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EXERCISE NEW HORIZONS

**WHY IRAN SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO DEVELOP A NUCLEAR
WEAPONS CAPABILITY**

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the hypothesis of Iran becoming a Nuclear Weapon State (NWS) is adopted, out of which the possible consequences for world politics are deduced. The reader is taken through three consecutive steps to show that a nuclear armed Iran would thoroughly destabilize the world in general and the already highly instable Middle East in particular. First, Islamism and its interaction with Iran are described, followed by an analysis of the stabilizing and de-stabilizing effects of Iran as a NWS, to conclude with policy recommendations for NATO and the European Union.

Communism has now been replaced as the main opponent to liberal democratic thought by an equally violent and intolerant but, due to its religious nature, much more powerful ideology: Islamism, having as its champion state the Islamic Republic of Iran.

This fact in combination with the dawn of Iran as a NWS would almost inevitably lead to a nuclear catastrophe, whether intentionally, preceded by conventional aggression or provocation, or accidentally.

Therefore, it is concluded, NATO should lead a “coalition of the willing” that should employ all necessary means, up to armed force but short of a nuclear strike, to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

“If you have a shield, it is easier to use the sword”

President Nixon

1. INTRODUCTION

On August, 29, 1949, the USSR detonated its first atomic bomb and thus effectively ended the nuclear hegemony of the USA. This fact is often considered as having had a stabilizing effect on the world throughout the Cold War. Both sides held each other in a balance of terror, which ostensibly helped avoid a new global conflict. But is this really true?

All over the world, so-called “proxy wars” sprung up, in which both sides fought out their ideological differences in an indirect way. The Soviet Union, safe behind its nuclear shield, never stopped exporting communism all over the world. It supported and inspired terrorist organizations in nearly every West-European country: Bader-Meinhoff and Rote Armee Fraktion in Germany, Cellules Communistes Combattantes in Belgium, IRA in the United Kingdom, Brigata Rosse in Italy, Action Directe in France ...

Furthermore, nuclear deterrence was not nearly as effective as generally accepted, with several historically recorded instances of near all-out nuclear war¹. Last, the acquisition of a nuclear weapon capability by the Soviet Union led to a proliferation cascade, comprising five of the total of seven² official Nuclear Weapon States (NWS); as a reaction to the USSR developing nuclear weapons, Great Britain, France and China

¹ Senators Daniel Coats and Charles Robb. *Meeting the Challenge. U.S. Policy Toward Iranian Nuclear Development* (Washington D.C.: 2008), 53.

² Israel is generally regarded as the eighth NWS but has never declared nor demonstrated its nuclear weapons capability.

followed suit. In reaction to China joining the NWS, India developed its own capability in response to which Pakistan felt compelled to do the same. These facts strongly indicate that the world did not become a safer place, despite the nuclear equilibrium between the superpowers.

Sixty years later, the world faces new challenges. After the fall of communism, Islamism became the leading ideology to challenge Liberal Democracy³ and found a Champion State in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Now this rising regional power is on the brink of developing nuclear weapons of its own.⁴

This paper will not deal with the probability of Iran developing nuclear weapons and the different possible roads and timelines to get there. Instead, the hypothesis of Iran becoming a NWS will be adopted, out of which the possible consequences for world politics will be deduced.

As will be shown, a nuclear armed Iran would thoroughly destabilize the world in general and the already highly instable Middle East in particular. Therefore NATO should lead a “coalition of the willing” that should employ all necessary means, up to armed force but short of a nuclear strike, to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

To reach this conclusion, this paper will take the reader through three consecutive steps. First of all, Islamism and its interaction with Iran will be described. Secondly, the

³ Barry Rubin. *The Iranian Revolution and the Resurgence of Islam*. (Broomall: Mason Crest Publishers, 2007), 21.

⁴ Jeffrey T. Richelson. *Spying on the Bomb. American Nuclear Intelligence from Nazi Germany to Iran and North Korea*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 564.

stabilizing and de-stabilizing effects of Iran as a NWS will be discussed. Finally, policy recommendations for NATO and the European Union will be promulgated.

2. CONNECTING ISLAMISM, IRAN, AND THE WORLD

In order to understand the influence of Iran on the political and geostrategic world stage, one has to study the driving political ideology of the country: Islamism. Although frequently confused with a subdivision of the Islamic religion, Islamism is one of the big political ideologies and as such belongs in the same list as Fascism, Communism, Socialism, Liberal Democracy, and Nationalism.⁵ The main characteristics of Islamism and its goals will be described next, followed by the link to the Iranian society and state. At the end of this chapter, the interaction with Persian nationalism and Shi'a will be examined.

WHAT IS ISLAMISM?

A first observation to be made about Islamism is that it is a revolutionary political ideology and as such challenges the status quo in the world. In the same way as Communism wants to liberate all proletarians on earth but in the process obviously has to neutralize or destroy capitalists and middle class, Islamism in its strive to 'liberate' all Muslims and bring them back to the "True Faith", has to affect non-Muslims too. A clear example of this can be seen in Lebanon, where multiple religious minorities live together. Since 1982, first with the Iranian Pasdaran or Revolutionary Guard and up until now with Hezbollah, Iran actively fights this multi-religious society:

“Our goal is to Islamicize [sic] the place and, as the Imam Khomeini says, we have to export the Islamic revolution to the world. So, like any other Muslims, we have come here with the aim of saving the deprived,” one Iranian told a

⁵ Barry Rubin. *The Iranian Revolution...*, 16.

British reporter in a rare interview⁶

The basic tenant of Islamism is that Islam is not only a religion but that it provides all elements that make up both society and politics.⁷ This means there can be no division between religion and state, and both are intimately intertwined. On this basis alone, Islamism is incompatible with most contemporary governing systems. This is even true for Muslim secularist states such as Turkey, or in which Islam is the official state religion such as Egypt. This incongruity is enhanced by the Islamist concept that the only governing doctrine can be a proper or “pure” Islam, and thus that all states where Muslims live must be reconverted to the true faith, as Iran has.⁸

Another fundamental principal of Islamism is that contemporary “mainstream-Muslims” are apostates of True Islam who have to be killed according to Koran. This adds an element of extreme violence to Islamism. Also, Islamism regards a narrow interpretation of “jihad” as the sixth pillar of Islam.⁹ “Jihad” means any effort or penitence in name of faith in mainstream Islam, but it has been interpreted by Islamism as an armed struggle to spread Islam.¹⁰ Although the efforts of Islamists to have “jihad” incorporated in mainstream Islam as the sixth pillar have so far been fruitless, fact remains that it is firmly embedded in their own version.

⁶ Robin Wright. *Sacred Rage. The Wrath of Militant Islam*. (New York: Touchstone, 2001), 81.

⁷ Barry Rubin. *The Iranian Revolution...*, 16.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹ The five pillars of Islam are The Confession (*shahada*), Prayers (*salat*), Almsgiving (*zakat*), Fasting (*sawm*), and Pilgrimage (*hajj*).

¹⁰ Robin Wright. *Sacred Rage. The Wrath of Militant Islam...*, 55.

In the eyes of Islamists, the Koran is pretty straightforward in its calls to kill or subjugate all adepts of other religions until Islam rules the world.¹¹ This has also been reflected in a radical Islamic document, found in Geneva in 2001 and known as “The Project,” which outlines a hundred year plan to establish an Islamic government on earth:

This is the history, obscured for a long time, of a secret society and its project to conquer the world. From the mid-20th century to the present days, the men forming the spearhead of militant Islam have consecrated their lives to this great goal: establish an Islamic reign over the whole world. These members of the Muslim brotherhood have worked in the shadows, shielding their ultimate goals from inquiry. It is crucial to understand their strategy and methods since the Brotherhood and their heirs form the most organized of forces that speak in the name of Islam in the West.

It is a totalitarian ideology which works through infiltration and which, in the long term, represents the greatest threat to European societies.¹²

ISLAMISM AND IRAN

The Iranian Revolution in 1979 did not constitute the start of Islamism as a political ideology, just as the October Revolution in Russia in 1917 did not constitute the birth of Communism. What both revolutions did accomplish is the first successful conquest of a nation state by the respective ideologies.

As was the case with the Soviet Union for Communism, Iran immediately became the champion of Islamism in the world. The first ten years after the revolution were characterized by active support for every extremist Muslim movement possible. In the

¹¹ Brigitte Gabriel. *They must be stopped. Why We Must Defeat Radical Islam and How We Can Do It.* (New York, St Martin’s Press, 2008), 24.

¹² Sylvain Besson. *La Conquête de l’Occident. Le Projet Secret des Islamistes.* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 2005), 11, 31.
Translated from the original French by the author.

meantime, the revolution consolidated. This happened in Iran internally with the purge of all liberal forces. Externally, the young Islamic republic had to stand up to the opportunist ruler of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, who thought to take advantage of the newborn regime and started the Iraq-Iran war.

Since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and the election of the “moderate” president Rafsanjani in 1989, “moderate” and “radical” forces in Iran more or less balance political power. In light of the nuclear issue though, it is important to note that Iranian “moderates” and “radicals” only differ in opinion significantly about domestic policy. As far as foreign policy is concerned, both sides largely agree on key issues such as opposition to the Israeli-Arab peace process, intolerance against Christian minorities in Muslim states such as Sudan, and support for anti-government extremists in other Muslim countries like Saudi-Arabia and Bahrain.¹³ Other examples are threats against perceived anti-Muslims such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Salman Rushdie, and the Danish cartoonists, and opportunistic use of terrorism as demonstrated in Iranian support for the Turkish terrorist group Islamic Action.¹⁴

Iran has a vigorous political scene housing the second most powerful parliament in the Muslim world.¹⁵ This does not mean though that its foreign politics have not stayed thoroughly Islamist. It can be argued that the moderates in Iran are even more dangerous in the execution of their Islamist foreign policy, since they put far more reliance in Iran’s military, which, consequently, they have built up to the standards expected of a regional

¹³Patrick Clawson. *Iran’s Challenge to the West: How, When, and Why*. (Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993.), 15-21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6

power. Last, they might make economical promises to the Iranian people they can not fulfill without annexations or foreign (military) adventures.¹⁶

INTERACTION WITH PERSIAN NATIONALISM AND SHIITE ISSUES

Certain authors state that contemporary Iran is a realist nation state with pragmatic policies that put the survival of the regime and Iranian national interest before international Muslim solidarity and the spreading of the Islamist revolution.¹⁷ This truism neglects the former is a basic condition for the latter though. As U.S. Senators Daniel Coats and Charles Robb have observed, Iran's Persian heritage does play a role:

Most Iranians, be they Islamist or secular, believe that Iran is a great civilization that deserves to be treated as a regional hegemon [sic], if not a great power. Arabs, Afghans, and the Turkish peoples of Central Asia complain that Iranians treat them with disdain and as cultural inferiors. Iran's sense of superiority is a constant irritant between Iran and its neighbours. [...] History remains important today as Iranian policymakers implicitly look at territory once under the Persian Empire's control as their near abroad in which they, and not others, have a right to dominate politically and diplomatically.¹⁸

It is clear that such Persian nationalism fuels the dream of expansion of the Iranian revolution even more.

The great schism in Islam between Shi'a and Sunni goes back to the years after

¹⁶ Ibid, xiii.

¹⁷ Sam Razavi. "Post-Khomeini Iran: A Case Study of Pragmatic Foreign Policy" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the ISA's 50th ANNUAL CONVENTION "EXPLORING THE PAST, ANTICIPATING THE FUTURE"*, New York Marriott Marquis, NEW YORK CITY, NY, USA, Feb 15, 2009 http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p310946_index.html, Internet; accessed 21 April 2009.

¹⁸ Senators Daniel Coats and Charles Robb. *Meeting the Challenge. U.S. Policy Toward Iranian Nuclear Development*. (Washington D.C.: Bipartisan Policy Center, September 2008.), 2.

Mohammed's death and the struggle for his ascendance. Iran holds a unique position in the Islamic world being the only Muslim country with a Shi'a majority. The fact that the Shiites are largely outnumbered outside of Iran reinforces the Iranian encirclement complex.¹⁹ On the other hand, although they only constitute ten percent of all Muslims in the world, Shi'a represent almost half of the Muslims in the heart of the Middle East²⁰, which gives them a high degree of influence.

Iran being a Shi'a nation could be seen as a guarantee against Iranians dealing with Sunni countries or organisations. This would be positive for world stability since the most dangerous and violent terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda are situated in the Sunni camp. When it comes to anti-Western politics and actions though, Iran seems willing to operate across the sectarian divide. Examples are the sponsoring by Iran of both Sunni and Shi'a insurgents in Iraq and the cooperation between Iran's Qod Force²¹ and the Taliban.²²

Some other important Shi'a influences on the Islamic rule of Iran include the tradition of martyrdom that was established very early in history and remains a constant in today's Shiite societies. Most Shi'a, including current Iranian President Ahmadinejad, believe in apocalyptic violence and chaos as factors that will trigger or speed up the

¹⁹ Thérèse Delpech. "The Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Mediterranean," *RUSI journal* (Aug 2002.): 49.

²⁰ Senators Daniel Coats and Charles Robb. *Meeting the Challenge...*, 25

²¹ Iranian government agency designed to spread the revolution through irregular warfare.

²² *The 9/11 Report. The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, Thomas H. Kean, Chair, and Lee H. Hamilton, Vice Chair (New York: St Martin's Press, 2004), 91.

return of the “hidden” twelfth Imam. According to Shi’a belief, he will return as an Islamic messiah and save all Muslims. Both the belief in the usefulness of apocalyptic violence and chaos, and the glorification of martyrdom, certainly do not encourage restraint on the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran but likely will make their actions even more unpredictable and aggressive.

ISLAMISM, SO WHAT?

Of course Islamism as described in this paper has given birth to several different forms since the Iranian revolution in 1979, varying in purity, goals and methods. Likewise, the communist party in Belgium or Great Britain could not be regarded equal to their Soviet counterpart during the Cold War. And even the Soviet Union knew periods of more moderate rule under Chroestjev and Gorbatjev. What throughout the history of communism never did change was the constant threat of the Soviet Union to export the revolution to other countries, both by supporting violent movements as by merely spreading extremist ideas. The reason the USSR could keep on doing this unpunished was because of its status as a superpower and a nuclear power.

Communism has now been replaced as the main opponent to liberal democratic thought by an equally violent and intolerant but, due to its religious nature, much more powerful ideology: Islamism. Having as its champion the Islamic Republic of Iran, this ideology has a base in an emerging regional power. If this power should get a boost by acquiring a nuclear weapons capability, what would the consequences for the regional and world political stage be?

3. IRANIAN NUCLEAR ARMS AND WORLD (IN)STABILITY

There are lots of different stages of nuclear weapons development. Some countries possess the necessary know-how, industrial capacity and have access to fissile material but they are parties to the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and have no intention to build nuclear warheads. The list of such countries is very long and comprises most industrialised countries including states as small as Belgium and as big as Canada. Other states are part of the NPT and do not possess nor pursue the necessities to become a NWS. Some countries, such as South Africa once had nuclear weapons but disarmed voluntarily. Only seven countries openly possess nuclear weapons.

Israel is generally accepted as being a NWS with a significant capacity but has never tested or demonstrated. The Israeli's have been living in ambiguity (the "bomb in the basement") for the last forty years. Iran might pursue the same policy for an indefinite period of time but due to its limited scope, this paper will adopt the hypothesis that at some point in time, Iran will have tested and will become a recognized NWS.

Over the following paragraphs, three different scenarios will be discussed, going from "Least likely course of action" to "Most dangerous course of action" and "Most likely course of action."

LEAST LIKELY: ACTIVE USE

In this scenario Iran developed the nuclear weapons in order to use them at the earliest convenient opportunity. Although chances of this happening are remote and contradict a great amount of analyses, two possible scenarios present themselves: use by Iran or Iranian leaders and use through an enabled terrorist organization.

Iran or its Leaders Decide on a First Strike

If any belief should be given to the repeated promises of Iran to eradicate Israel, the combination of nuclear weapons with ballistic missiles would certainly be able to accomplish just that. Israel is a so called “one-or two bomb country” meaning it only takes the destruction of one or two major cities to effectively destroy the Jewish state.²³ The same is actually true for some other countries in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, but they have not been threatened with destruction by Iran.

Though most analysts consider Iran’s threats to be mere rhetoric and refuse to contemplate such a scenario, Israel does not have this luxury. Their extreme vulnerability to nuclear destruction (over sixty percent of the population lives in two metropolitan areas)²⁴ in combination with the consistent Iranian threats, make the combination of Iranian nuclear weapons and vectors an indefensible threat.

Another unlikely scenario, made possible because of the convoluted governance of Iran and unclear authority concerning nuclear issues²⁵, is the resolve by one man or just a few people to go the path of “state martyrdom” and accept retaliation after a first strike. All this in the belief, shared by Iranian President Ahmadinejad, that chaos and apocalypse will speed the return of the hidden “Twelfth Imam.”²⁶ This kind of belief greatly

²³ Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan. *Iranian Nuclear Weapons? Options for Sanctions and Military Strikes*. (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy, Working Draft, Revised: August 30, 2006), 7.

²⁴ Thomas Brinkhoff, “City Population,” http://www.citypopulation.de/Israel.html#Stadt_gross; Internet; accessed 16 December 2008.

²⁵ Senators Daniel Coats and Charles Robb. *Meeting the Challenge...*, 10, 53.

diminishes any deterrence policy.

Use Through a Terrorist Organisation

The stabilizing factor of Iran being a modern nation state, with its national interests and internal safety procedures, makes the above scenarios highly unlikely. The likelihood of a deliberate and premeditated use of nuclear weapons is near certain though, if they were to be obtained by non-state actors such as terrorist organisations.

Some authors foresee possible scenarios in which “The possible use of non-state actors by states to further state ends, however, must now also be seriously considered.”²⁷ Others do not envision the state deliberately passing on nuclear weapons material and know-how to terrorist organizations but think that “...it will be difficult [for Iran] to keep such materials out of the hands of individuals or groups determined to use them.”²⁸

In both cases there is a certain “deniability” that can be exercised by Iran. Although procedures to establish the origins of a terrorist nuclear attack have been developed,²⁹ such highly technical evidence could be dismissed by Iran as forged or inconclusive, which would possibly leave enough doubt in Western people’s mind not to retaliate. Therefore this scenario, although unlikely, can not be totally ignored.

²⁶ Ibid., 17.

²⁷ Thérèse Delpech. “The Imbalance of Terror.” *The Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 1 Winter 2002 (Washington DC: The Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001), 37.

²⁸ James E. Doyle. *Nuclear Safeguards, Security, and Non-proliferation*. (Burlington, Elsevier, 2008.), 413.

²⁹ Ibid., 530.

MOST DANGEROUS: ACTIVE POSSESSION

On first thought, scenarios described here can not possibly be more dangerous than those portrayed in the least likely course of action above. This is only true insofar that “active possession” does not eventually lead to the same result: one or more nuclear detonations in anger. The risk for this to happen after a period in which tensions build up and countries are coerced by Iran is high though, as will be shown. The combination of this risk with the higher probability of this course of action makes it the most dangerous one.

First a definition of “active possession” will be given, followed by some examples of Iranian foreign policy for which it might be used. In conclusion, the reasons why this might lead to an uncontrollable escalation will be given.

Active possession of nuclear weapons by Iran means that the country has not only tested one and declared its nuclear weapons’ status, but that it actively uses the nuclear threat in its foreign policy. This can be done under the form of nuclear blackmail to coerce other countries into submission. Another possibility is that Iran is emboldened in both its overt and covert activities to spread Islamism across the globe, being quick to use its conventional military forces while sheltering under its nuclear umbrella.³⁰

Several very real and contemporary Iranian (foreign) policy issues lend themselves to conventional aggression under the nuclear umbrella or nuclear blackmail. Among those are:

- The old but recently renewed territorial claims by Iran to (parts of)

³⁰ Senators Daniel Coats and Charles Robb. *Meeting the Challenge...*,53.

Bahrain³¹

- The Armenian-Azeri conflict in which Iran sides with the Armenian Christians. This seems odd at first sight but is self-explanatory when looked at in light of the difficulties Iran has with Turkey (which supports the Azeris) and with regard to its own Azeri minority. More Azeris live in Iran (20 million) than in Azerbaijan.³²
- Internal Iranian demographic and economic problems might lead Iran to expand its wealth to the detriment of its neighbours.³³
- The overthrowing of traditional Arab governments in light of Islamism as discussed in chapter 2. Or as James Bill, Iranian specialist at the University of Texas, Austin puts it:

The internal social and political problems that plague the traditional patrimonial Gulf countries, do not exist in a political vacuum, but rather continue to fester in an explosive regional context where the seeds of revolution blow in the winds from the Iranian north. The social and political challenges to the traditional regimes in the Gulf will surely magnify with time. The ability of the Gulf leaders to meet these challenges remains to be seen...³⁴
- Iran regards control over the Persian Gulf as its historic right and has built a military focused on sea-denial.³⁵ This gives it an ability to disrupt major oil supply lines of nearly all industrial nations and hence an out-of-proportion

³¹ Patrick Clawson. *Iran's Challenge to the West: How, When, and...*, 39-40.

³² Sam Razavi. *Post-Khomeini Iran: A Case Study ...*, 5.

³³ Patrick Clawson. *Iran's Challenge to the West: How, When, and...*, 47.

³⁴ Wright, Robin. *Sacred Rage. The Wrath of...*, 171.

³⁵ Patrick Clawson. *Iran's Challenge to the West: How, When, and...*, 57.

control over oil prices.

- A boost in Iranian state sponsored terrorism, even against targets in Europe and North-America.³⁶

In each of the above cases, Iran could openly threaten to use its nuclear weapons as either a backup for conventional action or a shield against any retaliatory action of an opponent. It is not difficult to see that such behaviour could lead to rapid escalation of a conflict.

Although a high reticence would exist for any nation to militarily oppose or retaliate against Iranian actions because of the nuclear threat, it is unlikely that nothing would be done. Given the relative weakness of Iranian conventional forces, this could lead to early use of nuclear weapons on Iran's side.³⁷

The same is true for Iran's limited Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) capacity and the relatively low survivability of its young nuclear strike force in case of a foreign first strike. This means Iran would have to maintain a very high readiness state of its nuclear strike capacity and a very short decision time from warning to launch. Both factors raise the risks of premature or accidental strikes exponentially.³⁸ All these factors added to an already highly volatile Middle East would raise the prospect of a nuclear weapons exchange in the near future to an intolerable level.

Up to this point, this author has endowed Iran with bad intentions in all scenarios.

³⁶ Senators Daniel Coats and Charles Robb. *Meeting the Challenge...*, xiv.

³⁷ Senators Daniel Coats and Charles Robb. *Meeting the Challenge...*, 28.

³⁸ Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan. *Iranian Nuclear Weapons? Options for ...*, 7.

There is good reason for this assumption because of the findings about Islamism in Iran in chapter two of this paper but there is equal good reason to assume Iran would only use nuclear weapons as all NWS have done so far; as a passive deterrence³⁹. This contingency will be explored next.

MOST LIKELY: PASSIVE POSSESSION

Historically, NWS have seldom threatened to use their nuclear weapons in conventional conflict, even if things did not go well for them like for Great Britain and France in the 1956 Suez crises.⁴⁰

As explained above, there is some reason to suspect that Iran would manage its nuclear weapon status more aggressively and irresponsibly, but the evidence pointing in that direction is certainly not conclusive. There is a distinct possibility that Iran would be just like any other member of the NWS-club, and would treat its nuclear strike capability as a deterrent force, only to be used in case of existential threat to the nation. This is what, in this essay, is called “passive possession” and it will be treated as the most likely scenario.

³⁹ With the exception of the first use by the U.S.A. in the Second World War. This is the first historic use, immediately following the initial development of the weapons. This is a special case since only a very select number of people were aware of the effects of the weapons and even marginally at that. Nuclear weapons were not yet part of public and political life.

⁴⁰ Exceptions to this rule were, generally, due to an overwhelming inequality in conventional military forces like the USSR had, at one time, over NATO in Europe. While the USSR could cash in on the PR front for its statement of “No first use”, NATO did not have that luxury since it was generally accepted that NATO would have to use nuclear weapons in order to be able to stop a conventional Soviet attack in Europe during the 1960s and 1970s.

The Transformation of the Strategic Environment

It is important to note that even the mere possession of nuclear weapons by Iran, without any intention of using them other than for self-defence, and without emboldening Iran to crank up its conventional actions, would most certainly transform the strategic environment of the region, and even the whole world.⁴¹

Since Iran would also have to plan for a possible use of its nuclear strike force, it will target and be targeted. The dangers of escalation, retaliation and pre-emption as described in the most dangerous course of action explained above, would still be present in this scenario. Intentions of people in general and governments in particular, are extremely hard to judge, so when the consequences of a certain event get more serious, states tend to base their own actions on opponent's capabilities instead of their intentions. Anthony Cordesman and Khalid Al-Rodhan of the Center for Strategic and International Studies describe the event of a nuclear armed Iran as follows:

Iranian possession of nuclear weapons, or of highly lethal biological weapons for that matter, would change the military map of the region. It would almost certainly lead to contingency planning by other nuclear powers to attack Iran—certainly Israel and possibly Pakistan and India. Such planning in potentially "existential" conflicts takes place when there is a possibility, even if there is not a probability. U.S. and allied forces in the Gulf would have to plan for nuclear war or the risk of nuclear escalation, and for preventive, preemptive, deterrent, and retaliatory options. Iran's would target cities, key civilian facilities, and military targets with nuclear weapons and be targeted in return. The risk of misunderstandings, misperceptions, and miscalculations would be significant in a crisis or war both

⁴¹ Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan. *Iranian Nuclear Weapons. Options for ...*, 3, 7.

before any use of nuclear weapons, and during the trans-attack and conflict termination phases.⁴²

Living under its own nuclear umbrella might give Iran a false sense of security which could influence decision making in a negative way. As much as it is generally accepted that nuclear deterrence works, it did not protect Israel from being targeted with ballistic missiles in 1991.⁴³ There also have been several instances in history where two NWS came close to nuclear war such as the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the 1983 Korean Air 007 shoot-down and most recently the 1999 India-Pakistan crisis over Kargil.⁴⁴

All this shows that nuclear deterrence is powerful but not perfect and the more NWS develop, the higher the probability of error and miscalculation. This is the exact reason why the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has been established, and why such a huge majority of countries adhere to it. The story of the NPT is full of ups and downs however, and momentarily the treaty is under stress. The effect on the NPT of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons will be discussed next.

The End of the Non Proliferation Treaty

The direct effect produced by a nuclear armed Iran on which nearly all nuclear specialists and diplomats agree, is that it will most likely lead to a nuclear proliferation cascade.⁴⁵ It might well mark the death of the NPT.⁴⁶

⁴² Ibid.,3.

⁴³ Thérèse Delpech. *The Proliferation of...*, 48.

⁴⁴ Senators Daniel Coats and Charles Robb. *Meeting the Challenge...*,53.

⁴⁵ Bruno Tertrais. "Under the Shadow. Nuclear Futures for 2030." *The World Today* 63, no. 2, (Feb 2007): 8.

⁴⁶ Senators Daniel Coats and Charles Robb. *Meeting the Challenge...*,53.

First, Israel has always been able to cast a shadow of doubt over its nuclear weapon status with its official policy of ambiguity, although most analysts accept for a fact that they have a considerable nuclear warhead inventory. Owing to their ambiguous attitude though, their statement that they would never be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons in the Middle East can still be regarded as the truth. In case of an Iranian nuclear capacity, things might change very quickly. Ze'ev Schiff, one of Israel's most respected security experts, estimates that an Arab or Persian nuclear weapon might force Israel to react but perhaps in another direction than they would like. He says: "Israel could decide to give up its ambiguity, test, and decide to produce tactical nukes."⁴⁷

An Israeli declaration policy, combined with the event of Iran as NWS, would deal a serious blow to the Arab psyche. Several Arab countries such as Syria, Libya and Egypt might consider restarting their abandoned nuclear programs and combining their efforts to produce their own nuclear weapons.⁴⁸ Senior political leaders in Saudi Arabia have already declared in private conversation with former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia Chas M. Freeman that they would feel compelled to acquire and stockpile their own nuclear deterrent force in the event Iran would actually possess an operational nuclear warhead. The same conclusion has been drawn by George Tenet, Director of the CIA, during a congressional hearing in 2003.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Kurt M. Campbell, Robert J. Einhorn, and Mitchell B. Reiss, editors. *The Nuclear Tipping Point. Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices*. (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2004.), 96.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 100.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 129.

Although momentarily still under the nuclear umbrella of the United States, Turkey might be one of the countries to follow in the proliferation cascade⁵⁰, in its turn causing further spread of nuclear weapons across the Mediterranean (Greece, Italy, Spain ...?) It is clear that this chain of events would be thoroughly destabilizing world politics and would be a recipe for near-certain disaster. To put it with the words of U.S. Senators Daniel Coats and Charles Robb:

A nuclear Islamic Republic would, in effect, end the Non-Proliferation Treaty security regime. Many, if not most, regional states might feel compelled to develop their own indigenous nuclear capability or accept coverage from another state's nuclear umbrella. Given historical instability in the region, the prospects of a nuclear Middle East—possibly including Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey—are worrying enough, even before the proliferation cascade continues across North Africa and into Southern Europe. Iran's continued nuclear development also endangers global non-proliferation by exposing weaknesses in the Non-Proliferation.⁵¹

Armed with the description of the possible effects of the least likely, most dangerous, and most likely course of action of a nuclear armed Iran, it is time to draw the conclusions for the world in general and the EU and North America, combined in NATO, in particular.

4. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As shown above, the dawn of Iran as a NWS would have a strong potential for nuclear catastrophe, whether intentionally, preceded by conventional aggression or provocation, or accidentally. Therefore, standing by the sideline and doing nothing to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons is not an option.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 329.

⁵¹ Senators Daniel Coats and Charles Robb. *Meeting the Challenge...*,ii.

WHO SHOULD STOP IRAN?

For prevention to work, a world coalition as broad as possible should work together to accomplish that goal. Though legitimacy for actions should be sought through the UN, it is highly unlikely this organization will be able to act firm and agile enough. More potently, NATO could be the nucleus around which a “coalition of the willing” could be formed to take action against the Iranian nuclear weapons program; indeed, a unified Euro-North American policy in this matter is indispensable for success. Unfortunately, this will also be difficult to achieve and maintain.⁵² The habit of political and military cooperation within NATO will help a lot.

HOW TO STOP IRAN?

The debate on how to deal with Iran in general and its nuclear weapons program in particular has raged on for several years now. Some propose full cooperation with Iran⁵³ while others choose to contemplate sanctions and military strikes.⁵⁴ It is this author’s opinion that a full range of options in diplomatic, economical and military areas and varying from cooperation to confrontation should be planned for and employed.

⁵² Bruno Tertrais. “A Fragile Consensus.” *The National interest* 83, (Spring 2006): 34.

⁵³ Christoph Bertram. “Rethinking Iran: From confrontation to cooperation.” *Chaillot Papers*. (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, European Union, August 2008)

⁵⁴ Anthony H. Cordesman, and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan. *Iranian Nuclear Weapons? Options for...*

What Makes Iran Different?

The argument to start treating Iran as just another regional power is gaining ground. Why should the rest of the world not deal with Iran as it does with Brazil or South-Korea? The answer can be summarized in one word: Islamism. Since Iran is the champion state of this ideology, just as Germany was for Nazism and the Soviet-Union for Communism, it is presently impossible for the West to build “normal relationships” with Iran. Much as Nazism and Communism, Islamism is a very aggressive ideology that is based on complete thought control and instigates hate between different groups of people, in this case Islamist Muslims, mainstream Muslims, and non-Muslims. This is contrary to the most basic Western values and thus prevents normal interstate relationships.

Diplomacy and Economic Measures

Of course, an absence of “normality” does not mean there should be a total lack of diplomatic and economical ties and cooperation. The coalition should, on the contrary, develop intensive diplomatic contacts with Iran and try to work together economically. However, any cooperation should always be conditional and firmly nested in the strategy of the West in the war that is forced upon it; a global war, not on the tactic “terror” nor on the religion Islam but against the political ideology Islamism.

Diplomacy and economical cooperation can form the basis, or at least the forum, where pressure can be applied to keep Iran from carrying out its nuclear weapons program. Even while cooperating economically in some areas, sanctions in others are also a very useful tool although they historically have a low—and in recent years—

declining success rate.⁵⁵ In the diplomatic realm sits the long overdue proclamation of a Western nuclear deterrence policy towards Iran. It should be made clear to Iran that an Iranian nuclear strike or even a nuclear terrorist attack carried out with nuclear fuel, technology or hardware provided by Iran, will provoke massive nuclear retaliation resulting in the permanent destruction of the ancient civilization that is Persia. Pronouncing such a threat openly and giving it the necessary credibility would greatly contribute in convincing Iran it is better off without nuclear weapons.

Military Action

When all else fails, and if intelligence shows Iran is on the verge of acquiring a nuclear weapon capability, or it already possesses an embryonic one, military action is the only option left. There is no doubt a military conflict with Iran will be painful in the short and mid-long term for all countries involved. When this is what it takes to avert nuclear war though, it can certainly be considered rewarding in the long term.

Extra Measures

To conclude, two less obvious policy recommendations will be made towards the European Union. They do not deal directly with Iran's nuclear weapons program but must be seen in the broader geostrategic context. Both will help Europe cope with the threat of Islamism which also exists without Iran as a NWS.

A first measure for the EU should be to expand on the Danish example and set long term (2025-2050) strategic goals for the whole EU to replace oil for electricity production

⁵⁵ Ibid., 13.

and ground transportation.⁵⁶ This will make Europe far less dependant on oil and unstable regions as the Middle East. Hence, the power of those regions (including Iran) over Europe would be mitigated.

Secondly, to avoid Islamist parties from establishing a foothold in the European Parliament, the incorporation of Turkey in the EU should be cancelled. A special economic status for Turkey with the EU would give the same advantages as membership. But it would not include the grave dangers of incorporating a non-European state with a strong Islamist party into a Europe that already struggles with large Muslim minorities harboring growing Islamist movements. This way, the EU also does not run the risk of being dragged into Turkish-Iranian differences involving ethnic groups such as Kurds and Azeris.

Summarizing thought

Having looked at the consequences a nuclear armed Islamist Iran would have on the world, it is clear that this event could likely constitute a “critical mass” eventually causing nuclear disaster. Therefore all means—short of creating just such a nuclear disaster ourselves—are appropriate to stop this from happening, however difficult or hard they may be.

⁵⁶ The Danish Ministry of Transport and Energy. *Energy Strategy 2025: Perspectives to 2025 and Draft Action Plan for the Future Electricity Infrastructure*. (Copenhagen, 2005) http://www.ens.dk/graphics/Publikationer/Energipolitik_UK/Energy_Strategy_2025/index.htm; Internet; accessed 17 April 2009.

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