Rogue State or Rational State Actor?
Understanding and Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Aspirations

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses an orthodox foreign policy analysis framework and a Realist standard for rational behaviour to examine the question of whether Iran is a 'rogue' state or a rational state actor. The analysis considers key policy determinants from Iran's international, domestic and governmental settings, as well as its historical experiences. It uses Iran's nuclear policy and an assumed intent to proliferate nuclear weapons as the primary policy for analysis. The evidence cited suggests no greater irrationality, propensity for first use, or lack of deterability than for any other country in the system of states. Specifically it finds that the evidence does not support a notion of 'rogue' behaviour on Iran's part, and Iran's nuclear policy is shown to represent a reasonable and rational policy option for the country, albeit an internationally unacceptable one for a number of reasons. Further, with respect to a theoretical dimension where irrationality is the defining quality of a 'rogue' state, the case of Iran is found to demonstrate the 'rogue' state notion to be flawed.

The paper goes on to suggest that the fact of a rational Iran has implications for how proliferation or proliferation roll-back can ultimately be dealt with. Dealing with a rational Iran successfully on the nuclear issue and in the context of a comprehensive solution to a number of related problems may be the key to future US foreign policy success in the wider Middle East. Being a rational state, dealing effectively with Iran can exploit all of the tools of diplomacy, policy and economics. Engagement and normal interstate relations are argued as essential to being able to do so, as is an ability to separate Iran's desire for nuclear weapons from the existential threats that have linked such weapons to vital national interests.

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"Our goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction … Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom. States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world"[1]

- U.S. President George W. Bush

"They say it is not possible to have a world without the United States and Zionism. But you know that this is a possible goal … it is 27 years now that we have survived without a regime dependant on the United States. The tyranny of the East and West over the world must end …"[2]

- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

"Leaders in both countries don't just see themselves as politicians, they also see themselves as carrying out the work of God. They have left the ground a bit, and that is very dangerous for the world."[3]

- Former reformist Iranian Vice President
Mohammed Ali Abtahi

Introduction

Iran has been a fixture in the foreign policy of the United States for close to six decades, at first as an ally protecting the soft underbelly of Asia from Soviet ambition, and since 1979 as the Persian Gulf region's most persistent anti-US antagonist. Indeed,

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[1] From the President's State of the Union Address, 29 January 2002. The White House, "The State of the Union Address," http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11 html; Internet; accessed 20 February 2008.

[2] From the President's address to an Islamic Student associations conference, 26 October 2005. Nazila Fathi, "Text of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Speech," *The New York Times*, 30 October 2005; available from http://www nytimes.com/2005/10/30/weekinreview/30iran.html?ex=1136782800&en=d932ad0feae2cdef&ei=5070; Internet; accessed 13 February 2008.

[3] Frontline, *Showdown with Iran.* Documentary directed by Frontline, Public Broadcasting Service, (2007); available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/showdown/view/; Internet; accessed 12 February 2008.

contemporary Iran is a country for which anti-Americanism was a founding principle, to the extent that longstanding grievances with the US heavily influenced the anti-imperialist and foreign policy goals articulated in the country's constitution. The national interests of Iran became identified with the anti-US ideological priorities of the post-revolutionary Islamic regime, and ergo a rupture of relations with the US became a prerequisite for implementing the desired new foreign policy direction.[4] This rupture was not without cause, as evidenced by a compelling list of Iranian grievances originating with the 1953 CIA-engineered overthrow of the legitimate nationalist Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadeq, and his regime's replacement by a rigid authoritarian state under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. By this US-sponsored action were planted the seeds of revolution that eventually sprouted in 1979.[5]

The 29 years since the revolution have seen a continuation of the animosity between the US and Iran as well as progressive and considerable growth in Iran's renewed stature as an emerging regional power. This growth is due to a number of reasons, most recently the elimination of Iraq as a traditional regional military counter-balance to Iranian influence.[6] The animosity, rooted in years of a continuing US policy of containment and coupled with global trends associated with terrorism and WMD proliferation, has seen Iran increasingly and rhetorically portrayed as an erratic, terrorist-sponsoring rogue state, indeed a charter member of George W. Bush's 'Axis of Evil'.

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[4] Onder Ozar, "Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era," *Turkish Review of Middle East Studies Annual 2004*, no. 15 (2004): 269-273.

[5] Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic* (New York: Times Books, 2006), 85-86.

[6] James Noyes, "Iran's Nuclear Program: Impact on the Security of the GCC," in *Iran's Nuclear Program: Realities and Repercussions* (Abu Dhabi, UAE: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2006), 72.

The term, 'rogue state', despite common usage, appears absent from the recognized political science/international relations lexicon. However, the term often appears in official US documents. From its use in the 2006 US National Security Strategy, a 'rogue' state can be defined as one that supports terrorism, "has chosen to be an enemy of freedom, justice and peace", [7] and is not deterrable with respect to WMD use. In its essence, it is an *irrational* state-actor. Elinor Sloan, in her examination of American grand strategy in the post-9/11 era, identifies the possession of WMD by unpredictable states living 'outside' of the international system as posing the greatest threat to the US. Such states "do not conceive of themselves as part of, or influenced and affected by an international system of nations. They do not make a conscious connection between their decisions, the impact of those decisions on others, and how the decisions affect the well-being of their state and its people."[8] This describes the essence of the irrationality and rogue qualities that President Bush attributed to Iran in the two National Security Strategies produced by his administrations.

Given the current concerns regarding Iran's nuclear aspirations and mounting evidence of its apparent intent to proliferate nuclear weapons, the preconception of Iran as an irrational actor has tremendous implications for how it is ultimately dealt with by the US and the international community. More importantly, if this assessment of irrationality on Iran's part is incorrect, the stage is set for potential solutions involving the use of major force, preventive war and other risky measures that may in fact be totally unnecessary, inappropriate and bring decades of unwelcome consequences.

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[7] United States, National Security Council, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington DC: National Security Council, 2006), 12; available from http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/; Internet; accessed 11 February 2008.

[8] Elinor Sloan, "Beyond Primacy: American Grand Strategy in the Post- September 11 Era," *International Journal* 58, no. 2 (Spring, 2003): 308.

This paper argues that Iran is not the unpredictable and irrational threat described in American grand strategy. It will demonstrate that Iran is behaving rationally in the context of its historical experiences and the Middle East strategic environment, and suggest that this has implications for the approach needed to deal with Iran's nuclear aspirations. It will focus not so much on <u>what</u> Iran is doing in the foreign and nuclear policy realm, but rather <u>why</u> it is doing it, and use this insight to establish Iran as a rational (and deterrable!) state actor. It will incorporate an analytical dimension that demonstrates that Iran's behaviour cannot be cast as irrational. As well, a theoretical dimension, whereby the absence of irrationality as a *sine qua non* condition of the notion of a 'rogue' state, will invalidate the idea of Iran as a 'rogue' state and reveal 'rogue' state behaviour to be a flawed concept. Iran's nuclear policy will provide the main example for analysis.

Analytical Framework and Approach

This paper will not consider the acceptability or non-acceptability of a nuclear Iran as part of the world order, instead determining whether such an outcome would represent possession of WMD by an irrational and undeterrable state. Likewise it will not debate the wisdom of permitting such proliferation – to the contrary, anti-proliferation is clearly an ideal that must be upheld and pursued to the extent possible. Concurrently, understanding Iran as a rational vice an irrational threat may be a key to preventing or dealing with such undesirable proliferation.

For the purposes of analysis and to avoid the ambiguity of Iran's uncertain intent with respect to nuclear weapons, it will be assumed that Iran's nuclear aspirations extend to acquiring nuclear weaponry regardless of the current state of its nuclear programme. By all logic, the known details of its efforts to enrich uranium in quantity and in secret, stockpile

precursor gases, perfect advanced centrifuge technology in parallel with ballistic missile capabilities, and stonewall the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for close to twenty years make it appear unlikely that it is not planning on being able to build a weapon at some point in the future.[9] Under no circumstances should this assumed intent to proliferate be interpreted as irrational behaviour. To the contrary, this behaviour will be shown to be rational state conduct within the international order of states referred to by Sloan, consistent with realist theory and supportive of Iran's own grand strategy and its perceived place in its region and in the world.

To frame the analysis of Iran's rationality this paper makes use of an existing orthodox framework for foreign policy analysis, one articulated by Kim Richard Nossal in his book *The Politics of Canadian Foreign Policy*. The framework is based on the notion that "a country's foreign policy is forged at the nexus of politics at three levels – international, domestic and governmental,"[10] and includes the influence of history as a fourth analytical sphere. Within each of these four spheres are found a number of the determinants of foreign policy, essentially the variable factors that influence or explain how a given state behaves in international politics. For example, the International sphere includes such determinants as the state's physical location, its position in the international hierarchy and political economy, regional group dynamics, as well as the state's capabilities and sources of power.[11] Iranian

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[9] George Jahn, "Diplomats: Iran Processes Uranium Gas," *The Washington Post*, 13 February 2008; available from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/13/AR2008021302303.html; Internet; accessed 14 February 2008. The recent National Intelligence Estimate assesses that at a minimum, Tehran is keeping open the option to build nuclear weapons. United States, *Annual Threat Assessment of the Director of National Intelligence for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence*, Edited by J. Michael McConnell. (Washington DC: Director of National Intelligence, 2008), 12; available from http://www.tsa.gov/assets/pdf/02052008_dni_testimony.pdf; Internet; accessed 18 February 2008.

[10] Kim Richard Nossal, *The Politics of Canadian Foreign Policy*, Third ed. (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1997), 1-2.

nuclear policy will be considered in the context of several key determinants, predominantly with respect to its international political setting, but also in consideration of several historical, domestic and other factors, in order to illustrate the fact of its rationality. The primary focus is on the international political setting because of its inordinate impact on the policy in question and the result that the majority of determinants are to be found there.

This analytical approach is coupled with aspects of Hans J. Morgenthau's Realist international relations theory that defines rational state behaviour as being based on the state's pursuit of rational self interest, where such interest is defined solely in terms of power (i.e., Morgenthau's theory is applied within Nossal's framework to provide a standard for rational behaviour).[12] Realism is a normative theory that describes how rational states ought to behave: consistent with their national interest.[13] Actions taken that are aimed at conserving or improving the state's power and that are not expansionist are essentially rational acts. In essence, "only one question matters: Is the statesman acting to preserve the state and its power? If so, [the] policy is rational."[14] This allows consideration of Iran's actions against its national interests with respect to state power as an indicator of rational state behaviour. Pursuit of national interest has been shown to be an excellent predictor of state strategy and indicator of such rational state behaviour.[15]

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[11] *Ibid.*, 7-8.

[12] Reference to Nossal's framework and Morgenthau's realist theory in combination is not meant to infer any convergence of the work of these two scholars. Nossal remains very much an internationalist and does not necessarily agree with Morgenthau's realist view that states behave as they do only for the sake of power.

[13] Morgenthau's theory and discussion of the principles of Political Realism are found at: Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace,* Seventh Edition, Revised (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 3-16.

[14] Michael G. Roskin, *National Interest: From Abstraction to Strategy* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1994), 4.

[15] *Ibid.*, 18.

It should be noted that Morgenthau's rational model does not preclude war where states' national interests collide, nor does it ignore the possibility of deviations from rationality.[16] But it does guard against the fallacy of these deviations being driven by ideological preferences and moral excess such as cloud current western assessments of Iran's actions: a rational state pursuing its interests will not indulge in moral excess and political folly, or 'rogue' behaviour, that are contrary to that interest.[17] Ergo it is extremely unlikely that Iran would pursue a rational course to the point of acquiring nuclear weapons, with the intent of defaulting to irrational or 'rogue' behaviour in their use. Pursuit of its interests in consideration of key policy determinants will therefore provide an indication of Iran's rationality with respect to its nuclear aspirations.

Finally, Morgenthau considers two levels of national interest that are relevant to this discussion and therefore worth defining: vital and secondary. *Vital interests* concern the very life of the state over which there can be no compromise or hesitation about going to war (for example, security as a free and independent nation). *Secondary interests* are ones over which a state may seek to compromise, perhaps including things such as the possession of nuclear weapons where no existential threat exists; but clearly nuclear weapons could fall into either category of interest based on the nature of the threat to the state's survival.[18]

Given that a nuclear policy that leads to proliferation intuitively relates to a country's foreign policy, it should come as no surprise that with respect to our analytical framework the preponderance of the most relevant policy determinants are found in Iran's international

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[16] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations…*, 11.

[17] *Ibid.*, 6-7.

[18] Definitions are derived from Roskin, *National Interest...*, 6.

political setting. Geoffrey Kemp in his 2005 address to the Emirates Center for Strategic

Studies and Research identified four main factors explaining Iran's desire for a nuclear

weapons capability, and of these three are international in nature. These are: the perceived

threat from the US, the existence of other regional nuclear powers (most notably Israel), and

the desire for status in its regional sphere of influence.[19] Each of these will be considered

here. The fourth factor, the bureaucratic momentum of a nuclear establishment within Iran's

civilian leadership, will also be discussed later in the context of key Iranian domestic factors.

The reader's challenge will be to consciously consider Iran's strategic environment

from the Iranian perspective. The ability to reasonably and objectively do so is a contextual

precondition of understanding the rationality of any state's behaviour. The discussion starts

with a look at Iran's place in the region and its desire for status in that sphere.

Iran's Sphere of Influence and Regional Ambitions

Iran is a country of 70 million people, easily the largest in the Persian Gulf region

and dwarfs the members of the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC). Its population is 70 percent

literate and well connected informationally; it is culturally and economically advanced, with

the vast majority of its population committed to a modern theocracy.[20] While all of these

factors would tend to naturally fuel international leadership ambitions in any country that

found itself in Iran's current regional context and relative position in the system of states, the

reality is that such ambitions have existed in Iran since the 1950s, and were in fact

encouraged by the US up to the time of the revolution.

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[19] Geoffrey Kemp, "The Impact of Iran's Nuclear Program on Gulf Security," in *The Gulf: Challenges of the Future* (Abu Dhabi, UAE: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2005), 213.

[20] Frontline, *Showdown with Iran…,* accessed 12 February 2008.

Iranian regional ascendancy has been a constant of the last 50 years, and this includes the genesis and pursuit of Iranian nuclear ambitions. The country's initial nuclear programme, always the exclusive policy domain of the ruling elite, was started in the early 1970s under the Shah subsequent to a 1957 nuclear cooperation agreement with the US. His intent has been confirmed as to create the capacity to develop a military nuclear capability within a short time without actually assembling a weapon. The needed technology was purchased from European states that today cast themselves as concerned about such proliferation (notably France and West Germany), and "Waeeee as to create tne-ran ond Wcompin niaTc -0.0

checked by the fact that although most of its neighbours are endowed with a significant Shia Muslim minority, Iran as a majority Shia Islamic state is surrounded by predominantly Sunni Muslim states that have resisted if not feared Iranian pre-eminence. The overall dynamic has changed recently to Iran's benefit with the removal of the traditional Iraqi counter-balance, as well as the US-led isolation of Syria that creates a natural ally for the even more isolated Iran. These changes have created an opportunity for the creation of a Shia-influenced Islamic crescent extending from Iran through Iraq and Syria, all the way to Lebanon in the west. Creation of such a crescent would not only start to satisfy Iran's long-held ambitions of regional leadership, but would also provide reduced Iranian isolation and vulnerability to external acts of aggression long signaled by various power centers in the international community.[24] As such, its creation is supportive of Iran's desire to conserve its regime and improve its state power in accordance with Realist theory, as well as being consistent with its constitutional founding pan-Islamic ideology. It also places Iran in direct conflict with the interests of several other states.

Of course, the desire to create such a swath of influence, does not automatically lead to a rational and conclusive need for nuclear weapons. Such a conclusion is arrived at by taking a closer look at other regional powers and realizing that several among them that would oppose Iranian ascendancy are able to leverage possession of nuclear weapons in their dealings with Iran and to thereby threaten Iranian security and ambition. In fact, Noyes has concluded that "if not for Iran's post-revolutionary behaviour in general and the

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[24] The 'Shi'ite Crescent' is a term coined by Abdullah III of Jordan. Iran's desire to create such a crescent is rooted in preservation and self-interest. It is in response to Neo-Salafi Sunni Islamic extremism, a major force in the Iraqi insurgency, that attacks all Shi'ites and other sects of Islam as the equivalents of apostates or non-believers. This also goes a long way towards explaining Iran's support for the Shia insurgents in southern Iraq. Anthony H. Cordesman, *Arab-Israeli Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 2.

inflammatory rhetoric of its current President, Iran would have a reasonable case on a regional basis for possessing nuclear weapons."[25] Closest among the nuclear states posing a threat to Iran is Pakistan, a neighbouring Sunni Muslim country that achieved nuclear status about a decade ago. Although its weapons are primarily intended to deter India, the Pakistani arsenal remains a threat to the Iranian state and a source of Pakistani power in dealings with Iran. Other regional and transregional threats include India, Russia, the US and Israel. The latter two also represent a serious and unbalanced conventional threat. It should not be surprising that the desire to ensure state survival and influence in the face of such trans-regional threats results in the pursuit of symmetric and asymmetric military capabilities, including nuclear weapons. Most significant among all such threats in today's international setting are the myriad of threats posed to Iran by the US and Israel.

The US Strategic Threat and Iran/US Relations

Looking at Iran's relations with the US, it is clear that the nuclear-armed US and its own regional interests serve as Iran's greatest strategic threat. To state this concisely, the two are overtly competitors and enemies, and no small wonder. Anti-Americanism was a founding principle of the Islamic state due largely to historical US complicity in internal Iranian affairs, and Iran continues to harbour long-standing paranoia of US intentions to this day.[26] In the 1980s Iran was attacked by Iraq, at the time increasingly a regional US client state. In that war an entire generation of the Iranian population was decimated and the country itself the subject of Iraqi attacks with chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction (WMD). A reasonable belief in US complicity in these events is widely held in

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[25] Noyes, "Iran's Nuclear Program…", 66.

[26] *Ibid*., 84.

Iran. In fact, Iran is among a small number of countries that has actually been attacked by WMD and with regards to their traditional US enemy is currently facing a country that has actually used WMD, continues to develop new generations of such weapons,[27] has a tremendous stockpile of them, has not excluded their use against Iran, has failed to act on general and complete nuclear disarmament as committed to under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty,[28] is openly antagonistic towards Iran, and has a significant military presence in the Persian Gulf region and in three of the countries bordering Iran.[29]

That Iran would find this threatening and pursue an asymmetric nuclear response capability in circumstances that challenge its state's existence is not surprising, perhaps even expected, and its doing so reinforces rather than questions the rationality of its actions when viewed from its perspective. Indeed, the Iranian-US geo-political reality coupled with Article 152 of the Iranian constitution that rejects all forms of domination and calls for preservation of Iranian territorial integrity, especially with respect to the 'hegemonic superpowers', makes the Iranian development of a military nuclear capability almost inevitable.[30] It also makes long-term state survival as a vital interest a credible primary reason for Iran's pursuit of

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[27] An example of such new generation nuclear weapons of relevance to this discussion is the 'Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator', or RNEP. Designed for use against very deep hardened targets such as Iran's underground nuclear facilities, and despite earlier reports that the nuclear portion of the programme had been abandoned, the RNEP is still in development but currently without the funding to test and produce the nuclear warhead component due solely to underground test prohibitions. Imagine the inconsistencies of a scenario where such a weapon is used tactically to prevent a state from proliferating nuclear weapons. George Cahlink, "Defense Department Not Giving Up Work on Nuclear 'Bunker Buster' Weapon," *Defense Daily* 228, no. 38 (6 December, 2005): 1.

[28] United Nations, *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* (New York: United Nations, 1968); available from http://www.fas.org/nuke/control/npt/text/npt2.htm; Internet; accessed 12 February 2008.

[29] The US currently has a military presence in Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Oman, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan. Its ground force presence is backed up by air and naval assets within easy reach of the Arabian Gulf from the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean, Europe and continental US. Kemp, "The Impact of Iran's Nuclear Program…", 211.

[30] Ozar, "Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era…", 273.

nuclear weapons. And as long as the state and its regime's existence are threatened, nuclear weapons will be linked to such vital interests vice the secondary interests that may be more conducive to a negotiated solution to proliferation roll-back or prevention.

Moreover, the US position as the surviving superpower in the post 1990 unipolar world has done little to lessen the desire of countries such as Iran to proliferate nuclear weapons. To the contrary, it has re-enforced it. Jeffrey Record, a professor of strategy and international security at the USAF Air War College, has argued convincingly that US conventional military primacy has accelerated potential adversaries' investment in asymmetric responses and increased the attraction of WMD to America's enemies - a trend that has been intensified by the related US abandonment of the notion of war as a last resort and a demonstrated willingness to commit to war against other nations when it suits its purposes to do so.[31] Record further considers this "strategic hubris" as validating Realist international relations theory that teaches that "power unchecked is power exercised", and an unintended consequence of the American exercise of power has been a rush by potential target nations, such as Iran, to seek the tools to defend themselves and deter US aggression.[32] Thus in today's context and from the Iranian perspective, the possession of nuclear weapons becomes critical to the success of an increasingly required and rational asymmetric deterrence strategy aimed at protecting state power and ensuring state survival in response to a threat from Iran's most significant antagonist.

The elephant in the room with respect to US/Iran relations, one that cannot be avoided in this discussion, is the question of Iranian sponsorship of terrorism. After all, the

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[31]Jeffrey Record, "The Limits and Temptations of America's Conventional Military Primacy," *Survival* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 39-40.

idea that 'rogue' states would develop nuclear weapons and then turn them over to a terrorist third party is one that is central to the logic that placed Iran in President Bush's 'Axis of Evil'.

In fact, this idea enjoys no precedent, credible historic underpinning or sound theoretical foundation. Never have such key elements of national power been offered, much less turned over, for uncontrolled, non-state, third party use in the 2,000 years of 'terrorism' marked from the First Century A.D. and the period of the Hebrew Zealot political movement. Further, there is nothing unique or unusual about Iran's pattern of proliferation that suggests it is being done for reasons other than state power. In this regard their actions and motivations are not unlike those of India, Pakistan, South Africa or Israel before them, including with respect to efforts aimed at deceiving the international community as to the true intent of their 'peaceful' nuclear energy programmes.[33] All that is different with Iran is our relative discomfort with it because of the unlikely hypothesis that these WMD will be knowingly used as terrorist weapons, ignoring the fact that Iran has possessed WMD for in excess of twenty years now. Iran is believed to already possess both biological weapons (anthrax and smallpox) and chemical weapons (blister, blood and choking agents) that can be mated to delivery systems such as artillery shells and gravity bombs.[34] Not a single one has been provided for third-party state or terrorist purposes. This is likely a reassuring outcome of the fact that Iran behaves as a rational state, and rational states do not turn over control of

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[32] *Ibid., 41-42.*

[33] Israel used a variety of subterfuges to explain away the activity at Dimona nuclear facility, calling it a "manganese plant", among other things. During annual inspections by the US between 1962 and 1969, inspectors were shown above-ground simulated control rooms while access to underground areas was kept bricked-up while inspectors were present. The Nuclear Weapon Archive, "Israel's Nuclear Weapons Program", http://nuclearweaponarchive.org/Israel/Isrhist.html; Internet; accessed 11 February, 2008.

[34] Peter Brookes, *A Devil's Triangle: Terrorism, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and Rogue States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 197-198.

key components of their national power to uncontrolled third parties whose actions, especially in the case of nuclear weapons use, risk bringing severe and destructive retribution upon the state contrary to its national interest. Entertaining such a possibility disregards the history and logic of 60 years of effective strategic deterrence since the end of WWII. It is also a scenario that is not supported by any evidence and is at odds with how Iran has controlled existing holdings of WMD and why states traditionally pursue expensive and risky nuclear weapons programmes.

With the possible exception of Israel, every country in the world that currently possesses a nuclear arsenal is subject to some form of mutually deterrent opposing nuclear counter-balance that militates against the unchecked use of those weapons. The existing Israeli and US stockpiles would certainly deter Iran, just as Iranian weapons would deter these two nuclear enemies as well as others in their actions towards Iran. Moreover, the situation in which they currently find themselves is far more conducive to a need for deterrent capability than it is to any far-fetched, sponsored third-party first-use scenario. Mutual deterrence has long been viewed as a stabilizing feature of the nuclear dynamic, and given that Iran's quest for these weapons is most surely threat-based and driven by state power concerns and not by any unrealistic desire to provide such weapons to third parties, it is unlikely in the extreme that Iran or any other country would pursue a path of guaranteed annihilation unless facing an existential threat of the type that nuclear weapons are generally sought to deter.[35] Certainly, there is an abundance of evidence supporting the efficacy of

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[35] 'Mutual deterrence' is defined as "a stable situation in which two or more countries or coalitions of countries are inhibited from attacking each other because the casualties and/or damage resulting from retaliation would be unacceptable." John M. Collins, *Grand Strategy: Practices and Principles* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1973), 273.

mutual deterrence, and no evidence anywhere in the literature that suggests Iran is not deterrable.[36] Record summarizes the inconsistency of the belief in terrorist third party use of nuclear weapons provided by even so-called 'rogue' states as follows:

> The theoretical supposition that [WMD-seeking regimes] could transfer WMD to terrorist organizations ignores the absence of such transfers in the past, the different motives of rogue states and terrorists in seeking WMD, and the continuing vulnerability of rogue states to US military power, including credible threats of nuclear retaliation.[37]

Although less relevant to the issue of Iranian nuclear aspirations, the more general US charge that Iran has a policy of supporting terrorist organizations is far more tenable, but is not entirely unassailable. Nor is it devoid of the reciprocal logic that from the Iranian perspective both the US and Israel also support terrorism. Terrorism has become the "classic weapon of the weak"[38] when it comes to balancing the military primacy of an opponent. Iranian support for 'terrorist' groups that target Israel fit this model. It is no secret that Iran does not consider these to be terrorists, but rather 'freedom fighters' who remain engaged in a now seven decades old civil war-type conflict for lands once co-inhabited and commonly claimed by Jews and Palestinians. This is why Iran does not currently recognize Israel's right to exist. What has altered this conflict in their view is the relative Zionist success in achieving some recognition of statehood and as a result being able to incorporate their own 'terrorist' groups (the Hagannah, Irgun, Stern Gang, etc.) directly into the legions of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF). But the conflict and its root causes remain unchanged in Iranian eyes, thereby justifying continued Hamas and Hezbollah attempts to liberate their homeland.

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[36] Sadr, "The Impact of Iran's Nuclearization …", 63.

[37] Record, "The Limits and Temptations of America's…", 38. This view is also supported by Stephen Walt, Academic Dean of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, in Stephen M. Walt, "Taming American Power," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (September/October 2005): 115.

[38] Walt, "Taming American Power…", 114.

Yet Iran continues to support these groups solely with conventional capabilities, despite the ability they have had for over twenty years now to also provide them with chemical or biological WMD.

There are many who would not agree with this view of terrorism or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but it is not an irrational view uniquely held by Iran, nor is it supported by irrational acts on Iran's part. Indeed, support to these groups is one way that Iran exerts its influence and preserves its power and stature in the region. Their pattern of support has been consistent with using sponsorship of such groups as part of a strategy of deterring and challenging Israel.

Perhaps most relevant to this discussion of support to terrorism are those instances of such support that impact directly on the US/Iran relationship. It is worth noting that the earliest US ally in Afghanistan post-9/11, the Northern Alliance, included an Iranian created 'terrorist' proxy whose cooperation with US forces had to first be approved by Tehran. Today the Northern Alliance forms the basis of the government in Afghanistan. But the more publicized example is that of Al Qaeda operatives believed by the US to be held in Iran, but which Iran has refused to turn over.[39] pTx.88ngeed, suple is thapublePerhmbeTdtheyt AMucret ofrranstanM

These instances contribute significantly to the mistrust that exists between the two nations,[41] and also serve to underscore the political manipulation that surrounds reciprocal charges of support to terrorism. However, this reciprocal political manipulation also places the issue of support to terrorism squarely in the realm of state power politics and distances it from that of supposed irrational 'rogue' behaviour. This view is supported by the trend that the majority of foreign 'terrorist' fighters captured in Iraq are of Saudi origin,[42] but pillorying Saudi Arabia as a 'rogue', irrational state supporter of terrorism would simply be bad state power politics on the part of the US. Indeed, the use of 'terrorist' guerrilla proxies to fight small wars in countries within the other superpower's sphere of influence was a common feature of the Cold War, and Iran's actions today are analogous to that type of state behaviour.[43] Support to third country insurgencies, deemed 'terrorist' or not by one side, has long been a strategic tool. Such Iranian antipathetical actions towards the US are unlikely to change as long as the relationship as currently practiced and relative power between the two does not change either. Further, it has become a characteristic of the US/Iran relationship that is supportive of Iran's state power objectives in the region.

The nature of reciprocal charges of supporting terrorism emphasize the fact that normal dialogue does not exist between the two countries, and that for the last 29 years such dialogue has generally been replaced by harmful, distorting and unchallenged rhetoric that originates from both sides. One has only to 'Google' the terms 'Iran' and 'glass parking lot'

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[41] 'Mistrust' is defined as "a belief that the other side prefers exploiting one's cooperation to returning it." Thresholds for mistrust are situation specific, but are very low for both the US and Iran given the nature of their relationship since 1953. Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 6.

[42] Frontline, *Showdown with Iran…,* accessed 12 February 2008.

[43] Examples include the Viet Cong, Contras, and Mujahadeen.

on the Internet to appreciate the extent to which the unofficial dialogue (in the absence of an official one) can lead to perceptions of threat. There is likewise no doubt that "strong anti-Iranian stances by American officials towards Iran have in turn engendered a confrontational approach on the part of the Iranian state."[44] Being the 'Great Satan' or 'Little Satan' automatically confers upon the title holders legitimate target status for extremists, while history has also clearly shown that being identified in US policy as a member of the rhetorical 'Axis of Evil' makes you a candidate for pre-emptive war and attack by the US. Both contribute to the prevailing atmosphere of mistrust and bring with them increased yet inaccurate perceptions of threat that are then exploited for narrow political purposes by both camps, causing perception to indeed become reality. But the risks and ultimate consequences inherent in this form of dialogue should be of enormous concern to other state parties with interests in the Gulf region and the Middle East, for it will more likely lead to confrontation and conflict than to any peaceful resolution. The fact that the US is so vehemently opposed to Iranian proliferation to the point of propagandizing that opposition in the eyes of most Iranians is likely enough to convince them and many Islamists that such proliferation may not be a bad thing. As a minimum, adopting an extreme rhetorical position has damaged the credibility of Western concerns.

It should be added that demonizing the 'enemy' is not a new practice and has generally been used by all parties to modern conflict. That the 'evil' losers of WWII also proudly proclaimed "*Gott mit uns!*" (God is with us!) serves to underscore the fact that evil is not a simple nor innocent personification to make, and will seldom be totally accurate even once the victors have gotten around to writing the history of the conflict. As a result rhetoric,

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[44] Mahmood Sariolghalam, "Iran's Emerging Regional Security Doctrine: Domestic Sources and the Role of International Constraints," in *The Gulf: Challenges of the Future* (Abu Dhabi, UAE: The Emirates Center for

like propaganda, is almost never crafted for accuracy and certainly should provide a poor basis for policy development. Diplomacy needs to address reality and avoid preconceived notions, biases, bigotry and stereotypes in order to be effective. But when such threatening rhetoric shows up in the State of the Union Address of the most powerful nation on earth, identified states are unlikely to ignore it. And for the sake of preserving state power against a clearly threatening and vastly superior conventional and nuclear-armed adversary, acquisition of nuclear weaponry becomes one of the few rational options available to an isolated state such as Iran.

The best example of rhetoric setting a disastrous tone for international relations in the region is the comment attributed to Iran's hard-line President Ahmadinejad regarding his reported desire to 'wipe Israel off the map'.[45] Although Iran is undoubtedly Israel's greatest strategic threat, this example illustrates the extent to which rhetoric becomes propagandized to an opponent's advantage. President Ahmadinejad's comments have been portrayed by Israel and the US as representing a threat to use nuclear weapons against Israel, yet President Ahmadinejad has certainly never spoken of nuclear weapons in this context and has otherwise been seen to carefully only threatened the regime that currently occupies the lands of Palestine and not the physical entity of Israel or Palestine itself.[46] This difference is fundamental to understanding not only the risks of dialogue by rhetoric, but also the lack of an overt Iranian nuclear threat against the physical entity of Israel. His publicly threatening

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Strategic Studies and Research, 2005), 162.

[45] Noah Feldman, "Islam, Terror and the Second Nuclear Age," *The New York Times Magazine*, 29 October 2006, 52.

[46] The Middle East Now, "Was Ahmadinejad Misquoted?", http://www.themiddleeastnow.com/wipedoffthemap html; Internet; accessed 13 February 2008.

Israel with nuclear destruction would be surprising indeed, since Iran continues to deny having any interest in even developing nuclear weapons.

The call to wipe the current regime in Israel from the map is in fact a longstanding cliché of Arab nationalist rhetoric.[47] Accordingly, Iran has arguably never laid claim to the objective of the physical destruction of the state of Israel, but more correctly to eliminating the current regime and replacing it with a one-state solution: an Islamic Palestine in which Jews, Arabs and Muslims live side-by-side. The basic difference between that and what exists today, apart from restoring Muslim control of Islam's Holy Places, is found in its contrasting non-secular nature (i.e., it would replace a one-state Jewish Israel in which Jews, Arabs and Muslims live side-by-side).[48] While neither appears to provide the basis for a lasting peace in today's context, by its very nature Iran's position does not cater to the physical destruction of the people or the lands being contested. Concomitantly, Iran has conceded that although it does not favour a two-state solution to the Palestinian problem, it would nonetheless accept whatever solution the Palestinian people accepted.[49] Such posturing has nothing to do with Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons except as a result of US and Israeli rhetorical attempts to link the two. Attribution of a direct nuclear threat against Israel results not from the facts, but rather from well-publicized Israeli interpretations of blustery Iranian rhetoric, interpretations that are not without their own interest-based purpose.

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[47]Feldman, "Islam, Terror and the Second…", 52.

[48] Judith H. Yaphe and Charles D. Lutes, *Reassessing the Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran*, McNair Papers, 69th ed. (Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, NDU, 2005), xii.

[49] Sadr, "The Impact of Iran's Nuclearization …", 64.

So why does Iran engage in such duels of rhetoric? Like Holocaust denial, it represents an official policy aimed at provoking Israel, radicalizing Arab sentiments in the region (thereby preventing Israel and moderate Arab states from allying against Iran), and appealing to Islamist audiences throughout the Middle East.[50] Such goals respect Iran's power base, are consistent with its regional leadership aspirations, especially with respect to Israel, and are far more rational than any suggestion "that a purely ideological Iran would welcome its own annihilation, that of hundreds of thousands of Arab Muslims, the Palestinian homeland, and the third holiest site in Islam, simply for the pleasure of destroying the Jewish State."[51]

Iran and Israel – Regional Peer Competitors

This leads us to the other major international component of the actual nuclear threat to Iran and the only one that currently originates within the region as a constraint on Iran's state power and pursuit of its interests: the State of Israel. Significantly, only Israel between the two states is able to leverage nuclear capability in its dealings with the other. In addition, Israel has proven to be instrumental in shaping and influencing US policy towards Iran, a fact that greatly enhances Israel's relative power and intensifies the Iranian need for a counter-balance to this influence.[52] But clearly the aspects of Israel's state power that most drive Iran's desire for nuclear capability are its conventional military superiority, nuclear arsenal, and ability to employ both with almost total freedom throughout the Middle East.

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[50] *Ibid.*, 63.

[51] *Ibid.*, 63.

[52] Sariolghalam, "Iran's Emerging Regional Security Doctrine…", 179.

In addition to combined nuclear/conventional long range strike capabilities represented by its fleets of F-16I and F-15I aircraft, Israel is also thought to possess as many as 200 plutonium warheads, tactical nuclear weapons including artillery shells and atomic demolition munitions, the Shavit space-launch vehicle capable of delivering a 775 kg payload a distance of 4000 kms, short and medium range missiles, chemical weapons, biological weapons, and an anti-ballistic missile system.[53] More recently they have acquired nuclear capable submarine launched cruise missiles (SLCMs) based on the Israeli Popeye Turbo, as well as a fleet of Dolphin class attack submarines capable of delivering them.[54] That Iran should find this depth of potentially strategic offensive capability threatening in the hands of an antagonist and regional competitor is understandable, especially given that the nature of Israel's delivery capabilities make it clear that its nuclear weapons are intended for potential use against its Middle Eastern neighbours. As well, the offensive potential is underscored by the total lack of a reciprocal first or second strike capability targeted at Israel. Such an imbalance of capabilities in a global model would be an incredible source of instability. That it would have a similar effect in a regional model and motivate a search for a nuclear response capability is both rational and expected.

Israel's unofficial policy for its nuclear weapons has been one of 'nuclear ambiguity' and 'opaque deterrence' – essentially "to marry its officially unconfirmed arsenal to a US guarantee of conventional superiority in order to restrain potential Arab war aims and re-

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[53] Weapons data is from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2007: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 548-549; and Cordesman, *Arab-Israeli Military Forces…*, 141-145.

[54] John Keller, "Submarine Threat Heats Up in the Middle East," *Military & Aerospace Electronics* 17, no. 10 (Oct, 2006): 1.

enforce diplomatic engagement."[55] Being opaque about their capabilities provides the desired deterrent effect while permitting Israel the full range of indignant reactions to the attempted proliferation of others. Further, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has cryptically iterated that Israel will not be the first country that introduces nuclear weapons to the Middle East.[56]

But this Israeli position is less than convincing for several reasons. First of all, with its missile and SLCM capabilities Israel is no longer vulnerable to a first strike that could destroy its retaliatory capabilities, meaning that deterrence is preserved even if faced with other nuclear states in the Middle East.[57] By officially denying the existence of these capabilities the logic for a strategic offensive capability that surpasses its legitimate deterrence/defence needs does not have to be defended.

Likewise, Prime Minister Olmert's assertion that Israel would not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons does not pass the test of historical experience. On 9 October 1973, Israeli forces were put on nuclear alert for potential first use as Egyptian and Syrian forces looked poised to enter the territory of Israel introduce nuclear wesired

first use propensity, in this case absent an existential threat, both incidents also demonstrate the extent to which the Israeli nuclear arsenal is as much about power politics and influence as it is about legitimate defence and deterrence concerns. "Israel is not prepared to enter into a framework that would establish any sense of symmetry between its nuclear weapons and those of its regional antagonists."[60] Why, under Realist thinking, would Israel settle for mutual deterrence as an outcome while hegemony remains available to it for the same cost and investment in nuclear weaponry?

Israel's reasons for preferring a hegemonic nuclear monopoly to simple deterrence should be obvious when considered in a national interest context. Israel and Iran, once allies, are competitors for regional influence and power. Tehran's quest to become nuclear does not alter the deterrent effect of Israel's arsenal, and in fact should enhance the stability of the overall deterrence dynamic between the two countries by creating the more stable condition of mutual deterrence. However, by working to ensure a nuclear monopoly, Israel secures an inordinate leveraging and strategic effect from its investment in its nuclear capabilities. Being successful in this regard delivers optimal benefit from their arsenal, and the resultant Israeli policy freedom of action is precisely what Iran's nuclear programme seeks to curtail in its own rational pursuit of both its interests and nuclear weapons.

Related to this issue of an Israeli desire for regional pre-eminence is the oft-cited Arab belief that Israel benefits from the US practice of a nuclear double standard. Any argument to the contrary is hardly compelling. The US's seemingly unquestioned acceptance of Israel's large nuclear arsenal despite parallel US security guarantees are difficult to explain, especially when neighbouring countries that have a right to feel their interests are

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[60] Aronson, "Israel and the Strategic Implications…", 109.

threatened by Israel's arsenal are doggedly prevented from proliferating. This as much as anything is seen as a reason to be suspicious of US/Israeli motives in the region, suspicions that are re-enforced by the perception of a similar double standard with respect to US attempts to broker a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the root cause of Arab-Israeli tension in the region. Their apparent blind support of the Israeli position on any one of a number of related issues has caused the US and Israel to be seen as one and the same enemy from the perspective of many Arab capitals, Tehran included. The resulting sense of domination by these two nuclear-armed partners undoubtedly contributes to the perceived Iranian need for nuclear weapons as a prerequisite to practicing effective policy in the region.

The Palestinian Problem and an apparent lack of US transparency in dealing with it also point to yet another key determinant of Iran's policy direction. It is well established that Iran sees itself as a champion of the Palestinian voice on this issue. Being that champion, especially with an accompanying strong anti-Israeli rhetoric, promotes broader Islamic interests and lessens Sunni fears about Iran's rise in power. [61] It also provides Iran the opportunity to actually assert regional leadership in such a way that is generally not offensive to Sunni Muslim countries. In addition, it is Iranian aegis of this issue that prevents Iran from considering recognition of the State of Israel, even though it has firmly indicated that it would accept a two state solution if that is the choice of the Palestinians.[62] Such recognition would pre-suppose a two-state solution, represents a key concession, and could only be realistically considered once significant progress has been made towards a comprehensive solution to the region's problems. All to say, the Iranian position towards Israel is proving to

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[61] Feldman, "Islam, Terror and the Second Nuclear Age…", 54.

[62] Sadr, "The Impact of Iran's Nuclearization …", 64.

be far more driven by pragmatism than by ideology, supporting an assessment of Iranian rationality in perhaps the most contentious of policy areas.[63]

In the final analysis, Israel represents a significant strategic threat to Iran that, absent a comprehensive Middle Eastern security regime that puts Israel's nuclear weapons on the table, can only be effectively responded to in the current strategic environment with a balancing Iranian nuclear capability. At present Iran's only tool of reciprocal strategic deterrence is its support of Hezbollah (and to a lesser extent Hamas), a source of power that is of limited and inadequate value in terms of the regional balance of power when confronting an opponent who can leverage nuclear weapons. What this means is that while Iran is unlikely to abandon its support for these groups in the short-term, it is equally unlikely to abandon its nuclear aspirations in the longer-term. It is not about wiping Israel off the map and thereby ensuring self-annihilation as Israeli and US rhetoric would have us believe, but rather it is all about good old-fashioned inter-state power politics. From the perspective of Israel/Iran relations alone, Iran's case for seeking nuclear weapons appears both compelling and rational, and represents a reasonable strategy to preserve state power in pursuit of Iranian national interests.

The Conventional Force Balance

A final key determinant of Iranian policy in the international sphere is the conventional military balance. Based solely on numbers and with the exception of the US, Iran has likely achieved numerical conventional military superiority in the Gulf region since

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[63] This documented trend away from revolutionary ideology towards interest-based pragmatism emerged in 1989 following the end of the Iran/Iraq War, the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the fall of the Soviet Union, the abatement of threats to the revolution and the rebirth of traditional Persian nationalism. Ozar, "Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era…", 280.

2003.[64] However, this superiority does not apply in relation to the wider Middle East and in particular to Israel, Iran's most significant regional competitor. In addition, a comparison of forces indicates a significant gap in equipment technology of conventional forces, not just between Iran and Israel, but a growing gap between Iran and the GCC states as well. Israeli strategist Yair Evron of Tel Aviv University has concluded that in order to pose a conventional existential threat to Israel, all Arab forces combined would have to grow 50 to 70 percent, with no commensurate growth in Israeli forces.[65] The capability gap is further illustrated by data contained in the 2007 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Yearbook. While Iran outnumbers any potential opponent, it is not able to modernize its forces at the same rate. According to SIPRI, in 2007 GCC and Israeli conventional military spending combined was more than six times higher than Iran's, suggesting pressure on Iran to seek counter-balances, such as nuclear weapons, to conventional technological superiority.[66]

Iran can never hope for conventional parity in its dealings with the nuclear-armed US, and to attempt such parity with nuclear-armed Israel would be extremely if not prohibitively expensive. The affordable rational option that provides overall strategic symmetry at reasonable cost and without having to address the conventional imbalance is for Iran to seek nuclear weapons. The existing conventional balance therefore tends to support the idea that the Iranian perceived need for nuclear weapons originates in a rational desire for mutual deterrence and a regional balance of power that will permit Iranian political action within its regional sphere of influence and in accordance with its interests.

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[64] Simpson, "Iran's Nuclear Capability…", 65.

[65] Yair Evron, *Israel's Nuclear Dilemma* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 219.

Bureaucratic Momentum and Domestic Government Setting

Before drawing conclusions regarding Iran as a rational vice 'rogue' state actor there are some key insights to be gained from examining aspects of Iran's domestic setting, and in particular the role of the leadership and bureaucracy in setting policy.

It must be understood that nuclear policy in Iran, predating the revolution by several decades as has been demonstrated, has always been the purview of the ruling elite: the Shah in his time and the Mullahs today. This is one of the reasons why President Ahmadinejad's inflammatory rhetoric is just that: rhetoric. The Mullahs set the policy on the nuclear issue and represent the real center of national power. By President Ahmadinejad's own words in addressing Iran's 'peaceful' use of nuclear power:

> The government has the responsibility to meet the nation's demands, that is
> the implementation of the (Supreme leader's nuclear) policies. And the
> President, as the person in charge of the country's executive body has the duty
> to follow up the issue and announce the nuclear stance of the country.[67]

Indeed, even the contemporary nuclear policy predates the hard-line President Ahmadinejad by some twenty years and has been sustained by multiple elected hard-line and reform governments. The fact that it is elite-driven is what has allowed it to transcend successive regime changes. The responsible unelected constitutional elite centre of power, the Supreme Leader and Guardian Council, serves as the ultimate authority over national affairs by exercising theological fiat. Their foremost purpose is to "create conditions under which may be nurtured the noble and universal values of Islam."[68] Those conditions do not exist if Iran's

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[66] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2007…*, 397-402.

[67] Presidency of the Islamic Republic of Iran, "News Headlines", http://www.president.ir/eng/ahmadinejad/cronicnews/1385/11/11/index-e htm; Internet; accessed 13 February 2008.

[68] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran…*, 2.

influence is limited by nuclear-armed hegemons. So the question must be asked: to what extent do these institutions represent rational decision makers?

There is no doubt that in the immediate aftermath of the 1979 revolution decision-making rationality appeared to have become a casualty of the conflict. However, Stephen Walt (Academic Dean of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government) in his analysis of post-revolutionary societies has shown that revolution produces enmity and insecurity that characterizes both internal relations and those between the revolutionary state and other powers.[69] This is attributed to a desire to protect the revolution due to a general belief that the revolution might also be reversed. So while Iran's behaviour may be incomprehensible outside the context of the revolution, it follows the pattern of other post-revolutionary societies (including the Russian, French, American, Mexican, Turkish and Chinese revolutionary experiences.) It is also typical that these states abandon many of their initial utopian objectives under pressure, giving way to the familiar principles of rational state behaviour as the state system modifies their revolutionary behaviours.[70]

That this has occurred in Iran is very much in evidence. As Ozar has demonstrated, there has been much diminished revolutionary ardour in Iran since the Iran/Iraq War, including recognition that a policy of exporting revolution in order to protect the revolution itself created distrust among the Sunni dominated countries in the region. In essence, and since 1989, the regime has re-defined the Iranian national interest.[71] The 1990s saw in Iran the election of the reformer President Khatami that represented an intellectual transition to

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[69] Stephen M. Walt, *Revolution and War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 332-341.

[70] Stephen M. Walt, "Revolution and War," *World Politics* 44, no. 3 (April, 1992): 322; available from http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0043-8871%28199204%2944%3A3%3C321%3ARAW%3E2.0.CO%3B2-U; Internet; accessed 31 January, 2008.

[71] Ozar, "Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era…", 271-280.

modernity, with the intelligentsia maturing into the cohesive element in Iranian society.[72]

Their abandonment by the electorate post-9/11 has been attributed to their inability to effect

change through their rapprochement initiatives aimed at the US, an outcome for which the

US must accept much of the blame.[73]

The 2001 RAND report on *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-revolutionary Era*

concludes that today's Iran conforms in many ways to the Realist definition of 'state'. It is

seen as increasingly prudent, "preferring to work with governments rather than sub-state

movements, and increasingly uses ideology as merely a mask for realpolitik."[74] Of particular

note, it concludes that Iran "has long been willing to sacrifice its ideals for its national

interests. Its motives and priorities are dictated by cold national interest concerns."[75] This

would include the fact that over the last decade Iran

> has closed its eyes to Chinese and Russian mistreatment of their Muslim
> minorities, publicly renounced Khomeini's fatwa against Salman Rushdie,
> normalized diplomatic relations with the Gulf states, stated its willingness to
> live with a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and even
> cooperated with the Great Satan in Afghanistan and Iraq.[76]

Such behaviour suggests a degree of rationality that re-enforces both the likelihood of

rationality in Iran's nuclear policy and in the use and management of any subsequent nuclear

capability. There is even a domestic debate in Iran regarding the country's nuclear strategy

as well as offers from the country's reform element to place all of nuclear power, support to

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[72] Ramin Jahankeglov, "On Bringing Liberalism to Iran," *Toronto Star*, 17 September 2006, D3.

[73] Irfani Saroosh, "The Iranian Election: Iranians Voted for a Pluralistic Society," *The Washington Post Report on Middle East Affairs* XVI, No. 2 (Washington: Sep 1997), 13.

[74] Daniel Byman, Shahram Chubin, Anoushiravan Ehteshami, and Jerrold D. Green, *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2001), 99-103.

[75] *Ibid.*, 103.

terrorism, and even Islamic fundamentalism on the table as negotiable policies, provided that the essence of the Islamic State is preserved.[77] Such rational pragmatism has invariably been shaped by Iran's self interest in its quest for regional power and influence.

A Rational Iran

From the perspective of its historical experiences and its current geo-political environment, and with respect to its assumed pursuit of nuclear weapons, there is little if any evidence to suggest 'rogue' or irrational behaviour on the part of the state of Iran. To the contrary, considered within the normal system of states and against the Realist standard of acting in self-interest to preserve state power, there is every indication that Iran can provide a compelling and rational case for acquiring such weapons.

It has not been argued that Iran is pursuing a military nuclear capability solely as a rational response to an existential threat, even though it is more than reasonable that it faces one in its current security environment. And insofar as an existential threat continues to be a concern in Iranian eyes nuclear weapons will remain associated with vital interests. Rather, just as the US maintains its nuclear arsenal to ensure its global strategic position, Iran also seeks one to solidify its own regional strategic position. Iran wants nuclear weapons for similar reasons of strategy, and to create mutual deterrence as the mechanism of ensuring both its survival as an Islamic regime and its ability to practice statecraft and exert influence. This becomes particularly important considering that nuclear weapons already exist within its sphere of influence. These latter reasons of statecraft and influence relate primarily and

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[76] Sadr, "The Impact of Iran's Nuclearization …", 64.

[77] Noyes, "Iran's Nuclear Program…", 95; and Dr Babak Ganji, *Iranian Strategy: Factionalism and Leadership Politics*, Middle East Series, edited by Conflict Studies Research Centre, 07/06 ed. (Surrey, England: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, 2007), 19.

directly to Iran's secondary interests and its preservation of state power in a regional state system where the direct challenges to those interests are already leveraged in nuclear capabilities. As previously pointed out, if associated with purely secondary interests, the pursuit of nuclear weapons should become negotiable to a rational state.

Looking back to Sloan's characterization of 'rogue' qualities, we see nothing in the evidence that suggests Iran is an irrational, unpredictable state living 'outside' of the international system. Its actions have been what one would expect based on its security environment and reflect a rational strategy to preserve its state power. Nor does Iran appear to fail to see itself as part of, or influenced and affected by the international system of nations, and it does indeed seem to make a conscious connection between its decisions and how those decisions affect the well being of the state and its people. Its actions based on its geopolitical position and its perspective of the Middle East security environment support this. The case in point, Iran's nuclear policy, is illustrative of Iran's rational pursuit of its national self-interest, defined as preservation of its state power. To Morgenthau's question that was posed at the outset as the standard of the rationality of Iranian policy (i.e., "Is the statesman acting to preserve the state and its power?"), the only reasonable answer is "Yes". This rationality, where irrationality is a *sine qua non* condition of the 'rogue' state concept, demonstrates the 'rogue' state notion to be flawed.

Exploiting Iranian Rationality

The discussion will now turn to the impact that a rational vice a 'rogue' Iran has in terms of dealing with its potential proliferation of nuclear weapons. As mentioned at the outset, this paper does not argue the wisdom of permitting Iran to proliferate; instead, it

suggests that distinguishing between Iran the 'rogue' and Iran the rational state actor is essential to effectively dealing with or preventing Iran's proliferation potential. Although this paper has assumed that it is Iran's intent to acquire nuclear weapons, the December 2006 US National Intelligence Estimate is clear in its assessment that the decision to actually go nuclear has not yet been taken.[78] As a minimum, attempting to prevent proliferation by coercion risks rolling back years of post-revolutionary moderation in Iran and progress towards what many observers point to as perhaps the most democratic of Middle Eastern societies.[79] At worst it invites protracted war scenarios and regional instability on a grand scale in a region that much of the world looks to for its oil. Even an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities of the type carried out on a smaller scale by Israel on Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981 would require a major exercise of war, and likely cause retaliations on US sites in Iraq, Afghanistan and the GCC states.[80]

How, then, do we act to exploit Iran's rationality in order to deal with or prevent proliferation, short of risky, unnecessary, regrettable and coercive regime change and preventive war options that could give rise to decades of undesirable consequences?

Options that exploit rationality point us to an approach of either diplomacy or accommodation, recognizing that diplomacy may also include efforts or actions that are coercive in nature.[81] Sanctions are one diplomatic tool whose use has been favoured in the past; however it has been clearly shown that Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons is linked to

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[78] United States, *Annual Threat Assessment of the Director of National Intelligence…*, 11-12.

[79] Thomas Friedman, *Longitudes and Attitudes: The World in the Age of Terrorism* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 192.

[80] Noyes, "Iran's Nuclear Program…", 81.

[81] The four international response options mentioned (destruction, diplomacy, regime change and accommodation) are described in Aronson, "Israel and the Strategic Implications…", 106.

both security concerns and relative power in its regional sphere of influence. It can be argued that as long as such security concerns remain tied to state or regime survival, Iran's nuclear aspirations will remain a vital vice a secondary national interest, and therefore significantly more difficult to manipulate through measures such as sanctions. Moving nuclear weapons from a vital to a secondary interest is therefore a key to any accommodation or diplomacy-based solution.

The peaceful example of Libya provides some reason for optimism that separation of a nuclear capability from national security concerns is possible. In that example, the growing political and economic costs of developing a nuclear capability eventually came to pose a greater threat to Libyan security than the more traditional security concerns that gave the nuclear programme its genesis. But it must be emphasized that the Libyan experience also demonstrates the immeasurable value of combining constructive engagement and international pressure.[82] The object would then become one of how to separate Iran's quest for these weapons from the state power concerns that they are intended to address. Doing so requires identifying precisely what those state power concerns are, and then ensuring that the mechanisms are in place to conduct engagement with respect to them.

The latter will be a challenge. Perhaps the most significant impediment to such an approach is the almost total lack of engagement that currently exists between Iran and the US, and the damaging dialogue by rhetoric that has taken its place. The current US policy of containment (vice engagement) has been in place for 29 years and has proven to be a failure with respect to its ability to influence Iran's behaviour.[83] Cast in 1979, it ignores the many

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[82] Målfrid Braut-Hegghammer, "Libya's Nuclear Turnaround: What Lies Beneath?" *RUSI Journal* 151, no. 6 (December, 2006): 54.

[83] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran…*, 220-221.

positive changes that have taken place in Iran's post-revolutionary society since that time, as well as the significantly changed world and Middle Eastern dynamic. Further, the problems with containment are intensified by the US policy of 'linkage' – a number of Iranian policies that all have to change before normalization of relations can occur. Critics have correctly argued that "linkage […] has produced paralysis [and] it is a dangerous time to entertain paralysis in our dealings with Iran."[84] Linkage issues are most properly resolved through negotiation subsequent to or as part of the normalization of relations. But by far containment's greatest flaw is that it does absolutely nothing to address Iran's valid security concerns and a reasonable regional role for the country. Not factoring these into any solution gives it almost no prospect for success.

What is required is initial open dialogue and then normalization of relations as an essential first step in addressing the many problems to follow. Creating this ability to conduct normal engagement is essential to any hope of working towards a required comprehensive solution. After all, and the high profile of the nuclear weapons issue notwithstanding, "Iran now lies at the center of the Middle East's major problems – from the civil wars unfolding in Iraq and Lebanon to the security challenges of the Persian Gulf – and it is hard to imagine any of them being resolved without Tehran's cooperation."[85] The tradition of rhetoric has entrenched extreme positions on both sides. Just as it may take a position of power by moderates in Iran to replace rhetoric with dialogue, it will likewise require a role by moderates in the US as well.

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[84] Linkage issues include such things as renouncing terrorism and recognizing Israel, things on which it is more reasonable to expect negotiated resolution rather than unilateral Iranian acquiescence. *Ibid.*, 221.

[85] Ray Takeyh, "Time for Détente with Iran," *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 2 (2007): 17.

Once given the required mechanisms of engagement, the object of appeals to Iran's rationality must be the creation of a non-nuclear Iran as a full member of the regional power structure, in keeping with its size and economy. Given Iranian rationality, anything else is rife with risks of continued Iranian intransigence and prolonged regional instability. As indicated previously, success in this regard involves reasonable accommodation of Iran's state power concerns to the exclusion of nuclear weapons. Addressing these power concerns involves identifying to what point Iran's pursuit of its regional and domestic goals can continue without nuclear weapons – in an attempt to separate them from Iran's vital interests – and then determining what is reasonable in terms of an accommodation. They should include a reasonable and valid regional role for the state of Iran, security guarantees that address all nuclear arsenals at play in the region (including Israel's), establishment of a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ), reasonable access to nuclear power, commitment to Iran's economic viability, and most importantly: resolution or at least stabilization of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a root cause of several related problems. These all play to Iran's rationality in that they all preserve aspects of its state power and are reasonably included on this list. The latter is important to all invested states, in particular Israel, and that importance cannot be understated. For Iran, its importance is underscored by the fact that 29 years after the revolution the Palestinian issue is the only remaining ideological and revolutionary one that remains on the foreign policy agenda of the Islamic Republic.[86]

On the other side of the negotiating table there are corollary issues to be resolved. As a minimum these include complete transparency with respect to Iran's nuclear programme and ambitions, security guarantees for Israel and the GCC states, establishment of a NWFZ, acceptance of a newly established regional order, ending support to 'terrorism', and finally:

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[86] Sariolghalam, "Iran's Emerging Regional Security Doctrine…", 182.

resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict in such a way that is acceptable to Israel and the Palestinians, and that results in recognition of the state of Israel itself. In the end, an environment must be created that permits Israel to resolve its problems by negotiation rather than by conflict. Only such an outcome allows Israel's nuclear arsenal to be placed on the table as a necessary part of any comprehensive solution and compromise, as Israel has already agreed to in principle.

A point of caution is worth raising here. There is little doubt that the main negotiating partner in a multilateral forum must be the US. For over fifty years now the US has been the major strategic consideration in Iranian security thinking, notwithstanding the fact that Israel has become Iran's most significant regional competitor. What the US must realize in its efforts to achieve a comprehensive regional solution, especially in consideration of the fact that Iran is also Israel's most significant regional competitor, is that on many issues US interests and those of Israel will not be aligned. Allowing Israel to shape American policy towards Iran during a process of negotiation aimed at mutual accommodation, as has become the normal practice,[87] will yield nothing but the many dead ends that have come to characterize the last twenty years of negotiations on the Arab-Israeli question. If it is the US understanding that one of its roles in seeking accommodation with Iran is preserving Israeli pre-eminence and nuclear hegemony in the region, then they will fail. Compromises that include reasonable alternative security guarantees for Israel will be necessary from the perspective of all Arab states and not just Iran.

This point is particularly valid with respect to resolution of the Palestinian question as part of the comprehensive solution. Long accepted as a mediator to this process, thereby placing it totally in control of its related policies if the appearance of impartiality was to be

maintained, the US has failed in this capacity by repeated and blind acquiescence to the Israeli position. Over four decades it has proved that having one western-style democracy in Israel is more important to it than having many throughout the Middle East. Even-handed treatment of Israel and Palestinians is a conscious choice that the US has not made, to the detriment of its interests in the Arab world. The result is a loss of credibility, and more importantly a challenge to its prospects for success in appealing to the rationality of not only Iran but a multitude of other Arab states as well.

There is no doubt that an accommodation such as the one described above is complex and likely involves decades of dedication and diplomacy to become feasible and to realize ultimate success. But the truth is that no side's current position provides the basis for acceptable long-term alternative solutions, and in fact several offer a not insignificant risk of literally centuries of continued conflict on a number of fronts. These include problematic if not nightmarish scenarios involving a multi-polar Middle East and a resultant increased risk of the use of nuclear weapons if the current situation is allowed to progress.

That a multi-polar Middle East is undesirable from a security perspective is intuitive, but its specter in these discussions serves to underscore the number and complexity of issues at play. Security guarantees for not just Israel and Iran, but also for Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and the GCC states become important, as they do for China who relies on Iran as an important source of natural resources. Add the likely impossibility of a comprehensive solution without the creation of some form of Palestinian state, and the magnitude of the problem becomes apparent. What is encouraging is the fact that both Iran and Israel have signaled agreement in principle with the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East, albeit both have linked such an eventuality to a

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[87] *Ibid.*, 179-180.

comprehensive settlement of the type being alluded to.[88] In fact, in 1993 rational Iran became the first country to propose a NWFZ in the Middle East, viewing it as one of two ways to realize its interest-based objective of nuclear parity in its region, thereby obviating the need for nuclear weapons.[89]

In the final analysis, that a nuclear Iran has serious implications for the region should be obvious. Unpalatable and risky alternatives drive home the need to find a suitable diplomatic accommodation with Iran that prevents it from proliferating; an accommodation that in practical terms exploits its rationality and relegates its need for nuclear weapons to the status of a negotiable secondary interest vice the vital national interest that a lack of other security guarantees has made it. Accommodation is made possible by the conclusion that Iran is a rational state that behaves in a manner consistent with its self-interest and preservation of its state power. This should be reassuring, as it vastly increases the number of non-coercive options available and their chances for success, while in some circumstances arguably enhancing the effectiveness of purely coercive options as well.

Conclusion

This paper has used an orthodox foreign policy analysis framework and a Realist standard for rational behaviour to examine the idea that Iran is a 'rogue' state and found that the evidence does not support such a supposition. The notion of rogue behaviour appears to be the result of the rhetoric and lack of official dialogue that exists between Iran and the US, and is compounded by a strong Israeli influence over the US policies relating to Iran. Based

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[88] Israel has agreed to a NWFZ based on a comprehensive peace and a mutual inspection and verification system. Thomas Land, "Converting a Crisis into an Opportunity," *Middle East*, no. 363 (Jan, 2006): 23.

[89] Ozar, "Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era…", 281.

on an analysis of policy determinants relating to Iran's historical experiences and international, domestic and governmental settings, and in particular with respect to the other nuclear states that have interests and exert influence in the region, Iran's nuclear policy and the assumed intent to proliferate nuclear weapons represent a reasonable and rational policy option, albeit internationally unacceptable for a number of other reasons. Even with respect to other issues, such as support to terrorism, the case for rationality is easily made when considered in the context of Iran's perspective of its security environment, its interests and the means it has available to promote them. By the standard of Morgenthau's Realist Theory where rationality is defined by self interest and preservation of state power, Iran is assessed as a rational state actor. Further, with respect to the theoretical dimension where irrationality is the defining quality of a 'rogue' state, the case of Iran demonstrates the 'rogue' state notion to be a flawed one.

Having examined the impact of the key determinants influencing Iran's nuclear policies, it is fair to say that the basic arguments for such a policy have changed little since the Shah's US-supported nuclear programme of the 1970s. What has changed over time is the congruity (or lack of congruity) between US, Israeli and Iranian interests in the region. That lack of congruity has been sold by the other states as the vestiges of irrationality or 'rogue' behaviour on Iran's part. However the real problem with a nuclear Iran has nothing to do with a rhetorical 'Axis of Evil'. Rather, it has everything to do with the fact that such a rational entity greatly reduces US and Israeli policy flexibility and freedom of action in the Gulf region and in the entire Middle East, and conflicts with the interests of these two allied powers.[90] A rational, nuclear-armed Iran is a far greater challenge to US policy objectives

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[90] Brookes, *A Devil's Triangle…*, 201.

than a rational conventional Iran, and preventing or dealing with the former successfully may be the key to future US foreign policy success in the wider Middle East. It is also a significant challenge to current Israeli regional strategic hegemony.

Based on its long history, size, population, resource wealth and economy, Iran is also a legitimate regional contender for power. In consideration of the hegemons and threats that already exist in that region, some of them representing existential threats, it should not be surprising that Iran is seizing on opportunities and policies to realize its regional power potential. But its related and assumed proliferation of nuclear weapons is problematic from a larger security perspective, the rationality of that policy notwithstanding. Being a rational middle-power intent on exerting its influence in its sphere, dealing with Iran necessitates using all of the tools of diplomacy, policy and economics. Success starts with separating Iran's quest for such weapons from the existential threats that have made them a vital interest. Engagement is essential to doing so, thereby building bonds of trust that have to be created sooner rather than later if a reasonable and preferred option of accommodation is to be realized in the required context of a comprehensive solution to a number of related problems in the Middle East.

The prospect of a nuclear Iran is a serious enough issue to warrant extraordinary measures aimed at normalization of relations if nuclearization is to be prevented or even mitigated if it actually occurs. At the end of the day an environment that features recognition of the state of Israel and permits Israel to actually resolve its problems by negotiation must also be created. It is painfully obvious that doing so will require a comprehensive settlement addressing a significant number of long-standing regional issues, and ultimately some recognition that with respect to Iran US and Israeli interests are not necessarily aligned. If it

is the US understanding that they need to preserve Israeli regional hegemony as an outcome, vice a regime of far-reaching and mutual security guarantees, then their efforts are already doomed to fail.

It is true that the "preoccupation with the destructive power of a nuclearized Iran has … precluded a systematic evaluation of the likelihood that such a power would actually be used."[91] WMD use by rational nation states is traditionally constrained by the logic of deterrence and diplomacy. With respect to Iran, the evidence suggests no greater irrationality, no greater propensity for first use, and no greater lack of deterability than for any other country in the system of states. Even so, the greatest risk lies in believing our own rhetoric and thereby failing to respond to Iran in a way that is most likely to shape the decision-making of this rational state actor, preferably in a timely enough fashion to actually prevent its proliferation of nuclear weapons.

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[91] Sadr, "The Impact of Iran's Nuclearization …", 58.

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