

Ephraim Kam

A Nuclear Iran:
What Does it Mean,
and What Can be Done

Institute for National Strategic Studies

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A Nuclear Iran: What Does it Mean, and What Can be Done

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Executive Summary

Intelligence assessments vary as to how long it will take Iran to acquire nuclear weapons – three to four years according to Israeli estimates, and five to eight years in American estimates. Projected timetables have proven inaccurate in the past, and various factors are likely to increase or decrease the time it will actually take. It should be assumed that if fundamental parameters do not change, Iran will eventually succeed in its quest. The production of a complete operational nuclear system that includes at least eight to ten bombs and second strike capability would take an additional few years following the production of the first bomb.

It is still possible to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. However, thus far conditions to arrest Iran's progress are lacking, and time is working against these and similar measures:

- Stopping Iran by diplomatic means, the preferred route at this point, requires an international consensus regarding the application of substantial, ongoing economic sanctions. Although the Security Council decided to impose sanctions on Iran, they are not severe and hence painful enough to force Iran to suspend its nuclear activities. Nor is there any guarantee that even significant sanctions would succeed. Sanctions can be circumvented and are time-dependent: it takes some time before their impact is suffered enough to make a difference, especially given the support that the nuclear program enjoys among most Iranians.
- At this point conditions for significant dialogue between the American government and Iran do not exist, though they may develop in the future. While a change in the nature and outlook of the regime is possible, it does not appear likely anytime in the near future.
- Taking military action against Iran's nuclear installations would be a problematic and risk-laden step, incurring a possible Iranian

response and an open-ended account between Iran and the attacking country. Furthermore, the success of such an operation is by no means ensured, and the political conditions for carrying it out will not exist as long as diplomatic efforts continue. Nonetheless, the military option is possible and should be prepared for in order to increase the pressure on Tehran; indeed, the possibility of encouraging Iran to reverse its stance on its nuclear program is likely dependent on the viability of a military option. The United States and Israel are so far the only countries that have not ruled out a military option. The timetable for a military operation is limited, namely, until Iran is able to produce a sufficient amount of fissile material to produce a nuclear bomb.

Iran has thus far exhibited staunch determination to advance its nuclear program, and in light of the hesitancy displayed by those states that would stop Iran, including via sanctions, it should be assumed that Iran's nuclear drive will succeed. Iran will probably aim to build a full operational nuclear arsenal with a large number of bombs and various delivery systems; such an arsenal might provide Iran with second strike capability.

As it develops its future nuclear policy, Iran can choose from among three approaches:

- Proceeding to the nuclear threshold, and deciding not to produce an operational nuclear weapon at the moment but to develop the ability to produce one within a short period of time.
- Adopting a policy of nuclear ambiguity, by producing nuclear weapons but neither announcing the achievement nor conducting nuclear tests, in an attempt to ward off additional international pressure. This appears to be the most likely possibility, at least during the first stage.
- Announcing that it has acquired nuclear weapons and perhaps carrying out a nuclear test. Although this option would be more problematic for Iran, the Ahmadinejad-led government has tended to challenge the world with *faits accomplis* in the nuclear realm and insensitivity to world opinion, along the lines of the North Korean model. This tendency could result in the adoption of an open nuclear policy.

For Israel, the implications of Iran's acquiring nuclear weapons are extremely serious and present Israel with the real potential for an

existential threat. Still, assuming that Iran behaves as a logical actor – even in Iranian terms – that considers the risks and costs incurred by its actions and is not guided by ideological-religious considerations alone, several factors decrease the likelihood that Iran will use a nuclear weapon against Israel:

- Iran's primary motivation for seeking to obtain a nuclear weapon has been and remains the achievement of a defensive deterrent, which in the past was meant for Iraq, and which today is meant for the United States. In addition, Iran's strategic interests include achieving hegemony over the Persian Gulf and the Middle East as a whole, as well as bolstering the domestic status of the Iranian regime. It is thus reasonable to assume that Iran will prefer to keep this weapon as a final card against extreme threats, such that the destruction of Israel is not considered a critical interest worth the use of a nuclear weapon.
- Israeli deterrence: Iran regards Israel as a nuclear power, apparently with second strike capability. Israel's active anti-missile defense system, which might reduce the effectiveness of an Iranian nuclear attack, would likely influence Iran's considerations. Despite the fact that the Iranian regime is motivated by messianic religious motivations, it is highly doubtful that Tehran would want to risk an Israeli nuclear response.
- American deterrence: Tehran must assume that a nuclear attack on Israel will result in an extremely severe American response against Iran, possibly including a nuclear strike.

The analysis is even more complex in that these constraints are based on assumptions, not on facts; indeed, there is currently no solid basis for an assessment of Iran's future nuclear policy. Iran denies any intention of acquiring nuclear weapons in the first place, and thus is not prepared to signal how it will act once it attains nuclear capability. Therefore, as long as no mitigating factors have been established by cumulative evidence or have been proven over time, Israel must relate with the utmost caution to the Iranian nuclear threat in all its severity. And, even if Iran does not use nuclear weapons against Israel, Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons will result in other troublesome realities:

- Iran is likely to adopt a more aggressive policy in various realms, vis-à-vis moderate Arab and Muslim states, the American presence in Iraq and the Gulf, or European and Turkish regional concerns,

including oil-related interests. With regard to Israel, additional aggression is likely to be manifested by encouraging organizations hostile to Israel, first and foremost Hizbollah.

- Iran will create an additional dimension of deterrence against Israel, in part if it promises, explicitly or implicitly, to provide Syria with a nuclear umbrella in the event of military distress. Such a promise could convince Syria that it has broader freedom of action against Israel. In this case, Israel's strategic deterrence against a full-scale conventional Arab attack might be curtailed, should Iran possess nuclear weapons.
- Other countries – especially Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and in the long term, Iraq – will likely strive to join the nuclear club, thus increasing the potential for regional instability.
- Iran will assume the leadership of the radical Islamic camp, thereby putting pressure on Muslim and Arab countries to adopt the Iranian line and damage their own relations with Israel.
- The chance that Iran would provide terrorist organizations with nuclear weapons appears low. Nonetheless, a nuclear Iran could attempt to deter Israel from inflicting extensive damage on Hizbollah by explicitly or implicitly threatening to defend the organization with all the means at its disposal. Iran is not likely to resort to nuclear weapons to protect Hizbollah, yet such a threat, and perhaps even the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran, might limit Israel's freedom of action against Hizbollah.
- Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons could create an atmosphere of fear in Israel, impact negatively on immigration and emigration, and hamper economic investment from within Israel and abroad.
- Iran may take actions that surprise Israel and the United States, both before it has acquired nuclear weapons and once it has done so.
- Israel's regional strategic environment will be less stable. A nuclear Iran is likely to increase its support of terrorist groups, enjoy greater influence over an unstable Iraq, and increase the threat against American interests in the region. Furthermore, uncertainty regarding Iran's intentions will increase, contributing to periods of tension and crises in the Middle East.

Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons will cause the United States, Israel, and other countries to consider three different courses of action in order to disarm Iran of its nuclear weapons:

- Use of dialogue, incentives, and pressure: it is likely that economic and political sanctions will be imposed on Iran once it acquires nuclear weapons. Yet it is unlikely that economic and diplomatic sanctions will remain in force for the long term, and the chances of rollback by means of this approach are slim, at least as long as there is no change in the nature of the Iranian regime.
- Attacking Iranian nuclear facilities. Undertaking military action after Iran acquires nuclear weapons will not be possible from an operational standpoint, since Iran will disperse and conceal its nuclear arsenal, whose total destruction cannot therefore be guaranteed.
- Attempting to reach a comprehensive agreement among countries in the region for a nuclear weapons-free Middle East. This idea might be proposed if no other way to stop Iran's march towards nuclear weapons is found, or as a means of disarming Iran once it has acquired nuclear weapons. Under such circumstances, Israel would be faced with a proposal or demand of joining a regional nuclear non-proliferation regime.

This analysis points to three conclusions:

- The United States, Israel, and other interested parties must do everything in their power to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, as it will be much more difficult, if at all possible, to reverse course and disarm Iran after it has already acquired them. Imposing harsh sanctions on Iran might deter other states from joining the nuclear club.
- The military option must be considered along with other measures, both as a possible course of action in itself and as a means of intensifying diplomatic pressure on Iran. Clearly the United States' overall operational capability for undertaking military action is superior to Israel's.
- At the same time, countries must also prepare themselves for a scenario whereby despite all the preemptive efforts, Iran acquires nuclear weapons and is unwilling to give them up.
What must Israel do in order to prepare itself for this scenario?
- Adopt the position that the leading powers, especially the United States, and not an individual country in the region, are responsible for preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, and disarming it by both military and political means should Iran achieve nuclear

capability. A nuclear Iran threatens the critical interests of the United States and other countries, and a superpower is better equipped to address the threat and handle the outcome of its actions. At the same time, Israel must make sure not to be seen as encouraging the American administration to attack Iran.

- Continue to declare publicly that under the present circumstances Israel cannot accept a nuclear-enabled Iran. In practical terms, Israel must develop an independent course of action against Iran's potential nuclearization.
- Bolster its deterrence against Iran, which might be reduced if Iran acquires nuclear weapons. Iran must be persuaded that Israel has a second strike capability that could inflict a heavy blow on Iran; that a nuclear attack against Israel is likely to be blocked by Israel's anti-ballistic missile system, which would help ensure Israel's second strike capability; and that Israel is prepared to retaliate with all its strategic power.
- Intensify strategic cooperation with the United States and other countries with regard to Iran. Israel's aim should be for the American government to convey to Iran in no uncertain terms that an Iranian nuclear attack on Israel would be considered an attack on the United States itself, and will obligate it to act against Iran without hesitation and in full strategic force. Israel will need to reconsider the possibility of entering a defensive alliance with the United States or joining NATO at the proper time.
- Take steps, in coordination with the United States and other countries, to minimize other dangers resulting from Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons. This will include deterring other Middle East countries from joining the nuclear arms race.
- Reassess its own policy of nuclear ambiguity. Although it is preferable for Israel to continue its nuclear ambiguity, conditions could arise that would justify abandoning this policy. Important factors might include Iran's behavior, Israel's need to strengthen its deterrence capability against Iran and clarify its red lines, and the establishment of channels of communication with Iran on the nuclear issue, whereby both parties would be required to declare their capabilities.
- Examine the possibility of signing a peace treaty with Syria, in the hope that this severs Syria's close relationship with Iran and Syrian

support of Hizbollah. Entering into peaceful relations with Syria would result in further improvements in Israel's relations with other Arab countries, reduce the influence of Iran's militant approach, and perhaps result in a dialogue between Israel and Iran.

Can Israel live with a nuclear Iran? Possibly, but it is hard to anticipate this situation in advance. Certain conditions – some of which are not yet extant – may help to soften this reality, and reduce the Iranian threat and the uncertainty therein. These include:

- Collecting credible intelligence that Iran is not planning to use its nuclear weaponry against Israel.
- Obtaining a clear American obligation to retaliate against Iran with a nuclear strike should Iran use nuclear weapons against Israel.
- Arriving at an assessment in Israel that is based on clear, credible indicators that Israel's strategic capability effectively deters Iran from recourse to nuclear weapons.
- Seeing more moderate officials join the circle of decision-makers in Iran.

Finally, Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons will obligate Israel to attempt to construct a stable balance of deterrence against Iran to prevent an unintentional slide into a nuclear confrontation. As yet there are no agreed-upon rules of behavior between Israel and Iran in a nuclear environment, and without communication between the two countries, it will be impossible to reach an understanding as to these rules. Neither Israel nor Iran is sufficiently familiar with the considerations and decision-making processes of the other, and this uncertainty increases the risk of miscalculation and crisis escalation. Israel thus has a critical need to try to build channels of direct communication with Iran. Even if indirect, these could allow fostering rules of the game and pursuing confidence building measures in a nuclear environment and help guard against nuclear deterioration. Assuming that Iran also has an interest in preventing American or Israeli miscalculations that could spiral unintentionally into an American or Israeli strike against Iran, it is not unreasonable to assume that the possibility of building such channels exists, perhaps via European governments.



Nuclear Sites in Iran

Preface

In recent years the international community has invested significant efforts in trying to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. These efforts have consisted mainly of carrots and sticks, combinations of incentives and pressures aimed at persuading Tehran to halt its drive toward nuclear weapons, with the possibility of military action looming on the horizon. As of early 2007, the ultimate success of these efforts remains questionable. Should they fail, Iran may well succeed in acquiring nuclear weapons in the near future.

This study examines the scenario of Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons should the preventive efforts fail, and Israel's potential options for handling the situation. It is divided into three sections. The first section explores whether it is possible, either diplomatically or militarily, to stop Iran's drive toward acquiring nuclear weapons. The second section addresses the implications of Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons for Israel and other countries, and discusses the nature of Iran's future nuclear policy. The third section examines the courses of action open to Israel and other countries for dealing with the reality of a nuclear Iran in the event that it is impossible to prevent, specifically: action aimed at rollback and neutralizing Iran's nuclear capability; and steps required to minimize the dangers stemming from the reality of a nuclear Iran.

This study – the first part of a more comprehensive research study on the Iranian nuclear threat prepared by the Institute for National Strategic Studies – focuses primarily on a situation that might emerge within a few years. Analysis of this situation and the possibilities it presents are based on current information. As time passes, however, and as more data emerges, this information could very well change or look different, especially as the issue of Iranian nuclear activity is evolving at a rapid pace. It will therefore be necessary to examine the conclusions of this study repeatedly, as the data becomes clearer.

This research has been benefited from comments by colleagues, particularly members of "IranWatch," a working group at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) designed to follow and assess the developments in Iran, particularly those that are nuclear-related. Thanks go to Zvi Shtauber, director of INSS, and to Ephraim Asculai, Yehuda Ben Meir, Shlomo Brom, Uzi Eilam, Meir Elran, Shmuel Even, Yair Evron, Moshe Grundman, Mark Heller, Emily Landau, Giora Romm, Judith Rosen, and Uzi Rubin for their advice and critiques.

Introduction

Since the summer of 2002, the world has learned a great deal about the Iranian nuclear program. In August of that year, the international community was confronted with new information about Iran's nuclear facilities, some of which were hitherto unknown or had only recently been built, and about secret Iranian nuclear activity underway for many years in the realm of uranium enrichment and plutonium production. This information was exposed by Western intelligence communities, Iranian opposition groups, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the Iranians themselves. Its release has led the international community to two principal, generally accepted conclusions: first, along with its civilian program, Iran does in fact have a military nuclear program aimed at developing nuclear weapons; and second, Iran has already made great progress towards the acquisition of nuclear weapons.

It is unclear exactly how close Iran is to acquiring nuclear weapons. In mid-2006, the Israeli intelligence assessment projected that within a few months, Iran would possess the knowledge and technology necessary for producing fissile material independently, and that from this point it would take a few years for Iran to produce its first nuclear bomb.¹ The American intelligence community has estimated that it would take somewhat longer, whereby Iran would attain its first nuclear bomb in the early to middle years of the next decade.² It is impossible at this stage to determine which assessment is grounded in more solid information, and previous timetables presented by the Israeli and American intelligence communities, which estimated that

1 See for example the statement by the head of Military Intelligence, Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin, *Maariv*, April 12, 2006.

2 US House of Representatives, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, "Recognizing Iran as a Strategic Threat: An Intelligence Challenge for the United States," August 23, 2006, p. 10.

Iran would possess nuclear weapons by the year 2000 or sooner, were not substantiated, in part because changing conditions readjusted the projections. So too regarding future projections. For example, if Iran is engaged in unknown covert substantial nuclear activity, it will likely acquire nuclear weapons sooner than expected. Conversely, the period will be longer if Iran encounters additional technical difficulties or if it succumbs to international pressure and agrees to another suspension of its nuclear activity. In any event, it is clear that if the updated American intelligence assessments are accurate, there is still a considerable amount of time to try to stop the Iranian nuclear project or significantly reduce the threat it poses. Alternatively, if the Israeli intelligence assessments are correct, the timetable for stopping Iran before it begins building an arsenal of nuclear weapons is actually much shorter.

Since the uncovering of the secret Iranian nuclear program, Iran has been the subject of intense diplomatic pressure from a number of sources aimed at arresting its nuclear progress. One source is the American government, which for years has been making efforts to stop Iran's nuclear program, primarily by attempting to block the transfer of nuclear technology, equipment, and materials to Iran. The Bush administration is committed to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, and has periodically indicated that it has not ruled out the use of military force in order to do so. American pressure has been bolstered by the threat to Iran demonstrated by US military action against Iran's neighbors, Afghanistan and especially Iraq, as well as the fact that Iran is now surrounded on most sides by countries linked to the United States, some of which have American forces stationed within their borders. At this stage, the American government prefers to exhaust the diplomatic process to stop the Iranian nuclear program, given the difficulties involved in undertaking military action. In this context, the American position is that if the diplomatic efforts fail to achieve their goal, the UN Security Council must impose significant economic sanctions and other restrictions on Iran.

A second source of pressure is Europe. Led by France, Germany, and Great Britain, Europe has been spearheading political efforts to stop the Iranian program. This endeavor represents a change in the European approach since the summer of 2002, when it became painfully clear that Iran had been misleading Europe and was secretly coming close to the acquisition of nuclear weapons. European diplomatic activity

stems from these countries' own concerns regarding the negative implications of an Iranian nuclear threat to regional stability, and possibly regarding American military action against Iran in the event that they fail to achieve a diplomatic solution. At present, the three European governments support the imposition of sanctions on Iran by the UN Security Council, but they oppose military action.

A third source of pressure on Iran has been the International Atomic Energy Agency. Since the beginning of 2003, the IAEA has frequently and regularly sent teams to inspect nuclear facilities in Iran, has installed monitoring equipment at known Iranian nuclear installations, and has published reports on the state of Iranian nuclear activity every three months. These periodic reports have been critical of Iran's behavior, including its failure to declare a long list of nuclear activities and to provide reasonable explanations regarding some suspicious activity. However, the IAEA has thus far refrained from concluding definitively that Iran is striving to acquire nuclear weapons. It switched course in September 2005, when the IAEA Board of Governors passed a resolution stating that Iran was not fulfilling its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and that the IAEA would therefore transfer the issue to the UN Security Council for discussion at an unspecified date. In November 2005, IAEA director-general Muhammad ElBaradei spoke for the first time of the possibility that Iran would acquire nuclear weapons if it continued its enrichment of uranium. In this context, the Board of Governors resolved by a large majority in February 2006 to transfer the issue of the Iranian nuclear program to the Security Council, where it has been handled since.

Notwithstanding some hesitation, Russia has joined the United States and Europe in exerting pressure on Iran. Since the end of 2005, a Russian compromise proposal has been on the table whereby Russia would enrich uranium for Iran, and under supervision transfer the uranium to Iran for use in Iranian nuclear reactors. Iran, however, rejected this proposal, explaining that even if Russia were to enrich uranium for Iran, it would not halt the enrichment of uranium within Iran itself, even if only on a limited scale. After talks on the compromise failed, Russia issued public criticism of Iran's position and added its support for transferring the issue to the Security Council. Since July 2006, in light of Iran's refusal to suspend uranium enrichment, Russian signals began indicating that Russia would not oppose the imposition of

certain types of sanctions within the Security Council. And in late July 2006, the Security Council decided – with the consent of Russia and China – that if Iran did not suspend its nuclear activity by early August, the Security Council would meet to decide on sanctions against Iran. Iran has since rejected these demands and has threatened to respond with its own measures in the face of disciplinary steps by the Security Council, such as actions related to oil production or its relations with European governments.

Over the years of the Iranian nuclear chapter, diplomatic efforts yielded two agreements, one in October 2003 and one in November 2004. Within the framework of these agreements, Iran committed to suspending its suspicious nuclear activity until the achievement of a comprehensive agreement with the governments of Europe on nuclear, technological, and economic issues. These suspension agreements had an important benefit: they slowed down Iran's progress toward nuclear weapons, apparently by about one year. For their part, the Iranians later explained that they had used the cover of negotiations in order to make progress in the nuclear development program, and that they agreed to suspend only those activities in which they had not encountered technical problems. More importantly, Iran emphasized that its commitment was unilateral and only temporary in nature; that it had no intention of giving up its nuclear activity; that it had the right to build a full nuclear fuel cycle; and that it would resume its enrichment of uranium, unless it reached a comprehensive agreement with the governments of Europe.

The two agreements were short-lived. A few months after they were reached, Iran announced that it was rescinding suspension and it would resume uranium enrichment activity. Moreover, since early 2006, Iran has taken a number of steps in response to international pressure and the transfer of the issue to the Security Council. It removed most of the IAEA monitoring devices that had been installed in nuclear sites around the country, resumed its enrichment of uranium in stages, and hinted that it may withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty if pressure mounted. This trend intensified in early April 2006, when Iran officially announced that it started to enrich uranium. Although it enriched only a small amount of low quality uranium that is not suitable for military uses, the Iranian announcement means that Iran is close to mastering the technology for enriching uranium on its own, independent of external

assistance, even if it is occasionally stalled by technological obstacles, for example in centrifuge operation. At the same time, Iran continues to install additional centrifuges in experimental and larger facilities in Natanz. Iranian officials have stated that Iran plans to install and put 3,000 centrifuges for uranium enrichment into operation by March 2007. And, in August 2006 and with much public fanfare, Iran opened a heavy water production facility, which indicates that Iran pursues the road to nuclear weapons via the plutonium route as well.

Although Iran returned the process to square one at the beginning of 2006, defiantly resuming its uranium enrichment activities, the efforts made during the past three years played an important part in the continued international confrontation with the Iranian challenge. The Iranian nuclear program has been delayed to a certain extent, and a relatively broad international coalition against Iran has emerged. In addition, discrepancies between the positions of the United States and Europe on the implications of the Iranian nuclear program and ways to stop it have diminished. Furthermore, much information on the Iranian program has accumulated, which can help prevent a repeat of the intelligence errors made prior to the war in Iraq. And finally, if there is eventually no choice but to undertake military action against Iran, it is important to exhaust the diplomatic process first.





Can Iran be Stopped?

Currently, most efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons lie in the realm of diplomacy. Since 2003, there has been a relatively united American-European front aimed at stopping the Iranian nuclear program by means of diplomatic dialogue. At the same time, decision-makers in the United States and Israel have been considering the option of a military attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, in the event that political efforts fail to achieve their goal.

Diplomatic Efforts

Since 2003, key European governments, with American backing, have been working to reach a comprehensive deal with Iran, whereby Iran would surrender elements of its nuclear program that could lead to Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons. To this end, European governments offered Iran a package of proposals in the summer of 2005. The package included assurances of aid to Iran in the realm of nuclear development, technology, and economics, in return for an Iranian commitment to refrain from developing nuclear weapons and cease all activities in the realm of uranium enrichment, plutonium production, and construction of a heavy water production plant. Iran, however, rejected the European proposal, and negotiations came to a halt in August 2005. Moreover, since the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the Iranian presidency in June 2005 and the ensuing replacement of central members of the Iranian administration and the Iranian team directing talks on the nuclear issue, there has been a marked hardening in Iran's style of negotiations and perhaps in their content as well.

In May-June 2006, the European proposal was updated and submitted to Iran as a carrot and stick package. Against the background of disagreement within the Security Council on levying sanctions

on Iran, there was also a change in the format of the dialogue: the package of proposals was not submitted to Iran by the three European governments, as per the previous format, but rather by six countries – the five permanent members of the Security Council (United States, Russia, Britain, France, and China) and Germany. The United States also announced that it would be willing to join the negotiations directly if Iran suspended its uranium enrichment. However, since Iran has so far refused this condition, the United States has not joined the negotiations. The package of suggestions was designed to encourage negotiations, yet while Iran has stated that it sees positive developments in the package, it was not willing to suspend its enrichment of uranium indefinitely. Accordingly, the negotiations stopped where they began, although in order to stymie the sanctions process, Iran proposed suspending enrichment for a few weeks and engaging in negotiations on the incentives package.

The package evidently includes the following components:³

- Iran has the undeniable right to utilize nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. The six countries will provide assistance for the Iranian nuclear program, including the construction of a light water reactor.
- Iran will suspend indefinitely its activities relating to uranium enrichment, and this suspension will be supervised by the International Atomic Energy Agency. The suspension of uranium enrichment is a precondition for any agreement.
- In the future, Iran will be permitted to enrich uranium, but only after the IAEA establishes with absolute certainty that the Iranian nuclear program is meant for peaceful purposes only; that all the reported problematic issues have been resolved; and that Iran has no undeclared nuclear activity or materials. Permitting Iran to enrich uranium will also require the authorization of the UN Security Council, and Iran will need to prove that all its nuclear activities are economically justifiable and related to peaceful purposes. The Americans argue that the process of verification will take many years and they will be able to prevent Security Council authorization for uranium enrichment by exercising its veto power.

3. Although the incentives package has not been made public, its components have been leaked to the press. See for example "Contents of the Proposal by the International Community (5+1) to Iran on the Nuclear Issue," MEMRI, June 15, 2006, www.memri.org.il.

- Iran will be supplied with nuclear fuel in one of two ways: either it will help operate the enrichment facility in Russia, which will enrich uranium that had been converted in Iran; or, it will receive nuclear fuel under the supervision of the IAEA.
- Iran will receive economic and technological incentives. For example, it will be accepted into the World Trade Organization; the European Union will assist it in the development of its nuclear energy sector; it will be able to purchase American-made spare parts for civilian aircraft; and restrictions on the Iranian use of American technology in agriculture will be lifted.
- In the event that these proposals are rejected, the six countries will impose economic and political sanctions on Iran, based on a schedule of sanctions assembled by them for that purpose. The threat of sanctions was apparently presented to the Iranians separately from the list of incentives.

Recent developments have seemingly created a number of conditions that are likely to enhance the possibility of reaching a comprehensive deal with Iran. First, the Iraqi military threat against Iran, and the non-conventional military threat altogether, has disappeared, and will remain dormant for many years to come. The Iraqi threat and its embodiment in the Iran-Iraq War, which cost Iran more than 200,000 lives and effectively illustrated to the Iranians the meaning of the chemical threat and the missile-based threat, was the apparent primary motivation for Iran's decision to develop its nuclear program and its missile program. With the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iraq ceased to pose a threat to Iran for the foreseeable future.

Second, while the Iraqi threat facing Iran dissolved, the American threat increased tremendously. The United States is viewed by the regime in Tehran as a strategic threat. From its perspective, the United States is doing everything in its power to hamper Iran's military strength and economic development, to isolate it diplomatically, to present it with an ideological and cultural challenge, and to overthrow the regime. Iran believes that to achieve these goals, the United States may even use military action, with the most likely current scenario an attack on Iranian nuclear installations. While achieving a broad, overall agreement on the issues in dispute would not erase the American threat entirely, it would substantially reduce it.

Third, the carrot and stick package proposed to Iran goes a long

way to meeting Iran's demands. It recognizes Iran's right, with certain limitations, to develop its own nuclear program, and provides it with a theoretical possibility of enriching uranium within its own borders, albeit only under exceptional conditions. The package also guarantees Iran technological assistance in a number of realms, including that of nuclear development. Accepting the proposal and resuming economic contact with the United States could infuse the Iranian economy with significant momentum. Furthermore, authorization to continue developing its nuclear program for peaceful needs would enable Iran, at least theoretically, to bypass its obligations and to continue developing a secret military nuclear program.

These conditions, however, are counterbalanced by the Iranian regime's basic positions on the nuclear issue and relations with the United States. From the vantage point of Iran's leadership, the acquisition of nuclear weapons is a strategic priority of paramount importance. Iran needs nuclear weapons first and foremost as a means of deterrence against the United States and other potential enemies. While Iran possesses reasonable means to defend itself against regional adversaries, and despite the decline of the Russian threat since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the more recent disappearance of the Iraqi threat, Iran does not have a sufficient answer to the threat posed by the United States. Iran regards weapons of mass destruction in general, and nuclear weapons in particular, as a suitable response to this threat and the main component of the strategic deterrence it is striving to attain. Furthermore, Iran sees nuclear weapons as a requirement for building its position as a regional power and advancing its hegemony over the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. Iran believes that the acquisition of nuclear weapons will free it of its dependence on others in the realm of security, decrease its vulnerability to threats and pressures, force international and regional actors into taking Iran's interests into greater consideration, and assist Iran in achieving these interests. The Iranian regime also appears to believe that acquiring nuclear weapons will increase its strength and prestige on the domestic front as well.

Evidently for these reasons, there is a broad consensus in the Iranian leadership that Iran must continue striving to attain nuclear weapons, notwithstanding the pressures. Apparently the Iranian political establishment also strongly supports continuing the nuclear program, and debate on the subject, if any, is more tactical than strategic.

Furthermore, Iran's hostility towards and continued isolation from the United States have been prominent characteristics of the radical Islamic regime in Tehran from the outset, and concessions in this realm would be interpreted as substantial erosion of the regime's ideology, if not of the regime itself. This makes it difficult for Iran to agree to a deal with the United States even though the American administration is willing to talk to Iran, and the antagonism within the Bush administration and political circles in the United States does not facilitate a deal with Iran anytime in the near future.

What does Iran's conduct suggest about the chances of achieving a comprehensive agreement on the nuclear issue? On the one hand, Iran has shown that it is determined to build a full nuclear fuel cycle, which in practice will allow it to retain the option of pursuing nuclear weapons. Due to Iran's staunch interest in attaining this goal, it is reasonable to assume that Iran will not make concessions on this issue. In addition, after committing itself publicly and repeatedly to continue building a full fuel cycle, which includes uranium enrichment on Iranian soil, it would be difficult for Tehran to concede this point without its being deemed surrender to the United States. In order for Iran to be willing to make a comprehensive deal on ending its drive towards nuclear weapons, some or all of certain conditions are critical: a change in the internal balance of power of the Iranian leadership in favor of elements amenable to compromise on the nuclear issue; Iranian willingness to begin a meaningful dialogue with the American government; American willingness to offer Iran far-reaching proposals in political, economic, and technological realms; an overall change in the relationship between Iran and the United States; and Iranian understanding that it will pay a heavy price for continuing its efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. These conditions do not yet exist, and the chances that the parties involved will succeed in reaching a comprehensive solution do not appear imminent.

On the other hand, Iran's willingness to sign two agreements, one in 2003 and another in 2004, indicates that the leadership is sensitive to its status in the international arena. It is therefore willing to be somewhat flexible in order to avoid sanctions, the risk of diplomatic isolation, and, perhaps, military attack. The election of President Ahmadinejad, with his abrasive style and greater defiance of international public opinion, has lessened the likelihood of flexibility. Nonetheless, it appears that

there is still enough maneuvering room to facilitate the achievement of a limited agreement that, for example, might not obligate Iran to give up its nuclear program but would include an Iranian agreement to suspend certain nuclear activities. The fact that the governments of Europe have already agreed not only to allow Iran to run a nuclear program for peaceful purposes but even to assist the program could persuade Iran that in practice, it would be better off exploiting the program for the future advancement of a secret military nuclear program. Reaching a partial or temporary arrangement with Iran would be valuable as a delay in Iran's progress towards nuclear weapons, even if only for a short time. However, if such an arrangement does not reflect a clear Iranian strategic decision to abandon or distance itself from the nuclear weapons race, it will necessarily be short-lived. In this context, it may still be possible for Iran to begin operating a secret military nuclear program.

Under the present circumstances, however, whereby the Iranian leadership remains defiant against international pressure, and once – by its own account – Iran has acquired the capability of enriching uranium, it appears that the current pressures will not induce Iran to agree to an additional significant suspension in its nuclear activity. The key to success of diplomatic efforts to stop the Iranian nuclear program may very well lie in the degree to which international actors will be able to impose political and, more importantly, economic sanctions on Iran. Since 2000 Iran's economic situation has improved due to the dramatic rise in oil prices, and therefore Iran is somewhat less subject to pressure. Nonetheless, despite Iran's oil-based wealth, the Iranian economy remains weak and vulnerable. This is a result of the economy's reliance on the oil sector, which accounts for 80 percent of Iranian exports; economic problems stemming from the low price of oil between the 1980s and the year 2000; damage caused by the Iran-Iraq War; failed economic policies; and failures in implementing economic reform. Iran has a low growth rate, a high rate of unemployment, high inflation, a shortage of suitable housing and consumer products, and a low standard of living. This economic distress has also been reflected in the country's failure to mobilize capital and foreign investment, knowledge, and technology for the repair and modernization of some components of the country's aging and neglected physical infrastructure (primarily in the oil sector), and an insufficient quantity of distillation

facilities to meet domestic needs. These problems make Iran vulnerable to continued economic pressure.

Several types of economic sanctions could be especially effective against Iran, such as: prohibition of the import of distilled oil and consumer products; prohibition of foreign investment in Iran (primarily in the oil sector); and an embargo against the export of oil-based and other products from Iran.⁴ Sanctions should be aimed at creating shortages and a sense of distress among important social strata in the Iranian public, which could motivate the regime to give up its nuclear aspirations in order to prevent an outbreak of unrest that could cause instability.

The key factor is the ability to achieve the international cooperation necessary for applying significant and continuous economic pressure on Iran. Since the Carter administration, the American government has maintained broad economic sanctions against Iran, beginning in 1979 and with greater intensity since the 1990s. These sanctions, most of which remain in place today, include: a ban on the assistance of American companies in the development of the Iranian oil industry; a ban on imports of most Iranian products to the United States; the supervision of exports of certain American products to Iran; and a diplomatic effort to prevent international financial institutions from offering loans to Iran. These American sanctions, however, remain unilateral actions, as virtually no other government embraced the effort. Moreover, companies from Europe and elsewhere took the place of American companies that had been interested in investing in Iran. In the end, due to an absence of international cooperation, American economic sanctions have failed to bring about a meaningful change in Iran's behavior with regard to the nuclear issue, although the prohibition of transferring equipment and technology did play a role in delaying the progress of Iran's nuclear program.

4. Anthony Cordesman and Khalid R. al-Rodhan, *Iranian Nuclear Weapons? Options for Sanctions and Military Strikes*, Center for Strategic Studies, Washington, DC, August 30, 2006, pp. 13-30; George Perkovich and Silvia Manzanero, "Iran Gets the Bomb – Then What?" in Henry Sokolski and Patrick Clawson, eds., *Getting Ready for a Nuclear-Ready Iran*, The Strategic Studies Institute, October 2005, pp. 181-89; Shmuel Even, "The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: The Implications of Economic Sanctions," *Tel Aviv Notes*, No. 185, September 5, 2006.

In light of the difficulties involved with reaching a consensus in the Security Council on substantial sanctions against Iran, the United States is simultaneously considering the possibility of imposing economic actions against Iran outside the framework of the Security Council. The intention is to persuade countries and large organizations and banks to minimize their dealings with Iran; to limit the financial freedom of Iranian officials and organizations linked to the nuclear project; to limit Iran's access to international markets; to freeze Iranian assets in Europe and Asia; and to close Iranian bank accounts outside of Iran. Still, it appears that neither unilateral American sanctions nor economic pressure outside of the Security Council will motivate Iran to stop its nuclear program, regardless of the strict nature of the endeavors. Rather, the only effective measures will be the ones undertaken by all the relevant countries and backed by international institutions such as the Security Council.

There is no guarantee that Iran's nuclear program would be stopped by economic sanctions, which can be violated, subverted, or exchanged for different economic arrangements, and in any case, Iran may decide not to succumb to pressure despite economic hardship. At the same time, comprehensive and substantive international sanctions might result in the suspension or halt of Iran's nuclear program, due to the vulnerability of the Iranian economy and the implications of economic distress on domestic stability. Iran will be able to bear the sanctions to a certain degree, and the people of Iran are initially likely to support the regime in the face of pressures. And yet while extended sanctions are expected to cause social unrest, past behavior of various governments vis-à-vis their relations with Iran suggests that the imposition of sanctions will not garner wide endorsement, because at least in the short term, these governments do not regard Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons as a significant enough threat to justify the loss of substantial income due to sanctions.

Even if the parties do succeed in reaching an international agreement, its longevity is questionable, although the very perseverance over time is critical for the success of such actions. Sanctions take time until their effect is felt, especially if the Iranian political echelons endorse continuing the nuclear program. However, the time demanded by sanctions also defers the possibility of a military option and buys Iran time to proceed with its nuclear plans. Moreover, imposing sanctions

against the oil sector could be expensive in two ways. First, achieving international cooperation to this end might obligate the United States to compensate other countries for losses they would sustain due to the economic embargo, in order to persuade them to participate – an expensive course for the United States. Second, harming Iranian oil exports is likely to cause another significant rise in oil prices, as Iraqi oil exports have already dropped since the 2003 war. The prohibition of the export of Iranian products is likely to present fewer problems. Still, many governments may avoid this undertaking as well and even try to make a profit from the partial embargo, while Iran is likely to respond with a temporary reduction in oil production.

The international reaction to the nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan in 1998 illustrates the difficulties of perseverance in this realm. At first, the United States and other countries applied economic and diplomatic sanctions to both countries, including various restrictions on the sale of different products, the provision of economic aid and military equipment, and the provision of credit for both purposes. The sanctions, however, remained in place for only a short period. After a few months, economic restrictions were gradually reduced, and the rest were cancelled after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, when the American government undertook to recruit Pakistan to the war on terrorism. The relations between India and Pakistan also returned to their previous state. Iran is different for a few reasons: it is governed by a radical regime that is seen as a threat by different countries; Iran does not yet possess nuclear weapons and there is still a chance that sanctions will prevent this; and an international front working to stop Iran before it acquires nuclear weapons already exists. From its perspective, however, Iran is likely to assume that sanctions will cause it little damage, partly due to the importance of Iranian oil. Nevertheless, it is important to exhaust completely the option of economic sanctions, as this option may be the primary way to stop Iran's nuclear program.

The chances of reaching a diplomatic arrangement with Iran depend to a great extent on European-American determination not to yield to Iran with regard to critical aspects of its nuclear operations, and on levying continuous international pressure on Iran by means of the threat of American military action if it fails to comply with international demands. As of now, these conditions are only partially fulfilled. In

late December 2006 the Security Council for the first time imposed sanctions on Iran, due to its refusal to comply with the Council's demands regarding its nuclear activities. The sanctions represented a compromise between the Western governments and Russia and China. The Council imposed a ban on deals that involve or supply Iran with materials and technology that could contribute to its nuclear and missile programs. The Council also ordered a freeze on the assets of several individuals and organizations connected with those programs. If Iran refuses to comply, the Council will consider adopting further sanctions within sixty days.

Yet the common denominator achieved among the Council's members regarding the sanctions was minimal, and the list of sanctions agreed upon was quite watered down. Clearly, these sanctions are not painful enough to force Iran to suspend its suspected nuclear activities, and indeed, Iran soon announced that it would not stop its nuclear program. At the same time, however, the sanctions created a new dynamic that may continue and increase the pressure on Iran. As it has been thus far, the key may lie in the hands of the Russians. As long as disagreements regarding sanctions remain, the Iranians are likely to get the impression that they still have room to maneuver and evade the pressure. In this context, the Iranian government may well conclude that although the current levels of pressure (and even the current and future sanctions) are somewhat uncomfortable, they are tolerable as long as Iran can continue carrying out its nuclear program.

For its part, Israel cannot contribute in any way to the diplomatic efforts underway to stop the Iranian nuclear program. Israel has nothing to offer the Iranians in exchange for halting their project, and it has no channels of meaningful dialogue with the Iranian regime. Israel has also not been a participant (direct or indirect) in the recent negotiations with Iran. In actuality, the only way Israel can contribute to the negotiations is by means of the intensified pressure resulting from the assumption that Israel possesses the military capability to attack Iranian nuclear facilities in the event that talks on the subject fail. Israel can also try to obtain high quality intelligence on Iran's nuclear program.

Israel and the Military Option

The option of stopping Iran's nuclear program through military action is under consideration by only two countries, the United States and

Israel, nor is this option currently acceptable to any other country, including in Europe. The United States and Israel have also made it clear that the military option will only become relevant after all diplomatic efforts have been explored and thoroughly exhausted. Since 2004, senior American officials have announced that the United States is committed to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. While currently focusing on diplomatic efforts to stop the Iranian nuclear program, officials have stated they are not ruling out other options, including military action, should diplomatic pressure fail. The Bush administration has also not concealed the fact it has conducted military exercises and war games relating to military action in Iran, and from time to time it has leaked information on planning for such action against Iranian nuclear facilities.

The military option is on Israel's agenda as well. Israeli statements on this issue have been more explicit than those of the United States. During the past decade, a number of senior Israeli defense establishment officials have declared that Israel will have to use all possible means, including military action, in order to stop the Iranian nuclear threat. Last year, leaders of the Israeli government and defense establishment announced that they were waiting to see the results of the international pressure exerted on Iran, but that if this pressure proved insufficient, Israel would have no choice but to take measures in its own defense.

The objective of Israeli or American military action is a significant delay of at least a few years in Iran's completion of its nuclear project, in the hope that a more moderate regime will emerge, and be willing to abandon the program and accept the European-American package of incentives. The alternative aim – of halting Iran's nuclear program altogether – would be difficult to achieve by military means. It should be assumed that after an attack, Iran would rebuild its damaged nuclear facilities or begin undertaking a different type of nuclear development, as Iraq did after Israel's 1981 attack on the Osiraq nuclear reactor. A full obstruction of Iran's drive towards nuclear weapons would require years of repeated attacks against Iran's nuclear sites, including sites rebuilt after previous military strikes, until the government in Tehran were to abandon the goal of acquiring nuclear weapons.

Any timetable for military action against Iranian nuclear facilities relies on the updated intelligence assessment as to Iran's nuclear progress. Military action must be carried out prior to Iran's acquisition

of its first nuclear bomb which, if the prevalent Israeli assessments are accurate, will occur towards the end of the decade. However, military action would actually have to be taken earlier, before Iran produces sufficient fissile material to make a bomb. From that point on, Iran will be able to disperse and conceal this material in unknown storage facilities around the country, thus making the already complex planning and implementation of a military operation all the more difficult. This factor dictates a shorter timetable for military action. Because estimates regarding Iran's timetable for acquiring its first nuclear weapon have changed over the years, periodic review of these assessments will be necessary.

In 1981, Israel chose to attack the Iraqi nuclear reactor by means of an air strike. In early 2006, former IDF chief of staff Moshe Ya'alon indicated that in addition to an air strike, Israel possessed a number of other options for military action in Iran. Indeed, while the most frequently discussed option is an aerial attack, an air strike against Iranian nuclear facilities would inevitably be problematic and occur under difficult conditions. Although American and Israeli operational capabilities to attack the Iranian facilities from the air have improved significantly over the past twenty-five years, Iranian nuclear facilities are 1,200-1,500 kilometers from Israel, much further away than the Iraqi reactor. The distance could be even longer if the planes need to bypass Jordanian airspace to avoid a crisis in Israeli-Jordanian relations, or refrain from flying over Iraq if the operation is not coordinated with the United States and as such take an alternative route via the Indian Ocean. In order to travel such distances, the Israeli planes would need to refuel in mid-flight twice, once on the way to their targets and once on the way back. This in turn would make the operation even more complicated, due to the vulnerability of the fuel planes. Moreover, the Iranian facilities are carefully sheltered, with some located deep underground, and are well protected by air defenses and interceptor planes. All this will require that the attack be carried out by a relatively large force, including attack planes, interceptors planes, fuel planes, and additional supporting aircraft, all of which would be vulnerable to interference and mishaps.⁵

5. For details of the operational capabilities related to such an attack, see Shlomo Brom, "Is the Begin Doctrine Still a Viable Option for Israel?" in *Getting Ready for a Nuclear-Ready Iran*, pp. 148-49.

This difficult and sensitive operation is complicated even further by the broad geographical distribution of Iranian nuclear facilities. It is impossible to neutralize Iran's nuclear capability by attacking just one facility, as Israel did in Iraq. While comprehensive damage would not require destroying all of Iran's nuclear facilities, it would require striking at least three or four sites involved with uranium enrichment and plutonium production. It is also doubtful whether Israel would be able to maintain the element of surprise as it did in Iraq, because the Iranians fear such an attack and have therefore prepared for it. Nevertheless, Israel may be able to achieve a tactical surprise, regarding the planning and the means employed in the attack.

The Israeli air force has the operational capabilities to attack and damage the Iranian nuclear facilities, yet while the air force would be able to execute a number of precise strikes on the sites, over time it would not be able to carry out the recurring attacks that may be required to significantly impair all critical components of the Iranian nuclear program.⁶ At the same time, even if Israel can only carry out a limited number of attacks, these attacks will be meaningful because they will demonstrate Israel's determination to stop Iran's drive towards nuclear weapons.

Related operational and political considerations are Iraq, currently a theater of operation of American and British forces, and the large number of American forces located in the Persian Gulf. For this reason, in contrast to the 1981 attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor, any operation in Iran might require advance coordination with the United States, in order to prevent engagement with American forces. In addition, in response to an Israeli attack, Iran will likely retaliate against American targets or take measures in the oil sector, and a wave of anti-American sentiment throughout the Middle East is essentially inevitable. For these reasons, it will be important to inform the United States of Israel's intention to attack ahead of time. However, it is not at all clear whether the Americans will consent to an Israeli attack, and attempts to coordinate such an attack with the American government could result in an American veto of the operation as a whole.

Furthermore, in contrast to the Iraqi scenario of 1981, development of Iran's nuclear capability is much broader and has reached a much

6. Ibid.

more advanced stage. Iran no longer appears to be significantly dependent on external sources for the acquisition of nuclear technology, and it already possesses most of the knowledge required for developing fissile material. Iran possesses nuclear raw material; it manufactures centrifuges for uranium enrichment; the large facility that it built for uranium enrichment is almost complete; it operates a facility for uranium conversion; it claims to have succeeded in enriching uranium; it has built a heavy water facility; it has carried out plutonium separation tests; and it appears to have a sufficient quantity of well-trained and professional personnel. This means that even if a few main Iranian facilities are attacked, Iran will be able to construct alternative sites within a short time if it is allowed to do so undisturbed. Construction of the Natanz enrichment facility took three years, from 2000 to 2003. Given the valuable experience gained by the Iranians through the construction of this facility, the construction of a new facility would most likely take less time. The extent to which the professional personnel involved with the project will be injured by such an attack remains an open question.

Moreover, it is also possible that Iran has already secretly built additional unknown nuclear installations as backups for the recently discovered facilities. A large portion of Iran's main nuclear installations – including the Natanz centrifuge facility, centrifuge production workshops, a laser enrichment facility, the Arak facility for heavy water production, and other facilities – were completely unknown until 2001-2002. Because centrifuge installations and centrifuge production workshops can be concealed within relatively small structures, there is a realistic chance that additional facilities already exist. This could give Iran significant residual capability, even following attacks on the known installations.

An attack on nuclear installations would bring Iran to a critical juncture regarding the future of its nuclear program. It could convince the Iranians that Israel – and/or the United States – is determined to stop the program, especially if rebuilt and newly discovered facilities are also repeatedly attacked. This could strengthen Iranian decision-makers (if there are any) who believe that Iran's quest for nuclear weapons is unnecessary and damages Iranian interests. However, there is also a significant chance that an attack will not impel Iran to abandon its quest for nuclear weapons, at least as long as the current regime remains in power and Iran's hostile relations with the United States persist. Iran's

nuclear project is a national project, and enjoys a broad consensus within the Iranian regime. Military action against Iran is liable to unite the Iranian people behind the regime and, at least in the short term, hinder the advancement of liberal trends within the regime itself. Since Iran has already come a long way in its quest for nuclear weapons, an attack on its nuclear facilities could actually have the undesired effect of encouraging the acceleration of the program, as was the case in Iraq in the aftermath of Israel's strike in 1981. An attack would also present Iran as a victim of aggression, enabling it to shake off international pressure and IAEA supervision and perhaps even withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty without paying a high price.

Iran's ability to retaliate in the event of an attack today consists of three primary components. The first involves firing Shehab-3 missiles at Israel. This type of missile is still not precise, but it is likely to be effective against large targets. Iran has already explicitly stated that it will respond to an Israeli strike against its nuclear facilities by firing Shehab-3 missiles. Iran also has a small number of AS-15 missiles that it purchased from the Ukraine, and BM-25 missiles that it acquired from North Korea – both long range missiles whose range extends to Europe. For now, it appears that Iran is not capable of firing a large number of missiles at Israel, and Israel's Arrow missile defense system is capable of intercepting volleys of a small number of missiles. Thus, the damage that Iran's missiles would inflict, as long as they are not fitted with nuclear warheads, is limited. However, the capabilities of Iranian missiles could improve both qualitatively and quantitatively in the coming years. Iran also possesses a limited capability to strike at Israel from the air, though it is highly unlikely that it will use it. Iran has 24-36 long range Sukhoi-24 ground attack aircraft capable of reaching Israel, as well as limited ability to refuel in mid-flight. Nonetheless, Iran will find it difficult to carry out such a long range strike against Israel's air force and air defense system.

The second retaliatory element is encouragement of Hizbollah to deploy its extensive rocket array, built in part by Iran itself, against Israel. This array, particularly the long range rockets, sustained some damage during the campaign in Lebanon of July-August 2006, and so far it is unclear to what extent it will be restored. It is reasonable to assume that Hizbollah still has the capability, even if reduced, to strike at Israel. At the same time, Iran is expected to encourage Palestinian

groups to intensify their terrorist attacks against Israel.

The third retaliatory measure is spectacular attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets outside Israel (similar to those Iran carried out in Argentina in the mid-1990s). In this context, it is also possible that Iran would strike at its own Jewish community.

In all, Iran's retaliatory capability against Israel is as yet limited. Its missile launch capacity is circumscribed, and if missiles are successfully intercepted by the Arrow system, Iranian deterrence will be damaged. Hizbollah's rocket formation has been reduced, and the second Lebanon War indicated that even if this capability is restored, its implication for the long run is limited. Iran already encourages Palestinian terrorism against Israel. However, an Israeli attack might be countered with measures against American and Western targets – including in Iraq – and in oil-related activities.

Furthermore, an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities will create an open account between the two countries, which could continue even after the decline of the current regime. For this reason, Iran's response could be immediate, but it might also be delayed until it attains a future ability to carry it out. An attack could arouse a wave of anti-Israeli sentiment among the Iranian population, most of which is not as hostile to Israel as the Iranian regime is today. This wave would be encouraged by the regime, and would most likely leave its mark for years to come.

Finally, an Israeli attack that damages the Iranian nuclear program would serve the interests of many countries, such as the United States, other Western countries, and Muslim and Arab countries that regard Iran as a threat. Nonetheless, considerable criticism of such an attack would certainly emanate from these same countries. Some will see the attack as an act of aggression against the Muslim world as a whole, which could undermine Israel's delicate relations with Arab and Muslim countries, and some might opt for diplomatic measures against Israel. In any event, many will see the attack as a joint American-Israeli operation, especially if it becomes clear that there was advance coordination between the two countries. This could increase feelings of hostility towards the United States throughout the Arab and Muslim world. However, despite the expected criticism and condemnations, it is likely that for several reasons Israel in the long term will not be forced to pay a high price in the international arena: Iran's nuclear activities are seen as defying the international consensus; the vast majority of

the countries involved favor the destruction of the Iranian nuclear program; and President Ahmadinejad's statements about wiping out Israel have bolstered the impression that Iran constitutes a threat to Israel's existence, justifying actions of self-defense.

Overall, an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities involves a delicate and problematic balance of risks and benefits. An attack involves operational challenges and other difficulties that could block achievement of Iran's goals, and could also incur an Iranian response and a limited international response. Therefore, Israel should allow the international community to exhaust all diplomatic efforts to stop the Iranian nuclear program and retain the military option as a last resort. This conclusion is especially applicable to the situation of early 2007, when negotiations with Iran are not progressing but might eventually resume, despite the serious obstacles. Moreover, the issue has been transferred to the UN Security Council, which imposed sanctions on Iran. The fact that today, in contrast to the Iraqi situation in 1981, there is an international front working to stop the Iranian nuclear program, even though it has so far had only partial and perhaps temporary successes, connotes that there is insufficient international support for an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. Clearly, though, this approach suffers from inherent structural problems: the timetable for exhausting diplomatic efforts ends when Iran begins building an arsenal of nuclear weapons, and precisely when this will happen is unknown.

This analysis does not rule out Israel's use of the military option as a last resort for stopping Iran's quest for nuclear weapons. Israel must continue to declare publicly that it cannot accept an Iran endowed with nuclear military capability, and it must develop its own independent alternatives to prevent the nuclearization of Iran. The existence of a viable military option, whether Israeli or American, also plays a very important role in intensifying pressure on Iran, and without it, the diplomatic effort would lose considerable impact. However, a series of conditions are essential to a successful military operation, and without them Israel would be better off refraining from carrying out an attack. The main conditions are as follows:

- A precise intelligence assessment regarding the Iranian nuclear program. The failures of Western intelligence communities before the war in Iraq with regard to the existence of weapons of mass destruction highlights the absolute necessity of presenting a

convincing assessment that Iran is in fact close to acquiring nuclear weapons.

- Precise intelligence not only about known installations, to facilitate their complete destruction, but also intelligence that can determine, with a high likelihood of accuracy, if there are also main installations that are still undisclosed. Such intelligence must ensure in advance that an attack would damage Iran's nuclear program for a significant period of time, even if it cannot be delayed indefinitely. If the estimate is that an attack will delay the completion of the Iranian program for only one or two years, the outcome may not justify the risks. It will also be necessary to consider that circumstances will not facilitate repeat attacks of main installations that were not damaged during the first attack or that were discovered later.
- Assessment of a high probability of success. The worst possible scenario would be an unsuccessful attack. A failed attack would convince the Iranians to continue their program with a sense of invincibility; make repeat attacks more difficult; damage Israel's deterrence capability; and come at a high price from the perspective of Israel.
- Advance coordination with the United States, or at least tacit consent. Coordination with the United States could be problematic, and it is not clear whether the American government will be willing to undertake such coordination, as it involves risks for the US as well. In fact, it is unclear whether it would support military action against Iran at all. However, it is not out of the question that the United States will be interested in having Israel dirty its own hands and try to present an attack as an independent Israeli operation in order to minimize risk to the United States.
- Conditions in the international arena that could help justify the operation. This could include Iran's withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or additional disclosures regarding its nuclear program, just as diplomatic efforts have reached a dead end. From this perspective, it is important that Israeli actions are not perceived as disrupting diplomatic efforts to stop the program.
- The possibility of a diplomatic effort as a result of the military operation. As it will be difficult to bring the Iranian nuclear program to a complete halt by a military attack alone, efforts must be made to ensure that the attack will create a springboard for complementary

diplomatic efforts to achieve another delay in the program, if not its full cessation.

- The alternative to military action. This should examine not only the possibility of stopping Iran's nuclear program through non-military means, but also the possibility of living with a nuclear Iran by reducing the inherent dangers to a level that is bearable from an Israeli perspective.

In the face of the difficulties and risks involved with a military option, Israel should adopt the position that the bulk of the diplomatic and military burden for addressing the Iranian nuclear threat must lie squarely on the shoulders of the American administration and the international community, and not on Israel. There are two reasons for this: the Iranian threat is not just against Israel, but also against the vital interests of the United States and its allies; and the United States is most likely better prepared for military action against Iran and for dealing with the risks involved. The bottom line is that addressing a problem as great as the Iranian nuclear program must be the responsibility of a superpower supported by other powers, and not of one of the countries in the region.

The United States and the Military Option

The American government casts the Iranian challenge, led by the possibility that Iran might acquire nuclear weapons, as greater than the challenge presented by any other country in the world. As far as the American administration is concerned, Iran's possession of nuclear weapons will constitute a threat to the United States' most vital interests in the Middle East and elsewhere. It would threaten America's allies in the region (first and foremost Israel and the Gulf states); strengthen radical trends throughout the Middle East and the Muslim world; create dangers for United States assets in the region (including in the Persian Gulf, Iraq, and Afghanistan); and threaten regional stability. The new US secretary of defense, Robert Gates, said that he could not guarantee that Iran would not attack Israel with nuclear weapons. The United States is also concerned that a nuclear safety net will enable Iran to take conventional military action against the Gulf states or in certain circumstances against American forces in the Gulf, and to increase its involvement in terrorism. For these reasons, the American government sees itself as obligated to make every effort – including military action

– to stop Iran’s drive towards nuclear weapons. Military action would be meant to demonstrate to Iran that America is determined to stop the Iranian nuclear program.

Most of Israel’s considerations regarding recourse to a military option are applicable to the United States as well, although they differ from Israel’s in a number of ways. First, the United States has better operational capabilities for undertaking military action. It possesses better weapons and better means for attack; its bases in the Gulf and along Iran’s borders from which attacks can originate are much closer to the targets, and it could use cruise missiles to carry out a large number of regular attack sorties. This advantage would also enable the United States to carry out repeated strikes on installations over time if need be, and try to complement strikes with diplomatic efforts between waves of air strikes. From an operational perspective, the United States does not need to coordinate its actions with any other country. The US may also consider the option of ground operations by special forces against nuclear sites, either separately or in conjunction with an air attack. This option is much more difficult for Israel, given the range, multiplicity of targets, operational complexity, need for precise intelligence, and risks of failure, yet for the same reasons, it is doubtful whether the US will choose it.

It is also important to the US to obtain the broadest possible international backing for a military operation, particularly after embarking on a military campaign in Iraq with inadequate support. The US will not have to weather economic or diplomatic sanctions in response to a military action in Iran, but it is liable to face a wave of protest and criticism in the Muslim world and elsewhere following such a strike. If following the failure of diplomatic efforts the administration succeeds in obtaining support in advance from European governments for military action, it will find it easier to choose a military option. At this point, the chances of gaining such support appear rather poor. And ultimately, if the US administration decides that a military strike against nuclear sites in Iran is essential to defend its interests, it will take such action, regardless of the anticipated criticism.

The US administration would consider including Israel in any military initiative that it undertakes against Iran. In most aspects, a joint US-Israeli operation will not be of much help to the US. Israel can provide the US with covert intelligence before and after the operation,

but Israeli operational assistance during the action itself will contribute nothing to the US. Furthermore, operational cooperation with Israel will intensify criticism of the US in the Arab and Muslim world. For these reasons, it is more likely that the US will prefer not to include Israel in any action if it decides to attack Iran, and will probably also not notify Israel of such action until the last minute. At the same time, the administration will have to weigh whether it is preferable to give a go ahead for an independent Israeli military action, without US participation, should the US decide that there is no alternative to military measures against Iran. From the administration's perspective, the advantage of an Israeli action is that the US can claim that it has no connection with the attack, thereby deflecting criticism of itself. The disadvantage is that some of the Iranian response and international criticism will in any case be aimed at the US, which will find it difficult to dissociate itself from an Israeli operation. In addition, the chances that an Israeli action will succeed are smaller, given the operational difficulties. In any event, the US administration is using the threat of an Israeli action, at least tacitly, to pressure the Iranians and the Europeans to halt the Iranian nuclear program.

Iran is liable to take countermeasures against the US following an attack on its nuclear installations. Retaliatory measures could include terrorist attacks against American targets, both inside and outside of the Middle East; terrorist attacks and military measures against American allies; attacks employing conventional weapons against American forces in the Gulf region or in Iraq, including a cruise missile attack on US ships; and an intensified effort to disrupt American efforts in Iraq, where Iran has influence among Shiite organizations. Iran is also liable to respond to a US attack with an attempt to hit Israeli targets, even if Israel is not involved in the attack. At the same time, the US has greater deterrence vis-à-vis Iran than Israel does, including second strike capability following Iranian retaliation. For that reason, it can be assumed that if Iran decides to respond to an American attack, its response will be restrained and careful, in order to avoid dragging the US into an escalating response. In any case, an Iranian military response against American targets is expected to lead to an American counter-response, and to a chain of actions and counteractions.

In response to an American attack, Iran might try to disrupt the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf by blockading the Straits of Hormuz, or

by trying to attack tankers passing through the Gulf. At the same time, it is doubtful that Iran would persist in such efforts, both because its own oil revenues would be affected and because the US would be likely to apply counterforce in order to protect freedom of navigation in the Gulf. In any event, the US will have to take into account that a military confrontation with Iran, one of the world's most important oil producers, is liable to cause an upheaval in the energy market and a rise in oil prices, which in any case have been spiraling upward in recent years.

The American imbroglio in Iraq is likely to constitute an inhibiting factor in the administration's considerations, because public opinion in the US, and certainly in the world as a whole, will find it difficult to accept a military entanglement in yet another country. The lessons of the difficulties in Iraq are already leading certain American parties to question to what degree a nuclear Iran actually constitutes a significant threat to American interests, and whether a military attack will solve the problem. At the same time, only an operation limited in time and scope is contemplated, not a broad ground assault comprising a lengthy invasion and an extended presence of American forces in Iran. The administration can therefore assume that the internal response to its attack would not be overly harsh, particularly if it is able to justify its action as necessary. Alternatively, if a military operation in Iran is considered after the bulk of American forces have been withdrawn from Iraq, the administration may have a freer hand to take action in Iran, and may even opt to use such an action to prove that the Iraqi affair has not affected its deterrent ability.

The European position will play an important role in the American administration's considerations. Despite the concern of European governments over Iranian efforts to obtain nuclear weapons and the extended range missiles that can reach Europe, they will not participate in a military operation and will probably not support one, at least not actively, except in extreme circumstances – for example, if they are convinced that Iran is liable to use nuclear weapons. At the same time, if it appears that Iran is approaching nuclear weapons capacity while ignoring international pressure, support from European governments for heavier sanctions against Iran will grow, and tacit acceptance by some of a US attack against Iranian nuclear facilities is possible. The position of European governments on the Iranian issue has already

changed considerably since 2002, and British prime minister Tony Blair no longer rules out a military strike against Iran.

These attitudes mean that while an American attack against nuclear sites in Iran would encounter difficulties, both military and political, as a superpower, the US can handle such problems if it is convinced that military action is the only way to stop the Iranian nuclear program. It is clear that a superpower's ability to withstand punishment and cope with difficulties following a military operation is greater than that of Israel. Furthermore, if circumstances arise that can justify a military strike against Iran in public opinion in the US and other countries – for example, if it is clearly shown that Iran is indeed close to obtaining nuclear weapons, and withdraws from the Non-Proliferation Treaty – the US administration will find it easier to decide to attack nuclear facilities in Iran.

In theory, another military option exists: not drawing the line at an operation against nuclear sites in Iran, but carrying out a broad land-based assault aimed at overthrowing the Islamic regime in Tehran, as the United States did in Iraq and Afghanistan. Israel certainly does not have this option, even in theory; in practice, however, the US does not have it either. Iran's physical expanse, its terrain, and the size of its population and army make a military campaign to conquer the power centers in Iran far more complex and difficult than in Iraq and Afghanistan. After becoming entangled in Iraq, it is doubtful the US administration would embark on a similar operation in Iran. At the same time, if the administration decides on a military strike against nuclear sites in Iran, it cannot be ruled out that in addition to nuclear targets, it will hit other strategic sites. This option is also restricted to the US; it is difficult to believe that Israel would be willing or able to use it on any measurable scale.

Some are proposing that the US apply subversive measures to try to change the Islamic regime in Tehran and replace it with a moderate regime. The US administration has already decided to allocate additional funds to an attempt to change the Iranian regime through propaganda broadcasts and aid to the Iranian opposition. This is another option that is unavailable to Israel, but it is also impractical for the US and certainly cannot be relied on as a principal strategy. If the regime in Iran is replaced or changed at a later date, it will be the result of internal developments, not external intervention. The US has no real means of

changing the regime in a major country like Iran, other than through a full-scale military campaign. Nor is there a guarantee that regime change in Iran will end the effort to attain nuclear weapons, given the widespread support in Iran for the objective.

Finally, while Israel's stance should be that responsibility for handling the Iranian problem and spearheading the international campaign should lie first and foremost with the American superpower, Israel must not be suspected of urging the US to attack Iran. As it is, Israel has suffered a degree of damage because it was considered to be illegitimately encouraging the United States to execute a military attack in Iraq. It is best for Israel to avoid pouring oil on this fire.

Conclusions: Preventive Efforts

Iran has displayed impressive determination to continue its efforts to acquire nuclear weapons, as well as a marked ability to maneuver through the increasing international pressure to suspend its nuclear activity. Its approach has apparently been shaped by the assessment that it can still manage the pressure; the possibility of sanctions is far off; and the danger of a military attack is even more remote.

There are still viable – though by no means guaranteed – ways to attempt to obstruct Iran's drive toward nuclear weapons:

- The diplomatic option should focus on significant ongoing economic sanctions. The sanctions imposed on Iran by the Security Council in December 2006 are not painful enough, yet imposing sufficiently severe sanctions requires broad international agreement that does not yet exist. Even if sanctions are imposed, they can be violated or circumvented, and Iran is liable to demonstrate its determination to continue on the nuclear path notwithstanding a heavy price.
- A military option is possible but difficult and complex, particularly for Israel. It involves operational difficulties and risks, and is of questionable success. Israel will only reach a point of decision regarding military action in Iran if the diplomatic channels handling the issue are exhausted, if it becomes clear that the United States does not intend to take military action on its own, and with the realization of additional conditions that could endow the operation with a reasonable chance of success. The timetable for a possible military strike, whether American or Israeli, is a function of intelligence estimates as to how long until Iran obtains its first bomb. In actuality,

however, the timetable is shorter, i.e., until Iran will be able produce a sufficient quantity of fissile material to produce a bomb.

The real objective of military action may be postponing the completion of the Iranian nuclear program for a significant period of time. It is doubtful whether such action will cause a total halt in the program, unless the US attacks the Iranian nuclear targets again and again over a period of years, until the Iranian regime abandons its efforts to obtain nuclear weapons. Overall, the US is better equipped to carry out a military strike and cope with its results, primarily because of its proximity to targets in Iran and its ability to make repeated attacks against them. If the US opts to attack Iran, it is likely to decide against including Israel in the attack and may even fail to give Israel advance notice. It is important that Israel not be perceived as urging the US toward such an attack.

Iran has the ability to respond against both Israel and the US if its nuclear installations are attacked. This includes a limited military response; involvement in widespread terrorist attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets, and against American targets, mostly in Iraq and the Persian Gulf; encouraging organizations linked to Iran, especially Hizbollah, to act against Israel and the US; and economic measures. An Israeli attack, and possibly an American one as well, will inevitably open a longstanding account with Iran.



If Iran Gets the Bomb

What it Means for Israel

Since the early 1990s, Israeli leaders have taken the Iranian threat with much seriousness, due to the hostile attitude of the Iranian regime towards Israel, Iran's increasing involvement in terrorism against Israel, and above all, Iran's obvious advancing efforts to attain nuclear weapons. Many Israeli leaders regard the Iranian nuclear threat as the gravest strategic threat to Israel, particularly now that other threats have waned, given Syria's military and political weakness and the elimination of Iraq as a military power. Some leaders believe that Iran poses an existential threat to Israel in light of what appears to be an increasingly imminent scenario, whereby a fundamentalist Islamic regime in Tehran that calls explicitly for the annihilation of Israel boasts nuclear weapons capability; such capability is liable to lead the regime to attempt to translate its attitude towards Israel into actions.

Clearly how the threat is handled is determined in part by a perception of its gravity. An evaluation that the threat is existential and liable to materialize requires an effort to stop it by any means, including military. An evaluation that the threat is less serious is likely to suggest that it can be handled in more moderate ways, or even that it is possible to live with the threat.

The serious consequences for Israel of Iran's possession of nuclear weapons should not be taken lightly. Such an event would bring about a new situation, whereby for the first time since Israel's establishment a hostile country will have the ability to strike it a critical blow. This threat is particularly ominous in light of the uncertainty regarding Iran's strategic intentions and future nuclear policy. The Iranian regime's radical philosophy and the extent to which it is willing to take risks

are not sufficiently understood. There is currently no solid basis for an evaluation of the Iranian regime's future nuclear policy, as the regime denies any intention of acquiring nuclear weapons and therefore offers no clue as to its policy once it obtains such weapons. The absence of this data in itself contributes to the prevailing uncertainty concerning Iranian policy, and demands the utmost caution in evaluating Iran's intentions.

The statements by Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad about wiping Israel off the map are not qualitatively new and resemble those by other Iranian leaders. Their reiteration at a time when Iran is under pressure on the nuclear issue, however, suggests increasing extremism on the part of the Iranian leadership towards Israel, as well as diminished sensitivity towards international public opinion. Even if it is unlikely, the possibility that a fanatical group, whether within the regime or a faction emerging from a split in the leadership, will gain control of nuclear weapons and decide to use them against Israel cannot be categorically ruled out. Moreover, the Middle East is a volatile region that has witnessed much violence and military force. Ballistic missiles and chemical weapons have already been used on a large scale, including in wars between Muslim countries. The risk that nuclear weapons will be used in the Middle East is greater than in other regions and is greater than the risk between the superpowers during the Cold War. Rules of behavior and channels for dialogue capable of reducing the risk do not yet exist.

Despite the seriousness of the possible use of nuclear weapons by Iran, the principal question is whether Iran would actually use its nuclear capability in an attack on Israel. With no definitive answer to this question, any assessments are entirely speculative. Assuming, however, that Iran acts as a reasonable player that also weighs the price and risks of its actions – even if by Iranian standards, rather than by familiar Western standards – and is not guided solely by religious-ideological motives, several factors could reduce the risk that Iranian nuclear weapons will be used against Israel.

The first reason concerns Iran's motives. As far as can be judged, Iran's basic motives for striving to obtain nuclear weapons are defense and deterrence. Iran initially decided to develop nuclear weapons capability in the second half of the 1980s, apparently as a counterweight to Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction, especially because

of the severe blow that Iran suffered in its war with Iraq. The Iranians were primarily concerned about the fact that Iraq had chemical and biological weapons and missiles with a range covering Tehran and other Iranian cities. Iraq had already used chemical weapons and missiles against Iranian targets, and was on its way to obtaining nuclear weapons. Later, after Iraq was weakened in the Gulf War, the Iranian regime's nuclear ambitions were motivated by its increasing drive to deter the US from using its strategic capabilities against it. The Iranian regime also has an interest in deterring Israel from attacking the Iranian nuclear facilities. Apparently, however, the belief that Israel has nuclear weapons did not play an important role in Iran's decision to develop such weapons itself.

Meanwhile, there is no reason to assume that any change has taken place in the dominant role played by defense and deterrence in Iran's considerations. In contrast to Saddam Hussein's regime, the Iranian Islamic regime has so far shown no inclination for risky adventures. Yet if and when Iran obtains nuclear weapons, it cannot be ruled out that these considerations could change. Its inclination to weigh its policy carefully might wane, and aggressive impulses against Israel might become more influential. It can be posited, however, that like other countries that have obtained nuclear weapons, these weapons will be considered a last resort, to be used only in case of an extreme and immediate strategic danger. Iran apparently does not consider Israel a country that constitutes this degree of danger. Iran's wish to destroy Israel is not a supreme interest justifying use of nuclear weapons at any price in order to realize it.

The second factor is Israel's deterrence against Iran. Israel, which according to foreign reports possesses thermonuclear weapons and which is deemed by Iran as a strong regional power with a large stock of nuclear weapons, possesses deterrent capability against Iran. If the Iranian regime assumes that Israel has second strike nuclear capability, it is very doubtful whether Iran will indulge in a nuclear attack on Israel, given that in its judgment the price would be an Israeli nuclear strike against Iranian cities. Despite its extremism, it is hard to believe that the Iranian regime would be willing to sacrifice millions of Iranians in order to launch a nuclear strike against Israel. In theoretical terms, a nuclear attack on densely populated greater Tehran, home to 12 million people, would cause a massive number of casualties, destroy the

physical infrastructure for many years, severely harm the Iranian elite, and conceivably cause the overthrow of the Iranian regime. A nuclear attack on Israel would also be liable to kill thousands of Muslims living under Israeli rule and harm Islamic holy sites, especially Jerusalem. Israel's capability to intercept a nuclear missile with its Arrow anti-missile system is also likely to carry considerable weight in Iranian considerations, because the worst scenario for Iran would be to stage a nuclear attack against Israel and have it fail.

Assuming that Iran is sensitive to the price it would pay, its nuclear policy against Israel would be affected by the balance of strategic forces between it and Israel. This balance will remain in Israel's favor in the initial period after Iran attains nuclear capacity. Iran must assume, on the basis of foreign reports, that Israel has a much larger stock of nuclear weapons, and that it will take Iran years to redress the balance. Israel has a more diversified delivery system and an anti-missile system, which Iran does not have. It is therefore possible that Israel's deterrent capability will initially lead Iran, on the basis of its assessment of the balance of power, to strive to achieve a balance of nuclear terror and mutual nuclear deterrence with Israel, rather than necessarily launching a nuclear strike against Israel.

The third factor is American deterrence. Iran is fully aware of the balance of forces between it and the US: the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 Iraq War have made clear the size of the strategic and military gap between them. The last situation that Iran wants is a military conflict between it and the US. The strategic links between the US and Israel are also clear to Iran, which is aware of the US administration's commitment to the existence and security of Israel, including vis-à-vis the Iranian threat. Iran must therefore assume that a nuclear attack on its part against Israel would lead to a harsh American response against it, especially if the American administration made this clear in advance. Furthermore, in the event that the US would respond, using nuclear weapons against Israel would detract from what the Iranian regime currently regards as the main function of these weapons – maintaining deterrence against the US.

The fourth factor concerns the long term. Iran has been experiencing significant change over the past decade, stemming from widespread demand, particularly among the younger generation, for greater personal and political freedom, economic progress, and less corruption.

This change has evolved slowly and experienced ups and downs. The fortunes of those favoring change have fallen over the past three years, a setback reflected in the election of Ahmadinejad, a radical, as president of Iran, and the loss of a parliamentary majority in favor of reform. The demand for change is nevertheless genuine, and originates from below. There is therefore a basis for believing that at some (unknown) point, a more moderate regime will emerge in Iran that will be ready for a significant dialogue with the US, and possibly also with Israel. If this occurs, even if Iran possesses nuclear weapons, it will be less serious and threatening. At that point the US and Europe will have a significant opportunity to attempt to halt the Iranian nuclear program, and if Iran already has nuclear weapons, to try to persuade it to destroy them as part of a comprehensive deal.

Another aspect pertaining to the long term is whether a significant peace process develops between Israel and the Palestinians and/or Syria, leading to a peace agreement with them. If so, presumably relations between Israel and the other Arab countries would thaw once again, and Iran would find it difficult to remain aloof. Such a development may lead to dialogue between Israel and Iran, but even if this does not occur, it is hard to believe that Iran would attack Israel with nuclear weapons under these circumstances.

In terms of a hypothetical analysis regarding a possible future reality, what are the chances of a nuclear confrontation between Iran and Israel? In theory, there are several possible scenarios for such a confrontation:

- One of the parties initiates a deliberate nuclear attack against the other. One possibility is that Iran, in a surprise attack, will try to destroy Israel, or at least damage it severely, not necessarily in an attack directly related to current regional events. The likelihood of this seems limited; the likelihood that Israel will initiate a nuclear attack against Iran is essentially nonexistent.
- An escalation from a conventional confrontation to a nuclear one. The chances of such escalation are not great, because there is little likelihood of an extensive conventional conflict between Iran and Israel, due to the distance between them. Even if Israel stages a limited conventional attack against Iran, for example, following a clear Iranian involvement in an exceptionally severe terrorist attack against Israel, the risk of escalation to a nuclear confrontation is not great.

- A preemptive nuclear strike, due to a concrete concern by one of the parties that the other will stage a nuclear attack or due to miscalculation. This is a significant risk, as long as the parties have not established rules of behavior in a nuclear environment.
- A nuclear attack by Iran against Israel in response to an attack on Iran or its allies. Two possibilities should be noted in this connection. The first is an Iranian nuclear attack against Israel in response to an American or Israeli attack against Iran. The decisive factor in this scenario is the severity of the attack against Iran. It is likely that a conventional attack against targets in Iran when the latter already possesses nuclear weapons will not lead to an Iranian nuclear response against Israel – if Iran retains second strike capacity – even if this possibility cannot be ruled out altogether. On the other hand, in scenarios of an American nuclear attack against Iran, a very large number of Iranian casualties, or an assessment by the Iranian regime that a nuclear response against Israel is essential to its survival, an Iranian nuclear attack against Israel will be more likely, provided of course that Iran retains second strike capability. The second possibility is an all-out Israeli attack against Syria or Hizbollah, which forces Iran to consider coming to its assistance. It is unlikely that Iran would use nuclear weapons to help its allies, although Iran is liable in these circumstances to threaten Israel with a nuclear attack, explicitly or implicitly, for purposes of deterrence.

This last scenario raises another possibility: that Iran will provide Syria, its closest ally, with a nuclear umbrella against Israel, i.e., threaten to attack Israel with nuclear weapons in a conflict between Israel and Syria. This possibility can occur in two ways: if Iran promises Syria in advance, secretly or openly, to provide it with an explicit nuclear umbrella against an Israeli attack (a precondition here is an Iranian declaration that it possesses nuclear weapons); or in an Iranian defense agreement with Syria that does not explicitly mention the use of nuclear weapons.

In both of these cases, particularly the first, Iran will create a dimension of deterrence against Israel, which will have to include a new element of uncertainty in its policy considerations vis-à-vis Syria with respect to an Iranian response. This deterrent consideration will be of secondary significance in a scenario of a limited military confrontation between Israel and Syria, but it is liable to be more significant in a

scenario of a general war between them, particularly if Syria meets with military misfortune. An Iranian military umbrella may also lead Syria to conclude that its freedom of action against Israel will be greater when it has the benefit of an Iranian nuclear safety net.

Even if over time Iran does not try to use nuclear weapons against Israel or other countries, an Iranian nuclear capacity has other alarming significance. First of all, an Iran in possession of nuclear weapons is liable to behave more aggressively towards various countries, including Israel, as a result of the confidence that a nuclear umbrella bestows. While obtaining nuclear weapons may relieve some of Iran's anxiety and force it to behave more cautiously in order to avoid escalation that might lead to a nuclear confrontation, still, Iran's ambitions in the region and the Muslim world and its hostile attitude towards Israel are liable to encourage excessive aggression. This aggression might be manifested in increased Iranian involvement in terrorism and subversion against other countries, including boosting Hizbollah activity against Israel, and reflected in Iran's policy towards its neighbors – in possible conflicts with Persian Gulf countries or Iraq and Afghanistan, and also in non-military issues, such as oil sources and prices. In this context, Iran is liable to increase its pressure on Persian Gulf countries and demand their cooperation in achieving certain ends, including a reduced presence of American forces in the Gulf.

Second, the presence of nuclear weapons in Iran may spur other countries in the region to attempt to develop their own nuclear weapons, thereby accelerating the nuclear arms race in the region. Iran itself may distribute nuclear technology and materials to some countries, particularly those it has an interest in strengthening. Other countries in the region – such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Algeria – may want to obtain nuclear weapons, or at least develop chemical and biological weapons, either in competition for hegemony in the region, or because of concern about the Iranian threat. At the same time, it is likely that at least some will not do so because unlike Israel, they do not regard the presence of nuclear weapons in Iran as a serious threat. Algeria and Syria are not threatened; nuclear weapons in Iran's hands will have no real effect on them. Iraq, the country most threatened by Iran, cannot return to the nuclear track in the next few years, though it may well attempt to do so in the long term. Iran does not directly threaten Turkey, which has NATO's backing. Official

Turkish sources therefore deny any possibility that their country will try to develop nuclear weapons if Iran obtains them.

In effect, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are the main countries likely to have an important reason for joining the nuclear arms race. Saudi Arabia may be particularly sensitive to Iranian aggression, owing to concern about the stability of its regime and the future of its oil reserves. At present, Saudi Arabia lacks a suitable technological infrastructure for nuclear weapons and it is likely to prefer relying on American backing. However, Saudi Arabia may exploit its financial capabilities to try to obtain nuclear capability at a later stage. Iran does not directly threaten Egypt, but as a leading country in the region, Egypt will find it difficult to stand aloof while Iran and Israel are on the nuclear track. Syria too might embrace a nuclear route as the preferred method of deterrence against Israel; it might improve its military capabilities and regional posture, and thereby aim for Iranian nuclear assistance. In short, Iranian nuclear capability will not necessarily constitute a direct motive for most affected countries in the region to enter the nuclear race, and they will face heavy international pressure to refrain from doing so. If, however, an Arab country such as Egypt decides to do so, it is liable to prompt other countries to follow the same route. The fact that several Arab governments announced in the fall of 2006 that they intend to develop a nuclear capability – albeit for peaceful needs – might be a first indication of such a scenario.

Third, a nuclear capacity will reinforce Iran's status as the backbone of radical elements worldwide, particularly in the Muslim world. Obtaining nuclear weapons is liable to strengthen the radical tendency within Iran, at least in the short term, and increase the regime's prestige. It may impel moderate regimes in the region to adapt their policy to Iran, as they will be more exposed to Iranian pressure, even if some of them, mostly those in the Gulf, try to increase their reliance on the US as a counterweight to the Iranian threat. Iran's stature is liable to increase; indeed, since the weakening and fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, there is no regional player that can balance and contain Iran in the Gulf region. And, the Iranian regime may wave the banner of its nuclear weapons to bolster its struggle against the US over influence and control in the Gulf. The strengthening of radical elements is liable to harm the peaceful relationships that Israel is trying to build with the Arab and Muslim world.

Some see another risk in Iran's possession of nuclear weapons, namely, that Iran will transfer these weapons to terrorist organizations, principally Hizbollah. In this case, these organizations are liable to attempt to blackmail the US, Israel, or other countries into accepting their demands. Possession of nuclear weapons will make them more daring in carrying out terrorist attacks; in a particularly extreme case, they may even use nuclear weapons. Despite the gravity of this possibility, however, it is unlikely. In addition to the problems and limitations for terrorist organizations in possessing and using nuclear weapons, it is hard to see what important interest Iran would have in transferring nuclear weapons to these organizations. Such a transfer will not strengthen Iran's deterrence or its effort to achieve regional hegemony. It will reinforce Iran's image as an irresponsible country with no restraint on its involvement in terrorism, because the source of the weapons will be clear to everyone. It will also give Hizbollah the ability to blackmail Iran. If Iran's goal is to deter Israel from attacking Hizbollah, it is more likely to prefer doing this itself, instead of transferring nuclear weapons to the organization for purposes of deterrence. Above all, giving nuclear weapons to terrorist organizations is liable to put sensitive dangerous weapons beyond Iran's control, while putting them into the hands of organizations with a limited sense of responsibility and great destructive capability. It can be assumed that Syria will strongly oppose giving nuclear weapons to an organization in its field of influence, which could seriously embroil Syria with Israel. From Syria's perspective, Israel is liable to respond to a nuclear threat in Hizbollah's hands with a harsh attack against Syria or Lebanon.

Iran's possession of nuclear weapons, especially if it conducts a nuclear test, may cause the Israeli public to panic concerning a possible Iranian nuclear attack. Such an atmosphere is accelerated by threatening statements by Iranian leaders, and aggravated by the media and other factors. If such an atmosphere develops, it could increase emigration from Israel, reduce immigration to the country, and cut economic investments in Israel, at least for some time.

These factors mean that possession of nuclear weapons by Iran will give it an unprecedented ability to harm Israel. Such weapons can also complicate several of Israel's security problems and hinder Israel's ability to deal with them. Israel would have to endure a greater level of uncertainty. Yet while these factors face the test of time, there are

nevertheless several reasons why Iran will not try to attack Israel with nuclear weapons. If this assumption proves correct, it should affect the way Israel deals with the Iranian nuclear threat. In other words, if Iran's possession of nuclear weapons will aggravate Israel's security problems but not lead to a nuclear attack, alternative ways of dealing with the threat, other than military action, can be considered.

The Region and Beyond

The fighting in Lebanon in the summer of 2006, and the direct link between Iran and Hizbollah, revives the question of the effect of a nuclear Iran on the Lebanese arena and Hizbollah's mode of action. Iran founded Hizbollah and built it, militarily and politically, into the most successful export of the Islamic Revolution and the Shiite vanguard of the Iranian regime. But there is additional significance for Iran to Hizbollah's military power. As part of its deterrence against Israel, Iran contributed heavily to Hizbollah's large stockpile of rockets – particularly long range rockets – and its array of fortifications in southern Lebanon. The Iranian regime thus tried to signal Israel that if Israel were to attack Iran, especially its nuclear sites, these rockets would be launched against Israel as part of the Iranian response.

It is still too early to determine how the conflict in Lebanon will affect Iran's standing and deterrent capability against Israel. If Hizbollah is militarily and politically damaged to some degree as a result of the conflict, Iran is also liable to be hurt, in two senses. The first and more important is a reduced ability on Iran's part to use Hizbollah as an instrument to deter Israel. Hizbollah will find it difficult to rebuild its fortifications on the border with Israel, and may also have trouble reassembling its stockpile of long range rockets. Israel has proved that it is not deterred from the challenge, even at the price of thousands of rockets fired at Israeli territory and the human and material damage they incur. In addition, the conflict in Lebanon has drawn international and Arab attention to the threat that Hizbollah poses to regional stability when Iran (and Syria) stand behind it.

It is worthwhile theorizing how Israel, Hizbollah, and the Iranian regime would have acted had the conflict in Lebanon broken out after Iran already possessed nuclear weapons. In the summer of 2006, Iran refrained from intervening on Hizbollah's behalf beyond an effort to

ship arms. Iran also did not threaten to respond against Israel while Hizbollah remained under attack, probably due to Iran's inability to intervene and stop the Israeli offensive against the organization, and perhaps also out of concern about an Israeli response against Iran. When Iran obtains nuclear weapons, however, in the event of a general conflict between Israel and Hizbollah, an Iranian threat to intervene on Hizbollah's behalf must be taken into account, possibly accompanied by an implicit threat to use nuclear weapons, with the aim of deterring Israel from attacking Hizbollah. It is hard to imagine that Iran will resort to nuclear weapons to assist Hizbollah in its fighting against Israel, but the very fact that Iran has nuclear weapons, and certainly if it threatens explicitly or implicitly to use them in a major conflict between Israel and Hizbollah, may well restrict Israel's freedom of action against the organization.

If Iran obtains nuclear weapons, it may incite Hizbollah to resort to what remains of its rocket arsenal in an attack against Israel. Similarly, Hizbollah itself may exhibit greater aggressiveness against Israel without any Iranian encouragement, calculating that its own military freedom of action has grown once its patron has greater deterrence against Israel. At the same time, it is likely that Hizbollah may act more aggressively in special circumstances and isolated cases, and not necessarily in a reversal of policy towards Israel, because the organization is also driven by other exigencies, beyond the extent of its Iranian backing. One such constraint is the possibility of an Israeli attack against Syria, already in a weak position, should Hizbollah cross red lines in its behavior towards Israel. Another is Hizbollah's place in the Lebanese power structure. It can be assumed that the Israeli attack against Hizbollah targets in the summer of 2006, and the effect of the campaign on the latter's capabilities and standing, will constitute a restraining factor in Hizbollah's considerations.

The presence of nuclear weapons in Iran's hands will also pose a threat to other countries in the region, especially Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the small Persian Gulf countries, and to a lesser degree, Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. Iran is very unlikely to use nuclear weapons against these countries, unless it becomes involved in a general war against Iraq in the distant future, along the lines of the war during the 1980s. The threat, however, could lead to Iranian aggression against these countries and a strengthening of the radical elements in the region. This

could undermine the stability of these countries' regimes and escalate the nuclear arms race in the region. Since no existential threat against these countries is involved and because they lack the ability to conduct military operations against Iran, they should not be expected to act to stop Iran in its drive toward nuclear weapons, their heightened concern notwithstanding.

European governments are anxious about the possibility of Iran obtaining a nuclear capacity. They are not concerned that the arms may be used against them, although Iran's efforts to increase the range of the Shehab missiles to cover parts of Europe, or develop or purchase missiles with a range of 3,000-4,000 kilometers that cover all of Europe does arouse their concern that Iran will try to use nuclear extortion against them as a bargaining chip. They do not have an alternative explanation for the increase in the missile range. Yet for the European governments, the fact that nuclear arms in Iranian hands will upset the stability of the Middle East is of no less importance. The specific threat to Israel, which might potentially lead to regional deterioration, joins the possibility of a more aggressive Iran and a more radical Middle East. A nuclear Iran may also spur an acceleration in the regional arms race, with Turkey being one of the prime potential participants. Most of Turkey is already within the range of Shehab-3 missiles. This would further heighten tensions in NATO, and the arms control regime would suffer considerably.

Thus, should Iran achieve a nuclear capacity, it is likely that European countries will agree to impose sanctions on Iran for a limited period, partly because they did not manage to stop its nuclear arms endeavors and their credibility will be put to the test. However, ultimately, they will probably accept a nuclear-enabled Iran, while trying to limit the dangers of the situation as far as possible.

Finally, Iran's achievement of a nuclear capacity through bypassing control of the IAEA and defying international efforts will comprise a severe blow to the arms control regime, the IAEA, and the NPT. The severity of the blow, aggravated by the nuclear test conducted by North Korea in October 2006, will depend on Iran's conduct and international response to its behavior: will Iran attain the weapons following withdrawal from the NPT, or will it violate its obligations? Will it carry out nuclear tests, or will it opt for a nuclear ambiguity? Will the international community impose heavy sanctions on Iran

over time, or will it suffice with lighter sanctions that will be lifted after a period of time, as in the case of India and Pakistan? It is clear that Iran's move, particularly if it declares its possession of nuclear weapons and carries out a test, will have more serious implications for the arms control regime than the nuclear tests carried out by India and Pakistan in May 1998. As opposed to India and Pakistan, Iran signed and ratified the NPT. Iran bypassed the supervision controls imposed on it by the IAEA, and finally, Iran will achieve a nuclear capacity despite extensive international efforts to stop it. In any scenario, such a development would severely undermine the IAEA and its ability to implement supervision; hamper its future supervisory efforts; and question the basic assumptions of the NPT. This will be a more serious blow if various governments, which in the past abandoned their quest for a nuclear capacity, reexamine their positions in light of the Iranian affair.

Iran's Future Nuclear Policy

Today there is no basis for determining Iran's future nuclear policy after it obtains nuclear weapons. The questions that arise relate to the stage up to which Iran decides to develop a nuclear capability, the manner in which it decides to present its nuclear capacity, and, primarily, how it decides to use its nuclear weapons. It is highly likely that the Iranians themselves have yet to decide on their nuclear policy, and that they will define it only after they actually obtain the weapons or are close to doing so. In the absence of factual data, any assessment of Iranian nuclear policy depends on familiarity with the defense and foreign policies of the Iranian regime and an analysis of what are likely to be the ensuing considerations.

This assessment invites three principal scenarios regarding Iran on a nuclear route. The first is where Iran proceeds to the nuclear arms threshold. In such an eventuality Iran would decide not to produce operational nuclear arms at this time but would secretly start to develop the ability to produce such arms within a short period of time – in the space of months – and would stop there. Developing a nuclear option without completing the work would mostly be based on considerations of cost and consequence. Iran may appreciate that in such a scenario it could continue to claim it does not possess nuclear weapons and is not working towards obtaining them, and it would be hard to prove

that it has obtained the arms. Iran would hope that this approach will allow it to limit the penalty it would pay in the international arena for developing the weapons. To this end Iran may well even desist from leaving the NPT and will purport to be fulfilling its international commitments. On the other hand, Iran may believe that its proximity to achieving a nuclear capacity will give it the requisite degree of strategic deterrence if the American or Israeli threat to carry out military moves against is stepped up. This is coupled with the fact that it is openly developing long range missiles. For Iran, the drawback to this scenario is that this approach will not give it the domestic and regional prestige it seeks through achieving a nuclear capability. It will also not provide it with a reliable deterrent if faced with an immediate threat.

The second scenario is where Iran maintains a policy of nuclear ambiguity: Iran will not carry out nuclear tests, will not announce that it possesses nuclear arms, and will probably even deny they exist in Iran. However, the understanding in the West and Israel – at the level of certainty or high probability – will be that Iran does possess nuclear arms. Similar to the previous scenario, here too Iran will be able to try and claim it is not developing nuclear arms. While Iran in any case will be suspected of already having a nuclear capability, it will be in a more comfortable position for lack of evidence if it does not declare it has the arms. In contrast with the previous scenario, the nuclear arms in this scenario will be immediately available for use should the need arise, and in this case the credibility of its nuclear deterrent against the US and Israel will be greater, as they will assume Iran is already capable of employing nuclear arms. This policy offers two additional advantages for Iran: concealing the arms will help it to build a stockpile of nuclear weapons secretly; and a policy of ambiguity will not spark a nuclear arms race among other countries, which offers no benefits for Iran. In this scenario too, Iran will not gain the domestic and regional prestige it would hope to garner from possessing nuclear arms, and the credibility of its deterrence will be somewhat reduced. However, these advantages will be achieved gradually, as the belief that Iran already has a nuclear capability increases yet without Iran providing clear evidence of such.

The third scenario involves a policy of declared nuclear weapons, possibly using demonstrative overtness. Either Iran declares it possesses nuclear arms or delivers clear signs that this is the case. Or, in a move designed to bolster its credibility, Iran's declaration

is supported by nuclear testing – even though it is a signatory to the nuclear test ban treaty and, while it has not ratified it, it is committed to abstaining from such tests. For Iran, a declared nuclear policy offers two benefits. First, it gives its nuclear deterrence greater credibility. Even a declaration that it has nuclear arms, without carrying out a test, would probably be accepted as reliable; certainly carrying out a nuclear test would leave no doubt about Iran's nuclear capability. Secondly, a policy of a declared capability, as opposed to other policy options, and certainly if nuclear testing is performed, facilitates dialogue with other parties – for example, Europe – to try to circumscribe the risks of unintended escalation. On the other hand, an open nuclear policy would bring international pressure to bear on Iran and probably include economic sanctions and other measures. At the same time, a declaration by Iran that it has nuclear arms unaccompanied by testing could leave some room for doubt, until adequate intelligence is obtained, as Iran may declare it has the weapons ahead of time if it believes it needs an immediate deterrent to block imminent attack. Clearly, a declaration by Iran that it has nuclear weapons would oblige Israel and other countries to treat it as reliable until proven otherwise, even if there is cause for suspicion.

Which nuclear policy will Iran choose? Presumably Iran's decision will be shaped by two principal considerations. One is the extent of its willingness to pay the heavy price demanded of it by the international community, at least during the period around the time it obtains a nuclear capability. The weight of international pressure currently exerted on Iran, in advance of achieving a nuclear capability, will likely impact on its policy after it obtains nuclear weapons. The greater this pressure and the more practical significance it has, the more Iran is likely not to declare it possesses nuclear arms and not carry out nuclear testing. The second consideration is the extent to which Iran suspects an attack is in the offing, including on its nuclear sites. The greater this fear, the more likely Iran is to develop an interest in having nuclear weapons heralded in a declared nuclear policy, with a view to deterring the attacker.

Weighing these two considerations, it is more plausible that Iran will initially prefer a policy of nuclear ambiguity, unless circumstances force it to adopt an open policy to generate an immediate and credible deterrent out of fear that an attack may be launched against it. Ambiguity may alleviate international pressure, in the absence of any

clear proof that Iran has obtained nuclear arms. On the other hand, the belief that Iran possesses nuclear weapons, even without a relevant declaration or testing, may be sufficient to generate a relatively credible deterrent against an attack. Iran is aware of increasing international impatience regarding the nuclear issue, and it may very well try not to incur more wrath of international parties with a declared policy, particularly if a price tag is attached to such a policy. In this respect, Iran may learn from Israel's policy: although Israel has not declared it possesses nuclear arms and has not carried out any testing, there is a worldwide consensus that it has obtained nuclear arms. Opting for nuclear ambiguity will also provide Iran with a degree of flexibility: if Iran feels it has not earned an adequate deterrent it can always move to a policy of declaration. On the other hand, a policy of declaration, even if it is damaging to Iran, will be irreversible. For these reasons, India and Pakistan waited many years after they obtained a nuclear capability before carrying out declared nuclear testing.

Yet while the more logical scenario is that Iran at least initially will opt for nuclear ambiguity, it may eventually, after a period of time, opt for a declared nuclear policy, including nuclear testing. Here Iran may well learn from the experience of North Korea. If the sanctions imposed on North Korea in the wake of its nuclear test are relatively light and short term, Iran may be encouraged to adopt a similar course; the converse is also true. Similarly, Ahmadinejad's tendency to defy world opinion may encourage a declared nuclear policy.

In any case, one should assume that if Iran crosses the nuclear threshold, it will not make do with producing one or two nuclear bombs. Iran will look to build up a relatively large arsenal of nuclear weapons, including a range of delivery devices: ballistic missiles, attack planes, and cruise missiles. This assumption derives from Iran's expected interest in strengthening its deterrence towards its enemies, reducing the danger of attack on its nuclear facilities, and building a nuclear second strike capability if an attack is launched on its facilities. Several years will elapse between the first bomb and a full operational capability (comprising at least eight to ten bombs): the speed of Iranian nuclear production is unknown but it can be assumed that it will be able to produce four to five bombs within three years after producing the first bomb. Although the impact of a nuclear Iran will start to emerge as soon as it crosses the threshold and it has its first bomb, the effect will be

different and more limited than a full nuclear facility. Thus, when Iran has its first bomb or two it is safe to assume it will not look to attack just with them – even if it adopts an aggressive nuclear policy – but only if exposed to a particularly severe risk. An Iranian attack is liable to fail for technical reasons or because the delivery system is intercepted, and Iran would be unable to re-launch the attack; in any case, it will not have the ability to deliver a second nuclear strike in order to deter a nuclear attack on it.

Any policy Iran chooses will generate a significant degree of uncertainty for Israel, the US, and other countries in the region, at least in the initial period after Iran approaches nuclear capability. If Iran opts for a policy of proceeding to the nuclear threshold or for a policy of ambiguity, how will it be possible to know that Iran has achieved a nuclear capability? In such a case, if reliable and clear cut intelligence information is not obtained regarding Iran's capability – what will clearly be hard to achieve and may require a sustained period of endeavor – there also may be a need to rely on indications of its intentions and abilities, such as: if Iran withdraws from the NPT or the nuclear test ban treaty; or reliable evidence of its success in producing large quantities of enriched uranium, even in non-military quantities, or plutonium. However, because of the nature of such indications, relying on them could lead to an intelligence error that over- or underestimates the nature of the danger. Nevertheless, experience with India and Pakistan shows that the nuclear capability does come to light in time, even without express declarations.

Is Iran likely to launch a nuclear attack on Israel – or another country – as a surprise initiative, or as a response to military steps taken against it? While it is true that as soon as Iran launches missiles towards Israel it will be possible to locate and verify the launch, a deterrent ahead of a nuclear attack is a highly complex issue and difficult to evaluate. The number of parties involved in preparing a nuclear attack will be small, and the preparations will be conducted in secret, generally in closed subterranean facilities. As opposed to a conventional attack, preparations for a nuclear attack will provide few overt indications that allow for the buildup of a nuclear deterrent. Even if there are indications of an Iranian nuclear attack, for example, preparations in Iran for an Israeli response, these indications could be interpreted in other ways. It will be difficult to differentiate between information about missiles or

aircraft carrying conventional arms and information on aircraft carrying nuclear arms. The warning period for a nuclear attack will be short, when the missiles are already affixed to the launchers, and there is not enough past experience with nuclear attacks to help define and identify indications of a nuclear attack. One must assume that if the Iranian regime decides to attack Israel, despite knowledge of the Arrow anti-missile system, it may do so by launching a large number of nuclear missiles simultaneously, in the hope that at least one of them will hit its target.

Uncertainty surrounding Iran's nuclear policy will force Israel and possibly other countries to act with caution and take various countermeasures, at least as long as there is no accurate picture of Iran's policies. This uncertainty may also encourage Iran to act with caution, based on the assumption that it too has no interest in nuclear deterioration. On the other hand, such a situation of uncertainty may lead to miscalculation and erroneous steps by the relevant parties.

Conclusions: Implications of Iran's New Status

If Iran obtains nuclear weapons, this will pose a severe strategic threat to Israel. An alarming combination will be created, the first of its kind, of a radical regime that openly calls for the destruction of Israel and an ability to strike a critical blow. The very combination poses an existential threat to Israel.

- The effect of a nuclear-empowered Iran will emerge as soon as Iran has its first nuclear bomb, although the full significance of this development will become clear when it has a complete operational nuclear facility, of at least eight to ten bombs and a variety of delivery means, a process that will take several more years.
- At the same time, important limitations detract from the gravity of the threat. It is far more likely that Iran – if it acts like a reasonable player, even by Iranian standards, guided by consideration of the enormous damage and cost, and not solely by religious-ideological motives – will not use nuclear weapons against Israel. These limitations include the presumed purpose of nuclear weapons as conceived by Iran, Israeli deterrence, and American deterrence.
- The problem is that the degree of influence of these constraints is based on assumption and assessment. Until these assumptions are verified, Israel will have to treat the Iranian threat with maximum caution and seriousness.

Even if time shows that Iran will not use nuclear weapons against Israel, Iran's possession of nuclear weapons will lead to a strategic change in the Middle East: Israel's strategic environment will be less stable; Iran will generate a threat on a new scale to a number of countries, primarily Israel; and Iran may adopt a more aggressive policy in various areas, based on a heightened sense of confidence. As the backbone of the radical camp, it may encourage radical elements and exert pressure on moderate countries. It is liable to boost its support for terror organizations, chief among them Hizbollah, and it will increase the threat towards American interests in the arena. Syria may benefit by an Iranian nuclear umbrella and feel less restrained in aggression towards Israel; and additional countries, especially Egypt, Syria, and eventually Iraq may join the nuclear arms race.

An Iran endowed with nuclear weapons will generate a significant degree of uncertainty among various countries in the region, particularly Israel. This uncertainty will derive from the difficulty in evaluating Iran's future nuclear policy and the extent of its willingness to use nuclear arms, and from the possibility of miscalculation and unintentional deterioration until it becomes possible to define a common code of conduct in a nuclear environment. The uncertainty may generate tension and crises and, in extreme circumstances, even nuclear deterioration.

On the other hand, an atmosphere of suspicion may cause the relevant parties – including Iran – to rein themselves in, to act with caution, and desist from taking steps that may lead to nuclear deterioration, including situations of conventional confrontation. If Iran's nuclear approach is non-aggressive and deterrent- and defense-oriented, and it is possible to open channels of dialogue and shared codes of conduct, it may be possible to further limit these sources of tension for several years.



Responding to a Nuclear Iran

This chapter examines the steps available to Israel and other countries if and when Iran attains a military nuclear capability: how is the threat created by a nuclear Iran best managed? The responses to an Iran with nuclear weapons capability can be divided into two types. One type adopts steps designed toward rollback, in other words, to remove Iran's nuclear arms, assuming that is possible even after Iran achieves a nuclear capability. The second type, acknowledging that notwithstanding the various preemptive measures that were attempted Iran has obtained nuclear weaponry, includes measures that are designed to limit the dangers emanating from this situation. Israel is able to carry out some of the steps independently of other parties. Other measures are the domain of different countries, while for its part Israel has only a limited ability to influence them or participate in them.

Rollback

Once it attains nuclear weapons, Iran's disarmament will be more difficult than stopping weapons development. Here too, it will be necessary to approach the potential courses in two ways: through military action and through political efforts.

Whether carried out by Israel or the United States, military action against Iran and its nuclear sites after it obtains a nuclear capacity will be far more complicated than before Iran obtains nuclear arms, and in practice it will be nearly impossible. After Iran has nuclear weapons it will be able to disperse and conceal them at disparate, secret, and well protected storage sites. Recourse to military action in this situation will thus require accurate intelligence not only on the arms production infrastructure but also on the nuclear weapons storage sites and the

launch facilities. The Iraqi episode indicates that obtaining quality intelligence of this kind is in effect not possible. Furthermore, there is a very real chance that Iran would still possess critical nuclear sites and nuclear weapons that would not be damaged in an attack, due to the lack of quality intelligence information.

In addition, Iran's deterrence will increase after it achieves nuclear weapons. If a military option to destroy nuclear sites is considered even after Iran has nuclear weaponry and an operational nuclear capacity, Iran may respond to attack by using its nuclear weaponry, if it retains a second strike ability. The likelihood of Iran attacking the US appears small – even if there are American targets in the Middle East vulnerable to an Iranian nuclear attack, which in itself is questionable. The likelihood of a nuclear response by Iran against Israel in the case of an American attack or especially in the case of attack by Israel against Iranian nuclear sites appears greater. In any scenario, if the US makes it clear in advance that any Iranian nuclear retaliation against it or against its allies will incur a severe nuclear strike on Iran, this should reduce the danger of an Iranian nuclear response. However, any possibility – low or high – of an Iranian nuclear retaliatory response must be considered before any attack.

This reasoning leads to the conclusion that Iran's obtaining a nuclear capability will significantly limit the military option to remove Iran's nuclear facility, which in any case was problematic. Since the objective is far-reaching, i.e., to eliminate the Iranian nuclear stockpile in its entirety, extraordinary conditions will be needed to justify military action. In practice, a successful operation will be difficult, if not impossible. Even a more comprehensive military step, designed to topple the regime – whose chances of success before Iran obtains a nuclear capability are limited – will not be relevant after Iran has a nuclear deterrent.

Another way of removing Iran's nuclear capability is to take political and economic measures that will pressure as well as entice Iran to destroy its nuclear weapons and the production infrastructure. These measures would aim to reduce the internal and regional gains Iran will seek to achieve from developing a nuclear capacity, to weaken its motivation in maintaining such weapons, and to persuade it through the consequences involved that the price of maintaining such arms is too high. These measures comprise both incentives, in the form of security

guarantees and economic and technological rewards; and means to isolate it politically and to impose economic sanctions as part of the penalties.

In contrast with a military option, Israel does not have the ability to be involved in any substantive way with the political and economic measures taken against Iran; these are the domain of international parties. Israel can contribute to them indirectly through political contacts with various governments, by providing intelligence, and through lobbying efforts, but it lacks the ability to participate in tangible steps against Iran. The only significant contribution Israel can make relates to the idea of nuclear disarmament in the Middle East.

Providing Iran with international guarantees is designed to allay its concerns regarding the possibility of military attack against it and regarding attempts to unsettle its regime. There is logic to this step: as the concern over Iraq's non-conventional strength, and later over an American attack on it, constituted some of the main reasons for Iran to develop a military nuclear program, these measures could reduce its motivation to maintain nuclear weapons. These measures could include: an American commitment, with international backing, neither to attack Iran in any manner nor try to unsettle its regime; generous economic and technological aid to Iran, particularly to its energy sector, including a release of its frozen financial assets in the US; steps towards normalizing relations between Iran and America; revocation of the embargo on the supply of conventional weapons from Western countries to Iran, in practice imposed after the revolution; and recognition of Iran's position in the Persian Gulf and its role in a regional defense pact. In return for these steps Iran will be asked to destroy its nuclear weapons stockpile and its production infrastructure, as well as take additional steps relating to abstaining from involvement in terror, interference in the Arab-Israeli peace process, and subversive action in other countries.

The chances of rollback through political-economic carrots and sticks cannot be ruled out entirely. There are precedents, such as Argentina, Brazil, and Libya, whereby countries gave up their nuclear programs, at various stages of development, following a combination of pressures and incentives. South Africa surrendered its nuclear stockpile. However, some of the relevant offers were already made to Iran during 2005-2006 as part of an effort to persuade it to halt its nuclear program,

and to date it has not accepted them. The chance of its accepting them after it already has a nuclear capacity seems even smaller. Moreover, the importance of nuclear weapons for Iran's security and strategic position – as Iran sees it – is apparently greater than for the countries that chose to forego their nuclear ambitions. Nevertheless, such moves should not be dismissed outright and they may even provide some benefit, on two conditions: if there is an internal change at the top of the Iranian regime towards more moderate elements, or if these steps are backed by severe and considerable punitive measures taken with extensive international agreement.

The pressure exerted on Iran can include political isolation and economic sanctions. The political moves are likely to focus on interstate relations, with pressures ranging from reducing the level of representation of various countries in Iran to severing relations with it. Measures of this sort would be a severe blow to normalization of relations with Iran, would distance Iran from international frameworks in various areas, and impose an embargo on it. Such steps are not insignificant, as Iran is sensitive to its international standing and does not want to find itself politically isolated. This may also deter other countries from pursuing a nuclear path. Yet it is doubtful whether total agreement will be obtained for taking significant political measures against Iran in view of the stances of countries that attach importance to relations with Iran, such as Russia and China. Even if agreement is reached on the measures, it is hard to see them being sustained in the long term. With this in mind, political moves alone will probably not convince Iran to dismantle its nuclear weapons.

The chance of achieving international cooperation by imposing economic sanctions and thereby stopping Iran's nuclear program is greater before Iran obtains nuclear weapons, since stopping it en route is more feasible. After it obtains a nuclear capacity, it may be assumed there will be agreement on sanctions, as with India, Pakistan, and North Korea, but questions remain over the severity of the sanctions and their duration. The possibility of sustaining strict sanctions will lessen over time, the more determination Iran demonstrates in dealing with the sanctions and not surrendering its nuclear weapons, and in light of the importance of Iranian oil. In such a situation it may be assumed – as was the case with India and Pakistan – that various governments may prefer at some stage to accept Iran's nuclear capability, instead of persevering with the imposition of sanctions. The success or failure of

substantive sanctions against North Korea following its nuclear test of October 2006 will likely be an important precedent for Iran.

Finally, another approach that may be worthwhile considering in an effort toward rollback of Iran's nuclear program is through a weapons of mass destruction-free zone, within the framework of a regional defense regime. It is not a new idea, and has been raised intermittently since the 1980s by various countries, including Arab countries, principally Egypt. The main aim thus far has been to persuade Israel to agree to international supervision of its nuclear activity and subsequently dismantle its nuclear capability as part of a comprehensive peace agreement, whereby the other countries in the region would also agree not to develop weapons of mass destruction. To date, the idea has yet to be raised as part of negotiations for stopping Iran's nuclear program, although it is occasionally mentioned in this context, principally by Egypt, as a possible means of preventing Iran from achieving a military nuclear capability. Egypt is hereby seeking two objectives: disarming Israel of its nuclear capability and preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear arms. Thus, Egypt managed to raise the idea within the framework of a decision by the IAEA Board of Governors in early February 2006, which delegated handling of the Iranian nuclear issue to the Security Council.

Even if the idea of a nuclear weapons-free Middle East has not yet been raised as part of talks with Iran, it may be on a future agenda, either before Iran obtains nuclear weapons, if international parties are convinced that political pressure is not stopping Iran and the military option is too problematic, and therefore regional disarmament remains the only way; or after Iran obtains nuclear weapons, if international elements believe that the military option and sanctions will not persuade Iran to reverse its proliferation course. In both these scenarios the idea is that the only way to stop Iran from obtaining and maintaining nuclear weapons is through Israel's agreement to join a regional verification regime relating to weapons of mass destruction.

The matter has yet to be raised, and therefore Iran's position is unknown. Although in February 2006 the Iranian president asked that the Middle East and the entire world be free of nuclear weapons, he spoke in general terms, and referred to other nuclear-empowered countries – not Iran, which does not admit it intends to develop nuclear weapons. One cannot draw any conclusion from this with regard to Iran's stance on the matter. If the Iranian regime's ambition to achieve a nuclear capability

derives from a set of reasons – and it does not consider the possibility that Israel possesses a nuclear capability the most important one – there is no guarantee it will agree to such a deal. However, one can assume that if Iran is subjected to significant and sustained political-economic pressure, it may agree to a serious proposal on a nuclear weapons-free Middle East. In such a case Iran could present its decision to give up its nuclear program as a success, as this would involve a similar step by Israel. In addition, it is likely that Iran would not suffice with asking for supervision of Israel's nuclear activities but would demand Israel's nuclear disarmament as a condition for its agreement. Finally, Iran would probably consent out of tactical reasons, in order to transfer the weight of refusal to Israel, assuming Israel does not agree to the idea.

Thus if political or military means of stopping Iran's quest to obtain nuclear arms or of persuading it to disarm is not found, Israel may find itself faced with a proposal or demand to agree to the concept of a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction, with guarantees provided by the international community, as a practical way of preventing Iran from gaining a nuclear capability. Mention of this approach in the February 2006 decision of the IAEA and the package of incentives and penalties submitted to Iran in June 2006 may be the first sign of this eventuality, even if it does not yet have practical significance. However, as the Iranian nuclear program is designed to achieve other objectives and not necessarily to lead to the dismantling of Israel's nuclear capability, it is doubtful whether the idea of a WMD-free Middle East will gain much momentum, unless Iran decides to relinquish its nuclear program as a result of pressure brought to bear on it.

Should Israel subscribe to an initiative to establish a nuclear-free Middle East and pay for it with its own nuclear currency, as a means of getting Iran to disarm its nuclear capability? This is a complex issue, and lies outside the realm of a nuclear-empowered Iran. However, Israeli considerations will have to address the following questions: (a) What are the chances of having Iran dismantle its nuclear weapons by other means? (b) To what extent can the dangers be minimized, to make it possible to live with a nuclear-enabled Iran? (c) To what extent will Israel's strategic deterrence towards Arab countries and Iran be reduced if it agrees to forego its nuclear capabilities, particularly while there is no comprehensive peace between it and the Arab world and its stability is not ensured? (d) What kind of qualitative alternative security

assurances would Israel receive in return for foregoing its strategic abilities? (e) Under possible future conditions, what correlation will there be between non-conventional and conventional weapons? (f) How stable can one expect a nuclear-free regime in the Middle East to be over time in light of the ability – or the lack thereof – to generate an infrastructure of mutual trust between the regional players? In other words, can Iran be trusted to fulfill its commitments to dismantle its nuclear arms as part of regional disarmament, based on its conduct to date? Would it be possible to verify Iran's nuclear disarmament, particularly against the background of its deceiving and untrustworthy past?

Living with a Nuclear-Enabled Iran

Failure to prevent Iran from gaining a nuclear capability or to dismantle this capability will force Israel, the United States, and other countries to prepare for an unprecedented situation, in which a country led by a radical regime, with pan-Islamic and regional ambitions that calls for the annihilation of Israel and threatens other countries, is in possession of nuclear weapons. This preparation must be carried out before the situation is finalized, and a range of steps will be required to limit the risks to Israel, the moderate countries in the region, and regional Western interests. Such preliminary preparations imply acknowledgment of the inability to stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. On the other hand, some of these steps require prior preparation, and hence the need to plan the necessary measures without creating too much noise and without relenting from efforts to stop Iran from achieving a nuclear capability. The steps required must be designed to strengthen Israel's deterrent ability towards Iran, with backing from the United States and other countries, in order to convince Iran of the intolerable price it will pay if it resorts to nuclear weapons. At the same time, such measures will aim to limit the dangers arising from Iran achieving a nuclear capability, even if it does not actually employ the weapons. Some of the steps will naturally have to be taken by Israel, while some will be taken by other countries, principally the United States.

The measures should focus primarily on enhancing Israel's deterrent ability towards Iran. Here it is important to distinguish between deterrence against conventional weapons and deterrence against a nuclear attack. Israel currently has a degree of deterrence against Iran

that derives from Israel's ability to inflict punishment: Iran assumes that Israel is able to carry out a nuclear attack against Iran, though it would do so only in extreme circumstances. It is able to carry out a limited conventional attack, using planes or missiles, on Iranian targets; and it can try to persuade the US to punish Iran. On the other hand, Iran also has a limited deterrent capability towards Israel: Iran can employ Hizbollah, particularly with its rocket capability, against northern Israel, encourage Palestinian terror, carry out its own spectacular terrorist attacks, and try to launch Shehab missiles against Israel. This deterrence neutralizes some of the Israeli deterrence against Iranian terror, and as such, Israel never responded to Iran when the latter encouraged Hizbollah and Palestinian organizations against Israeli targets. Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons will likely limit Israel's deterrence somewhat against Iranian terror and conventional weaponry, and it is therefore important to strengthen this deterrence, not necessarily with a nuclear deterrent. Iran's assumption that Israel possesses nuclear weapons most likely is not a deterrent against using terrorism and conventional methods, since it assesses that Israel would only launch a nuclear attack against Iran under extreme circumstances.

To date, Israeli deterrence has existed against countries with conventional military capabilities; and against countries with chemical or biological weapons and the ability to launch missiles, such as Syria and Iraq. This deterrence failed to stop Saddam Hussein from launching missiles and Hizbollah from launching rockets into Israel. If Iran obtains nuclear weaponry, it will be important to strengthen Israeli deterrence against Iran's recourse to this capability. In concrete terms, putting together a deterrent capability against Iran will require several components: Israel would need considerable ability to punish Iran; the Iranian regime would have to understand fully that Israel has this ability, and be sensitive to the severity of the punishment that would be inflicted on it; Israel would convey a clear message to Iran that it is capable of punishing it, in a manner that leaves Iran in no doubt on the matter; and Israel's ability to damage Iran would have to be adequately safe from a surprise nuclear attack by Iran. Israel should consider other aspects of its deterrent capability, including: boosting the credibility of its deterrent towards Iran; obtaining security guarantees from the US and/or NATO; enhancing its defenses against missiles; and reexamining its policy of nuclear ambiguity.

Iran, like all countries in the region, apparently believes that Israel has nuclear weapons. Thus, should Iran consider a nuclear strike against Israel, it would be based on one of two assumptions: that Iran would be ready to risk a nuclear response, Israeli or American, against its cities, exploiting the advantage of its large size to destroy Israel, or a part of it, through nuclear attack. The likelihood of this happening appears low. Despite the radical stance of the Iranian regime, it is hard to assume that it would be willing to sacrifice the lives of millions of Iranians and destroy its country and possibly even itself in order to destroy Israel, an important objective but not essential to Iran's security. The alternative assumption is that the Iranian regime will estimate that a nuclear attack on Israel will succeed, will leave Israel without the ability to launch a second strike against Iran, and prompt the US to react in different ways against Iran, without launching a nuclear attack against it.

As such, in a theoretical analysis, any enhancing in the future of Israel's deterrent ability against the Iranian regime's launching a nuclear attack must convey first of all that even if Israel is subjected to a nuclear attack it would still be able to launch a second strike against Iran that would take a heavy toll on Iran, and Israel would be steadfastly determined to respond to a nuclear attack with its own nuclear arms. A second strike capability, a weapon system that would survive a nuclear attack, is considered the most efficient deterrent between nuclear countries. According to foreign reports, Israel is fully aware of the need to maintain a second strike ability and response capability. Israel is creating this capability among other measures by increasing and varying its delivery devices, and, according to foreign reports, by preparing to use submarines as a marine base for a strategic response force that will provide additional security for the use of land-based planes and missiles. Israel has a few years until Iran could obtain a full nuclear array, and in theory it should use this period to develop its response capability. It is likely that Iran assumes that Israel possesses a second strike capability, following the large number of reports about Israel's nuclear arsenal. To remove all doubts, however, Israel must be sure that Iran understands the viability of its response capability. One should also assume that the Iranian regime knows that if Israel is subjected to a nuclear attack, Israel will fight for its life and thus will not balk at launching the strongest possible attack against Iran.

Iran must understand that the United States is likely to react strongly

if it attacks Israel with nuclear weapons. At the same time, there is a problem with extended deterrence, i.e., deterrence against aggression directed at one of the United States' allies, rather than the US itself. In a situation of this sort, it is questionable whether the US would launch a nuclear response against Iran, which might prompt a nuclear counter-response from Iran, should it retain its second strike ability against the United States itself. In turn, Israel may question how much it can rely on the US, while Iran might try to deter the US against a nuclear attack with the threat of its nuclear counter-response. Iran is aware of the basic US commitment to the existence and security of Israel. Thus, it is important that the US make clear to Iran from the outset that it will not hesitate to react against it with its full strategic power, if it attacks Israel with nuclear arms.

President Bush recently declared that the US will protect Israel against the Iranian threat, including with military means, if the need arises. This was augmented by reports that the US would provide Israel with a “defense umbrella” against an Iranian nuclear attack. This commitment could be enhanced in two additional ways. There could be a prior agreement with the US administration that if and when Iran obtains nuclear weapons, the administration will declare that any nuclear attack against Israel would be considered an attack on the US, and this would prompt an American nuclear attack against Iran. In this respect, America’s strategic ability would act as a sort of “third strike capability” against Iran. Second is the possibility of forming a defense pact with the United States, and/or joining NATO, on some basis or other, both of which are complex issues and extend beyond the context of the Iranian nuclear threat. Here, certain issues should be considered. The timing of such moves is important, if they are taken at all. They should not be taken too early, so as not to waste part of their effect. The right time to take them may be when a crisis on the Iranian issue arises. Meanwhile, Israel must forestall any impression in Iran that Israel lacks an adequate deterrent of its own and is dependent on American deterrence. Furthermore, strategic reliance on the US or NATO may incur a cost – for example, demanding that Israel subscribe to the idea of a nuclear weapons-free Middle East – such that it is important to assess whether the same benefit can be achieved without the formal agreement. Of course, even if Israel is interested in such an alliance, there is no guarantee that the other party – the US or NATO – will adopt the proposal.

Finally, Iran must understand fully that a nuclear attack on Israel might fail, a fact best conveyed by the anti-missile defense system, first and foremost the Arrow system, and therefore it is important to improve the system. If Iran is persuaded that there is a reasonable possibility that the Arrow will intercept Iranian missiles, it may abandon the idea of a nuclear attack. At the same time, the Arrow system can improve the second strike capability.

Deterrent considerations in a nuclear context are connected to the relative sizes of Israel and Iran. Former Iranian president Rafsanjani referred to this matter in an extraordinary remark at the end of 2001 when he claimed that “even a single nuclear bomb on Israel would destroy everything, while such a bomb would only cause damage to the Muslim world.” This may reflect something of Iranian thinking, namely, that in a case of reciprocal nuclear threat between Iran and Israel, Iran would have a strategic advantage, due to Israel’s greater vulnerability to a nuclear strike because of its smaller population and geographic size. In this respect, Iran does have an edge over Israel. However, Iran’s leaders will have to consider if they are willing to sacrifice millions of Iranians and suffer enormous damage in order to launch a strike on Israel, before considering the question of Iran’s rehabilitation compared with rehabilitating Israel.

As part of the efforts to enhance its deterrence Israel will need to reconsider its policy of nuclear ambiguity. The need to convince the Iranians that Israel has a credible second strike capability may require exposing details of Israel’s capabilities and their chances of surviving a nuclear attack. Moreover, if Iran adopts a policy of declared nuclear weapons and especially if it carries out nuclear testing, Israel may see the need to respond with a similar move, to preclude any doubts by the Iranians of its capabilities and lessen the psychological impact of Iran's moves. At the same time, Iran already believes that Israel has a range of nuclear capabilities, and it is likely to estimate that Israel has a second strike capability. In this case, foregoing nuclear ambiguity will not add to the credibility of Israeli deterrence. Moreover, exposing Israel’s capability is liable to encourage other countries in the region, principally Egypt, to join the nuclear arms race if they still hesitated to do so after Iran obtains a nuclear capability. Revealing Israel’s capability may attract international censure, including from the United States, which will moderate criticism and pressure on Iran to an extent and will place both countries on a similar standing.

The Israeli decision will have to balance an assessment of the need to convince Iran of Israel's response ability and an assessment of the risk that Israel's surrender of the ambiguity policy will cause Egypt and other countries to try to obtain nuclear weapons. Thus, maintaining nuclear ambiguity appears the preferred option. This would be subject to change only in the event that ambiguity impairs Israel's deterrence; as yet, such a risk is not very high.

At the same time, the absence of dialogue between Israel and Iran may impact on the ambiguity policy. The Iranian assessment that Israel possesses nuclear weapons and even a second strike capability may not be sufficient to provide a credible deterrent. Iran may not understand Israel's red lines and the situations in which Israel might react with its nuclear weaponry. Therefore, if the United States makes it clear that it is committed to responding to an Iranian nuclear attack on Israel by employing its own nuclear weapons, Israel will not have to adopt an open nuclear policy, and instead the US can define the red lines. However, if the American administration does not provide adequate clarification in this regard and if no lines of communication open up between Iran and Israel, it is possible that with previous coordination with the United States, the consideration to adopt an open policy may come to the fore, in order to enable crisis management before there is undue escalation.⁷ On the other hand, if channels of dialogue open up between Iran and Israel on the nuclear issue, the content of the dialogue may lead Israel to forego its policy of ambiguity.

Deterrence vis-à-vis Iran connotes additional dimensions. If Iran obtains nuclear weapons, this will force Israel to try to generate a stable deterrence balance against Iran that will prevent unintentional nuclear deterioration, as constructed between the superpowers during the Cold War. The problem is that between Iran and Israel no accepted system of rules of conduct in a nuclear environment exists, and without communication and dialogue between the parties it will not be possible to arrive at an understanding on such a system. A stable deterrence balance must be generated on the assumption that the other side acts on a logical basis, and on a good understanding of the other side's decision-making process. Lack of familiarity with the Iranian regime's system of considerations and its leaders' method of reaching radical decisions,

7. See Reuven Pedatzur, "The Iranian Threat: Is it so Bad?" *Nativ* 2, no. 109 (March 2006).

and the lack of communication between the regime and Israel and to a great extent with the United States too, will make Iran an unstable partner in the deterrence balance.

The rhetoric sounded by President Ahmadinejad with regard to the annihilation of Israel and his denial of the Holocaust highlights the problem. Ahmadinejad represents a group of politicians who rose to power through the ranks of the Revolutionary Guards: nationalist radicals who want to return to core values of the revolution, and who endorse confrontation with the United States and the West and hatred towards Israel. In Israeli or Western terms, his statements, riddled with messianic inflections, are irrational, and he is viewed as a dangerous leader who must be stopped. He causes Iran political and public relations damage, and justifies Israel's concerns over his country's nuclear ambitions. Probably due to reasons connected to his domestic standing, however, he thinks otherwise and does not shirk from airing his views, nor does he exhibit any sensitivity to the condemnation aimed at him. Leaders of his type at the helm of the Iranian regime are liable to take unforeseen, reckless steps that defy accepted logic, and such conduct will also hamper the cultivation of stable deterrent relations with a nuclear-enabled Iran. In these conditions Israel will have to take into account behavior that in Western terms is irresponsible and irrational and the possibility of mistakes by Iran on the nuclear issue.

The problem is mutual. Not only is it hard for Israel to understand Iran; Iran also has a hard time understanding Israel. Since the revolution, the Iranian leadership generally followed a cautious policy and avoided unnecessary risks in general and with Israel in particular. It displayed careful calculation in encouraging Hizbollah to act against Israel, and up to July 2006 generally avoided crossing red lines, such as massive use of the rocket array that it helped build for Hizbollah in Lebanon, which might evoke a large-scale Israeli response against the organization and/or Syria. However, it is doubtful whether the Iranian regime sufficiently understands Israel's considerations, intentions, and red lines, and an error can easily contribute to deterioration in the situation. If the Iranian regime was aware of or was a party to Hizbollah's decision to kidnap IDF soldiers, which led to the escalation in July 2006, this indicates its lack of understanding of Israel's system of considerations.

In the nuclear context, where neither Israel nor Iran knows how the other side plans to act, each is liable to take extreme action. This

uncertainty may increase the dangers of miscalculation, overreaction, escalation of crises, and difficulty to harness the escalation in time. Because of this, Israel needs to strive to create lines of communication and dialogue – even indirect channels – with Iran. This is not impossible, despite the current estrangement between them: Iran too may have a major interest in preventing miscalculation by Israel and the United States that might lead to unwanted deterioration and damage inflicted on Iran. Lines of communication can be generated with the help of European and other countries, and through dialogue that occasionally emerges at working levels between Iran and the United States.

Theoretically, a future dialogue of this nature can incorporate clarifications of each side's red lines that, if overstepped, could lead to a nuclear response, and also include confidence building measures designed to limit the dangers of misunderstanding. For example, following the nuclear testing that India and Pakistan carried out in 1998, Pakistan defined the scenarios in which it would use its nuclear weapons: if India occupied a large part of its territory, destroyed a considerable part of its army, attempted to strangle its economy, or carried out extensive subversive activities. At the same time, India and Pakistan declared they would not be the first to launch a nuclear attack, and would not attack the nuclear facilities of the other side. They also reached agreement over confidence building measures to prevent nuclear deterioration, including: consulting on their nuclear strategy, and advance notification of events that might give an impression of a nuclear attack and of planned missile testing.

Consolidating Israel's deterrence towards Iran must be augmented by enhancing the Americans' deterrence. The United States currently has a considerable deterrent capability towards Iran, deriving from its superpower status, its conventional and non-conventional abilities, and its proven willingness to use these abilities against countries that appear to cross the red lines. Iran fully understands the United States' strategic abilities and the balance of power between them. American capabilities deter Iran from launching a direct conventional attack against American targets in the Middle East, and would no doubt similarly deter Iran from a nuclear attack on the United States. Yet there are limits to the US's ability to deter Iran from engaging in terrorism against it or in challenging its allies and Iraq. Also not clear is the degree of American deterrence against Iran's launching a nuclear attack on American

allies. Nevertheless, if and when Iran obtains nuclear arms, there will be grounds to upgrade the American deterrent capability towards a nuclear-enabled Iran. As it is hard to foresee Iran launching a nuclear attack on the United States, unless in very extreme circumstances, the US must bolster its deterrent capability in several additional areas.

First and foremost, it must enhance its deterrent capability against Iranian use or even a threat of nuclear weapons against America's allies, principally Israel. Most importantly, Iran should have no doubt whatsoever that the United States will adhere to its commitment to protect the security of its allies and will be determined to respond with all the means at its disposal, including nuclear weapons, to an Iranian nuclear attack on its allies. Such backing for its allies, in the form of a clear and unambiguous presidential statement and, if necessary, through a defense agreement, is important to avoid Iranian miscalculation of US determination to respond to a nuclear attack with all its power, to bolster its allies' confidence, and to prevent its weaker allies from succumbing to Iranian dictates.

The US must take measures to strengthen the deterrence against conventional aggression by Iran, backed by its nuclear capability. Such measures can be based on the United States' conventional abilities in the Middle East and include defense treaties, building a coalition and defining frameworks for joint consultation and cooperation at times of crisis, enhancing its allies' active and passive defense, and improving the United States' response and intervention abilities during a crisis centered around Iran.

Steps should be taken to deter Iran from supplying terror organizations with nuclear arms, despite the small likelihood of this step. However, because of the severity involved there is reason to devote intelligence efforts to identifying such a threat and cautioning Iran in no uncertain terms against such a move, and acting against it and against terror organizations if such a threat is carried out. It is more important to deter Iran from increasing its involvement with terror and to deter terrorist organizations, principally Hizbollah, from stepping up their activity with the backing of the Iranian nuclear security net.

Finally, after Iran obtains a nuclear capability, the United States and European governments will consider it important to work towards limiting further proliferation of nuclear arms in the Middle East, taking steps to prevent additional countries from joining the nuclear arms race,

and strengthening the arms control system. Israel has an interest in these steps, yet it has to take into consideration that they might advance the concept of a nuclear arms-free Middle East.

Conclusions: Responses to the Reality

It will be harder to dismantle Iran's nuclear capability than to arrest it before its completion, be it through political-economic and/or military actions. If the Iranian regime achieves a nuclear capability, its bargaining power will increase, the military option to eliminate its nuclear stockpile will in effect be nonexistent, and abandoning this capability will be deemed as capitulation and a sign of weakness. Overall, it will be difficult to persuade Iran to dismantle its nuclear capability.

Israel maintains a degree of deterrence against the Iranian regime's recourse to conventional weapons and terrorism, due to its conventional ability to strike at Iran and its close ties with the US. This deterrence has been lessened somewhat by Iran's own deterrence against Israel through its involvement in terrorism. Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons would impair Israel's deterrence further, and hence the need to strengthen it. Israel will thus need to enhance its ability to deter Iran from a nuclear strike. Theoretically, Israel's future efforts in this area will concentrate on: strengthening its second strike ability – as far as it exists, as claimed by foreign sources – while making Iran acutely aware of this capability; strengthening the US commitment to a strategic response against Iran if Israel is attacked with nuclear weapons; and strengthening the anti-missile defense system.

If Iran obtains and declares a nuclear capability, Israel will be forced to reexamine its nuclear ambiguity policy. The considerations include Iran's conduct; the need to bolster a deterrent against it; the chances of opening lines of communication with it; the US position; and the danger of other countries joining the nuclear arena. Currently a policy of ambiguity is best for Israel, although it is possible that conditions will develop that will force it to forego this policy.

Assessment

Since mid-2002 many details have come to light regarding Iran's nuclear sites and nuclear activity. These revelations should leave no doubt that Iran is working towards developing nuclear weapons and that it is only a few years away from achieving this objective – three to four years according to the Israeli estimates, and five to eight years in American estimates. At the same time, these revelations leave important question marks, both with regard to Iran's capabilities and future intentions and policies on the nuclear issue. Does Iran maintain secret nuclear sites where it conducts most of its nuclear activities? A positive answer to this question will impact on a projected timetable for nuclear weapons in Iran and on the feasibility of the military option against Iranian sites.

Assessment of Iran's future nuclear policy is even more complex as there is no factual basis for evaluating its strategic intentions once Iran has nuclear weapons. Iran's fervent denial of any intention to obtain nuclear weapons means total silence as to its intentions, and without adequate information one can only hazard a guess as to Iranian nuclear behavior and try to construct its agenda based on familiarity with its conduct to date. The difficulty inherent in any assessment of this nature is compounded by the difficulty in understanding the radical leadership in Tehran. It is particularly hard to evaluate how much Iran's nuclear policy towards Israel will be dominated by ideological-religious motives, rather than considerations of risks and their related costs.

The corollary to these fundamental difficulties is that Iran's nuclear conduct may involve certain surprises. For example, Israel's three to four year prediction for Iran's obtaining its first nuclear bomb is based on Iran's known nuclear activity; hitherto unknown activity would alter the projected timetable and all relevant measures. Or, a logical analysis of Iran's system of considerations suggests that it is working to achieve a nuclear capability for defense-deterrence purposes, and that the risk

involved in using such arms to attack other countries, including Israel, is not great. However, this conclusion requires continual reexamination and the utmost caution in order to limit the dangers of a surprise nuclear attack.

Is it still possible, even if by no means guaranteed, to stop Iran in its tracks, before it achieves a nuclear capability? There is a chance of blocking Iranian efforts through economic and political sanctions, although this is contingent on achieving international agreement for imposing significant and long term sanctions on Iran, a consensus that is hard to achieve. Even if agreement to impose sanctions is reached, if Iran shows determination to complete its nuclear program and is willing to pay the price for such action, it is unlikely that the sanctions will stop it. Alternatively, an attempt could be made to stop Iran through American or Israeli military action against Iran's nuclear sites, a difficult, complex, and risk-filled measure. This is more conceivable for the United States than for Israel, due to its proximity to the targets, its operational ability, and its ability to withstand the results of an attack. If such action is taken, its success could delay completion of Iran's nuclear program for a significant period of time, though not necessarily stop it, unless the United States repeatedly attacks the Iranian nuclear facilities over the course of several years, until Iran despairs of obtaining nuclear arms. If such a scenario does not materialize and if Iran is sufficiently determined to maintain its ambitions despite the political or military efforts to block them and despite the price it will have to pay, it may ultimately obtain nuclear weapons.

A nuclear-enabled Iran represents serious implications for Israel, and implies a potential threat to its existence. For the first time, an enemy country whose rhetoric calls for the destruction of Israel would have the ability to inflict a fatal blow on Israel. This combination on its own will create a new and high level of risk for Israel. At the same time, assuming Iran will act as a logical player, there will be important elements that will erode the Iranian nuclear threat and its risk to Israel: Israeli deterrence; American deterrence; and the assessment that Iran is developing a nuclear capability as a last resort to deter its enemies, principally the United States, and to block strategic and immediate danger to its security, and thus would not use it to neutralize a secondary threat such as Israel.

Even if Iran will not use its nuclear weapons against Israel and other

countries, the situation creates worrisome implications. Iran might display heightened aggression in its defense and foreign policies, including towards Israel; Iran would become the hub of the Islamic radical camp, and would generate constraints on moderate countries to impel them to adopt its policies; and other countries, particularly Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and in the long term Iraq, may join the nuclear club.

In addition, Iran's achievement of a nuclear capability will create a serious dimension of uncertainty for Israel and other countries as to Iran's nuclear intentions and policies of the Iranian regime. Even if it does not use nuclear weapons, this uncertainty may increase as a result of Iran's declarations and actions and spark a period of tension. Moreover, nuclear arms in Iran's possession may create an atmosphere of anxiety in Israel, which may have a detrimental effect on immigration to (or conversely, emigration from) Israel and economic investments.

The conclusion is threefold: (a) The United States, Israel, and other countries must do their utmost to prevent Iran from achieving a nuclear capability, since once Iran has nuclear weapons it will be much harder (and militarily impossible) to effect any rollback and disarm it. (b) The military move must be included in steps to be considered, both as an option in itself and as a means of increasing pressure on Iran. (c) At the same time, these countries will have to prepare for a scenario in which Iran obtains nuclear weapons, all the while maintaining efforts to block this very outcome.

In preparing for this scenario, Israel must:

- Strengthen its deterrent capability towards Iran. Israel currently has limited deterrence against Iran's recourse to conventional weapons and terrorism, based on its strategic capabilities and its relations with the United States. This capability may ebb if Iran obtains nuclear weapons. Therefore, Israel must use the years until Iran attains nuclear capability and take additional steps to bolster its deterrence against a nuclear attack, including: convincing Iran that a nuclear attack on Israel may fail because of Israel's anti-missile system; strengthening its deterrent credibility against the Iranian regime, and convincing Iran that should Israel be attacked with nuclear weapons, it would retain a response capability that would exact a heavy price from Iran.
- Strengthen strategic cooperation with the United States against Iran. Israel's aim is that the US administration will make it clear

to Iran that any Iranian nuclear attack on Israel or its other allies will be viewed as an attack on the US itself, which would force it to act without reservation and with its full strategic strength against Iran. Israel will have to reexamine the possibility of bolstering its deterrent capability by entering into a defense treaty with the United States and/or joining NATO at the appropriate time.

- Take steps, in collaboration with the United States and other countries, to limit risks – beyond the threat of a nuclear attack – resulting from Iran obtaining nuclear capability.
- Reexamine its policy of nuclear ambiguity. Israel would be best served by maintaining nuclear ambiguity, but it is possible that conditions will emerge that will force it to relinquish this policy, such as the conduct of the Iranian regime, its need to increase its deterrence and clarify its red lines, or potential channels of communication with Iran on the nuclear issue.
- Consider the possibility of agreeing to the idea of a nuclear weapons-free Middle East, as a means of preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear arms or of disarming Iran.
- Examine the possibility of a peace agreement with the Syrian regime, at the right time and with conditions that are acceptable to Israel, in the hope that this leads to limiting Syria's close ties with Iran and an end to its military support of Hizbollah. If there is a possibility of a peace agreement with Syria, which would entail further warming of Israel's relations with other Arab countries, the effect of Iran's militant approach will also be reduced, and there may even be dialogue between Israel and Iran. But even if such dialogue does not develop, it will be hard to assume that under such regional conditions Iran would decide to launch a nuclear attack against Israel.

Can Israel live with a nuclear Iran? Possibly, but it is hard to anticipate this situation. Certain conditions – some of which are not yet extant – may help to soften this reality, and reduce the Iranian threat and the uncertainty that it contains. These include:

- Collecting credible intelligence that Iran is not planning to use its nuclear weaponry against Israel.
- Obtaining a clear American obligation to retaliate against Iran with a nuclear strike should Iran use nuclear weapons against Israel.
- Arriving at an assessment in Israel that is based on clear, credible

indicators that Israel's strategic capability effectively deters Iran from recourse to nuclear weapons.

- Seeing more moderate officials join the circle of decision-makers in Iran.

Finally, if Iran obtains nuclear weapons, this would obligate Israel to try to build up a stable deterrent capability against Iran, which will prevent unintentional deterioration to nuclear confrontation. As yet there are no accepted rules of behavior in a nuclear environment between Israel and Iran, there is no communication and no dialogue, and there is insufficient understanding of the set of considerations and the decision-making processes of the other side. Such uncertainty is liable to increase the risks of miscalculation, overreaction, escalation of crises, and difficulty stopping deterioration in time. Israel thus has a critical need to try to build channels of direct communication with Iran. Even if indirect, these could allow fostering rules of the game and pursuing confidence building measures in a nuclear environment and help guard against nuclear deterioration. Assuming that Iran is also interested in preventing miscalculations by the US and Israel, which may lead to deterioration and heavy internal damage, the possibility of generating such channels of communication, possibly via European governments, is not unreasonable.

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