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With luck, Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons could be delayed through a combination of Iranian technical difficulties, U.S. military action, and European diplomacy. However, neither delay nor regime change would remove the causes of proliferation pressures in Iran. Iran needs to be assured that the U.S. will respect its autonomy if it ceases nuclear weapons development, while Iran's neighbors need to be reassured that Tehran will respect their interests. Arab governments are reluctant to join in a regional security dialogue in part because of Washington's double standard regarding Israel's nuclear arsenal and treatment of Palestinians. To mobilize all of the international actors opposing Iranian nuclear development, the U.S. must recognize that Iranian proliferation, Persian Gulf security, the U.S. role in the Middle East, Israel's nuclear status, and Palestinian-Israeli relations are all linked and cannot be resolved without a more balanced U.S. stance. ■

Iran Is Not an Island: A Strategy to Mobilize the Neighbors

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Iran is too strong and proud for the United States alone to dissuade or coerce it from acquiring nuclear weapons. Washington needs not only Europe but also Arab states to demonstrate why it is in Iran's national interest not to build nuclear weapons. Because Israel also wants to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons, it too should take steps that would facilitate a U.S. coalition-building effort. A strategy that addresses the regional factors shaping Iran's interest in nuclear weapons is necessary to complement the European Union's engagement with Iran.

Iranian leaders say they seek uranium enrichment and plutonium separation capabilities only to generate electricity. However, more economically attractive means exist to fuel power plants. Iran clearly wants a nuclear weapons option to deter the United States from threatening Iranian sovereignty; to prevent a recurrence of the horrific war Iraq started in 1980; and to assert Persian power in a region where Israel, Pakistan, and the United States wield nuclear weapons. Any Iranian government will want to satisfy these interests—whether it is hard-line or moderate,

clerical or technocrat. As Under Secretary of State John R. Bolton testified, even the “moderates in Iran's governing class...believe in the pursuit of nuclear weapons.”¹

Rather than address the causes of Iranian interest in a nuclear deterrent, Bush administration officials argue that changing the ruling regime in Tehran will solve the Iranian proliferation challenge. But reformers in Iran have lost ground, so the Bush administration now seeks to delay Iran's technical march to buy time for regime change. That's why the United States no longer objects to time-consuming EU-Iranian negotiations. Meanwhile, Washington prepares covert and overt military plans to destroy as much of Iran's nuclear capability as can be located and also to neutralize the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and other aggressive actors.

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Toward a Regional Strategy

To really solve the Iranian proliferation challenge, the United States needs a strategy that speaks to the enduring national interests that arise from Iran's history, security environment, and aspirations. Iranians of all political persuasions want to know that the United States will not invade their country or try to dictate who should govern it. The history of U.S. relations since the 1953 overthrow of the Mossadegh government convinces most Iranians that Washington cannot tolerate a truly independent Iran. Iranians also need to believe that the United States, Iraq, other neighboring Arab states, and Israel will welcome Iran as a major power in the region and in the global political economy and that Iran does not have to build and test nuclear weapons as Pakistan did to earn deference from bigger powers.

To be sure, Iran must change its own policies to create more favorable conditions, but the United States should encourage constructive thinking in Tehran by actively supporting the European Union's diplomacy and, above all, by clarifying that the United States will take no coercive action against Iran if Iran poses no nuclear weapons threat and ceases material support of terrorist groups. Given U.S. interests in states neighboring Iran, Washington will not offer this reassurance, and Tehran will not believe it, in the absence of a regional security framework.

Iran needs to see the prospect of a region where it is treated respectfully as a major power and not subject to military encirclement, economic isolation, political harassment, and covert operations. For this prospect to be realistic, Iran's Arab neighbors as well as Turkey, Israel, and the United States need to know that Tehran is not seeking nuclear weapons and supporting terrorism, including against Israel. To get from here to there, Arab states must be mobilized to encourage Iran to engage in the necessary regional diplomacy that would include the United States and

other extra-regional power balancers.

Sophisticated Iranians know that Iran has a strong interest in reassuring its Arab neighbors that a powerful Iran is not a threat and that the smaller Arab states do not need closer security ties with the United States. They know that they will gain more regional and global standing if their neighbors and the rest of the world do not see them as a threat that must be contained. One of President Mohammad Khatami's few successes since 1997 has been to improve relations with the wary Sunni-majority states in the neighborhood, particularly Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Nuclear weapons would reverse this success and drive Arab states farther under the U.S. security blanket, no matter how hard Tehran tries to blame its nuclear ambitions on Israel.

But Iranian militants are less worried about what the current Arab governments think. They counter that a closer U.S.-Arab security embrace would further embitter Arab societies, weakening Arab governments and the U.S. position in the region. As they see it, undermining Arab governments and the United States, over the longer term, would partially offset the political-strategic costs of driving these governments into the U.S. embrace by breaking Iran's nonproliferation obligations.

Building Coalitions

A good way to discredit the militant faction would be to raise the net regional costs Iran would bear by acquiring nuclear weapons. And the best way to make these costs clear to Tehran is to bring all the relevant players together in a regional security forum where Iranians, Iraqis, Saudis, the smaller Gulf states, Turks, and others put on the table the dangers that must be addressed if the region is ever to be stable and prosperous. Because the nuclear issue is too sensitive to advertise as the main topic of discussion, the forum should focus on the requirements for security in the post-Saddam Persian Gulf. To ease the

political way for all relevant states to participate, the forum should be convened by the Secretary General of the United Nations, not any single state. Tehran needs to hear from its neighbors that, if Iran does not acquire nuclear weapons, it would be possible to construct a cooperative security framework in the Persian Gulf that does not threaten its autonomy. On the other hand, if it were to go ahead and seek nuclear weapons, Iran would face economic sanctions and a U.S.-led intensification of military encirclement and political containment; it could also inspire neighboring states to acquire nuclear or biological weapons.

Building such a regional coalition, however, will not come easily. The United States will have to overcome deep distrust and resentment from the Arab states. Many countries feel that the United States became a rogue cop during George W. Bush's first term and fear this will not change in his second

encountered the double standard obstacle many times. "The Iranian nuclear program is an existential threat to Egypt," an Egyptian official declared, "but so is Israel. Both should be dealt with."

"But Israel has had nuclear weapons since at least 1970," went the rebuttal, "and Egypt has not only lived with it, but has signed a peace treaty with Israel. While you're focusing on the Israeli double standard, Iran is acquiring a nuclear weapons capability and you're doing nothing to help stop it. Won't you be worse off if Iran gets away with it? You know Israel will not disarm in the time left before Iran can acquire nuclear weapons, so shouldn't we act now to prevent the new threat?" The Egyptian official answered with silence.

The smaller Gulf Arab states are more dynamic, but still passive. "America should take out those nuclear facilities in Iran," a worldly sheikh confided *sotto voce* over dinner recently in a Persian Gulf state. "It would be

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term. These governments and populations are more worried about protecting their national sovereignty from U.S. encroachment than letting Iran get away with building the bomb. When asked to pressure Iran, many Muslim states focus on the double standard that they perceive in Washington's acquiescence in Israel's possession of nuclear weapons and its violation of international resolutions regarding treatment of the Palestinians. To focus the Arab states (and Europe) on the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran, Washington must take a more balanced and active role in Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy.

Mobilize Arab States

During a recent visit to Egypt and the Arabian side of the Persian Gulf, the author

best by sabotage, not war, but either way we cannot live with an Iranian nuclear bomb."

"And if the United States did attack Iran, what would Arab populations do? Applaud?"

"No," the sheikh chuckled. "They would be outraged."

"What about your government, and other Arab governments? Will they defend the United States politically?"

"Of course not," answered the sheikh.

A cosmopolitan Iraqi-born analyst offered a variation on this theme. He explained that the leaderships of the small Arab states in the Persian Gulf support "stripping Iran of its nuclear capabilities" but will not say so publicly in part because it "would be interpreted as indirect support of Israel's position."

Washington's capacity to mobilize Arab

governments will be limited by this perceived double standard of U.S. policy toward the Israeli government. Daniel Yankelovich has concluded from his research into public opinion that the United States needs to “present a new vision of America to the Muslim world by positioning United States foreign policy on the side of justice, because the present perception is that the United States is always found on the side of injustice.” Yankelovich adds, “there’s just no way that we can skip over” the need to pay “much more attention to legitimate Palestinian grievances.”

Israel Can Help

U.S. and Israeli leaders do not truly comprehend how the aggressive expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank has made Muslims everywhere feel that the world is stacked against them. Israeli-Palestinian relations are *not the cause* of troubles in the Arab states and violence against U.S. interests, but they are a major political impediment to persuading Arab societies to share U.S. interests in curtailing terrorism and preventing nuclear proliferation. Israel’s continued disregard of its own commitments and international resolutions and legal judgments against the expansion and walling in of settlements makes Muslim populations feel it is unfair to do the United States and Israel “favors” by combating terrorism and proliferation in the Middle East.

For their part, Israelis justly feel threatened by terrorism and by Iran’s and Syria’s refusal to recognize Israel’s existence. Many hope that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s initiative to withdraw from Gaza and four West Bank settlements, paired with the election of new Palestinian leadership, can revive the near-dead peace process. Syria, too, recently has sent signals of wanting to revive talks with Israel. But Sharon may not be able to prevail over the militant settler movement, and he may be unwilling to negotiate acceptable

terms on the transfer of West Bank territory and the final status of Jerusalem.

The United States can regain some of its lost legitimacy as a champion of international justice by demanding more of Israel and by making sure Sharon follows through. In recent months, officers of an elite Israeli Air Force unit protested that operations in Gaza, particularly the destruction of roughly 1,500 Palestinian residences, violated any standard of justice. Other veterans have mounted similar protests. The Israeli Supreme Court has ruled against the course of the security barrier the government is building on occupied territory, including in East Jerusalem. Legal protests are being mounted against a policy the Sharon government adopted secretly last year to seize untended Palestinian property in East Jerusalem: The Palestinian owners cannot tend their property because the security barrier blocks their access to it, and Israeli authorities will not permit them to travel around it. Instead of joining Israelis who demand greater justice of their own government, Americans—Democrats and Republicans alike—have tripped over themselves to pander to the Sharon government, which, until recently, pursued settlement policies that a majority of Israelis do not support.

The United States should support Prime Minister Sharon in opposing the militant settler movement that answers only to God-given law and refuses to support the rule of democratically made law. One strategically vital way to help Sharon meet his immediate challenge is to free him from having to worry about the long-term threat from Iran. Mobilizing Arab states on the flank of a EU-U.S. coalition determined to prevent nuclear proliferation in the Middle East would be a huge strategic breakthrough.

Israel can further directly help the cause of nonproliferation by offering to cease production of plutonium when Iran permanently

The Military Strike Conundrum

“Israel absolutely cannot live with a nuclear Iran,” more than one Israeli official warned a recent visitor. Although tough, this formulation leaves room for definition. Clearly, an Iran with nuclear weapons is too much. And if Iran acquires the capability to produce weapon-usable uranium or plutonium it will be too dangerously close to having weapons. But can Israel live with an Iran that operates nuclear power reactors with fuel supplied by and returned to Russia? Here there are differences, but the general impression is that Israelis can accommodate Iran’s nationalistic determination to generate nuclear electricity under stringent international arrangements.

If Iran refuses to accept such an arrangement and instead moves to produce highly enriched uranium and/or to separate plutonium, Israelis believe military action should be taken—preferably by the United States. Military strikes would not end the threat; the United States and Israel believe Iran has still-hidden nuclear facilities that presumably would not be destroyed. Iran, Hezbollah, and other organizations would respond with attacks on Israel, U.S. forces in Iraq, and perhaps elsewhere. Military strikes would intensify rather than relax Iranian nationalism. In short, there is no viable military option to *durably* negate Iran’s capacity to produce nuclear weapons or to create a new government in Iran that would renounce acquisition of capabilities to enrich uranium and separate plutonium.

Nevertheless, “if you conclude that you absolutely cannot live with something, then you have to act,” an Israeli official explained. “The consequences may be horrible, but they will come later. The consequences of not acting are intolerable immediately, so you have to act and live another day to deal with what comes next.”

A U.S. or Israeli military strike against Iran would be less likely to cause Egypt and Saudi Arabia to seek nuclear weapons than would allowing Iran to acquire such weapons, but it would nonetheless entail huge political costs. A military strike without the authorization of the UN Security Council would be seen as an act of aggression in violation of the enforcement processes envisioned, but ill-defined, in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Iran would consider itself free from all restraints to develop nuclear weapons, and much of the developing world would endorse this view. The treaty-based nonproliferation regime would crumble. Other states—perhaps Egypt and Saudi Arabia—could then withdraw from the treaty with few repercussions and legally hedge their nuclear bets. This would leave Israel and the United States with the prospect of having to contemplate military action against still more Islamic states, and with a major rise in terrorism as a form of asymmetrical resistance to what would be perceived as U.S. and/or Israeli aggression.

This scenario is why Israel has tried to strengthen the nuclear nonproliferation regime even as it has maintained its undeclared nuclear arsenal as a deterrent of last resort. The Arab states also have supported the nonproliferation regime even as they denounce Israel’s nuclear status. They do so because they, even more than the United States, need a rule-based, enforceable regime to prevent proliferation. Middle Eastern states now experience insecurity from neighbors with chemical and perhaps biological weapons, but the threat would grow vastly more difficult if existing constraints on nuclear programs were obliterated. Sunni Arab governments worry that a nuclear Iran would dominate the region and embolden resurgent Shiite political forces in Iraq and other Gulf states.

Because the nuclear nonproliferation regime is helpful despite its flaws, neither the United States nor Israel can afford to abandon diplomatic efforts to confine Iran to peaceful uses of nuclear technology.

Note: For a thoughtful Israeli assessment of the pros and cons of a military strike against Iran’s nuclear facilities, see Ephraim Kam, “Curbing the Iranian Nuclear Threat: The Military Option,” Strategic Assessment (Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies), vol. 7, no. 3 (December 2004), available at www.tau.ac.il/jcss/sa/volume7_3.html.

Globalizing the Approach to Iran

Although the EU is acting on behalf of the international community to negotiate with Iran, and both parties are reporting their progress to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN Security Council ultimately should be brought into the picture. The Security Council imprimatur is vital so that if Iran (or another state in the future) refuses reasonable terms, the Security Council will be compelled to pursue its enforcement role. Just as important, the Security Council endorsement would help reassure Iran that the United States and others will not renege on keeping their side of a negotiated agreement.

One way to proceed would be for Iran and France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (the EU-3) to follow the course sketched in their November 2004 agreement that forestalled an international crisis by maintaining Iran's voluntary suspension of uranium enrichment activity. These four states, preferably backed by the United States and Russia, would flesh out the technical, economic, political, and security needs that must be met to serve both Iran's and the world's requirements. A central element of this final agreement would be the guarantee of economically attractive international supplies of nuclear fuel services to Iran in return for Iran's forgoing indigenous uranium enrichment and plutonium separation capabilities. This set of mutual obligations would then be codified in a *positive agreement—without sanctions*—that would be forwarded to the UN Security Council for endorsement. The Security Council imprimatur would help reassure Iran that the fuel services would not be withdrawn (by the United States or others); it would also signal U.S. recognition of the sovereignty of the Iranian government, further reassuring Iran against threats of coercive regime change. At the same time, the resolution would require the Security Council to take enforcement action if Iran or potential fuel suppliers rejected these terms.

The Security Council also could commend the prospective EU-Iran arrangement as a new international model, whereby states building new nuclear power plants forgo indigenous enrichment of uranium and separation of plutonium in exchange for economically attractive provision of nuclear fuel services. The globalization of an Iran deal would help prevent the emergence of other proliferation challenges and would address Iranian nationalists' demands that their state not suffer discrimination.

Separately, the Security Council also should head off future proliferation crises by following French and Russian suggestions to adopt a resolution requiring any state that withdraws from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to dismantle the nuclear facilities acquired through international cooperation under the treaty and to turn over nuclear materials produced in these facilities. Whatever the difficulties of implementing such a return policy, the rule would give the international community much-needed leverage to enforce the shutdown of such facilities.

halts its fuel-cycle-related activities. Such a step would establish a new baseline of no plutonium or highly enriched uranium production anywhere in the region.

Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and perhaps

Agency and the UN Security Council for decisive measures against Iranian nuclear proliferation. The Arab states, with Sunni majorities worried about resurgent Shiite activism in Iraq and Iran, must be brought off

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others would want still more from Israel. However, they should be reminded clearly that Israel does not threaten the existence or territorial integrity of any other state, and has reason to retain a strategic deterrent as long as other states do not accept its existence and support terrorist organizations dedicated to its destruction. The only way to create a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, which Israel and Iran and most Arab states say they support, is for every state in the region—and, in the future, a Palestinian state—to implement policies that do not threaten the security of their neighbors.

The United States should pursue these bold changes in Israeli policies and actively support the EU approach to Iran because both courses have merit in and of themselves. The added benefit of these moves would be to create solid footing for pushing Egypt and other Arab states to join in tough diplomacy to pressure Iran. Arab leaders will never publicly come out from behind Washington in containing potential Iranian threats. Recent history is littered with uncashed commitments by Arab leaders to publicly support initiatives toward regional peace and security. But a broader, more equitable strategy for promoting regional security would increase U.S. leverage for demanding more Arab support in the International Atomic Energy

the sidelines into the long-term struggle to create a framework for regional security that addresses not only their interests, but also those of Israel, Iran, and the broader international community. Policy objectives toward Iran, Persian Gulf security, Israel, and non-proliferation are inextricably linked.

¹ John R. Bolton, under secretary of state for arms control and international security, "Iran's Continuing Pursuit of Weapons of Mass Destruction" (testimony before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, June 24, 2004).

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IRAN-EU AGREEMENT ON NUCLEAR PROGRAM, Information Circular 637 (November 26, 2004) available at www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Infcircs/2004/infcirc637.pdf.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NPT SAFEGUARDS AGREEMENT IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, Report by the Director General, (International Atomic Energy Agency, November 15, 2004) available at www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2004/gov2004-83_derestrict.pdf.

TESTIMONY BY JOHN BOLTON TO HOUSE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE, June 24, 2004, available at http://www.house.gov/international_relations/108/bol062404.htm.

UNIVERSAL COMPLIANCE: A STRATEGY FOR NUCLEAR SECURITY, George Perkovich, Joseph Cirincione, Rose Gottemoeller, Jon Wolfsthal, and Jessica Mathews (Carnegie Endowment, 2004), available at www.CarnegieEndowment.org/strategy.

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