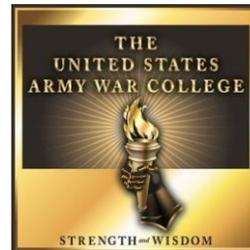


# Containing Iran: Options for Preventing Iran's Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons

by

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United States Army War College  
Class of 2015

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## Abstract

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For decades, Iran has disrupted security and stability in the Middle East. Its unlawful pursuit of nuclear weapons and support of terrorist organizations continues to pose a significant threat to U.S. national interests and the international community. The acquisition of nuclear weapons would thrust Iran into a hegemonic status and create an undesirable imbalance of power across the region. The National Security Strategy states that Iran must meet its international responsibilities beginning with a peaceful nuclear program. It must cooperate with the international community, abide by international laws, and comply with the content of the 2013 Joint Plan of Action. While current United States (U.S.) policy is focused on prevention, it lacks the teeth required to compel Iran to comply. The U.S. must develop a broad, comprehensive, consistent, long-range strategy to contain Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons in order to promote stability in the region. This paper reviews current U.S. policy. More importantly, it will discuss additional options the U.S. Government should consider before entertaining the notion of a nuclear-armed Iran.



## **Containing Iran: Options for Preventing Iran's Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons**

In November 2013, the United States (U.S.), United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, plus Germany (P5+1) reached an agreement with Iran to halt and rollback its nuclear program. In accordance with the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA), the P5+1 agreed to suspend targeted economic sanctions, activities, and services and impose no new nuclear related sanctions on Iran for a period of six months.<sup>1</sup> The JPOA was renewed by the P5+1 and Iran in July 2014, and renewed once again in November 2014. Both parties have until June 30, 2015 to reach a long-term comprehensive solution to limit Iran's nuclear program to one of peace. It is uncertain as to whether or not the P5+1 will reach a long-term agreement with Iran in the coming months.<sup>2</sup> Historically, Iran has failed to comply with the United Nations (UN), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the Non-Proliferation Regime. While inspections in February 2015 demonstrated compliance with the terms of the JPOA, it is difficult to determine if this will continue in the future.<sup>3</sup>

For decades, Iran has disrupted security and stability in the Middle East. Its unlawful pursuit of nuclear weapons and support of terrorist organizations continues to pose a significant threat to U.S. national interests and the international community (IC). The acquisition of nuclear weapons would thrust Iran into a hegemonic status and create an undesirable imbalance of power across the region. The National Security Strategy (NSS) states Iran must meet its international responsibilities beginning with a peaceful nuclear program.<sup>4</sup> It must cooperate with the IC, abide by international laws, and comply with the content of the 2013 JPOA. While current U.S. policy focuses on prevention, it lacks the teeth required to compel Iran to comply. The U.S. must develop

a broad, comprehensive, consistent, long-range strategy to contain Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons in order to promote stability in the region. This paper will review current U.S. policy. More importantly, it will discuss additional options the U.S. Government should consider before entertaining the notion of a nuclear-armed Iran.

### Historical Context

Historical context is vital as it informs theory. Theory in turn informs strategic thinking, and strategic thinking informs policy and decision-making. In order to comprehend the complex nature of Iran in the twenty-first century, its relationship with the U.S. and the IC, and its pursuit of nuclear weapons, a rudimentary understanding of Iran's history and culture is imperative. Iran is home to one of the world's most ancient and multifaceted civilizations dating back to the beginning of the Bronze Age. For more than a thousand years, the Persian Empire reigned supreme across present-day Central Asia and the Middle East. The Muslim conquest of the 7<sup>th</sup> Century ended Persian hegemony and established Islamic fundamentalism in the region. After centuries of foreign rule, Iran was reunified under the Safavid Dynasty. Safavid made Shiism the official state religion, and Iran was once again a regional hegemony.<sup>5</sup> Iran's desire to dominate the Middle East led to four hundred years of religious conflict. Following the Crusades, Iran remained a regional power until the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

Today, Iran is the center of Shia Islam and the Persian culture. It has a population of seventy-five million and is the eighteenth largest country in the world.<sup>6</sup> Beginning in the early eighties, Iran experienced a rapid growth in population. Approximately ninety-seven percent of the population is Muslim, predominantly Sunni Muslim.<sup>7</sup> Iran ranks second in the world in natural gas reserves, second in the world in

oil reserves, and is the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' second largest oil exporter.<sup>8</sup>

Iranians think, believe, and act in in terms of spheres of influence, a “term denoting an area in which a foreign power or powers exerts significant military, cultural, or economic influence.”<sup>9</sup> Modern day Iranians believe Iran is the center of Shia Islam, the center of the Persian culture, and a hegemon in the Gulf region.<sup>10</sup> Today, Iranian influence and the Persian culture and language can be found across the Middle East and in Central Asia in neighboring countries such as Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Pakistan. It has one of the largest youth bases in the Middle East and the Arab world due to highly successful family planning programs.<sup>11</sup> It is, however, rife with its own share of challenges. Its political system, the Islamic Republic of Iran, is relatively young--originating in 1980 following the fall of the Shah and the return of the Ayatollah. U.S. and Iranian relations remain contentious. The predominantly Shia nation is surrounded by neighboring Sunni-based Muslim countries. The Shia-Sunni divide is riddled with conflict and sectarian violence as evident in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Pakistan, and throughout the Middle East. Today, Iran is internationally isolated from most of the world--politically, economically, and ideologically.

### Nuclear Background

In 1957, Iran initiated its nuclear program under President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace.<sup>12</sup> For years, Iran's nuclear program continued to flourish under the premise that it be used as a source of power vice as a source in the production of weapons grade uranium. A decade later, the U.S. funded and supplied Iran with its first nuclear research facility. In 1975, Iran commenced construction of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant; however, the project was suspended in 1979 during the

Iranian Revolution.<sup>13</sup> In 1979 following the fall of the Shah, the creation of an Islamic Republic, and the return of the Ayatollah as the supreme leader, Iranian revolutionary students seized the United States Embassy in Tehran taking more than sixty American hostages.<sup>14</sup> This officially ended U.S. diplomacy in Iran and ultimately its support of Iran's nuclear program.<sup>15</sup>

In 1995, Russia signed an agreement with Iran to complete the construction.<sup>16</sup> In 2003, the IAEA reported that Iran failed to declare their enriching capability in accordance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).<sup>17</sup> UN sanctions followed and Iran was directed to suspend its uranium enrichment program. In 2005, Iran defied the UN and arbitrarily lifted the suspension.<sup>18</sup> In 2007, Russia delivered its first shipment of nuclear fuel to the Bushehr nuclear reactor.<sup>19</sup>

In response to the NPT violation and various other infractions, the IC levied numerous sanctions against Iran. This penalty,

Has been the world's main response to Iran's efforts to develop long-range missiles and the ability to arm them with nuclear warheads. Most of the Iranian entities punished are linked to these efforts. Increasingly, however, governments are broadening the scope of sanctions in an effort to hinder Iran's overall economy--targeting entities such as banks, transport and energy companies, and organizations.<sup>20</sup>

There are literally hundreds of UN, European Union (EU), and U.S. sanctions targeting Iranian entities and organizations suspected of directly or indirectly supporting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), terrorism, and human rights violations. A complete list of the key UN, EU, and U.S. sanctions through 2013 can be found online at [Iranwatch.org](http://Iranwatch.org).

## National Interests: U.S. and Iran

In February of this year, the Obama administration published the new NSS. Similar to previous strategies, the 2015 NSS outlines a comprehensive approach to 1) strengthen our National Defense, 2) combat the persistent threat of terrorism, 3) prevent the spread and use of WMD, 4) prevent mass atrocities, and 5) seek stability and peace in the Middle East.<sup>21</sup> In accordance with the NSS, the U.S. is “committed to . . . stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and securing nuclear materials. No threat poses as grave a danger to our security and well-being as the potential use of nuclear weapons and materials by irresponsible states or terrorists.”<sup>22</sup> Reversing the spread of nuclear weapons, securing nuclear materials, strengthening the NPT, and holding irresponsible state and non-state actors accountable for their actions remain top priorities for the U.S. Peace, security, and stability in the Middle East is largely dependent on Iran’s compliance with the JPOA. While elements of the first phase of the JPOA are well underway, full compliance has yet to be achieved. Following the successful implementation of the elements outlined in the comprehensive deal, Iran’s nuclear program will be acknowledged and subject to the guidelines established by the IAEA for all non-nuclear weapons states.<sup>23</sup>

Iran’s national values and interests are almost inextricably tied to its complex history and heritage. Once a regional hegemon, Iran remains the center of Shia Islam and the Persian culture. Its sphere of influence encompasses much of the Middle East, and it enjoys strong ties with Russia and China. Modern Iran favors Iranian nationalism ahead of the nation of Islam. Its interests include survival and security, territorial integrity and independence, economic growth and technological development, political stability and legitimacy, high defense capability, and cultural preservation.<sup>24</sup> It claims its

pursuit of nuclear energy is strictly peaceful; however, intelligence reports and past IAEA inspections indicate otherwise. Why would Iran pursue a nuclear weapon? First, nuclear weapons provide the power to deter nuclear and non-nuclear states from attacking Iran. Second, nuclear weapons provide prestige. Third, nuclear weapons elevate Iran's domestic political power and ability to influence foreign policy.<sup>25</sup> Finally, nuclear weapons would thrust Iran into a regional hegemony in the Middle East.

#### U.S. Foreign Policy: Bush and Obama

At the beginning of President Bush's first term U.S. and Iranian engagement was positive as the two countries worked to establish a new government in Afghanistan following the collapse of the Taliban.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, relations with Iran quickly returned to status quo during the second Iraq War. Iran's nuclear program was under intense scrutiny as intelligence reporting indicated Iran was enriching uranium. Subsequently, Iran failed to declare their enriching capability in accordance with the NPT. As a result, the UN, U.S. and the EU imposed additional economic sanctions, and the U.S. ceased engagement with Iran leaving the country politically isolated.<sup>27</sup>

Under the President Obama's Administration, the U.S. has taken a dual track approach to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Since 2010, there have been four major sanctioning acts targeting Iran's economic infrastructure and natural resources. In late 2013, the P5 + 1 reached an agreement with Iran to halt and rollback its nuclear program. According to the Department of State and Department of Treasury, the JPOA guaranteed limited, targeted, reversible sanctions for a period of six months in exchange for Iran's promise to limit its nuclear program to one of peace.<sup>28</sup> The JPOA was renewed by the P5+1 and Iran in July 2014, and renewed once again in November 2014. Both parties have until June 30, 2015 to reach a long-term comprehensive

solution to limit Iran's nuclear program to one of peace. While sanctions undoubtedly impacted Iran's economy and temporarily curtailed its nuclear capability, there are no indications Iran will permanently halt or delay its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

### Proposed Policy Options

While current US policy is focused on prevention, it is ineffective and lacks the ability to compel Iran to comply. The U.S. must develop a broad, consistent, strategy to contain Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. To accomplish this, the U.S. must first develop a long-range, comprehensive policy. Any policy must be consistent with our nation's values and interests at home and abroad. It must also seek to secure and stabilize the region, promote positive, sustainable, long-term relationships with P5+1 nations, NATO, and EU members, and protect U.S. foreign investments.

There are numerous policy options available for consideration. This paper will focus on the following five options the current administration should consider before entertaining the notion of a nuclear-armed Iran: 1) Status Quo, 2) Increase Sanctions, 3) Détente, 4) Regional Coalition, and 5) Military Operations. Each option will be discussed in detail and assessed utilizing the feasibility, acceptability, and suitability (FAS) test. The FAS test is a tool used by policy makers to determine immediate, second, and third order effects of a policy option; furthermore, the test aids in determining a given policy's ability to achieve strategic end state objectives.<sup>29</sup> Feasibility measures the means available to accomplish the option. "Acceptability assesses whether the policy option is proportional to the overall effort required, i.e., whether the benefit of the option is worth the cost. It is also designed to determine whether the option is compliant with domestic and international law and is militarily and politically supportable."<sup>30</sup> Finally, suitability assesses whether or not a policy option supports political objectives.

## Option 1 – Status Quo

Option 1 (Status Quo) is a continuation of the current policy. This option relies heavily on the diplomatic and economic instruments of national power with diplomacy in the lead. As outlined in the P5+1 and Iran JPOA, the U.S. Government retains the right to continue to impose sanctions established prior to 20 January 2014 through the JPOA period and extended JPOA period. The U.S. must continue to engage diplomatically with its P5+1 partners. Bilateral and multilateral engagements with all parties should occur on a regular and routine basis to maintain open lines of communication, provide situational awareness, and ensure Iranian compliance as prescribed in the JPOA. Intergovernmental organizations (IGO) and non-governmental organizations (NGO) such as the IAEA must be continuously leveraged to provide an unbiased, uninterrupted subject matter expert assessment throughout the verification process. Finally, the P5+1 coalition must be postured to reestablish previous sanctions in the event of Iranian non-compliance.

Option 1 (Status Quo) is feasible. The U.S. and the remainder of the P5+1 possess the requisite diplomatic and economic assets to execute this option. As previously discussed, sanctions against Iran and its pursuit of nuclear weapons date back to 2006. While the current JPOA guarantees limited, targeted, and reversible sanction relief through June 2015, the P5+1 retains the right and the resources to nullify the JPOA and resume previously levied sanctions. Diplomatically, the P5+1 remains poised to continue its alliance and cooperation throughout the duration of the extension or in the wake of a JPOA violation.

This option is acceptable to the P5+1 coalition and Iran under the terms and conditions outlined in the JPOA. All parties remain in compliance with the current policy

and will continue to do so with reasonable certainty. It is, however, less acceptable to Iran due to the effects of economic sanctions. Ongoing embargoes and trade sanctions have significantly impacted the Iranian economy and caused inevitable setbacks to their nuclear program.

This option is currently suitable based on the elements outlined in the JPOA and the NSS objectives. Recent inspections and intelligence reporting indicate Iran is in compliance with the JPOA. Unfortunately, the JPOA as currently written does not address or provide transparency into Iran's previous nuclear endeavors as required and outlined in multiple UN Resolutions.<sup>31</sup> "In a separate negotiating track with the IAEA, Iran has failed to provide timely information in areas related to its alleged past research into military nuclear technology."<sup>32</sup> This policy also lacks bipartisan support. Congress believes additional sanctions are required to compel Iran to prevent its pursuit. Ultimately, our objective is to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. On the surface, the JPOA is fulfilling this requirement.

### Option 2 – Increase Sanctions

Option 2 (Increase Sanctions) relies heavily on the diplomatic and economic instruments of national power with the economic element in the lead. Originally scheduled to terminate in July 2014, the JPOA was renewed again in November 2014. Unable to fully meet the elements of the first phase and ultimately the elements of the overarching comprehensive deal, the P5+1 and Iran agreed to yet another renewal, which is scheduled to terminate in June of 2015. With this option, the U.S. must first cease any future renewals/extensions to the current JPOA. Next, any/all sanction relief outlined in the JPOA must be reversed immediately. This includes sanctions related to Iran's export of petrochemical products, automotive industry, gold and other precious

metals, civil aviation, export of crude oil, and facilitation of humanitarian and other transactions.<sup>33</sup> Additional sanctions levied against Iran above and beyond those outlined for relief in the JPOA would have a crippling effect on the Iranian economy. Escalating new sanctions against Iran would stall or halt any political momentum Iran gained during the JPOA process and degrade Iran's ability to maneuver and safeguard against previous sanctions.<sup>34</sup> The U.S. must apply diplomatic pressure against those that trade regularly with the Iranian government and civilian sector and be willing to consider sanctioning those nations that support Iran's nuclear power program. Finally, this option requires support and complete buy-in from all standing members of the P5+1.

Option 2 (Increase Sanctions) is a feasible policy option. The U.S. possesses the requisite diplomatic and economic power to execute this option. Diplomatically, the U.S. has to maintain its alliance with the remainder of the P5+1 coalition in order to prevent future renewals and reverse the sanction relief outlined in the JPOA. Ideally, the U.S. must seek to garner full diplomatic and economic support from the P5+1 prior to levying any new sanctions against Iran. This will likely require additional diplomatic discussion and increased pressure on the IC in order to leverage full support from non-ally countries such as Russia and China.

This option is acceptable for the U.S. Government. Overall, it provides a non-kinetic solution to compel Iran to cease any future attempts in acquiring nuclear weapons. This option requires little to no monetary resources. It can be tailorable and scalable based on the terms of the sanctions and Iran's ability to demonstrate compliance. While diplomatic, economic, and non-lethal in nature, this option poses some challenges for the U.S. Government. Gaining IC, specifically P5+1 approval to

impose new sanctions would be extremely difficult. Many of these countries trade and rely on Iranian exports to sustain their economy. Additionally, several countries, namely China, Russia, and Germany profit from nuclear trade with Iran.<sup>35</sup> Finally, the imposition of new sanctions against Iran will cripple its economy and potentially lead to physical conflict in the region.

Option 2 (Increased Sanctions) is not suitable. With the release of the 2015 NSS, it is clear that Iran must “meet its international obligations and demonstrate its nuclear program is entirely peaceful . . . sanctions . . . demonstrated that the international community can--and will--hold accountable those nations that do not meet their obligations, while also opening up a space for a diplomatic resolution.”<sup>36</sup>

The administration believes the JPOA and current sanctions are highly effective. Additional sanctions will disrupt ongoing efforts, specifically our partnership with the P5+1 and create an environment conducive to war.<sup>37</sup>

### Option 3 – Détente

Détente is a “name given to a period of improved relations between the United States and the Soviet Union that began tentatively in 1971 and took decisive form when President Richard M. Nixon visited the secretary-general of the Soviet Communist party . . . in Moscow, May 1972.”<sup>38</sup> The détente developed in the wake of World War II and the Cuban Missile Crisis as tensions between the U.S. and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) flared for decades. U.S. and U.S.S.R détente took several forms including but not limited to arms control, trade and cultural exchange, established political borders, and promoted human rights by, through, and with the establishment of the NPT, Strategic Arms Limitations Talks, and the Helsinki Final Act.<sup>39</sup>

Option 3 (Détente) is similar in nature and relies heavily on the diplomatic, information, and economic instruments of national power with diplomacy in the lead. As written, the JPOA is a strategy used by the P5+1 to control the development, procurement, and proliferation of nuclear arms. Additional measures are needed to incentivize Iran. For starters, the U.S. and IC must allow Iran to pursue a peaceful nuclear program. Nuclear power as an alternate source of internal energy creates an environment less dependent on natural resources and allows for greater export of crude oil worldwide.

With this option, the UN and P5+1 must consider suspending or removing sanctions against the export of Iranian natural resources, foreign trade and commerce, and the automotive and aviation industries. Additionally, the U.S. and IC must work with Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to bridge gaps between the Shia-Sunni cultures in an effort to create a more stable region. Finally, the U.S. must acknowledge the efforts of Iran to promote greater peace in the Middle East. For example, acknowledging Iranian efforts to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The information instrument of national power is critical to carry the message globally. In exchange, Iran must continue to comply with the terms of the JPOA and recognize current UN mandates and resolutions specific to Iran's nuclear program. The IAEA must be allowed to conduct unhindered inspections of all Iranian nuclear facilities in order to provide full transparency into Iran's nuclear program, past and present.

This policy is feasible. It requires minimal resources to develop into a long-term strategy. The U.S. possesses the requisite diplomatic and economic assets to execute this option. This option would require the U.S. to take a more pro-Iran approach to

foreign policy. It would also require increased diplomatic influence in the region amongst nuclear and non-nuclear states.

This option is acceptable, however, it poses significant challenges for the U.S. and Iran. First, the concept of détente failed during previous attempts. During the Cold War, the breakdown of détente is attributed to a difference in scope and definition between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. and what the policy would require.<sup>40</sup> Both U.S. and U.S.S.R. public perception of the policy was marginal at best. When the U.S.S.R. invaded Afghanistan, all bets were off and Cold War détente ultimately failed.<sup>41</sup> Unless the U.S. invests time and effort developing common terminology between Iran, U.S., and the rest of the IC and clearly articulates the policy to the American people, a present day détente is doomed to fail just as its predecessor did decades ago.

Historically, Iran has demonstrated its inability to comply with the U.S., UN, and the IAEA. Since 2005, Iran's leadership has refused to cooperate and fully open the doors on its nuclear program. There is also great concern with proliferation. Iran is a known state sponsor of terrorism. A nuke in the hands of Hezbollah or Hamas presents a clear and present danger to the U.S., its allies, and the Middle East. Finally, present day Iran will likely find issue and concern with this proposal. Shia Islam, Iranian clerics, and the Grand Ayatollah could perceive this as a western centric initiative focused on institutionalizing U.S. policy and western fundamentalism, specifically democracy.<sup>42</sup> While the middle/younger class of Iran has the potential to acquiesce to modernization and new ideas, the current regime will yield to more traditional Islamic principles.

The policy is suitable but lacks congressional support. While the current administration fully supports a policy of prevention, it also supports Iran's pursuit of a

peaceful nuclear program. As discussed, Iran must remain compliant with the terms outlined in the comprehensive deal of the current plan of action. The policy does, however, lack bipartisan support. Congress believes additional sanctions are required to compel Iran to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

#### Option 4 – Regional Coalition

Option 4 (Regional Coalition) relies heavily on the diplomatic, information, and economic instruments of national power with diplomacy in the lead. With this option, the U.S. adopts a policy that seeks to build a regionally based security coalition to isolate Iran in order to deter its pursuit of nuclear weapons and restore a semblance of balance in the Middle East.<sup>43</sup> The regional based security coalition must consist of neighboring countries including the GCC. To accomplish this, the U.S. must:

- Reassess current policy and strategy through a regional, ideological lens;
- Leverage various IGO and NGO support to secure participation and aid of respective countries;
- Reassure the coalition that containment is a viable option;
- Codify the arrangement in U.S. Government and international policy and strategy;
- Increase foreign investments as an incentive;
- Improve U.S.-Egypt relations;
- Extend U.S. nuclear umbrella to member nations;
- Levy additional sanctions targeting the proliferation of nuclear weapons.<sup>44</sup>

Several countries in the region invest and trade with Iran. Foreign banks control large amounts of Iranian funds, some of which are directly tied to the procurement of nuclear

materials.<sup>45</sup> Standing members with economic ties to Iran must halt or at least minimize financial trade and investments. If required, the U.S. must apply international and economic pressure on those members unwilling to cooperate.

Option 4 (Regional Coalition) is feasible; however, there are challenges associated with this option. If the U.S. were to incentivize foreign nations to join and comply with the terms of the coalition, it must be prepared to divest additional resources into foreign economies. Unfortunately, the U.S. has the largest debt burden in the world now approaching \$18 trillion.<sup>46</sup> The U.S. must closely scrutinize and monitor any government and civilian spending in the short and long-term. While economic roadblocks exist and must be overcome, diplomatic efforts will prove to be a little less challenging. Ultimately, building a coalition of this nature requires time. This option is dependent on the administration's ability to build a regional coalition quickly and efficiently while simultaneously dealing with several other security concerns in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Yemen.

This option is acceptable to the U.S. and member nations. It seeks to build upon previous successful containment strategies, leverage current Muslim coalitions actively targeting non-state actors, and pursue non-kinetic approaches to isolating Iran. Additionally, this option demonstrates the U.S.' resolve in seeking regional stability without applying undue influence. It is dependent on the U.S.' ability to co-opt member nations without destabilizing ongoing counterterrorism efforts or creating an imbalance of power in the Middle East. This option will, however, prove problematic for Israel and strain already tenuous relations with its ally in the Middle East.

Option 4 (Regional Coalition) is suitable. It will achieve national objectives and is in line with current U.S. values and interests. According to the NSS, the U.S. has a wide range of interests in the Middle East--preventing the proliferation of WMD, protecting the nation-state of Israel, promoting the pursuit of freedom and democracy, enabling a secure and stable Iraq and Afghanistan, and maintaining access to international oil.<sup>47</sup> While security in the Middle East is of the utmost concern, our continued relationship with our Middle Eastern partners or future coalitions is dependent on future trade, exchanges, and cooperation on a broad range of issues.<sup>48</sup>

#### Option 5 – Military Operations

Option 5 (Military Operations) relies heavily on the diplomatic, information, military and economic instruments of national power with the military in the lead. With this option, the U.S. would adopt a three-phase joint, multinational approach to the conduct of military operations against Iran. Phase I objectives focus on increasing training exercises and military maneuvers in the area of responsibility (AOR) to dissuade Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons. Phase II objectives focus on limited offensive operations in the AOR to disrupt Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. Finally, Phase III objectives focus primarily on offensive operations in the AOR, specifically military strikes to destroy Iran's nuclear infrastructure. Phase I consists of the following non-lethal tasks:

- Conduct overt, joint, multinational training exercises throughout the Middle East;
- Maintain permanent footprints in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Turkey;

- Establish additional U.S. infrastructure and military projection capability in neighboring countries;
- Increase naval presence and maneuvers in the Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf.

Phase II consists of the following lethal and non-lethal tasks:

- Conduct strategic reconnaissance operations;
- Seek regime change;
- Conduct offensive cyber operations;
- Conduct clandestine/covert operations.

Phase III consists of the following lethal and non-lethal tasks:

- Establish naval blockades;
- Conduct advanced force operations;
- Conduct military strikes against nuclear infrastructure;
- Conduct military strikes against C4I;
- Conduct offensive cyber operations;
- Conduct clandestine/covert operations.

The military option is designed to be executed sequentially by phase; however, it remains flexible enough to proceed to Phase II/III if necessary. Option 5 (Military Operations) does not include a boots on the ground option due to the low probability of public support or national will.

This option is feasible but with significant challenges. The internal and external resources required to support this initiative are high. While the U.S. possesses the requisite diplomatic and informational assets to execute this operation, sequestration

and transformation will greatly impact the military's ability to conduct this option while simultaneously conducting combat operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and outside the declared theater of active armed conflict. As discussed, the nation is significantly in debt. Any long duration operations will continue to attrite an already beleaguered U.S. economy.

Option 5 (Military Operations) is acceptable to an extent. While not ideal, all three phases can be executed unilaterally without IC buy-in or support. Phases I and II are less disconcerting. If the U.S. were to execute Phase III unilaterally, it will significantly degrade foreign relations with its allies and quite possibly pull other world powers into the conflict. While the U.S. possess the technology and weaponry to defeat most adversarial systems, it is unlikely that it would be able to destroy Iran's entire nuclear infrastructure. No matter the phase, any military activity in and around Iran, on land or by sea, would impact the price and flow of oil globally.<sup>49</sup> Finally, there is no guarantee that a military operation will prevent Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons.<sup>50</sup>

This policy option is suitable and is currently in line with current U.S. objectives and national values and interests. If Iran refuses to live up to its international obligations and fully comply with the JPOA and a comprehensive deal, the U.S. will take the necessary steps to further isolate Iran and if required, bring them into compliance.<sup>51</sup> This includes exercising the military instrument of national power. While the option is suitable, there are risks and challenges. As discussed, the force is already spread thin with service members deployed throughout the Central Command AOR. Additional requirements in support of military operations will degrade ongoing stability and

counterterrorism efforts. Finally, the U.S. economy cannot afford to support an endeavor of this scale and magnitude at this time.

### The Difficulty in Containing a Nuclear-Armed Iran

We must assume that if Iran acquired a nuclear weapon, it is possible they will use the weapon to attack other nations directly through a conventional apparatus or indirectly through proxy forces. The very notion of nuclear proliferation in Iran coupled with potential second and third order effects will further destabilize an already unstable Middle East. The international community will turn to the UN Security Council, specifically the big three (U.S., Russia, and China) for short and long term deterrence options.

The current U.S. policy of prevention will no longer be valid. U.S. policy would need to change to containing a nuclear-armed Iran and would require support from the remainder of the IC. Redlines will need to be established in order to prevent the direct and indirect use of nuclear weapons against other countries and the sale of nuclear weapon technology to non-nuclear state and non-state actors. The preponderance of the containment effort will lie solely on the U.S. as the western superpower. Iran-Russia-China economic ties will likely trump most diplomatic and military efforts against the Islamic Republic. Russia's personal ties to Iran's nuclear program presents a conflict of interest between Russia and the U.S. and will require a change in Russia's foreign policy towards Iran. Furthermore, a policy of containment will completely over extend an already beleaguered U.S. Government and military force. Transition and sequestration have already reduced the nation's ability to fight a two front war. It is also questionable as to whether or not U.S. first strike capabilities will destroy Iranian nuclear infrastructure.

Israel's reaction to a nuclear-armed Iran poses a significant security challenge. Israel-Iran relations remain hostile at best. In 2000, Ayatollah Khamenei stated, "Iran's position, which was first expressed by the Imam [Khomeini] and stated several times by those responsible, is that the cancerous tumor called Israel must be uprooted from the region."<sup>52</sup> For years, Iranian state sponsored terrorist groups such as the Quds Force, Hezbollah, and Hamas have been directly and indirectly involved in the Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Palestinian Arab conflicts.<sup>53</sup> "Given Israel's status as an assumed but undeclared nuclear weapons state, the most immediate consequence is the emergence of an unstable bipolar nuclear competition in the Middle East."<sup>54</sup> A nuclear-armed Israel and Iran will give rise to additional terrorist activities and rocket attacks into Israel, increased conflict in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights, cross border conventional attacks between Israeli Defense Forces and the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and potentially nuclear war. Any perceived Israel-Iran conventional/nuclear precursors to war will undoubtedly thrust the U.S. into the diplomatic and potentially military arena to prevent or cease hostilities.

Another challenge is the proliferation of Iranian nuclear weapons or nuclear weapons technology to a non-nuclear nation, a state sponsored terrorist, or other non-state actors. There are many potential reasons why Iran would consider this as a course of action. The proliferation of nuclear weapons/technology will garner prestige in the Middle East and bolster Iran's pursuit of regional hegemony. The proliferation of nuclear weapons/technology will also provide much needed financial stability following years of sanctions levied against Iran by the UN and the P5+1. Finally, the proliferation of a dirty

bomb through an Iranian proxy or other terrorist organizations presents a significant threat to the U.S., Israel, and Sunni Muslim nations.

A nuclear-armed Iran could lead to proliferation of nuclear weapons in neighboring countries, specifically Sunni Muslim nations. The Shia-Sunni schism is centuries old and is one of the primary causes of modern day instability in the Middle East.<sup>55</sup> Recent sectarian violence in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, and most recently with the rise of the ISIL, lends credence to the religious differences between the two Islamic groups. Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia have used this age-old divide to establish dominance in the region and achieve national objectives.

Nuclear proliferation in Iran creates an undesirable imbalance in the region and potentially leads to future conflict or proliferation by Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries such as Egypt and Turkey. In response, the U.S. will need to co-opt Israel to remain neutral. Proliferation of nuclear weapons/technology by any Muslim country poses a significant threat to our Israeli allies. Like the bipolar nuclear relationship between Israel and Iran, a multipolar nuclear relationship between Israel, Iran, and one or more Sunni Islamic countries creates a highly volatile, complex environment. Finally, U.S. will need to utilize its instruments of national power to deter Saudi Arabia and other neighboring Muslim countries from additional proliferation in the region.

Finally, nuclear proliferation will directly impact the nature of the NPT. The three pillars of the NPT are preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons/technology, promoting the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and progressing towards nuclear disarmament.<sup>56</sup> Iran's proliferation of nuclear weapons is in direct conflict with the

second pillar and would jeopardize the very foundation in which the NPT was built. The NPT will cease to exist or need to be revamped to accommodate controlled proliferation.

### Containing a Nuclear-Armed Iran

Current U.S. policy is prevention. It is, however, well within Iran's ability to acquire nuclear weapons without P5+1 consent. "Although the United States is not likely to acquiesce to the emergence of a nuclear-armed Iran, Tehran may be able to achieve an unstoppable breakout capability or develop nuclear weapons in secret before preventive measures have been exhausted."<sup>57</sup> While the purpose of this paper is not to develop a policy for containing a nuclear-armed Iran, it is important to briefly discuss considerations should the currently policy of prevention fail.

In a 2013 report, the Center for a New American Security analyzed the consequences of a nuclear-armed Iran. As a result, the report identified a strategy for policymakers in the event Iranian foreign policy required change. The report identified numerous objectives through a:

Strategy of deterrence, defense, disruption, de-escalation and denuclearization. Strategic objectives included but were not limited to preventing the direct use and transfer of nuclear weapons and materials, limiting terrorist group(s) support, persuading Israel to avoid provocation and tempering premature use of internal nuclear assets, preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons by other nations in the region, and ensuring the flow of natural resources from the Middle East.<sup>58</sup>

If the U.S. adopted such a policy, all four instruments of national power will need to be leveraged with heavy emphasis on the diplomatic and economic apparatuses prior to policy implementation. The U.S. will require support and concurrence from the UN Security Council at a minimum. It will also need to levy economic sanctions against Iran

or at least be postured to sanction Iran in the event of policy non-compliance. Finally, a policy of this nature will require our military to be postured to strike at a moment's notice. Bottom line--containing a nuclear-armed Iran is simply "a bridge too far." A policy of this nature is contrary to our national values and interests, exceeds our resources and ability to support, and is detrimental to the stability of the Middle East. It must only be used as a last resort when all other options including military strikes have failed.

### Policy Challenges and Recommendations

While prevention remains the clear choice, there are underlying challenges with any policy or strategy regarding Iran and nuclear weapons, including the five policy options discussed thus far. First, the U.S. economy is in a state of despair. It is at an all-time high with no real short or long-term solutions available to halt or rollback the current debt. Most of the options available will require increased spending to resource. Bipartisan support is waning. While both agree containing a nuclear-armed Iran is not an option and military strikes are the least preferred option available, the executive and legislative branches have differing opinions on the success of the JPOA and increasing new sanctions. Iran's economy is plummeting. While they've been able to find a work around since the first round of UN sanctions in 2006, the latest round of sanctions, targeting both the government and the civilian sector, have directly impacted upper, middle, and lower classes of Iranians. Iran is to some extent already isolated from the majority of the region.

For the past three decades, the U.S. distanced itself from Iran. The Bush Administration refused to engage with Iran and threatened to attack militarily if Iran posed a clear and present danger to the U.S. and the region. While the Obama Administration relies heavily on the diplomatic arm of the government to engage with

Iran and the IC, it continues to threaten use of force. Any increase in pressure, diplomatically, militarily, or economically will further alienate Iran to a point of no return with the U.S. or the west. It could also alienate the P5+1 coalition, our partners, and allies if not scrutinized and closely monitored. Popular support, both home and abroad, is questionable. Will the American people continue to support the JPOA in light of all the recent renewals? Will they support a policy of détente after years of Iranian anti-American rhetoric? Will the IC support an increase in sanctions? Will the Islamic nations in the region set aside their differences in order to build a coalition against Iran?

Finally, there is the challenge of Islam itself, a religion deeply rooted in history and culture. While the Iranian middle class comprises the majority of the population, the nation answers to the Grand Ayatollah, the clerics, and religious law. Is Iran willing to set aside its differences and work with the west if the JPOA fails? Is Iran's leadership willing to compromise its own ideals and interests and pursue another than nuclear-armed option?

The U.S. should continue to pursue Option 1 (Status Quo) as U.S. policy until the end of the renewal period. Of the five options presented, this option offers the lowest risk to U.S. interests and values and achieves current national objectives. If at this time Iran is fully compliant with the elements of the first phase and provides the UN, the IAEA, and the IC with a certain level of transparency into their nuclear program writ large, the P5+1 and Iran should progress towards a more comprehensive deal. If Iran fails to comply with the elements of the first phase and refuses to fully open its nuclear program to the IAEA, then the U.S. should proceed with Option 2 (Increase Sanctions).

U.S. policy needs to remain flexible enough to retain a military strike capability, but it should not be the primary course of action.

### Conclusion

If left unchecked, Iran will continue to disrupt security and stability in the Middle East. Iran must cooperate with the IC, abide by international laws, and comply with the content of the JPOA. The U.S. must develop a broad, comprehensive, consistent, long-range strategy to contain Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons in order to promote stability across the region. While the JPOA has opened communication channels with Iran and demonstrated some progress in halting and rolling back Iran's nuclear program, it has failed to reach a full comprehensive deal. As the P5+1 approaches the end of the latest renewal period, the U.S. must be prepared to take additional steps to contain Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons.

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