Iran is *strategia della tensione* —

strategy of tension. This concept describes destabilization techniques employed in Italy in the 1970s and 1980s by ultra-right-wing groups in coordination with Italy's secret services, in the context of NATO covert operations in Western Europe during the Cold War.³⁴

It is true that Tehran's responses to Western criticism of its nuclear program have included military maneuvers, strengthened trade links with U.S. rivals like Venezuela and Russia, and the arrests of four U.S. citizens in Iran, two of whom have been released. A year ago, another American vanished at an Iranian seaside resort.³⁵ It is true that Tehran has interests in Iraq. But it is also true that the White House has been modulating regional tensions for years so as to weaken Tehran's sense of confidence with overlapping strategies of tension.

Dating from the Reagan administration, congressional sanctions on trade with Iran constituted the first strategy of tension. Last year, President Bush authorized the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control to ban transactions between U.S. citizens and Iranian banks accused of financing Tehran's missile program and its main security force, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). In an attempt to hamper IRGC business activities and the influence that the IRGC-Quds Force has with

"Shiite" insurgents in Iraq, the Bush administration placed the IRGC on the State Department's list of terrorist organizations (the Quds Force cultivates foreign paramilitary groups amenable to Iranian interests).³⁶ The Treasury Department is also pressuring European banks and energy companies to halt business in Iran.³⁷

The proposed Iran Counter-Proliferation Act sponsored in the House of Representatives by right-wing Democrat Tom Lantos spells out tighter sanctions against

Iran than those already on the books.³⁸ However, there is a chronic problem with the Iranian sanctions: They look formidable on paper, but enforcement has always been spotty and may remain so due to considerable

conflicts of interest. A report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), issued in mid-January, attests to the difficulties inherent in maintaining a workable sanctions regime.³⁹

Despite inconsistent sanctions enforcement, the White House has threatened military invasion for years, constituting the second strategy of tension. Since the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, there have been press accounts of provocations by British and U.S. naval forces from the contested Shatt al-Arab waterway in Iraq to the Strait of Hormuz.⁴⁰ According to investigative journalist Seymour Hersh and former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter,

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U.S. Special Operations teams and aerial reconnaissance drones have been present inside Iran since at least 2004.⁴¹ Last spring, several Coalition expeditionary strike groups staged war games in the Persian Gulf and surrounding waters. Vice President Richard Cheney took the opportunity to denounce "extremism and strategic threats" from aboard the aircraft carrier USS *John C. Stennis*.⁴² This is gunboat diplomacy writ large.

The Pentagon and the Israeli Ministry of Defense also have contingency plans to attack Iran. Based on research conducted between early 2006 and the spring of 2007, the independent Oxford Research Group argues that such an action would most likely take the form of a U.S. air assault on selected targets as a ground attack is less practical and Israel has limited military resources. All of the selected targets would be destroyed but, given limited intelligence, not necessarily all nuclear assets. Iranian national unity would increase, as would determination to build atomic weapons. The conflict might drag on for years with unintended consequences.⁴³ The Center for Strategic and International Studies released a more technical report at the end of 2007. This hypothetical scenario prepared by military analyst Anthony Cordesman argues that Tel Aviv has over 200 nuclear weapons, the Iranians have perhaps fewer than 50, and a nuclear exchange could kill 16-28 million Iranians and 200,000-800,000 Israelis.⁴⁴

The third strategy of tension is propaganda. Between 2005 and 2006, the vice president's oldest daughter Elizabeth led the so-called Middle East soft-power offensive. Among her other duties, Ms. Cheney ran the Iran Syria Operations Group (ISOG), which funded Iran's political opposition.⁴⁵

Under the conditions of the Iran Freedom Support Act, Congress approved over \$66 million for the Iran Democracy Fund when she was in office and \$60 million for this fiscal year. Iran's Minister of Intelligence and Security Gholam Hossein Mohseni-Ejeie sees the Fund as "psychological warfare." Others see it as a pretext for silencing internal dissent.⁴⁶

President Bush's warning last October that the Iranian nuclear program could result in "World War III" was a harsh form of propaganda.⁴⁷ But the president did not utter the only provocation in 2007. For example, neoconservative intellectual Norman Podhoretz (an advisor to Rudolph Guiliani) published an essay in which he called for bombing Iran (ElBaredei has called advocates of this position "new crazies").⁴⁸ In September, former UN Ambassador John Bolton told a group of British MPs that he missed the time when America "had the capability to engineer the clandestine overthrow of governments." During a panel discussion at a strategic-studies conference in Israel, Mr. Bolton said that the Israel Air Force should stage "a stunningly successful military strike" on Iran as it did on Syria in September.⁴⁹

Leading presidential candidates are also taking part in the propaganda campaign. Democratic Senator Hillary Clinton, an advocate of pragmatic diplomacy, is on record that "no option can be taken off the table" in reference to the "threat" of Iran.⁵⁰ For his part, Republican Senator John McCain, a supporter of Iranian regime change, told an audience in Florida, "There's [sic] going to be other wars, I'm sorry to tell you."⁵¹ In a statement delivered at a news conference last summer,

Democratic Senator Barack Obama observed, "Allowing Iran — a radical theocracy that supports terrorism — ...to acquire nuclear weapons is a risk we cannot take." He added that, while "Iran's most explicit and intolerable threats are aimed at Israel, its conduct threatens us all."⁵² Writing in the autumn issue of *Foreign Affairs*, former Democratic candidate John Edwards argued that an effective foreign policy protects America's "strategic advantage" from "weak and failing states." As for Iran's nuclear program, "[w]ith a threat so serious, no U.S. president should take any option off the table — diplomacy, sanctions, engagement, or even military force."⁵³

The fourth strategy of tension is covert action: espionage and terrorism. Given the air of secrecy that pervades this issue, "facts" may have changed by the time of publication. However, there are indications that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Pentagon are sharing responsibilities in what amounts to a "secret" war inside Iran. According to ABC News reports, the CIA runs "nonlethal" intelligence collection and, according to investigative journalist Larisa Alexandrovna, the office of the undersecretary of defense for intelligence is responsible for armed sabotage.⁵⁴ Last year saw many press reports about bombings and attacks on security forces in parts of Iran that are predominated by ethnic minorities.⁵⁵

Very instructive is the case of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI, also called the Mojahedin e-Khalq). An Iranian political party opposed to the current regime, the PMOI had left the country in the early 1980s and received protection from Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War. PMOI

forces periodically staged raids on the Iranian border and took part in operations against rebel Iraqi Kurds and Shiites in 1991. The State Department has recognized the PMOI as a terrorist organization for a decade, and it fell under U.S. custody after the fall of Baghdad in 2003.⁵⁶ Even so, evidence suggests that the Pentagon has used the PMOI for hit-and-run operations inside Iran. While details are admittedly hazy, this sounds like an application of the "pseudo-gang" concept popularized by British counterinsurgency theorist Frank Kitson (claiming to be authentic partisans of a certain population, pseudo-gangs are actually terrorist groups).⁵⁷

The State Department may also be backing covert action. Besides spreading rumors, did Ms. Cheney's ISOG subsidize arms shipments to pseudo-gangs? Al-Qaeda in Iraq could have been one of them. Besides battling other Iraqi insurgents, this group threatened last summer to carry out terrorist attacks in Iran. Estimated to have 5,000 active members at most, al-Qaeda in Iraq is also on the State Department's terrorist list.⁵⁸ U.S. efforts to gain the support of Iraqi and Pakistani tribal leaders is evidence of what Hersh and Canadian economist Michel Chossudovsky claim about "sectarian conflict" in the Middle East: Western intelligence services are cultivating pseudo-gangs, as they did with the Afghan Mujahideen.⁵⁹ That said, no strategy of tension can excuse Tehran's deliberate repression of ethnic minorities, journalists, students, trade unionists, and women.⁶⁰

DIPLOMATIC BREAKTHROUGHS IN 2007

A "breakthrough" in U.S.-Iranian relations came about in May last year when

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker discussed Iraqi "security" with his Iranian counterpart Hassan Kazemi Qomi. The talks that followed in late July established a special subcommittee that met again two weeks later at the "expert level," as an Embassy official put it without elaborating.⁶¹ Since then, both sides have alternated between scheduling new talks and canceling them.⁶² Interestingly, IRGC commander Major-General Mohammed Ali Jafari was in Baghdad in December to advise the Iranian negotiating team, according to *The Sunday Times*.⁶³ In early February, the Tehran-based Iranian Students News Agency (www.ISNA.ir) quoted an anonymous Iranian official as saying that Iranian and American officials would resume the security talks on Iraq sometime later in the month. However, while the true status of the negotiating process is unclear, it seems that the Bush administration now favors relatively open diplomacy with Tehran over relying on back-channels and intermediaries.

Diplomatic breakthroughs do not happen overnight. A fax sent to the State Department in the spring of 2003, supposedly by the Iranians, outlined conditions for a strategic understanding: In exchange for an end to U.S. hostility and recognition of Iranian regional interests, Tehran will stop assistance to Hezbollah and Hamas, help in Iraq's reconstruction, and cooperate with the IAEA. Parsi argues that President Bush snubbed the offer.⁶⁴ Last year, the Beirut *Daily Star* claimed that Iraqi President Jalal Talibani had been saying since late 2006 that Tehran wants to arrive at an "understanding" with the United States about Iraq.⁶⁵

Two days before the May talks

opened, the Iranian intelligence ministry announced that it "discovered" U.S. sabotage plans in Iran's western border provinces. Whether this claim was true or not, no official U.S. comment followed. Within the week, Reuters reported the seizure of "American-made weapons" after a clash in Iranian Kurdistan.⁶⁶ The Bush administration has not rejected the strategy of tension. However, indications are that containment instead of preemptive war has become the goal.

A theme that was being increasingly heard in official pronouncements and the mainstream media throughout 2007 had to do with Iranian support for Shiite insurgents in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan. One of the items that General David Petraeus, the commander of Multinational Forces-Iraq, cited in his report to Congress in September was that the Qods Force is training Shiite militia as "a Hezbollah-like force" for use in a "proxy war" against the Coalition. The general accused Ambassador Qomi of belonging to the Qods Force shortly before the administration designated the IRGC as a terrorist organization.⁶⁷ While there is no dispute that Tehran has a vested interest in Iraq, there is no consensus in Western capitals as to its extent.

The conflicting statements of high-ranking U.S. authorities show the volatility of this disagreement. In February 2007, the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Peter Pace, stated that he had no proof that the Iranian government was involved in shipping Iranian-made roadside bombs to insurgents in Iraq.⁶⁸ In June, a few days before Secretary of Defense Gates recommended that President Bush not renominate Pace, the NATO commander in Afghanistan, General Dan McNeill, denied evidence of Iranian arms smuggling

to Taliban forces. Afghan Defense Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak also rejected Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns's claim that Tehran arms the Taliban.⁶⁹ The contradictions continued through the year.⁷⁰

Last June, the spokesman for a UN-funded disarmament program in Afghanistan told the Inter Press Service that retreating Soviet troops in the late 1980s left most of the illegal weapons that are in his country.⁷¹ During an official visit to the White House several weeks later, Afghan President Hamid Karzai announced on CNN that "Iran has been a supporter of Afghanistan in the peace process that we have and the fight against terror, and the fight against narcotics in Afghanistan... Iran has been a helper and a solution." President Bush's reaction was muted most likely because it is commonly understood that the Iranians and the Taliban are proven enemies.⁷²

Revelations about the illicit circulation of U.S. arms in Iraq showed that hypocrisy still has a central place in U.S. policy. The GAO released a report in July that claimed that one-third of small arms and protective equipment issued to police in Iraq in 2004-05 were not recorded on military inventory lists.⁷³ The Pentagon did not dispute these findings. Talking on Fox News Radio about his experiences running security training at the time in question, General Petraeus said that police trainers could not take inventory, as they distributed the weapons during combat "in the dark."⁷⁴ This highlights the fact that obsessing over Iranian conventional explosives and spies, while ignoring the roles of Western "contractors" and all sorts of Western-made munitions, lacks a sense of proportion.

Such notions aside, at least three things

prompted the administration's change in emphasis. One was the Iraq Study Group report released at the end of 2006. Chaired by James Baker, national security advisor under President George H.W. Bush, and former Democratic Congressman Lee Hamilton, the commission advocated a strategic understanding with Tehran based on "a balancing of interests" and constructive engagement.⁷⁵ A growing number of influential voices like retired Army general John Abizaid, who headed Central Command until spring 2007, endorse constructive engagement. In a talk at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, he said that although the Iranians must not threaten "our vital interests," "...Iran is not a suicide nation."⁷⁶

Reflecting the bipartisan makeup of the Baker commission, members of Congress from both parties advocate constructive engagement with Iran. Lawmakers began to visit Syrian President Bashar al-Asad in late 2006 ostensibly without clearance from President Bush (the Baker-Hamilton commission also wanted a Syrian-U.S. understanding). However, last February, the White House quietly announced plans to hold talks with Damascus and Tehran about Iraq.⁷⁷

Another impetus for change is the latest National Intelligence Estimate (NIE). While the full text is classified, the director of National Intelligence released a summary in December, over two weeks after the release of the IAEA's November report. The NIE has "high confidence" that Tehran halted research and development on nuclear weapons in the fall 2003 and "moderate confidence" that it is still dormant. Similarly, the decision to join the NPT was predicated on a rational "cost-benefit approach." The NIE "does *not* assume" that the Iranians intend to get

nuclear weapons but rather wants to base any conclusion on "the intelligence."⁷⁸

The report's intelligence is evidently derived from the contents of a laptop that someone carried out of Iran last year. That action coincided with the purported kidnapping of Ali Reza Asgari, a senior Ministry of Defense official and deputy defense minister in Mohammad Khatami's government from 1997 to 2005, while he was traveling in Turkey (or he was a spy for Turkey who brought sensitive information with him).⁷⁹ Details are unclear.

President Bush is treading a middle ground. Even though he acknowledged the veracity of the NIE, he pled that Iran still is "dangerous." This, incidentally, is what the report summary implies (a decision by Iran's leaders to abandon a nuclear weapons program is "inherently reversible").⁸⁰ But the fact that the NIE release was long overdue is reason to believe that friction exists between technically-oriented intelligence professionals and their politically sensitive superiors in the White House. However, the NIE is vague and doesn't alter the fact that constructive engagement essentially depends on using strategies of tension in order to be effective.

A NEW WAY FORWARD?

Speaking at the World Economic Forum a day after the P5 + 1 agreed to the draft sanctions resolution, Secretary of State Rice allowed that U.S.-Iranian tensions "can and should be resolved through diplomacy."⁸¹ But no diplomatic "break-through" is free of coercion. It is easy to forget that the Enduring Stockpile is, in effect, the fifth strategy of tension that the United States has at its disposal in the Middle East. Furthermore, when one also takes the Russian, Pakistani, Israeli, and

Indian nuclear-weapons stockpiles into consideration, it becomes clear that a nuclear balance of terror already exists in the "Arc of Crisis."

The United States employs a sixth strategy of tension in the Middle East: military aid. This is perhaps the most awesome of them as it combines aspects of all of the others. Late last summer, Under Secretary of State Burns signed a Memorandum of Understanding in Jerusalem with Bank of Israel head Stanley Fisher that made official a ten-year military aid plan of \$30 billion for Israel. This was part of a larger military aid package announced two weeks earlier by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice totaling almost \$80 billion for U.S. allies Egypt and the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council.⁸² Approved in most respects by Congress in December and promoted by President Bush on his latest Mideast tour, the new military aid deal is a means by which Washington seeks to exercise leverage against the Islamic Republic. Iranian Foreign Minister Manoucher Mottaki sees it as an attempt to save U.S. arms manufacturers from bankruptcy.⁸³

But is promoting a regional arms race the best way to ease tensions with Iran? Newsweek senior editor Michael Hirsch has written that we must compromise with Tehran's "hard-liners" as they oppose war with the United States.⁸⁴ President Bush, of all people, put it best when he explained why he vetoed the Stem Cell Enhancement Act last year: "Destroying human life in the hope of saving human life is not ethical — and is not the only option before us."⁸⁵ Nor are double standards and strategies of tension valid tools of national policy.

- ¹ Special thanks are due to my wife Joanna, the parish of St. Malachy's, and friends in Philadelphia.
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