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# Iran

## The Moment of Truth

Working Paper No. 20  
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# Iran

## The Moment of Truth

### A European Perspective

François Heisbourg\*

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#### 1. The Backdrop

The definition of European policy objectives and strategies *vis-à-vis* Iran's nuclear ambitions must take into account the specificities of the case, setting, as it were, its *problématique*.

First, we have the unusual situation of a basically three-way game: the EU (and notably the EU-3, comprising the UK, France and Germany), Iran and the 'significant other', the United States, which is outside of the negotiation but a key player. Any student in strategy knows that a triangle is the most unstable and tricky combination to deal with, and the presence of yet another set of outsiders (notably Russia and China) adds another element of complexity.

Second, the US and Iran are acting as much, if not more, on the basis of past experience than from a cold-headed cost-benefit analysis based on current facts and future prospects. The American attitude towards Iran remains heavily influenced by the humiliation of the 444-day seizure of the American embassy and its diplomats in Tehran (1978-80), while Iran's vision of the US is coloured *inter alia* by the experience of the American-orchestrated regime change in 1953, with the overthrow of the Mossadegh government.<sup>1</sup>

Third, the EU is approaching the Iranian nuclear question on the basis of the severe trauma incurred during the 2000-03 Iraqi crisis, which split Europe down the middle, pitting EU (and NATO) members against each other. The EU-3's decision-making on Iran will clearly put a high premium on avoiding a repetition of the split. Such a consideration can cut both ways: it can lead to emphasising cooperation with the US (as a way of limiting the trauma of another 'old Europe/new Europe' split) but if the US position becomes incompatible with the national interests of all the EU-3 countries, it can facilitate the establishment of a common EU front working against the US line. This has already happened, albeit in a relatively non-abrasive manner, when in early 2005 the EU put pressure (with some success) on the US to relent on its refusal to proffer carrots in the Iranian-EU-3 negotiations.

Fourth, the spread of carrots and sticks between the EU-3 and the US is unusual, in the sense that the Europeans have few carrots and some sticks, while the US has few sticks and more carrots. Thus the EU-3 can hardly make any worthwhile economic, financial, trade and security concessions to the Iranians without a green light from the US, for the good reason that it is the US (and not the EU) that has during the last quarter of a century implemented sanctions, foregone diplomatic relations and avoided any sort of Iranian participation in regional security affairs. Conversely, the US does not have, at this stage, a credible military alternative at its disposal: American political and military efforts in Iraq are heavily dependent on the continued absence of Iranian support for activism by the more extremist Shiite groups. American troops pinned down in Iraq do not need a new insurrectional front and the Iranians know it. This singular context cramps the EU-3's negotiating margin of manoeuvre while preventing to a major extent an effective 'good cop, bad cop' division of labour.

Fifth and lastly, the Iranian mullahcracy is unpopular in its own country, while admiration for the American way of life is commensurately strong. But Iran is also one of the world's oldest nations,

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<sup>1</sup> See *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle-East Terror* by Stephen Kinzer, New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2003.

with a strong self-perception of its right to be endowed with the symbols of status and power, such as the nuclear programme, and international attempts at removing that right are one of the few things that can solidify support of the regime. Furthermore, the regime benefits from being seen as national in nature: whatever their faults, the mullahs are not in the thrall of Russian, British or American interests as their predecessor the late Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi or those in the Qajar era were perceived to be during the 150 years preceding the Islamic Revolution. This leads to a degree of inconsistency in the current US policy of seeking both regime change and denuclearisation – pressure for regime change reinforces Iran’s quest for nuclear weapons, while pressure to stop Iran’s nuclear programme reinforces the regime.

## 2. Current policy objectives

Although the US and the EU are (as they should be) working in close concert on the nuclear account, their policy objectives are not identical in terms of their content and their hierarchy. The US policy, as summarised with clarity by Undersecretary for Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns,<sup>2</sup> is threefold.

On top of the list, the “freedom deficit”, which, along with the severe restriction on free expression and fair elections, “is the first of our concerns with Iranian government policy...A second and critical US concern is our strong and resolute opposition to Iran acquiring a nuclear weapons capability”. This is seen as threatening “the peace and security of the [US], our friends and allies and the stability of the entire region”. The authority of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the integrity of the international non-proliferation regime are not mentioned. Third is the link between Iran and terrorist organisations.

Although the language used avoids Boltonian hyperbole and eschews open threats, it does not mark a break with the pre-existing vision of the Bush Administration. Indeed, as was the case during President George W. Bush’s first term, the policy statement by Mr Burns sets out a vision rather than formulate a strategy, let alone an operational-level policy.

The EU’s objectives also belong to the realm of vision rather than of a grand strategy; but the requirements of the negotiation lead the Europeans to set out operational policy goals. The EU’s goals, as can be pieced together from assorted statements, can be summarised as follows.

In addition to the American concerns about the regional effects of Iran going nuclear, the EU emphasises the potential consequences of Iran’s policies for the future of the multilateral proliferation regime: an Iranian *de facto* or *de jure* departure from the disciplines and objectives of the NPT would set a precedent vastly compounding the consequences of North Korea’s NPT opt-out. The dynamic of nuclear proliferation would return to its logic of the 1950s and 1960s, with the ensuing rapid spread of nuclear weapons in the Middle East and East Asia. The EU’s vision has the merit of avoiding the establishment of incoherent goals (i.e. the freedom deficit versus nuclear affairs).

Yet the EU potentially runs the risk of another type of inconsistency, flowing on the one hand from its wish to avoid a clash of civilisations through military confrontations with a prominent Islamic state,<sup>3</sup> and on the other hand, from its post-Iraq desire to prevent the emergence of a new intra-European and transatlantic split.

Today, the EU’s operative policy in the negotiation with Iran is reasonably coherent with all of the above, including the primary objective of avoiding a breakdown of the non-proliferation regime. This helps explain why the EU-3 have found it relatively easy to stick together on a platform of rejecting any Iranian activity in the enriched uranium (and plutonium) parts of the fuel cycle including related activities (e.g. uranium conversion into UF<sub>6</sub>).

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<sup>2</sup> See R. Nicholas Burns, Undersecretary for Political Affairs, “United States’ Policy towards Iran”, Statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington D.C., 19 May 2005.

<sup>3</sup> On this score, see the thoughtful Policy Analysis Brief by Michael R. Kraig, *Realistic solutions for resolving the Iranian nuclear crisis*, The Stanley Foundation, Musatine, IA, April 2005.

If the US or Iran (or both) were to choose the road of escalation, however, the EU may find it much more difficult to reconcile the refusal of the logic of the clash of civilisations with the avoidance of a new transatlantic crisis.

Iran's objectives are more difficult to discuss, given the apparent disconnection between rhetorical posturing and arcane negotiating tactics. Nevertheless, we will suggest here that Iran has three basic policy goals.

The first priority is the avoidance of regime change. This policy does not, however, lead naturally to a soft position on nuclear development, whether civilian or military, or both: from the standpoint of the Iranian politicians in power (or vying for power), being rhetorically tough on nuclear affairs contributes to their political prospects and regime stability.

Down the road, if for either American or Iranian reasons, confrontation were to become the preferred option, a nuclear crisis short of a full-blown military confrontation with the US or Israel would on balance favour the regime, not only politically (with the rallying-around-the-flag effect) but also economically: as such Iran would be like 'North Korea with oil', benefiting from the higher price of oil resulting from a context of regional tension.

The second priority is to sustain Iran's ability to keep its population and notably its youth satisfied. If high oil prices can provide the money with which to buy off various constituencies, it still does not create jobs. For that purpose, foreign investment and unfettered access to global capital markets are required. In this sense, Iran is profoundly different from North Korea: there is a civil society in Iran, operating in the space created by competing power centres, which are to some extent answerable to the electorate to a degree that is not always practiced by America's allies in the Arab world, even if Iran is obviously not a democracy.

Only the fear of incurring European censure and the risk of greater political and economic ostracisation can explain why the Iranians backed away from the brink during the discussions in Geneva on 26 May 2005. In other words, the future of diplomatic, economic and security intercourse between Iran and the outside world still has real weight in Tehran.

Third, at least for the time being, are the strategic aspects. Some Iranian officials harp in private on their wartime experience of utter strategic isolation between 1980-88, thus appearing to justify a possible nuclear weapons capability, while others, less privately, invoke the 'unfairness' of Israel having nuclear weapons. But the fact remains that in today's Middle East, Iran is not an underdog in strategic terms. It is more powerful than any of its not-so-friendly Arab neighbours. Unlike Pakistan, which had a clearcut rationale for going nuclear in the face of overwhelming Indian power, Iran has no real *prima facie* need to go down the nuclear weapons road. It can wish to go there, and has obviously been trying to get close to the threshold, given its impressive track record of cheating on its commitments to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Nevertheless, nothing irreversible has yet occurred in the technical area. As the International Institute of Security Studies states: "[even] if it abandons the suspension, Iran is still several years away from achieving an enrichment capability sufficient to execute a political decision to acquire nuclear weapons".<sup>4</sup> The widespread discussion in Iranian strategic and atomic energy circles<sup>5</sup> of the 'Japanese option' (rather than of an 'Indian option') may be a smoke screen, but it at least creates some doubt as to whether a definitive political decision has been made to actually 'go nuclear'. Similarly, in atomic energy circles, there is awareness that India paid a heavy price in terms of a civilian nuclear electricity programme by deciding to give the priority to the military road: New Delhi lost ready access after 1974 to Western and Soviet nuclear reactor technology without reaping obvious strategic benefits from the bomb.

Obviously all this is subject to change. We only know what we know, to paraphrase US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and there may yet be dark secrets lurking in the more remote parts of Iran.

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<sup>4</sup> See the press launch of *The Strategic Survey 2004/5* by John Chipman, IISS, London, 24 May 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Based on the author's interviews in Tehran, February 2005.

The mullahs may have come to the conclusion that the US really is determined to overthrow the regime and that the Bush doctrine therefore calls for a nuclear counter. Maybe. But given the timelines involved, the West has every reason to negotiate in good faith rather than to seek confrontation.

### 3. Scenarios

Under these conditions, three basic scenarios are open to the West.

#### 1) *Drift and failure*

Since the autumn of 2003, the EU-3 group has had a remarkable record of keeping the negotiations in play notwithstanding their rather weak hand. The temptation may therefore be to simply continue on the basis of current practice, for instance not taking seriously the undertaking to come up with a detailed set of substantive proposals by the time the negotiators reconvene in mid-summer 2005 after the Iranian presidential elections. That, however, is simply not going to work: Iran, for reasons of national pride and regime stability, will not accept an outcome in which it foregoes its nuclear fuel-cycle activity without any substantial *quid pro quos* or exceptions (or both).

‘Business as usual’ will lead to the dead-end of confrontation.

This point is not a critique of the EU-3’s activities to date; on the contrary, by remaining tightly united and by learning quickly from their difficulties with Iran in the summer of 2004, the EU-3 group has proven their effectiveness and professionalism. But, there are limits as to just how far one can go in a game of poker with only a pair of low-value cards.

#### 2) *Deliberate escalation*

In this scenario, the US arrives at the determination that Iran is not going to abandon “what we conclude is an active nuclear weapons program”.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, it decides to treat the ‘freedom deficit’ with the cure of ‘regime change’. Therefore, Washington sets itself a roadmap of subversion (as in 1953), special forces activity and air strikes to be implemented before the end of the Bush presidency, assuming that by 2007 the situation in Iraq is under adequate control. The Americans let the EU-3 play out their negotiation, conceding some carrots *pour la galerie*, but not enough to avoid a break sometime in late 2005 or in early 2006, so that the escalation process can begin both in the UN Security Council (UNSC) and more forcefully in the dialogue between the US and the EU. The Europeans would be invited to use their economic and political sticks (e.g. sanctions and the downgrading of diplomatic relations) independently of a presumably indecisive UNSC resolution. Needless to say, this would create a transatlantic divide of Iraqi-crisis proportions. Whether the EU would remain united or not, with or against the US policy, would be a matter of circumstance. But chances are that this would look more like a remake of Vietnam (with no European support) than Iraq (with a divided Europe).

#### 3) *Bargain or bust*

In this scenario, a determined attempt would be made to strike a grand bargain with Iran. Success would be measured by the following benchmarks: Iran stays in the NPT; it ratifies the IAEA’s model additional protocol; it does not resume the currently suspended fuel-cycle activity. Iran ceases its testing of intermediate range ballistic missiles of the Shahab missile family and does not deploy them (such restraint would not preclude Iran from engaging in a Japanese- or Brazilian-style space programme if it so desired).

Assembling the elements for such an attempted grand bargain would imply the following policy shifts. On the US side, a sweeping interagency reassessment of relations with Iran would need to be conducted in the spirit of the far-reaching reappraisal of US-Chinese relations by the US Republican administration in 1969, with the objectives of:

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<sup>6</sup> See Burns, op.cit.

- realigning the psycho-politics of the relationship towards the sort of *realpolitik* conducted by the Bush administration with Pakistan (a semi-failed state, massively involved in world-scale nuclear proliferation after having covertly acquired nuclear weapons). In other words, the US would make decisions on the basis of a present- and future-driven cost-benefit analysis rather than on the historical legacy of past humiliation and misdeeds.
- expanding the range of carrots authorised for use by the EU-3 in their summer 2005 proposals. Such carrots could entail a security dialogue, including a mutual non-aggression undertaking; better liaison with the IMF and World Bank (in order to facilitate Iran's access to the international capital market); and in the nuclear area, the possible offer of access to pressurised water reactor technology. Some of these carrots would be easier to release than others. Persuading the US Senate to revoke the 1996 Iran and Libya Sanctions Act with its third-party sanctions would presumably be in the close-to-impossible category, but much could be done in the diplomatic, security and financial fields without having to go to the Senate.
- accepting the proposal by IAEA Director General Mohammed El Baradei for an *erga omnes* five-year moratorium on any new enrichment and reprocessing facilities, as a first step in a fissile material cut-off negotiation (FMCT). This action would remove Iran's argument that it cannot politically accept being singled out in terms of being deprived of its right to enrich under the NPT. Otherwise, the EU-3 may find that they are compelled to give in to Iranian demands concerning uranium conversion (along the lines of the Russian-Iranian ideas of May 2005) or a pilot enrichment facility. Uranium conversion is not as sensitive as enrichment, but building up a stockpile of UF<sub>6</sub> would be an important contribution to any Iranian attempt to go nuclear: if conversion is conceded according to the Russian ideas, Iran could from one day to the next decide to halt shipments to Russia and build up such a stockpile. A pilot enrichment facility, if it were of a scale not exceeding current Iranian capabilities (i.e. less than 200 centrifuges) would presumably not be a significant direct threat in terms of acquiring nuclear weapons. But the associated building-up of technical industrial know-how would be an important part of the learning curve towards a nuclear weapons programme. Hence, the American-EU-3 position of refusing any Iranian fuel-cycle activity should be pursued; it also has to be made politically sustainable.

On the EU side, the same commitment should be made concerning the fuel-cycle moratorium and the FMCT negotiations. In terms of meeting American concerns, the EU should factor into the negotiations with Iran the requirement for Tehran to recognise the existence of Israel. Indeed, the EU should do so not only to placate its American partners but also because of the intrinsic merits of such a position – along with Iran's nuclear cheating towards the IAEA, Iran's refusal of Israel's right to exist fuels Western concerns about Iran's nuclear intentions. Similarly, the US and the EU should present a common front concerning the fate of identified al-Qaeda operatives currently located in Iran.

Obviously, at the end of the day, it is Iran's decisions that will be the essence of the matter. A security dialogue can help Iran measure the negative regional consequences of going nuclear, while a non-aggression undertaking would remove the strategic rationale for pursuing a nuclear deterrent. A US reappraisal of its sanctions policy would provide a strong incentive for the Iranian political and economic decision-makers (including those who are keen to generate nuclear electricity, thus release hydrocarbons for export) to avoid going to the nuclear threshold.

The grand bargain suggested here may fail; but it deserves to be tried with real determination. If it does not work, there is enough time to examine other options. And there would be a real chance that the US and the EU would be able to do so in a cooperative rather than in an antagonistic manner. It is thus a situation of *pari pascalien* (God may not exist, but you cannot be sure, so you can only win if you act as if He does). In other words, the grand bargain is the opposite of 'damned if you do, damned if you don't'.

# Influence, Deter and Contain

## The Middle Path for Responding to Iran's Nuclear Programme

### An American Perspective

Patrick Clawson\*

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**T**oo much of the discussion about responses to Iran's nuclear programme is concentrated on the extreme solutions: either attack or appease. Yet there are a wide range of intermediate policy options that hold much more promise. Western governments need to step up consultation about how to influence, deter and contain Iran's programme.

#### 1. Influence

Iran's leaders do not want to be isolated internationally; the country's near total isolation in 1980 left it vulnerable to military attack without response from the world community. When confronted with a united stance by the major powers, Iran backs down, as seen in the October 2003 agreement for freezing the nuclear programme. Therefore, the centrepiece of Western policy about Iran's nuclear programme has to be a common stance. On Iraq, transatlantic cooperation was preferred but not essential; on Iran, American-European cooperation is a necessary prerequisite. The Bush administration is on the whole optimistic that transatlantic unity can lead to a successful resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue, especially if Russia continues to move towards being more helpful (in particular, by making clearer its message to Iran that the Bushehr plant will never be fuelled by Russia until Iran reaches an agreement with Europe).

To influence Iran, the West needs instruments of persuasion and dissuasion. The Europeans are said to be formulating a proposal to be put to Iran in early August with four elements of persuasion: security guarantees, an assured supply of nuclear fuel for Bushehr (if Russia refuses to supply Iran for non-commercial reasons), cooperation in advanced technologies and the supply of nuclear research reactors. The latter area is quite dangerous, since many research reactors offer much potential for learning dangerous technologies and even for diverting material or using it in a breakout scenario. It would be more appropriate to concentrate on security measures, which are a good way to counter the argument that Iran needs nuclear weapons because it has real security needs. Furthermore, there are many confidence- and security-building measures and arms control measures that would provide gains for both Iran and the West. And these are the kinds of measures in which Europe, the United States and Russia have much experience, so these proposals could build a consensus among them about the appropriate ways to address Iranian security concerns – remembering always that the key to success with Iran is unity among the great powers. Issues worth exploring would include:

- an exchange of observers for military exercises in and near Iran, including Iranian observers during US naval exercises and any large troop movements near Iran's borders, plus American observers during large Iranian exercises. It would be in the West's interest to promote military-to-military contacts;
- naval cooperation at sea, including an incidents-at-sea agreement and a Gulf-wide agency for collecting information about sea hazards; and

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- the commencement of negotiations on an arms control agreement along the lines of the Conventional Forces in Europe accord to limit forces close to the Iraqi-Iranian and Afghan-Iranian borders, which would apply to both Iranian forces and the forces of Iraq, Iran, the US and other treaty signatories.

As for instruments of dissuasion, too much attention has been given to economic sanctions, which would be ineffective and inflict much damage on Western economies if imposed while oil markets are so tight. Much more useful would be measures to emphasise to Iran its isolation over the nuclear issue. In several recent cases, the UN Security Council (UNSC) has imposed targeted sanctions designed to drive home the high political price of unacceptable actions. For Iran, it would be appropriate to consider such steps as:

- establishing an international consensus, preferably through a UNSC resolution, about the consequences of withdrawal from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) along the lines of the French proposal to the NPT Review Conference, namely, withdrawal does not end a country's obligation to resolve any violations committed before withdrawal; further, a country withdrawing must also give up any benefits it obtained while it was an NPT member – which means dismantling, returning to the provider or putting under seal any nuclear technology of any sort acquired during NPT membership;
- banning travel by important individuals and their immediate families, including the key political decision-makers; and
- forbidding Iranian participation in international sporting competitions. If young Iranians learn that their country's participation in the World Cup is dependent on resolving the nuclear issue, there will be a dramatic increase in the interest they take in how the negotiations are going.

## 2. Deter

The West should show Iran that its security will be worse off if it continues with its nuclear programmes. The West should also put itself in a better position to use military force should the need arise later – but do so in a way that does not put the West on the first step of an escalator that inevitably leads to military action. The way to accomplish these objectives is to use military presence and military cooperation with regional states to deter Iran from acquiring or making use of nuclear weapons. The transatlantic partners have much experience with deterrence that can be drawn upon to design a programme to deter Iran. Possible steps in this effort include:

- enhancing cooperation with Arab states in the Persian Gulf, through activities such as selling them more advanced weapons including anti-missile systems and air defence systems. Raising doubts in the minds of Iranian decision-makers about the country's ability to reliably deliver its nuclear weapons could make the use of nuclear weapons prohibitively risky for Tehran in all but the direst of circumstances.
- expanding the Western military presence, through the more frequent deployment of larger and more sophisticated forces. Some of Iran's neighbours might welcome the opportunity to enhance their own military capabilities by closer cooperation with the Western states, including expanding access, basing and overflight rights to Western forces in the region.
- proposing more active and realistic combined exercises by the transatlantic partners aimed at averting the Iranian threat.
- taking a declaratory posture. The transatlantic partners could make an open statement about their policy of defending the region against a nuclear Iran.

### 3. Contain

The US and its transatlantic allies should also enhance their capabilities to contain a nuclear Iran, to hedge against the possibility that Iran will exploit an ambiguous nuclear status. This could include stepped-up actions in four areas.

A first step would be to respond to the main conventional threat from Iran (which is in the naval arena) and specifically the threat it poses to the flow of oil from the region. Iran has a wide range of capabilities, which it regularly exercises, to disrupt shipping in the Straits of Hormuz, including naval mine, special warfare, small boat, submarine and coastal anti-ship missile forces. Moreover, Iran could conduct limited amphibious operations to seize and hold lightly defended islands or offshore oil platforms in the Gulf. Some Iranian decision-makers might believe that ‘the bomb’ could provide them with a free hand to assert control over the Straits with relative impunity, since their nuclear capability would deter an effective response by its neighbours or US intervention on their behalf. The Straits of Hormuz are a vital sea lane of communication for the world oil industry, through which more than 10 million barrels of oil per day transits. For this reason, it would be appropriate for the transatlantic partners, in conjunction with Asian countries and the Gulf States, to conduct exercises protecting the Straits. Indeed, an exercise to protect the Straits (with minesweepers and so on), if conducted in the near future, would be a useful way to signal to Iran that the West is serious and united in its willingness to use force to protect its vital interests in the Gulf, yet at the same time such an exercise would be entirely defensive and in no way suggesting that the West is considering attacking Iran.

A second action would be to develop capabilities against the possible use of nuclear weapons by Iran. The West needs to work with the Gulf States to ensure that the capability to interdict nuclear devices en route to the target is present in the region. That would include the ability to detect the transport of nuclear devices being delivered through non-traditional means such as by truck or boat. This effort will require improving local coast guards in the Gulf and reinforcing control over unofficial land-border crossing points and smuggling routes. In parallel, planning should begin now for the management of consequences in the event of a nuclear explosion in the region, including disaster planning and the stockpiling of medical and other supplies that would be needed.

A third area concerns the need by regional states for enhanced capabilities to counter terrorism and subversion. This would include both constabulary capabilities (quasi-military and quasi-police) and also the implementation of political reforms that will alleviate the root causes of terrorism.

A fourth point is that the West should focus on military-technical cooperation with regional friends and allies, deepening existing bilateral security relationships and augmenting regional cooperative ventures; efforts are already underway to create shared air- and missile-defence early warning and C4I arrangements such as the ‘cooperative belt’ (*Hizam al-Ta’awun*) programme. Undoubtedly, such an approach lacks the appeal of more ambitious proposals to create new regional political and security structures, but it would allow building on existing bilateral and multilateral efforts, and through incremental steps, laying the foundation for future regional, collective security arrangements.

### 4. On whose side does time work?

Some have suggested that Western interests are well served by interminable negotiations, since Iran has frozen its nuclear programme while the negotiations are underway. That could be true. Nevertheless, one way to read the record today is that Iran suspends its nuclear activities when its scientists hit a technical barrier; once the problem is resolved, the programme is unfrozen until a new problem arises. If that is true, then the negotiations are not necessarily slowing Iran’s nuclear programme by much. Israel worries that once Iran has acquired the technological mastery of the fuel cycle, then its nuclear programme will be beyond the point of no return – a view that is shaping Israeli decisions about how and when to respond to a potential Iranian nuclear challenge.

Even more troubling, the negotiations are concentrating entirely on how to prevent Iran from going down two of the four routes to a nuclear weapon: diversion from a civilian safeguarded programme and acquisition of the potential for a rapid breakout. Setting aside the third route of buying a complete weapon, there is still a fourth method: the pursuit of a clandestine, parallel nuclear programme. It is not clear if the freeze during negotiations or the proposed agreement would have much impact on such a clandestine programme. This is a matter of concern, because there are accumulating indications that Iran may have such a programme. One easy-to-explain indicator has been Iran's proposal to the Europeans that it be allowed to produce UF<sub>6</sub>, which could then be sent abroad for centrifuging into reactor fuel. From an economic or political point of view, this proposal makes no sense: Why would Iran spend billions of dollars and much prestige to develop centrifuges, only to yield them while maintaining a lower-profile UF<sub>6</sub> plant? One explanation is that UF<sub>6</sub> is produced in a large plant that is difficult to keep clandestine, whereas centrifuging can be accomplished in small facilities that are easier to conceal (even a 164-unit cascade can be produced in a building no larger than a typical American home). In other words, Iran is proposing that it be allowed to keep the one link in the nuclear chain that would otherwise be most vulnerable to military strikes.

Yet another factor in the time equation is what will happen after the 17 June elections, especially if former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani is re-elected. Despite hopes that he may strike a deal with the West if elected, his record as president included stepping up terror outside Iran – such as attacking Iranian dissidents abroad and bombing the US barracks at Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia. And he has had a difficult relationship with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei for the last twenty years. Even if Khamenei wanted to normalise relations with the West – and there is little evidence that he is desirous of any ties other than economic – he has no wish to see Mr Rafsanjani receive credit for what would be a very popular step. So while it is quite possible Mr Rafsanjani would try to reach an agreement with the West – indeed, with the US – it is less clear that he would be allowed to do so by those who really control power in Iran.

Finally, the most important time issue concerns how long the present Iranian regime will last. Analysts have had a poor record at predicting when fundamental changes will take place. Who among us expected that when President Ronald Reagan said “this wall must come down” it would indeed fall within three years? Who expected on 1 January that Syrian troops would be out of Lebanon by 1 May? Nor is it possible to tell when change will come to Iran, but it is quite clear that the Iranian people detest the present system. At the same time that it concentrates on the nuclear issue, the US has important interests – both strategic and moral – in supporting Iran's pro-democratic forces. Despite complaints from hardliners in Iran about a ‘regime change’ policy, Washington will persist in its frequent and frank criticism of the Islamic Republic's failings on human rights and the rule of law. It would be a grave setback to Washington's reform agenda in the region if the US were perceived to have abandoned Iran's beleaguered pro-democratic forces by doing a deal with hardline autocrats to secure American geo-strategic interests. When Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns addressed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 19 May about American policy towards Iran, he spoke first and most importantly about democracy and human rights and only secondly about the nuclear issue. That well reflects the priorities of the Bush administration in its current approach to the Middle East in general and Iran in particular.

# Iran's Nuclear Programme

## A Russian Perspective

Vladimir Sazhin\*

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In recent years the nuclear programme of the Islamic Republic of Iran has become one of the key problems of modern international politics. Iran's nuclear programme is nearly 50 years old, and conditionally speaking, its history can be divided into two stages. The first stage is linked to the rule of the last Shah of Iran, the late Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The second stage started immediately after the Islamic revolution of 1979 and is still in progress.

The construction, with the help of the US, of a nuclear research centre having a reactor with a capacity of 5,000 megawatts, attached to the Tehran University, marked the beginning of the first stage of Iran's nuclear programme in 1960. Later an agreement on cooperation was signed between Iran and France on the purification and enrichment of uranium ore. A joint Iranian-French venture, the Eurodif Company, was set up for this purpose. In the early 1970s, a programme emerged in Iran providing for the establishment of a network of nuclear power plants (up to 20 nuclear power plants altogether). The initiator of this programme was the late shah, who had ambitious ideas about his country being worthy of modern technologies, having cashed in on the sale of oil at that time. His main objective in the development of Iran's nuclear infrastructure was to do all in his power to turn his country into the main player in the region. Nevertheless, the late shah said at the time with absolute certainty that his nuclear strategy was peaceful in character. Indeed, at that time, there were no signs that Iran had a military nuclear programme. Iran had signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and said it was ready to admit International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors to visit all of its nuclear sites for inspections.

For nearly 20 years the nuclear programme of the shah-ruled Iran was at the realisation stage, during which time dozens of countries, including the United States, Argentina, China, India and Germany, offered their help.

The Islamic regime that came to power in the country in 1979 on the wave of revolutionary extremism broke off all of Iran's contacts with its international partners. Under the conditions of self-isolation, which was closely linked to the blockade many countries imposed on Iran, its nuclear programme was closed down. All works in this field were qualified as 'satanic'. Ayatollah Ruhollah Moussavi Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic revolution and a proponent of the NPT, branded nuclear weapons as 'anti-Islamic'.

After the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, the pragmatic faction, headed by former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, came to power in Iran. Not giving up Ayatollah Khomeini's ideological principles, they determined their main foreign policy objective as that of turning Iran into a regional superpower. This had been the task the ousted shah had set himself earlier – only this time it was to be an Islamic superpower. Iran's authorities were of the opinion that the formation of Iran's nuclear potential should be one of the key mechanisms of that process. For this purpose, the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran was re-activated.

### Strengthening Iran's nuclear potential

While in office, former President Rafsanjani approved a secret directive, with the view that Iran's nuclear status provides strategic guarantees for the preservation of the Islamic regime in Tehran. The main clauses of the directive involve:

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- dispatching specialists to different states to gather all the necessary information for nuclear weapons development, which includes entering nuclear and technological centres on intelligence missions;
- establishing secret nuclear centres and enterprises that could not only compliment each other but also work independently; and
- using all possible means to obtain all the necessary technologies for the production of nuclear weapons.

And it should be noted that his directive continues to be painstakingly implemented.

Iran really has used all possible means, including illegal ones, for this purpose. Since the mid-1990s, the representatives of Iran's special services have repeatedly made attempts to illegally obtain high-technology equipment from Russia that could be used, among other things, for the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and weapon carriers. In December 2001, Nikolai Patrushev, Director of the Federal Security Service, said that Iran was more determined than earlier to establish secret contacts with the representatives of Russia's government bodies, power structures and scientists. Further, Iran illegally bought nuclear technologies on the black market that had been developed by the 'founding father' of Pakistan's nuclear bomb Abdul Kadir Han, including equipment and a file of documents to activate its nuclear activities.

Within the past 10 to 15 years Tehran has also done its utmost to effectively use its legal channel of scientific and technical cooperation with other countries. In the post-revolutionary period, countries such as Argentina, Belgium, the UK, Germany, India, China, Pakistan, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine, the Czech Republic and Switzerland have offered their help to Iran in the development of its nuclear programme. Tehran has accepted it to train its nuclear engineers, upgrade their skills and gather scientific information. Iran's physicists have undergone theoretical and practical training in China, Pakistan, North Korea, Russia and other countries. The graduates of the most prestigious institutes in the East and West have been assisting Iran in the development of its nuclear programme.

With the aim of strengthening Iran's intellectual potential, its clerical leadership has worked hard (and successfully enough) to urge Iran's émigré scientists working in the scientific research centres abroad to voluntarily return home. Another route used to draw on the intellectual capacities of émigré Iranians for the benefit of their country is to encourage them to both secretly and openly cooperate with Iranian specialists from the scientific research centres and design departments in Western universities, companies and firms.

Iran's efforts to modernise its nuclear industry do not stop there. To purchase all the necessary equipment and dual-use technologies from abroad, Iran's officials use bogus firms with innocent-sounding Persian names in order to camouflage their clients, primarily the government agencies that are linked to the military-industrial complex.

According to the US-based Centre for Non-Proliferation Studies of the Monterey Institute of International Studies, seven big nuclear research centres, which make up part of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation network, function in Iran today. Since the Islamic revolution, key research in nuclear physics has been carried out by the research centres in Tehran, Isfahan, Kazvin, Keredj, Yezd, Benab (80 kilometres south of Tebriz) and Iratom (Iran's centre of nuclear power plants). Further, work is underway to set up another 10 centres there.

It should be pointed out here that neither scientific research, performed in the field of nuclear physics, nor nuclear power production run counter to the NPT. This precept applies to the nuclear power plant that is now being built in Bushehr in southern Iran with the help of Russian specialists. The IAEA inspectors have been controlling the construction of the plant from the very beginning. The IAEA has never raised objections to either Russia or Iran on these accounts. It is even less likely to do so as Russia and Iran have recently signed a treaty on the return of spent nuclear fuel from the Bushehr nuclear power plant to Russia. According to the head of the Russian Federal Nuclear Energy Agency, Alexander Rumyantsev, Russia's nuclear fuel will arrive in Bushehr at the end of 2005 or in early

2006. The first nuclear fuel rods will be installed into the local reactor in mid-2006. The commissioning of the nuclear plant is set for the end of that year. The transportation and the maintenance of nuclear fuel will be carried out in accordance with a special regime under strict security and the watchful eye of the IAEA inspectors.

### **The right to develop nuclear power**

Any country has the right to develop powerful nuclear production for peaceful purposes. Touching on the Russian-Iranian contacts in nuclear power production, it would be good to point out the following. Russia must take a pragmatic approach, based on the development of mutually advantageous trade and economic contacts and on the strengthening of its own positions on Iran's nuclear power production market. At the same time, it must keep a vigilant watch on the ongoing processes of Iran's nuclear programme – including those concerning dual-use technologies – and do its utmost to prevent the development of Iranian nuclear weapons. What's more, Russia must act in cooperation with the EU and the US, with which it is in full agreement on this issue. This means that Russia's relations with Iran are likely to be characterised as 'cautious cooperation'.

Yet some analysts note that in addition to scientific research and nuclear power engineering, Iran is actively developing an alternative project that can be regarded as a dual-use programme with a great degree of certainty. It first applies to the so-called 'full nuclear fuel-cycle'.

In recent years, solid foundations have been laid in Iran not only for research but also to form the infrastructure for the full nuclear fuel-cycle. In and around Erdekan there are uranium mines (at a distance of 200 kilometres from Isfahan) along with plants for extracting ore, a plant for the production of yellowcake (U308) (in either Erdekan or Isfahan) and a uranium conversion plant; in Natanz (150 kilometres from Isfahan) there is a uranium enrichment plant; Isfahan has a fuel production facility and a plant producing covers for heat-liberating elements.

On 15 May 2005, the work to ensure a nuclear fuel cycle in Iran was granted a legal basis. On that day, Iran's parliament adopted a law making it mandatory for the government to develop a full nuclear fuel-cycle in Iran within the terms of the NPT treaty. The document makes it clear that the Islamic Republic of Iran must take all the necessary steps for the development of nuclear technologies meant for peaceful purposes, including the development of a fuel cycle for 20 nuclear generating units. The new law states that the government must develop high technologies under the NPT treaty guidelines and within international legislation and that it must use the potential of scientists and researchers.

Iranian journalists commenting on the new law point out that as a signatory to the NPT treaty, Iran has the right to develop a full nuclear fuel-cycle and has no plans to give up exercising its right. There's no doubt that any country has the right to develop nuclear power production for peaceful purposes under the strict control of the IAEA and in line with the international legislation. Yet, world experience shows that non-nuclear states developing nuclear power production, purchase nuclear fuel from the officially recognised nuclear powers without troubling with the production of nuclear fuel themselves – which in their opinion costs too much (with perhaps the exceptions of Germany and Japan). Spent fuel is transported back to the supplier. Such international cooperation is common practice in the nuclear field, about which Russia shares a similar view.

### **Purpose of development**

In this context the following question arises: For what purpose is the work being done now to ensure a full nuclear fuel-cycle in Iran, if in the near future it is unable to produce the required amount of nuclear fuel for nuclear power plants and if it is impossible to use it for energy purposes? What's more, the nuclear fuel that will be generated within its framework will cost three to five times more than the average world amount. Incidentally, Russian specialists are of the opinion that Iran's ore is not quite good enough for the production of fuel. The scientists believe that using it for the production of fuel for nuclear power plants will cost too much. Stanislav Golovinsky, Vice-President of the

Russian company TVEL (which produces nuclear fuel for electric power plants), has stated that Iran's reserves of uranium are "insignificant", adding that the "extraction cost" would be too high.<sup>1</sup> According to Mr Golovinsky, a nuclear engineer, uranium extraction costs fall into three categories: the minimum of \$40, from \$40 to \$80 and from \$80 to \$120 for a kilogramme. The IAEA estimates that Iran's uranium belongs to the last category. "We have some knowledge about Iran's nuclear sites" Mr Golovinsky said, touching on its nuclear deposits, "Iran has started extraction on one of them... [a] very low content of extracted uranium [with] the use of the mining method".<sup>2</sup>

Further, what is real the purpose of the plant for the production of heavy water currently under construction in Arak? As is known, there's only one heavy-water reactor of zero capacity in Iran; it needs a small amount of heavy water and it is situated in the Isfahan nuclear technological centre. There is only one answer: the heavy-water reactor that is now being built in Arak can also be used for the generation of weapons-grade plutonium. Americans believe that the technical characteristics of the heavy-water reactor are best for the production of weapons-grade plutonium.

Another issue raised within the 'Iranian dossier' framework regards Iran's production of polonium-210, which has been discovered by IAEA inspectors. It is not quite clear for specialists why the Iranians have started experimenting with polonium. It can be used for peaceful purposes for space programmes, but that is very unlikely in the case of Iran. On the other hand, in combination with beryllium, polonium-210 is used in military nuclear programmes, for, among other things, the development of neutron-initiating devices for nuclear weapons. Tehran has never previously reported to the IAEA that it had been (and continues) working with polonium-210.

Iran has built several facilities to produce and test centrifuges for uranium enrichment, including the pilot project for 1,000 centrifuges and an underground complex for 50,000 centrifuges. This information has already been confirmed. In February of 2003, Iran said it had installed 100 centrifuges for uranium enrichment at the experimental plant in Natanz, planning to increase these to 900 by the end of the year. In parallel, Iran is working on uranium enrichment with the help of lasers. In a report to the IAEA it was pointed out that Iran had used the two methods for secret uranium enrichment.

Analysing the situation in Iran's nuclear sphere, scientists have come to the conclusion that Iran has undoubtedly made greater progress in the implementation of its nuclear programme than was considered earlier. And if two or three years ago Iran's nuclear fuel cycle was more virtual than real, the information of recent months confirms its reality.

## Two nuclear programmes

The objective assessment shows that in the near future, as soon as the infrastructure of the whole chain of a full nuclear fuel-cycle is established, Iran will become technically capable of joining the nuclear powers' club. That is why we can say that, as it appears, there are two nuclear programmes in Iran, which are not directly linked with each other. The first includes nuclear power production. And the second is an object of concern to the Russian public and the world.

According to the IAEA experts, for a period of more than 15 years Iran has been doing nuclear research out of IAEA control. The so-called 'release' of the Iranian nuclear problem into the international arena dates back to 2000, when the US found evidence that Iran was purchasing nuclear equipment from Abdul Kadir Khan, as previously mentioned. Shortly afterwards the US collected information about Iran's plans to build a heavy-water reactor and a uranium enrichment enterprise, including some indications of Iran's alleged uranium enrichment at the Kalaye Electric Company, a watch-making factory in Tehran.

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<sup>1</sup> See the IranAtom website article "Transparency of the nuclear program of Iran", 14 April 2005 (in Russian) (retrieved from <http://www.iranatom.ru/news/aeoi/year05/april/golov.htm>).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

At a briefing in August 2002, Alireza Jafarzade, a spokeswoman for Iran's national resistance council in exile, said that Iran was building two secret nuclear facilities: a heavy-water facility near Arak and a plant to produce uranium fuel near Natanz. At the same time, space surveillance and on-the-ground intelligence service discovered a number of secret facilities on Iran's territory, meant for uranium enrichment, which could later be used to generate weapons-grade plutonium.

Iran had to make excuses at the talks within the international agencies' framework and at the meetings with EU and Russian representatives. Nevertheless, the negotiators noted that certain problems emerged in dialogues with the Iranians. It often happened that Iran's diplomats said one thing while technical specialists – nuclear engineers – said something quite different or nothing at all. Let's consider the latest example. After the unsuccessful talks between the EU-3 (comprising the UK, Germany and France) and Iran in April this year, some Iranian representatives said that their country would shortly resume its work on uranium enrichment. Others said that the work would resume partially. And still others claimed that the moratorium would last until the round of Iranian-EU talks in May.

What do these differences in Iran's position mean?

These shifts could be attributed to differences among Iran's governing bodies or to an agreed policy to delude the international community through various, often contradictory, statements. On the whole, Iran's scheme for explaining its stance on the country's nuclear problem in the past two to three years has been the following. At first, it denied everything; then it partially recognised the facts if clear-cut evidence had been provided but did so with endless reservations, set in conditions of agreed upon or spontaneous differences of opinion among news-makers. Later, if new facts appeared, they were followed by a new negation and so on.

Iran has signed an additional agreement with the IAEA, allowing IAEA inspectors to control its nuclear facilities, but it has not ratified the agreement; it is true, however, that Iran permits IAEA inspectors to work in the country. Although groups of IAEA inspectors arrive in Iran practically every month, there is no transparency or openness in their relations with Tehran. This gives the impression that in matters pertaining to the inspectors' jurisdiction, Iran is also playing a 'cat-and-mouse' game with the agency. For example, at first Tehran turned down the agency's request to visit the Kalaye Electric Company. Later, in March 2003, the government gave inspectors permission to inspect the facility but showed only some of the buildings to the inspectors and did not allow them to take samples of dust for an analysis of nuclear materials. Shortly afterwards, trucks carrying some materials away from the facility were identified in Sputnik photos. In August, when the IAEA obtained permission for a full inspection of the Kalaye electric facility, it turned out that one of the premises had been reconstructed: the floors and tiles had been changed and walls had been re-painted. Despite all of this, there were still traces of enriched uranium in the samples taken by the inspectors.

What is also alarming is that alongside its nuclear programme, Iran is also taking action on a missile programme. Iran has Shahab-3 ballistic missiles on combat duty, with the range of 1,500 kilometres. Work is underway to create a new, more powerful Shahab-4 missile with the range of 2,000 kilometres. These missiles can only be efficient if they use nuclear or chemical warheads. Therefore, military experts believe that Iran is developing rocket-carriers for WMDs.

Meanwhile, these actions are accompanied by statements from Iran's officials at all levels that the country's nuclear programme is peaceful.

## **Political factors**

Russia and a number of EU countries (such as Germany) believe that a final political decision on the creation of nuclear weapons has not yet been taken in Iran. Yet it looks like there is a consensus in Iran that a scientific-technological and production base should be created so that the production of nuclear weapons can be launched promptly at any time if needed.



This opinion is widespread and enjoys the support of practically all the sections of the country's population. Therefore, it can be expected that any government of Iran, irregardless of its political orientation, will see the acquisition of nuclear weapons as the nation's top priority.

Why does Tehran have such ambitions? This question leads to several explanatory factors.

First, there is a geo-political factor. The Islamic Republic of Iran plays a leading role in the world's most important region, western Asia, which comprises the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea zone and Central Asia. Iran is a strategic country: not only is it part of this region, it is washed by the Persian and the Oman Gulfs of the Indian Ocean. All the regional problems have something to do with Iran. None of the internal problems of the individual states in the area – of an ethnic, religious, military or economic nature along with the problems of refugees, drug trafficking, terrorism and separatism – can be properly resolved without Iran. As a source of hydrocarbon raw materials and a centre of transporting oil and gas products, Iran is certainly of major importance. In addition, with its 70-million strong population and one of the world's most numerous armies (with some 800,000 enlisted), Iran is a decisive factor in western Asian and even world politics irrespective of any political conjuncture.

Second is the military-political factor. Today the Islamic Republic of Iran is surrounded by unfriendly states and even potential adversaries, if not enemies. Its main adversary, the US (or 'the great Satan'), has concentrated its military might on three sides of the country: to the west in Iraq; to the east in Afghanistan and to the south in the Persian and the Oman Gulfs, on bases and naval ships of the Central Command. NATO countries – Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia – are also oriented towards Washington. On the other shore of the Persian Gulf, the Sunni Saudi Arabia and the Arab Emirates have taken a cautious attitude to their powerful Shiite neighbour, and they certainly do not see Iran as their ally. In addition, an important role in the Middle East is played by Israel, which has been described by Iran as a 'small Satan' to which it denies the very right of existence.

Third, there is a national psychological factor. The Islamic Republic of Iran is the heir to one of the world's most ancient civilisations – the great Persian Empire that conquered half the ancient world. For the past six centuries, Iran has spiritually been the world's religious centre of Shiism. For many centuries these major historical factors have influenced the nation's mentality. They are the root cause of the pride and lack of will to compromise shown by Iranian Shiites as they have defended their national interests in confrontation with numerous adversaries, whose number has increased markedly today.

At present, Persian national psychology, which is a combination of a great power's imperial nationalism and the pride of the Shiite elite, has become a political factor. This appears to be the main reason for Tehran's 'nuclear stubbornness'. The ideological, political and diplomatic opposition of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the world's only superpower – the US – cannot yield to American allies in the region. According to Iran's military-political doctrine, the country's main adversaries are the US and Israel. As previously mentioned, Tehran denies Israel the very right to existence. This extremist approach, alongside a daily propaganda campaign cannot but influence the hearts and minds of the population. Between the lines of Iran's declarations there is a question as to why countries such as Israel and Pakistan are allowed things banned for Iran. Why do they possess nuclear bombs while Iran has none? Certainly, these 'psychological complexes' of the nation influence the country's domestic and foreign policies. They are the driving force of the intricate game that Iran is playing on the international scene.

Compelled to take part in that game are Russia, Western Europe, the IAEA and the UN, and stakes in that game are high but the cards of the players are not equipollent. Under the circumstances, bluffing is a natural move of a keen and proud player. Therefore, many Russian and foreign analysts believe that the aim of Iran is not the creation of a nuclear bomb but an endless process of creating its politically convincing mirage, probably accompanied by a rapid development of nuclear technologies for dual use.

In this way Tehran intends to raise its military and political rating on the international scene, primarily in the Islamic world and in the region. What is also important for Iran is to obtain as many privileges from Western European countries as it can, and not only from Western Europeans but from Russia as well. In doing so Iran does not draw the line at provoking a conflict between the partners. For example, on his return from Moscow, Mr Hassan Rohani, the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council and chief supervisor of the country's nuclear projects, lashed criticism at Russia's stance on the Iranian nuclear programme. Having emphasised that Russia is leading the delivery of nuclear technologies to Iran, he added that Tehran expected much from Russia hoping that it would help Iran to resolve all crises on the international scene pertaining to Iran's nuclear activity.<sup>3</sup> "In fact," he went on to say, "Russia is lagging behind [in helping to resolve] the three European countries' efforts to arrest Iran's attempts at developing uranium enrichment technologies".<sup>4</sup>

It looks like Iran's diplomatic policy in the nuclear sphere is also one of deliberate procrastination. Tehran is disclosing its programme stage by stage. Why? Supposedly, it wants to gain time for the creation of a *moulage* of a nuclear bomb that can be promptly turned into a genuine nuclear weapon given a highly developed technological, scientific and production base, and at the same time blackmail both adversaries and partners.

### Key issues for international security

Iran's nuclear policy raises fears that the bluff of the player can give rise to the temptation to acquire the nuclear joker. Where is the demarcation between nuclear research for peaceful purposes and the infrastructure necessary for the production of nuclear weapons? What should the international community do to prevent Iran from overstepping that line? These are key issues of international security.

At present the international community discusses methods that can be used to prevent the appearance of nuclear weapons in Iran. In fact, there are two such methods – the use of force or negotiations and sanctions. Political scientists distinguish between three possible variants of the use of force to resolve Iran's nuclear problem:

- a war to topple the incumbent regime, similar to the military operation in Iraq;
- limited military action against Iran's nuclear facilities; and
- secret operations and support of the opposition with a view to promoting a gradual change of the Tehran regime.

Yet none of the three variants seems feasible today. There are no legal reasons allowing the international community to conduct a large-scale military operation or to take limited military action against Iran, and a possibility of creating an international coalition is practically excluded. In addition, a war against Iran cannot be won so easily as that against Iraq, bearing in mind that Iran has an 800,000-strong army and a people's guard of several million men and officers.

It is hypothetically possible to imagine that Iran's ground forces could deliver a powerful strike on US and NATO positions in Iraq.

As for secret operations and support of anti-government groups in Iran, this will take time and cannot resolve the nuclear problem.

In short, the use of force is, no doubt, the way to an impasse. In addition, it can produce the opposite results. Bearing in mind the mentality of Iranians, it can be expected that in case of any pressure

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<sup>3</sup> See the Novopol website feature "Rohani accuses Russia of unwillingness to help Iran in its nuclear program" (in Russian), based on the article in *Al-Hayat*, 21 February 2005 (retrieved from <http://www.novopol.ru/print1685.html>).

<sup>4</sup> V. Sazhin, *Iranian nuclear program and world policy*, Institute of Israeli and Middle Eastern Studies, Moscow, February 2005 (in Russian) (retrieved from <http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2005/23-02-05b.htm>).

brought to bear on the country, the currently disunited Iranian society will rally to rebuff the challenge from outside. All internal political differences, disputes and even recent sympathies for the Western way of life will be forgotten. The so-called 'Westernisation' that was finding its way into the Islamic society of Iran in recent years (albeit with difficulty) will go into oblivion. The country will be pushed 25 years back, to the period of revolutionary extremism.

A settlement of Iran's nuclear problem by peaceful means is more constructive. This is Russia's stance and it is similar to that of the EU.

A resolution of Iran's nuclear problem through peaceful means could also be provided by several variants. For instance, 'the Iranian dossier' could be submitted to the UN Security Council (UNSC) for consideration and subsequent adoption of sanctions against the country. Certainly, the issue can be brought to the UN but the adoption of sanctions is scarcely probable. Permanent members of the UNSC Russia and China have little interest in the adoption of such sanctions.

On the other hand, economic sanctions against Iran overstepping the nuclear threshold could produce positive results if they are adopted, even individually, by Iran's main partners. For the national economy – which only 15 years ago began adjusting close and important ties with main financial and economic centres (the EU, Japan, China and India) – a curtailment of those ties would mean a disaster.

Most important for the balance of political forces in Iran are the presidential elections scheduled for 17 June. According to all forecasts, the victory will go to Mr Rafsanjani, who was the country's president in 1989-97. The main goal of the pragmatic Mr Rafsanjani is economic reform, a position relying on the development of business ties with Europe and even with the US. So, the international community could use this economic lever to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power.

The situation around Iran's nuclear programme causes justified concern by the international community. It reminds the international community once again that all countries should coordinate a policy of nuclear non-proliferation and cut short attempts at the unsanctioned transfer of nuclear technologies, that is, to battle jointly against the 'nuclear black market'.

The Iranian nuclear programme is proof that, unfortunately, the international community is today lacking a comprehensive plan for resolving the problem of non-proliferation of WMDs. The international treaties on non-proliferation of WMDs that have been concluded do not stipulate a machinery of security guarantees. Proof of this is the conference on the nuclear NPT that has just ended in New York.

Thus an independent multi-functional agency should be created in the framework of the UNSC and the IAEA, as an efficient tool of international control and punishment of the countries that violate international treaties on non-proliferation of WMDs.<sup>5</sup> Such an agency should be vested with 'punitive' functions.

Iran's nuclear problem can be resolved only through the coordinated political efforts of all countries: they should use all possible means to persuade Iranian leaders, including economic sanctions, if necessary.

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<sup>5</sup> This has been repeatedly emphasised by the author in previous articles and speeches (see the Institute for Israeli and Middle Eastern Studies, retrieved from [http://www.iimes.ru/rus/frame\\_stat.html](http://www.iimes.ru/rus/frame_stat.html)).

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The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) joined forces late in the year 2000, to launch a new forum on European security policy in Brussels. The objective of this *European Security Forum* is to bring together senior officials and experts from EU and Euro-Atlantic Partnership countries, including the United States and Russia, to discuss security issues of strategic importance to Europe. The Forum is jointly directed by CEPS and the IISS and is hosted by CEPS in Brussels.

The Forum brings together a select group of personalities from the Brussels institutions (EU, NATO and diplomatic missions), national governments, parliaments, business, media and independent experts. The informal and confidential character of the Forum enables participants to exchange ideas freely.

The aim of the initiative is to think ahead about the strategic security agenda for Europe, treating both its European and transatlantic implications. The topics to be addressed are selected from an open list that includes crisis management, defence capabilities, security concepts, defence industries and institutional developments (including enlargement) of the EU and NATO.

The Forum has about 100 members, who are invited to all meetings and receive current information on the activities of the Forum. This group meets every other month in a closed session to discuss a pre-arranged topic under Chatham House rules. The Forum meetings are presided over by François Heisbourg, Chairman of the Foundation for Strategic Research, Paris. As a general rule, three short issue papers are commissioned from independent experts for each session presenting EU, US and Russian viewpoints on the topic.

**The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS)** is an independent policy research institute founded in Brussels in 1983, with the aim of producing sound policy research leading to constructive solutions to the challenges facing Europe.

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