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Iran's Nuclear Program: The Question of Non-Proliferation

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Introduction

. This program dates back to the period of the Shah's regime when construction of several nuclear power plants with the total capacity of over 20 billion Kilowatt hours (kWh) of energy was planned. With the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 the plans for nuclear power generation were abandoned. At that time two of the many-planned power plants totalling 18 units, were under construction in Bushehr on the coast of the Persian Gulf. At that time the plant No. 1 was almost 80 percent completed, while the plant No. 2 was close to 20 percent of its completion. With the start of the Iraqi Ba'athist regime's war against Iran and its aerial attacks against the sites of the Bushehr nuclear power plants heavy damages were incurred.

After the 8-year war and during the reconstruction period in Iran a revision of the abandoned nuclear power projects convinced the authorities that such plants were necessary, considering the growing energy need of the country and grim prospects for depletion of oil resources in a not too distant future. The initial approach to the German contractor of these nuclear power plants for the resumption of their activity proved not successful due to U.S. administration's opposition and through their diplomatic efforts with the German government. Iran's other attempts in persuading China, India and Argentina among several other countries with the nuclear technologies also failed due to the same U.S. pressures. Finally it was Russia that after a period of political humiliation after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and while its nuclear industry was in dire need for new contracts, declared its readiness for the completion of the first unit of the Bushehr nuclear power plant with the capacity of 1000 mwh. The agreement was signed in 1995 between the Iranian and Russian authorities and the project was supposed to be completed by the year 2000.

Although Iran's nuclear program has been opposed by the U.S. administration since its revival in the mid-1990s, the U.S. challenges have grown substantially since late 2002 when Iran's achievement in acquiring new technologies in the field of nuclear fuel cycle were disclosed. Those nuclear programs have now attracted the attention of many countries demanding Iran to sign the additional protocol for the Non-Proliferation Treaty. In their policies, some countries like the members of the European Union have taken a collective approach, declaring that the implementation of the additional protocol by Iran as prerequisites for the conclusion of new trade agreements under negotiation with the country.

Threat Perceptions

Iran's nuclear program has been criticized mainly by pointing to the following issues. Originally Iran planned to mine uranium, convert it to a gas and transform it into nuclear fuel with gas centrifuges, which it is allowed to do as long as monitors can watch. It was supposed to have some 50,000 centrifuges for its site at Natanz. The result would provide reactor fuel for electricity. But, the critics say that the uranium refined in these centrifuges could also be used in an atomic bomb. Iran's critics also use deductive logic to argue that the military purpose is the real one. They argue that in an oil- and gas-rich country like Iran, it will cost many times more to produce electricity from uranium than from petroleum. In addition, they say, Iran has no need to make reactor fuel of its own. Its only power reactor which has been under construction at Bushehr for years will be fuelled by Russia for at least 10 years after it becomes active. [1](#)

Some experts believe it would be easier for Iran to build a nuclear bomb from uranium, rather than from plutonium, which requires the reprocessing of spent reactor fuel. But even the plutonium route could be open if Iran were determined to use it and build a reprocessing plant. As with uranium, Iran can do this without breaking the treaty as long as international inspectors are able to monitor each plant and track the material produced. [2](#) Furthermore, the critics, with reference to legal aspects of Iran's nuclear program, suggest that the NPT also has an escape clause. Any country that declares its "supreme interests" to be in jeopardy can drop out on three months' notice. So the critics of the NPT believe that, any country like Iran can walk right up to the edge of nuclear weaponry while a full partner in the non-proliferation treaty. Once their nuclear program matures, they would have a good chance of crossing the line and fabricating a bomb without being discovered. [3](#) Iran indicates that its nuclear program is benign, legal and meant only to provide energy. It has cited its membership in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which guarantees "the inalienable right . . . to develop . . . nuclear energy for peaceful purposes."

But again the critics maintain that the equipment and raw material Iran is able to use for power generation can also give Iranians an ability to build a bomb. They claim that

Iran is moving purposefully and rapidly toward acquiring the capability. In this regard, they point to a confidential report prepared by the French government in May 2003 delivered to Nuclear Suppliers Group, an organization of governments with nuclear programs; it concluded that Iran is surprisingly close to having enriched uranium or plutonium for a bomb.⁴ The French warned other governments to exercise "the most serious vigilance on their exports to Iran and Iranian front companies," according to a copy of the report provided by a foreign intelligence service. The French report said that "Iran undoubtedly controls the manufacturing process of centrifuges and seems even able to improve it."⁵ Many foreign experts as well as Iranians say that even reformers linked to Iranian President Khatami believe that Iran needs a deterrent against its nuclear neighbors -Israel, Russia and Pakistan- and possibly against the United States. In this regard, reference is often made to some unofficial opinions that support Iran's intention to acquire nuclear weapons.⁶ However, none of these revelations refutes Tehran's claims of peaceful intentions and moreover there are differing views on Iran's nuclear capability.

Gary Samore, director of non-proliferation programs at London's International Institute for Strategic Studies and a former Clinton administration's security official, believes that "They {Iranians} have made the decision to develop a breakout capability, which will give them the option to leave the treaty in the future and complete a nuclear weapon within six months or a year." He concluded that "I think the program is probably unstoppable through diplomatic means."⁷

But Perkovich, the nuclear weapons expert at the Carnegie Endowment says that "I don't believe they have passed the point of no return. We should try to reverse Iran's direction by providing better, low-cost options to fuel the Bushehr electricity plant and by easing the security concerns that make Iranians, reformers and hard-liners, interested in getting a bomb."⁸ Also Khlopkov, the Russian nuclear expert, says the recent disclosures about the Iranian program surprised Moscow and might cause Russia to cancel a second planned reactor unless Iran agrees to stricter international inspections of its nuclear facilities.⁹ Daniel Ayalon, Israeli ambassador to Washington, says Israel has shortened its estimate. "The point of no return - where they are on the verge or on the way to get nuclear capabilities - is much, much smaller now, could be even a matter of a year or so."¹⁰

The critics say there are evidences that make Iran's nuclear ambitions very hard to deny. For instance, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is quoted in a radio broadcast on August 7, 2003 saying that "Iran is among the ten countries which have been able to produce the nuclear-fuel cycle." He said: "Of course, it is only natural that when there is such success they should make a commotion about it. They say 'Yes, they want to do this and do that, they want to build [nuclear] bombs, ' and

they say other things. But this is not important. This progress has been made as a blessing of the Islamic system."

In another occasion and in a gathering of Iranian ambassadors on August 19, 2003 Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said "the positions of the United States and certain Western countries, which require Iran to give up nuclear technology are unsuitable, unjust and oppressive, and the Islamic Republic of Iran will never accept these requests." "Iranian nuclear science is indigenous and peaceful, and the Islamic Republic of Iran, based on religious principles, will never use weapons of mass destruction," he added. [11](#)

Also in a move to show its readiness for cooperation, in an August 19, 2003 letter to the IAEA, Iran acknowledged that it had conducted "uranium conversion experiments" in the early 1990s that it should have reported but did not. Iran is "taking corrective action," the letter said. [12](#)

In response to the aforementioned accusations about Iranian nuclear program and the allegations that Iran is covertly in search of nuclear weapons, the Iranian authorities have made it clear in several occasions that Iran does not have any intention to develop nuclear weapons and its need for nuclear technology is for peaceful purposes and a rightful and legitimate policy that is pursued under the terms of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. For instance, it is argued that the preservation of scarce oil and gas resources for the next generation and opting for cleaner and safer sources of energy encourage Iran to seek alternative sources of energy including nuclear, solar, etc. Moreover, As far as the nuclear technology is concerned, access to nuclear technology provides Iran with the capability to develop advanced technologies for various purposes such as medical treatment, agriculture, and so on.

Regional Impact

Iran has the natural resources, population, geography, culture, and experience with faith-based politics to transform the Muslim Middle East through its successes or failures. Iranian nuclear weapons could shift the balance of power in the region, where Washington is trying to establish pro-American governments in Afghanistan and Iraq. Both of those nations border Iran and are places where Tehran wants to exert influence that could conflict with U.S. intentions, particularly in Iraq.

The perception of Iran's nuclear capability is not similar in the region. The Arab world does not share the deep distrust of Tehran's nuclear program felt in the United States and many other countries.[13](#) In fact, according to a political analyst Mohammad Kamal, who also teaches political science at Cairo University, Iran would likely increase its popularity among Muslims in the region if it developed a nuclear bomb. "It might add to Iran's ideological appeal," said Mr. Kamal. "People will perceive it as

the country that is capable of defending the interests of the Muslims. So it might emerge as the leader of the Muslim world because of its possession of nuclear weapons."

Mr. Kamal says Iran does not have what he called an evil image in the Arab world and in fact, claims many Arabs view Iran as a friendly country.¹⁴ But not everyone agrees. Sami Baroudi, who heads the political science department at the American University in Beirut, says that if Iran develops nuclear weapons, it will likely be for the defense of Iran, not the entire region. "They think this is sort of a balance to Israel having nuclear weapons," said Mr. Baroudi, "but I don't think anyone here expects Iran to extend its nuclear umbrella over Lebanon and Syria. They will think that those weapons are for Iran's own defense and not part of the political game in the Middle East."

Mr. Baroudi says while the general population of the Arab world might favor Iranian development of nuclear weapons, the governments of countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and most of the Gulf States would be adamantly opposed.

"I think the (Persian) Gulf States will oppose that Iran has nuclear weapons and they will call for the region, the Indian Ocean and the (Persian) Gulf and the Middle East to be free of these nuclear weapons at this stage," Mr. al-Musfir said.¹⁵ And Israel would view Iranian development of nuclear weapons as a threat. In 1981, Israel bombed and destroyed a nuclear reactor that was under construction in Iraq. But according to Mohammad Saleh, the Cairo bureau chief for the London-based Arabic newspaper al-Hayat, there are several reasons why Israel should not fear a nuclear attack from Iran. For instance, Mr. Saleh said a nuclear strike against Israel would cost the lives of Palestinians and Muslims living in and around Israel. He also pointed to the fact that despite the deep-rooted disputes between India and Pakistan, neither country has ever used its nuclear weapons.¹⁶

Iran-US Relations

Soon after George W. Bush took office in January 2001, his advisers began drafting a strategy for dealing with Iran. More than two years later, the national security presidential directive on Iran has gone through several competing drafts and has yet to be approved by Bush's senior advisers, according to well-placed sources. In the meantime, experts within and outside the administration are focusing on Iran as the United States' next big foreign policy crisis, with some predicting that the country could acquire a nuclear weapon as early as 2006. The Americans have had some success in mobilizing international opinion against Iran's nuclear program. As evidence, they cite recent threats by Russia to cut off nuclear assistance to Tehran and moves by the International Atomic Energy Agency to censure Iran for failing to report

the processing of nuclear materials. American officials including the President have described Iran's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction as "not acceptable." [17](#)

The White House, in a September 2002 global strategy report, threatened to stop North Korea and other hostile nations before they are able to attack the United States with weapons of mass destruction. Bush said in his 2003 State of the Union address, "The gravest danger facing America and the world is outlaw regimes that seek and possess nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons." [18](#) At present, the question before the US administration is what it should do about Iran's efforts to become a nuclear power.

The US government is faced with contemplating three options. These options are intervention, pre-emption or deterrence. Mark N. Katz in an article clearly analyses these options:

An American military intervention in Iran would not only end the Islamic Republic's efforts to acquire nuclear weapons, but would hasten the end of an Islamic Republic. An American presence in neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan could facilitate such an intervention. But the United Nations Security Council would almost certainly disapprove such a step after refusing to endorse the American-led invasion of Iraq. And Tony Blair's government in the United Kingdom, which staunchly backed that invasion, is suffering politically. Many Britons may mistrust claims about nuclear threats, since they have accused Blair of overselling Iraq's work on weapons of mass destruction. Even if American soldiers could end the Iranian regime without any international help, their failure to create stability in Afghanistan and Iraq suggests that a military invasion would trigger more chaos. It would also encourage many countries' tendency to view the United States as a hostile power.

Alternatively, the Pentagon could launch pre-emptive strikes to destroy Iranian nuclear facilities. This would also elicit outrage in many countries, but would avoid the much greater costs that invading and occupying Iran would entail. It is argued that under this scenario, though the hardliners would remain in power, and would presumably seek nuclear weapons more intensely than ever. Russia would be unlikely to stop selling both missile technology and nuclear know-how to Iran after an American pre-emptive strike. Indeed, a successful strike might make Iran eager to buy replacements for whatever Russian supplies and expertise the Americans have destroyed

Some American analysts believe that the remaining option is deterrence. They argue that the United States has pursued such a strategy with nuclear-armed adversaries for decades. The Soviet Union, under Joseph Stalin, acquired nuclear arms in 1949; Mao Zedong's China has owned them since 1964. These regimes were much more powerful than Iran and much more hostile to Americans and to the United States'

democratic model. Under the knowledge that a nuclear attack would lead to devastating nuclear retaliation, Soviet and Chinese leaders kept their arms docile. Therefore there is every reason to believe that Iranian leaders would do the same. Whatever their rhetoric, Iran's leaders are neither as reckless nor as isolated from reality as Saddam Hussein and North Korea's Kim Jong Il. Indeed, their desire to acquire nuclear weapons could only be based on the assumption that America is less likely to attack if Iran possesses them than if it does not. [19](#)

From the other side the hard liners in the United States are pressing for pre-emptive operations in Iran. They argue that we ought not to deceive ourselves about the chances diplomacy can stall Iran's quest for nuclear weaponry. They claim that Iran is now sufficiently advanced in its nuclear program that foreign assistance is not required for building a bomb. It's just a matter of Iranian engineering and time--in other words, the Manhattan Project in 1943. Therefore, Washington should certainly proceed on all fronts diplomatically against the Islamic Republic, encouraging, cajoling, and threatening Iran's trading partners to cut off technology transfers. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) should also be encouraged to become as rigorous as possible toward the Islamic Republic, and a massive diplomatic effort ought to be launched to arm-twist the Iranians into signing the 1993 protocol to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which would allow for more intrusive inspections of their nuclear sites. Advocates of a military option say a gap anywhere in the technological cordon sanitaire might well be sufficient to give them the bomb. And Europeans, Russians, and the Chinese are all now trying to expand trade with the Islamic Republic, not shrink it. Russian atomic energy minister Aleksandr Rumyantsev declared on May 19, 2003 that Russia has no plans to freeze its nuclear-energy cooperation with Iran, which "has not violated any international agreements in this sphere so far." (It is also claimed that it is a good bet that Tehran wouldn't appear to be violating any non-proliferation agreements until it tests its first weapon.) Iran's critical trading partners could of course become fastidious about selling nuclear-related technology to Iran, particularly the ever-tricky dual-use items, at a time when they are hoping for expanding trade. Then again, past history may hold. It seems clear that the only thing that could compel such trading partners into a more rigorous stance toward Iran is the certain knowledge that (1) the United States will commercially retaliate in a massive way against them if they do not and (2) Washington will pre-emptively bomb Iran's nuclear facilities if it does not get maximum compliance.

As Reuel Marc Gerecht suggest, this leads to the last option: a pre-emptive military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities. It is obviously an unappealing choice. But it is the only option that offers a good chance of delaying Iran's production of nuclear weapons. [20](#)

What is also neglected in the pre-emptive military option is that although the United States might have the military power to take out whatever state it chooses, it still lacks the ability to precisely locate and preemptively target WMD, despite all the technical wizardry of its intelligence.

Israeli Factor

A nuclear-armed Iran would present the United States with a difficult political and military equation. Iran would be the first avowed enemy of Israel to possess a nuclear bomb. Iran remains the only state in the world that does not recognize the two state solution; Iran's opposition to the peace process or its unwillingness to cooperate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution leads the United States to consider Iran's defense capabilities and its anti-Israeli policy as two sides of the same coin. [21](#) Thus, Iran's nuclear program with its record of not recognizing Israel and supporting attacks against it adds to the concerns about Iran as a proliferating country.

Certain pronouncements by the high-ranking Iranian officials have also been quoted in support of a policy for portraying Iran's nuclear program as a threat to Israel or to the international security has been frequently cited recently.[22](#) Mr. Hashemi Rafsanjani, head of an influential governmental body and president of Iran between 1989 and 1997, gave a speech on December 14, 2001, that has been interpreted widely as both a signal that Iran wants nuclear weapons and a threat to use them against Israel. Describing the establishment of the Jewish state as the worst event in history, Mr. Rafsanjani warned, "In due time the Islamic world will have a military nuclear device, and then the strategy of the West would reach a dead end, since one bomb is enough to destroy all Israel."

Mr. Rafsanjani apparently in a bid to remove any misinterpretation of his previous statement on the nuclear threats to Israel, noted in a sermon on Friday Prayers, "because of religious and moral beliefs and commitments that the Koran has created for us, we cannot and will not pursue such weapons that destroy humanity."

On July 20, 2003 Iran unveiled a new ballistic missile, the Shahab-3 that brings Israel within its range; the event was hailed as an important step in protecting Iran's security. Experts said a successful test of the Shahab-3 missile, which can carry a 2, 200-pound payload as far as 1,500 kilometers suggest that the missile is intended to carry a nuclear warhead. [23](#)

Terrorism and Nuclear Weapons

Iran has been labelled by the Bush administration as a state sponsor of international terrorism; they claim that Iran armed with nuclear weaponry might recover some of the dynamism of its early years of revolution. They believe that the hard-core faction abiding the hatred of the United States and its threatening liberal culture could

become bolder, fuelled by the security of nuclear deterrence and ever-growing anxiety about an "America-inspired" reform movement, Thus, in their view, terrorist reflex in Iran could again start powerfully acting up against the United States, with horrendous results. [24](#)

Also it is falsely and unrealistically claimed that, philosophically, clerical Iran and al-Qaeda aren't incompatible. They say for 25 years, there has never been a real moral debate among the ruling clergy about terrorism. The cause of this tendency is attributed mainly to the enormous influx of left-wing Western thought into Iran from the 1950s onwards which has taken a terrible toll on the traditional Muslim understanding of right and wrong, because terrorism for any devout traditional Muslim is an egregious sin. Beside, the "reformist" clergy are nearly all children of the left, who have, more than their elders, soaked up the Third World political theories that countenance terrorism against "Western imperialism." These "reformist" clergy tend to be ferocious when it comes to Israel and "Zionists" abroad. [25](#)

Iran's Security Concerns

Iran finds itself in a geographically volatile region. During the 1980s, Iraq under the leadership of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party, invaded Iran in an attempt to conquer valuable territories such as the Shatt al-Arab waterway. The war was devastating to both the Iraqis and the Iranians. Since the end of that conflict in 1988, Iran and Iraq have had tense relations. Iran is threatened by the region's most powerful state, Israel, which has a carefully defended nuclear monopoly in the Middle East. Analysts point to Iran's fears of its nearby enemy Israel, which has medium-range missiles capable of reaching Tehran and is a member of the nuclear bomb club. In 1981, Israel launched a surprise air attack on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in an attempt to dash Baghdad's goal of developing nuclear arms; Israel's aim was to preserve its nuclear monopoly in the Middle East. To add to its security woes, Iran has been facing a rapidly changing balance of power directly on its borders. With the removal of the Taliban from power, Iran now faces a border area littered with U. S. troops hostile to Tehran. In addition to Afghanistan, Iran also faces threats along its western flank with Iraq. In addition to being concerned about U. S. troops on its eastern and western borders, Tehran is worried about covert activities by U. S. intelligence agencies in their quest to seek the Bush administration's much touted "regime change" policy in Iran, which was classified by the White House as being part of an "axis of evil." Some analysts believe that while the Bush administration makes clear they will never let Iran get nuclear weapons, it shows no interest in addressing Tehran's very real security concerns. "We must address those chronic disputes that create the greatest incentives for acquiring WMD (weapons of mass destruction)," Mohamed ElBaradei, the director-general of the Vienna-based IAEA said recently. "It

is instructive that the majority of suspected efforts to acquire WMD are to be found in the Middle East, a hotbed of instability for over half a century," he added.

Harald Mueller, executive director and head of disarmament research at the Peace Research Institute of Frankfurt, a think-tank, said "Iran has good security reasons to be worried and to look for a deterrent," Mueller said. "It was attacked (by Iraq) in 1980 . . . It was attacked with chemical weapons without the international community helping." Rather than helping, he said the "East and West" simply supplied Iran's neighbor and enemy Iraq with "dual-use" items that could be used to build WMD." The United States has been hostile since 1979, and the present US government has put Iran in the 'axis of evil' - that is, as a candidate for forced regime change.[26](#)

In reaction to reports about possible military attack against its nuclear plants, a member of Iran's top security body said Tehran would pull out of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) if any of its nuclear facilities came under military attack. "Because we have obtained the essential (nuclear) technology, if they attack our facilities, we will withdraw from the NPT," the Kayhan daily quoted Dr. Ali Larijani, member of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, as saying. "If that case arose, our activities would go underground." [27](#)

On the issue of additional protocol Larijani said: "There is no reason to accept signing the additional protocol because they (NPT members) did not help the Islamic republic of Iran to develop nuclear technology," he added that there is "no guarantee that the Americans, after the signing of the additional protocol and inspections of nuclear installations, will not invent other pretexts to accuse Iran of developing weapons of mass destruction." [28](#)

This is while there are some who believe that signing the protocol would harm Iran's security. For instance an Iranian expert on national and international security from the Iranian Ministry of Defense is quoted as saying that the Additional Protocol to the NPT is absolutely discriminatory and signing it would affect the sovereignty of the country! [29](#) But officially Iran has not yet come to a conclusion. Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman as late as August 2003 said: "We are still discussing the additional protocol" to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty."[30](#)

NPT Discrimination

There are many ways to divide the world. But when it comes to military might, it is those who have nuclear weapons and those who do not. Due to the advances of nuclear science over the past half century, the eight or nine "haves" are an elite club of nations with almost 30,000 nuclear weapons and the ability to blow the earth to bits many times over. The "have-nots" are the rest of the world countries, which lack the technical capacity to make atomic weapons, do not want them or are staying true to a

vow never to acquire them. Some have security agreements with members of the nuclear bomb club and do not need what is usually called "The Bomb."

The New York Times warned recently in an editorial that "The international controls that contained the spread of nuclear weapons for decades are crumbling." It further advocated that the United States should lead an urgent international effort to repair the torn fabric of nuclear proliferation controls. [31](#)

NPT Facing New Challenges

Since the end of the Cold War and after revelation of Iraq's nuclear weapons program in the early 1990s and latter especially with the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests in May 1998 the global system of nuclear non-proliferation enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty [NPT] since the 1970s became under unprecedented heavy strains. [32](#)

The pressures on the NPT once again rose substantially when North Korea finally and after many negotiations with the US and other concerned countries in the region namely South Korea and Japan opted to formally withdraw from the NPT. This was the first time that a country had withdrawn from the NPT and to many analysts this marked an ominous trend, which could be followed by other states. This alarming trend somehow also reflects the approach toward Iran's nuclear program. Much has been said about this issue and the potential threats that its nuclear program might pose to the peace and security without much attention to the facts. Indeed in an objective review of the history of the NPT there are many good reasons for concern. However the root causes of NPT's weakness and its probable demise have been seldom addressed.

Since its inception, the NPT was considered to be an instrument for preserving the status quo in the form of an exclusive club for nuclear powers of that time. But later, it was changed into a regime that was best characterized as "proliferation management" instead of non-proliferation! With this notion, Israel was allowed to enter the club although clandestinely and through the back door. The same rule was applied for India and Pakistan reluctantly. In other words once the countries established their friendship with the US and other major powers and demonstrated their 'eligibility' for having nuclear weapons they were allowed to join the 'nuclear club', although reluctantly and unofficially. [33](#) It is with that approach and logic that countries who are considered as 'rouge states' are not even allowed to pursue their legitimate rights for peaceful use of nuclear technologies stipulated in the NPT.

The nuclear power states in the NPT have also undermined the present regime of non-proliferation by emphasizing on the nuclear weapons in their own military doctrines and by insisting on the reliance on these weapons as the main instrument for

deterrence. The same countries are also not acting according to their commitments for a timetabled nuclear disarmament. Adding to this adverse policy is the America's new program for considering developing mini-nukes and other types of nuclear weapons.

American Dual Policy

The United States is pursuing a double policy of global non-proliferation, while giving a blind eye to its closest ally and friend, Israel, is maintaining an active nuclear policy with the possibility of deploying min-nukes in the near future.³⁴ This policy is in total contradiction to the efforts to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons in the world. While US president and senior members of his administration invest a lot of effort trying to prevent the development of nuclear arms by other countries like North Korea and Iran, they are also making a very significant contribution to the opposite trend. Indeed this is one of the serious problems embedded in the new American nuclear policy. The administration is blurring the boundary between conventional war and nuclear war. It is saying that nuclear war is possible and in effect there is no difference between dropping a bomb that contains conventional explosives and dropping a nuclear bomb on an enemy. Blurring the clear and sharp line between nuclear weapons and everything else is endangering the relative strategic stability that has characterized the post-Cold War world. While the last five decades had clear and strict rules with regard to nuclear weapons, and the assumption was that the weapons were only for deterrence with no intention to use them for anything other than that purpose, now the American administration is trying to create new rules. At this stage it is still not certain what was decided in Nebraska, but it is clear in which direction the Bush administration is pushing. The new policy granting legitimacy to the use of nuclear weapons could encourage other countries to develop nuclear arms. ³⁵

Conclusion

While pressures are growing on Iran's nuclear program, it seems there is not much interest in looking to some substantive issues threatening the present non-proliferation regime. Meantime, the United States is convinced that even with more intrusive inspections, there could be little to do in stopping Iran to reach the final stages in acquiring nuclear capability. The U.S. policy is now focused more on delaying tactics, depriving Iran from advanced technologies to achieve nuclear capability. In this policy, creation of obstacles by denial of needed technologies from other countries, especially from Russia, or through international sanctions are envisaged. Been aware of the U.S. tactics, Iran resisted the pressures to sign the Additional Protocol to the NPT unconditionally and without a clear commitment by the IAEA for future access to peaceful nuclear technologies, which that country has been often denied in the past. Another issue that dissuaded Iran from signing the Additional Protocol was American vague position, declaring that Iran's signing of the Additional Protocol is necessary but not enough! That implied, once Iran accepts the terms of this protocol, she has to

succumb to other US demands that follows, leading to the total abandonment of its nuclear program. However, it seems that the US has opted for some time to take the back seat giving a chance to a group of concerned countries especially in the European Union and Japan to use their economic leverage for persuading Iran to accept more international intrusive control of its nuclear plants.

The existing nuclear non-proliferation regime established under the NPT was developed in the 1960s in a bipolar world system. Things have changed dramatically since then. There are now three new nuclear powers although not recognized by the NPT. In the recent years the NPT has been seriously challenged and under heavy strains. North Korea's decision to abandon the NPT, and news since last February about the advanced nuclear programs of Iran have created much concerns and anxieties in the international community. On the other hand, US quest for new small nuclear weapons called the 'Mini Nukes' could serve as a sever blow to the existing nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Amid these developments, the volatile relations between Iran and United States with neo-conservatives in US calling for a regime change in Iran have complicated the issue even more. The problem not only relates to the viability of the present most important nuclear disarmament treaty, namely the NPT, but it also concerns the wider regional security issues including Iran's legitimate right for access to advanced technologies. Although, there might have been lack of adequate transparency, diplomatic finesse or rhetorical pronouncements about nuclear weapons and Israel on the Iranian side, but the undeniable fact remains that Iran has not violated any commitments related to the NPT and there are no legal basis for prejudgement and depriving that country from access to peaceful nuclear technologies. Thus, it seems that to uphold the present nuclear non-proliferation regime by simply putting pressures on Iran's nuclear program is not fair and justified; although this is not to disclaim the responsibility of the Iranian side for adequately addressing the international concerns through needed transparency. However, it would be short-sightedness if some important aspects related to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons were neglected. This refers to the dual approach regarding the NPT, which allows the friendly countries to skip the provisions of the NPT while putting pressure on other states. This trend could lead to more dissents in the present regime and more withdrawals as North Korea did recently. The second point relates to the obligations of nuclear powers in fulfilling their duties under the NPT for a complete nuclear disarmament. Unfortunately nuclear powers have not done enough in convincing the international public opinion that they are abandoning the nuclear weapons in their military doctrines. Finally, it is the new nuclear posture and possible deployment of Mini Nukes by the US that could severely damage the present non-nuclear regime.

Without adequate attention to the above-mentioned issues it seems that there could be little hope for viability of the present nuclear non-proliferation regime in the future.

Footnotes:

1. [\[return\]](#) The point that Iran needs new sources of energy and its declared plan for production of 6000 MW of electricity from nuclear power in the next 10 years should be taken into account.
2. [\[return\]](#) Valerie Lincy and Gary Milhollin, "Iran's Nuclear Program: For Electricity or a Bomb?," New York Times, August 3, 2003.
3. [\[return\]](#) Ibid.
4. [\[return\]](#) Ibid.
5. [\[return\]](#) Ibid.
6. [\[return\]](#) For instance, Nasser Hadian, a professor at Tehran University as a person aligned with the reformers is quoted as saying that "These weapons would guarantee the territorial integrity and national security of Iran. We feel that we cannot possibly rely on the world to provide security for us, and this is felt by all the factions." See, Douglas Frantz, "Iran Closes In on Ability to Build a Nuclear Bomb," The Los Angeles Times, August 4, 2003.
7. [\[return\]](#) Ibid.
8. [\[return\]](#) Ibid.
9. [\[return\]](#) Ibid.
10. [\[return\]](#) Guy Dinmore, "Nuclear Arms At Heart Of US Relations With Tehran Leaders," Financial Times, July 15, 2003, p. 3.
11. [\[return\]](#) Tehran (AFP), August 19, 2003.
12. [\[return\]](#) Wall Street Journal Europe, August 28, 2003.
13. [\[return\]](#) See, Greg LaMotte, "Iran's Nuclear Ambitions Seen as Adding to Tehran's Prestige in Region," Cairo, August 6, 2003, Voice of America.

14. [\[return\]](#) Ibid.
15. [\[return\]](#) Ibid.
16. [\[return\]](#) Ibid.
17. [\[return\]](#) Michael Dobbs, "Pressure Builds for President to Declare Strategy on Iran," The Washington Post, June 15, 2003.
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