

July 2006

IRAN'S NUCLEAR THREAT: EXPLORING THE POLITICS

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In the third of a series of occasional ORG briefing papers from key international commentators and experts, Farhang Jahanpour explores the rhetoric of aggression developing between Iran and the USA and Israel, and asks if war is really inevitable?

After years of US and Israeli attempts to refer Iran's nuclear programme to the UN Security Council, and after two and a half years of European efforts to find a solution to the problem through negotiations, the Iranian file was finally reported to the Security Council on 8 March 2006. However, even when the Security Council started to debate the case, US Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton's strong-arm tactics failed to persuade other members to issue a strong, binding resolution against Iran. After difficult and protracted negotiations over three weeks, with the US, the UK and France on one side and China and Russia on the other, on 29 March 2006 the Security Council president read a statement calling on Iran to suspend her uranium enrichment. The United States and the EU3 (Britain, Germany and France) had pushed for a much tougher, binding statement, including the threat of action if Iran did not comply with the statement, but they were forced to accept a compromise as the result of Russian and Chinese objections.

Disagreement at the UN

Agreement was finally reached after a provision in the non-binding presidential statement, that "the Security Council was responsible for international peace and security", was removed at Russian insistence. The matter was referred back to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and its Director General was asked to submit yet another report about Iran's suspension of her enrichment activities. The US Ambassador John Bolton was clearly unhappy about the outcome. Brandishing a copy of the UN Charter for the cameras he lashed out against the Russian and Chinese position: "What happened here today was that Russia and China declined to quote from the UN Charter. They declined to quote from the UN Charter. So we accept that, if they don't want to quote from the UN Charter, because the message is clear nonetheless, that Iran's nuclear weapons program is unacceptable."¹

Both Russia and China were opposed to sanctions and felt that the inclusion of a reference to peace and security could later be used as a legal basis for economic sanctions or even a military strike against Iran. They argued that it was up to the IAEA to build the case against Iran, and not the Security Council. They even opposed setting a deadline for Iran to comply with the IAEA demands. Earlier on, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov had said that setting a deadline would put the US in position to attack Iran later in the year, should it choose to. He explained: "I know how the Security Council works. You start with a soft reminder, then you call upon, then you require, then you demand, then you threaten. It will become a self-propelling function."²

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The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Oxford Research Group.

The immediate Iranian response to the 29 March Security Council statement was defiant. Iran's UN Ambassador Javad Zarif denied that Iran had any intention of developing nuclear weapons, but insisted that Iran had an "inalienable right" to pursue nuclear energy. He said that Iran was prepared to co-operate with the IAEA, but that Iran's rights were not for sale. Iran's ambassador to the IAEA, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, said: "We will not, definitely, suspend enrichment."³ While stressing that Tehran was still open to talks with the IAEA, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said that there was "mistrust" over negotiations with European nations.

Those statements culminated in the Iranian president's announcement on 11 April at ceremonies held with great fanfare that Iran had successfully enriched uranium to 3.5% for nuclear reactor fuel, and thus Iran had joined 'the nuclear club'. Iranian officials told Mohamed ElBaradei, the Director General of the IAEA, who visited Iran on 13 April, that Iran had already achieved enrichment technology and there was no going back. However, Iran promised to increase co-operation with the UN nuclear watchdog. For his part, ElBaradei ended the talks on a note of optimism. "I don't think the issue of enrichment right now, emotional as it is, is urgent," ElBaradei said. "So, we have ample time to negotiate a settlement by which, as I said, Iran's need for nuclear power is assured and the concern of the international community is also put to rest."⁴

Iraq, Iran and Déjà Vu

Nevertheless, despite the weak tone of the Security Council statement and divisions among the five permanent members over Iran's nuclear programme, there is no doubt that Iran will come under increasing pressure to suspend her uranium enrichment. Despite some optimism about the possibility of a negotiated settlement, the situation is still very serious and the international community must devote more attention to the issue to make sure that it does not get out of hand. For many people it is déjà vu: the present situation is reminiscent of the days leading to the Iraqi war, with exaggerated statements about Iran's imminent danger, supported by orchestrated media campaigns preparing the public for sanctions culminating in an assault.

This is why it is so important for people to look at the facts and the possible options before the region is plunged into another war with much more devastating consequences than the invasion of Iraq. In addition to killing tens of thousands of innocent Iranians, an attack on Iran could also destabilise the whole of the Middle East, including Israel.⁵ It could prove to be the last straw that broke the camel's back and could put an end to the neoconservative dream of an American Empire. The Iraqi fiasco has shown that the United States cannot dominate the oil wealth of the Middle East through invasion and occupation. After three years of occupation and close to half a trillion dollars of wasted resources, Iraq is producing still less oil than it did before the invasion. The United States will not only fail to dominate Iranian oil, it might even lose control of the oil resources in the rest of the Persian Gulf region.

Given the debacle in Iraq, it is certainly in America's interest not to compound the problems by widening the conflict. Whether we like it or not, at least 10-15% of Iran's 70 million population is strongly behind the present regime and would fight fanatically in its support. The Iranian regime has a miserable human rights record, but the issue of democracy and human rights in Iran are separate from the nuclear issue. Those issues should be pursued vigorously and the Iranian regime should be forced to establish a more perfect democracy and show greater respect for the human rights of its citizens, but those goals will not be achieved by sanctions or invasions. Sanctions would hurt the poorer people in the society and would consolidate the position of the regime, as the experience of over a decade of stringent sanctions in Iraq demonstrated. Many Iranians may wish to see a change in their regime, but in the face of a foreign threat they would likely fall behind the regime as they did during the Iran-Iraq war.

The public has to be much more concerned about the possibility of a conflict than it is at the moment, due to some strong voices that are raised in support of an attack. As with the invasion of Iraq, the US

campaign against Iran has been driven by the known hawks in the US Administration. For example, even as the Board of Governors of the IAEA was still debating whether to report Iran's file to the Security Council or not, US Vice President Dick Cheney and US Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton were threatening Iran with "meaningful consequences" if she did not give up her nuclear programme. In a widely reported speech on 7 March to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the main pro-Israeli lobby in the USA, Dick Cheney declared: "The United States is keeping all options on the table in addressing the irresponsible conduct of the [Iranian] regime. We will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon."⁶

On the same day that Cheney spoke at AIPAC, General Moshe Ya'alon, a former Israeli Chief of Staff, speaking at another pro-Israeli think tank, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, painted a grim picture of the Iranian nuclear threat and the need to stop it. He told his audience that Israel, the United States and Europe must launch multiple attacks on Iran. Noting that Iran's nuclear sites are numerous and diverse, he remarked: "... the challenge of attacking Iran's nuclear facilities is greater than in the case of Iraq. Unlike Iraq, in which nuclear production was confined to Osiraq, the Iranian nuclear project consists of a few dozen well protected and defended facilities, requiring more than one strike to accomplish a mission against Iranian nuclear targets. I believe that Western air forces – including USAF, EUAF, and IAF – can effectively execute such a mission."⁷

It should be noted that going after Iran and Syria after Saddam Hussein had been dealt with has been a longstanding Israeli policy. Even before the invasion of Iraq, in November 2002 in a high profile interview with the Times of London, Ariel Sharon began publicly pushing the United States to confront Iran. Describing Iran as the "centre of world terror," and bent on acquiring nuclear weapons, he declared that the Bush Administration should put the strong arm on Iran "the day after" it conquered Iraq. Last December Sharon ordered the Israeli Air Force to get ready for a strike on Iran by the end of March 2006. In late April 2003, Ha'aretz reported that the Israeli ambassador in Washington was now calling for regime change in Iran. The overthrow of Saddam, he noted, was "not enough." Israel's so-called Project Daniel recommends that the United States or Israel should strike pre-emptively against Iran's nuclear installations if the diplomatic track fails.

In his first official visit to the United States, addressing a joint session of the Congress, the new Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert referred to Iran's alleged nuclear weapons as an 'existential threat' to Israel, and called for a tough stance against Iran, for which he got a standing ovation. He said: "If we don't take Iran's bellicose rhetoric seriously now, we will be forced to take its nuclear aggressions seriously later."⁸

Iran and the NPT

In view of these powerful voices advocating a military confrontation with Iran, it is necessary to take a calmer view of the facts regarding Iran's nuclear programme. There is no dispute that, as a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Iran is entitled to peaceful nuclear technology. The NPT begins by affirming that "all parties to the treaty are entitled to participate in the fullest possible exchange of scientific information for – and to contribute alone or in cooperation with other states to – the further development of the applications of atomic energy for peaceful purposes."⁹

But the NPT requires all signatories not already in possession of nuclear weapons to conclude a safeguards agreement with the IAEA, with a view to preventing diversion of "source or special fissionable material" to the production of nuclear weapons. Accordingly, the IAEA Director General and his designated inspectors "shall have access at all times to all places" as necessary "to account for [safeguarded] source and special fissionable materials" and "to determine whether there is compliance with the undertaking against use in furtherance of any military purpose."

When IAEA inspectors do determine that safeguarded materials have been used “in furtherance of any military purpose”, they shall report such non-compliance to the Director General, who shall thereupon transmit the report to the Board of Governors. Then, according to the IAEA Statute:

“If the Board, upon examination of relevant information reported to it by the Director General, finds that the Agency is not able to verify that there has been no diversion of nuclear material required to be safeguarded under this agreement, to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, it may make the reports provided for in paragraph C of Article XII of the Statute of the Agency.”

Iran has been one of the original signatories to the NPT. Since February 2003, when Iran joined the Additional Protocol and its Safeguards Agreement, the IAEA's inspectors have been conducting over 2,000 person-days of intrusive investigations into the nature and extent of Iran's nuclear programme. More than a year ago, ElBaradei reported to the Board that he had found no indication that (a) there were any undeclared “source or special nuclear materials” in Iran, nor that (b) “source or special nuclear materials” were being, or had ever been “used in furtherance of a military purpose.”¹⁰ However, the United States was not content with the non-diversion of nuclear material for military purposes and, contrary to NPT provisions, she demanded that Iran should give up her uranium enrichment activities. If this were allowed to stand, it would mean that the United States has succeeded unilaterally to rewrite the Nonproliferation Treaty. The present US drive to deny Iran the possibility of enrichment would mean that not only non-nuclear powers will not be allowed to possess nuclear weapons, they will not even be allowed to engage in independent nuclear research and technology or to enrich uranium for fuel. This would confirm what President Mahmud Ahmadinejad described as “nuclear apartheid” in his speech at the UN.

Negotiations

Nevertheless, in her talks with the EU3 Iran agreed ‘voluntarily’ to suspend uranium enrichment in return for meaningful concessions from the West. The three European countries made a number of minor concessions, including the sale of aircraft spare parts and facilitating Iran's membership in the World Trade Organisation that had been regularly vetoed by the United States. However, throughout those talks the absent United States was the proverbial ‘elephant in the room’. The EU3 had the desire but lacked the means of providing substantial concessions that Iran demanded, while the United States, which possessed the means, lacked the desire to do so. Iran was hoping to get the sanctions imposed by the United States over the past quarter century lifted, having her frozen assets released and above all receive security guarantees. The EU3 could not provide any of the above, while the US Administration continued with threats of regime change and invasion.

After over two years of stalemate in the talks, Iran decided to resume limited enrichment activities that she had voluntarily suspended, after informing the IAEA. This provided the United States with the excuse that she needed to push for the referral of Iran to the Security Council. In his latest report to the IAEA in March 2006, ElBaradei stated:

“As our report earlier this month made clear, Iran continues to fulfil its obligations under the Safeguards Agreement and Additional Protocol by providing timely access to nuclear material, facilities and other locations.”¹¹

He had already reported to the Board last November that “All the declared nuclear material in Iran has been accounted for, and therefore such material is not diverted to prohibited activities.” However, he did point out that he still had some concerns about Iran's nuclear programme. The main area of concern involved Iran's concealment of her enrichment activities for a number of years until she was forced to reveal them after its programme had been exposed by the political wing of the Mojahedin-e Khalq

organisation (which, incidentally, the United States and the United Kingdom refer to as a terrorist organisation).

In addition to the revelations by the Mojahedin-e Khalq, China and Russia had also provided some information about Iran's secret programme; and when Libya decided to dismantle her nuclear programme and ship all her nuclear-related equipment to the United States, she too revealed all the links that she had with the Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan, as well as Iran's contacts with the same network.

Dr. Hasan Rowhani, Iran's former secretary of the Supreme National Security Council and chief nuclear negotiator, claimed that in the meetings with the three EU foreign ministers, Iran had provided all the secret information about her nuclear programme. In return, they had promised to assist Iran with her peaceful nuclear program and to prevent Iran's file to be sent to the Security Council. He went on: "... the Europeans promised us that if we declared the full picture of the nuclear activities of the country, in keeping with the Agency's resolution, then if the Americans insisted to take our file to the Security Council, they would resist and would not allow this to happen."¹² He accused the Europeans of having reneged on both promises. Also in their defence, Iranian officials argue that, according to NPT regulations, they were not under any obligation to reveal their enrichment activities until 180 days before full-scale production. Therefore, technically they had not broken any rules.

After Iran resumed limited uranium processing, Russia proposed a way out of the impasse by offering to enrich uranium on her soil and sell Iran the needed fuel. However, Iran – that has spent a great deal of money and effort on enrichment technology and also possesses some uranium mines – insists that she is entitled to enrich uranium on her own soil. Furthermore, she argues that she cannot rely on secure foreign supplies, as on many occasions agreements have been violated. Iran's Bushehr nuclear reactor should have been completed and functioning a few years ago but, under US pressure, Russia has delayed her promise to provide fuel for it. Of course, in view of the threat that Iran is facing, it may have been wiser for her to accept the Russian compromise and transfer uranium enrichment to the Russian soil. However, Iranian leaders believe that engaging in nuclear research and development is their 'inalienable right' and they do not see any reason why they, and only they, should give up that right. Other countries, such as Japan, South Korea, Brazil and many other nuclear powers already enjoy that right. The issue of enrichment has become a matter of national pride in Iran and is often compared with the nationalisation of the oil industry under Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq in the 1950s. The government would find it very hard to climb down in view of massive public support for the programme.

During the last round of talks with Moscow and with the EU3, Iran agreed to extend her suspension of enrichment activities for a further two years, and to keep only a very small number of centrifuges for research purposes. These very important concessions were hardly reported by Western media. Russia and EIBaradei agreed with that proposal and, given the alternative scenarios, it also seems like a logical solution, unless the aim is to humiliate Iran and find excuses for a confrontation.¹³ It should be borne in mind that contrary to Israel, India and Pakistan that started with civilian nuclear activities and then developed nuclear weapons, Iran is a member of the NPT and is under constant surveillance. It is essential to ensure that Iran remains a member of the NPT and the surveillance continues.

Most experts agree that Iran is five to ten years away from the ability to enrich uranium for a nuclear bomb. As Joseph Cirincione, former Director for Non-proliferation at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, has pointed out: "Even that estimate, shared by the US Defense Intelligence Agency and experts at IISS, ISIS, and University of Maryland, assumes Iran goes full-speed ahead and does not encounter any of the technical problems that typically plague such programs."¹⁴

Nevertheless, as the result of persistent pressure from Washington, the board of governors of the IAEA, which normally takes its decision by consensus, was forced to take a vote to report Iran to the Security

Council. EBaradei urged caution and a return to negotiations. “Everybody is looking forward to a political settlement,” he told reporters in Vienna at the end of the meeting on Iran. He added: “What we need at this stage is cool-headed approaches. We need for people to lower the rhetoric.” He also urged that once security issues began to be discussed with Iran, “the U.S. should be engaged into a dialogue.”¹⁵ EBaradei insisted that Iran’s nuclear programme did not pose an “imminent threat” to world peace and security. He rejected the use of force against Iran and even argued that sanctions would be counter-productive. He said: “Imposing sanctions on Iran is a bad idea and will not be fruitful. We call upon all parties of the conflict to express their grievances and demands at the negotiation table.”¹⁶ He went on to say that the issue of uranium enrichment was the tip of the iceberg and all the inter-related issues of the Middle East, including Israel’s undeclared arsenal of nuclear weapons, had to be addressed.

What EBaradei said makes eminent sense. Politicians should use the additional period that has been provided by the Security Council to intensify efforts to find a negotiated settlement to the dispute. This cannot be achieved without active US participation. There are many inter-linked issues in the Middle East, including the issue of Israeli security against an attack from Iran, Syria, Lebanon or by terrorist groups. There is also still the unresolved problem of the establishment of a Palestinian state. At the same time, Iran has genuine concerns about a possible US or Israeli attack on her nuclear and military installations. Then there are the ongoing insurgency problems in Iraq and Afghanistan, the continuing threat from the al-Qaida movement, transfer of oil and gas resources from the Middle East and Central Asia to the rest of the world, the growing demand for those resources in China and India, and many other related issues. It would be wrong to imagine that one can resolve those problems only by attacking Iran or trying to suppress the genuine aspirations of the Iraqis and the Palestinians for freedom and independence. It is only through an active US involvement that those complex issues could be addressed and resolved. Meanwhile, despite their willingness to engage in military adventure in the region, unlike the Clinton Administration, the Bush Administration has refused to get involved with the Middle East in a meaningful way. The cost of a serious involvement in those issues would be much less than military attacks that do not produce any long-term solutions.

Iranian Politics

Despite all her faults, Iran is a democracy, although a defective one. There is much greater public participation in the affairs of the state than in most other Middle Eastern countries that are friendly to the West. The former reformist government of President Mohammad Khatami that called for a “dialogue among civilisations” and closer links with the West came to power unexpectedly through the democratic process. Khatami received the highest number of votes of any president before him. Yet instead of supporting his government and encouraging greater reforms, President Bush responded by declaring Iran a member of the “Axis of Evil.” In the last presidential election, despite all its defects, Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani who was favoured by America, Mostafa Mo’in, an even more ardent reformer than Khatami, and Mehdi Karrubi, the former reformist parliamentary speaker, were also among the candidates. Unfortunately, on the eve of the Iranian election, President Bush bizarrely called on the Iranian people to boycott the election. On a low turnout and with the reformist votes split among three candidates, the rightwing candidate Mahmud Ahmadinejad, who had promised to improve people’s economic plight, was elected president.

However, it is wrong to personalise all the issues regarding Iran as was done in the case of Iraq where Saddam Hussein came to represent the entire Iraqi nation. Ahmadinejad does not have a monopoly of power in Iran. Apart from a strong reformist voice, which is still active in the press and the parliament, even some leading conservative figures have spoken openly against Ahmadinejad’s outrageous remarks and policies. Furthermore, the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene’i has empowered the Expediency Council, a powerful body led by Hashemi-Rafsanjani, to oversee the activities of the three branches, including the government. The Majlis (Parliament) has strongly opposed some of Ahmadinejad’s policies and has rejected three of his ministers. Important decisions in Iran are taken collectively by the Supreme

National Security Council that includes the president, but also the heads of the parliament and the judiciary, the head of the Expediency Council and a number of other leading figures in the country.

After meeting with former President Mohammad Khatami, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, Iran's supreme leader, on 25 June 2006 established a new body called the Strategic Council for Foreign Policy headed by the former reformist Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi. Its members include Ali Akbar Velayati, the veteran foreign minister of Iran under former President Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, and Ali Shamkhani, former defence minister under President Khatami. It also includes two conservatives, Mohammad Shari'atmadari and Mohammad Hoseyn Taromi, thus providing a balance between reformist and conservative views. The aim of the new council is to counterbalance the hard-line policies of the government of President Ahmadinejad and define the overall foreign policy goals of the Islamic Republic. In his letter to Kharrazi, Ayatollah Khamene'i wrote that the new council should "help facilitate macro decision-making, explore new horizons in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic, and make use of the views of intellectuals and experts." *Sharq*, a leading reformist newspaper, splashed the news on its front page with the headline: "Return of the moderates to foreign policy", and Mohammad Ali Abtahi, the former vice-president under Khatami, said the body's composition meant "the continuation of détente." Therefore, there are signs that the extremist stances of the present government are being gradually curbed.

The next Iranian presidential election is less than three years away. The best way to encourage the Iranians to distance themselves from the hard-line policies of their present government and to pursue peaceful relations with the rest of the world would be to assure the Iranians that their opposition to the government would not result in a situation similar to that of Iraq. Iran needs to be brought more into the international community, rather than being isolated and threatened. Meanwhile, an Iran that is engaged with the international community would be less of a danger to its neighbours, including Israel, than an isolated and embittered Iran.

Iran-US Dialogue

In a March 2006 article in the *Financial Times*, former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright urged the US administration to disavow any plan for regime change in Iran, and instead to start meaningful negotiations with her.¹⁷ Another Washington insider, Flynt Leverett, who served in senior posts at the National Security Agency, the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency, accused the US Administration of not having a strategy of dealing with Iran. Asserting that the Bush administration rejected an invitation made by Iran in 2003 to open a strategic dialogue, Leverett added that Bush "is, on this issue, very, very resistant to the idea of doing a deal, even a deal that would solve the nuclear problem." He went on: "The Bush administration has deliberately ruled out direct negotiations with Iran either over the nuclear issue or over the broad range of strategic issues that you would need to talk to Iran about if you were going to get a real diplomatic settlement on the nuclear issue."¹⁸ He too called for direct talks with Iran to resolve both the nuclear and other outstanding issues between the two countries.

After her initial reluctance to engage in direct dialogue with Iran, the US Administration has indicated that she is willing to join the talks with Iran provided that Iran freezes her uranium enrichment. It has also indicated that they will lift some of the sanctions on Iran. Once the United States realised that it could not win the support of not only Russia and China, but even Japan, Brazil, South Korea and some of her European allies, for military action or even punitive sanctions against Iran, she reluctantly turned towards diplomacy. On 31 May, in an unexpected move Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice offered potential dialogue with Iran, but she also raised a number of preconditions. She demanded that Iran should stop its uranium enrichment programme before the United States would agree to talk to them. This clearly is the case of putting the cart before the horse. The aim of any dialogue should be to achieve mutually acceptable terms as the result of bilateral compromise. If Iran were to stop her enrichment

programme even in advance of any talks what then would be the point of any negotiations. Announcing these preconditions ahead of any talks has persuaded some commentators to point out that the offer of the talks is merely a ploy to persuade Russia and China to join tougher measures against Iran in case those talks fail or do not get off the ground.

However, whatever the intention behind that offer, it should be regarded as a positive move. In the same way that in his letter the Iranian president broke a quarter century-long taboo and addressed the US president directly, the US offer of talks also is of historic significance and goes against US insistence never to talk to Iran that it designated as a 'terrorist state'. The time has come for both sides to put aside their historic resentment and hostility towards each other and engage in substantive talks on the nuclear issue and other important regional and bilateral issues. By insisting on her right to enrich uranium and actually proving that she has gained access to the necessary technology, Iran has won an impressive victory. Having proved to the world that she has the capability to enrich uranium it will do Iran no harm at all to suspend her programme for a number of years, as it did when she was engaged in negotiations with the EU3. The art of diplomacy is to know how far to push and when to stop. Iran has scored a major victory by her insistence to enrich uranium, but now the time has come for Iran to use that ability as a negotiating ploy to resolve some of her outstanding problems with the United States and the West. Although Iran has the right to enrich uranium, it may be advisable to forego that right in pursuit of higher goals.

Solutions

The solution of Iran's nuclear issue, and indeed the nuclear problem in the Middle East as a whole, should be based on international law and NPT regulations, rather than on threats and intimidation or the whims of different governments. The NPT may need to be revised, but this should be done properly through the correct channels and in consultation with all the countries involved. Its final form cannot be decided as a part of an on-going dispute with Iran. Some proposals that could help resolve the present crisis with Iran on the basis of international law include:

- a) Iran should agree to suspend once again her enrichment programme for the duration of the talks with the West, which would also include the United States. This will be necessary for confidence building and for showing goodwill towards a peaceful resolution of the dispute.
- b) As a part of a final agreement, Iran should be allowed limited enrichment, say up to the existing limit of three cascades of 164 centrifuges for uranium enrichment to a maximum of 5% for the production of nuclear fuel, under strict IAEA supervision, and severe penalties if Iran transgresses those limits. This is something that Iran has already achieved and it would be pointless to try to reverse the stage that it has already reached. This would satisfy Iran's demands to continue with nuclear research and development and, at the same time, it would provide assurance to the international community that Iran's nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes only.
- c) In return for Iran's agreement to give up any possible ambition of possessing nuclear weapons, the United States and the West should offer Iran real and serious incentives, such as lifting the sanctions and ending Iran's diplomatic isolation.
- d) Set up a consortium under the supervision of the IAEA for providing nuclear fuel to the countries that are engaged in the production of nuclear energy, with no right of veto for any country to interrupt the supply of fuel to the countries that have not violated the NPT Agreement.
- e) Open up discussion regarding Israel's nuclear weapons in keeping with UN resolutions and set up a clear timetable towards the establishment of a WMD free zone in the Middle East.

- f) Devote much greater efforts with greater urgency to universal disarmament, guarantees of no-first use of nuclear weapons, especially against non-nuclear states. Otherwise, the future of humanity is at great risk and disputes between the nuclear and non-nuclear powers will continue. As Charley Rees said: "The politicians in this world... have at their command weapons of mass destruction far more complex than their own thinking processes."

Conclusion

Disputes over Iran's nuclear programme must be resolved through dialogue and negotiation, not through the use of force or even threats to use force. To his great credit, the former British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw consistently argued while in office that the use of military force against Iran was "inconceivable". However, it is not enough to make pious statements while the inexorable march of events is moving towards a disastrous confrontation. The British Prime Minister Tony Blair has consistently refused to completely rule out a military attack on Iran. In order to make up, in part, for his ill-judged support of the neocon-driven war on Iraq, he must now make a resolute effort to act as an honest broker and mediator between the United States and Iran, and push for a peaceful and honourable solution to the present impasse. That policy would help both Iran and the United States and would be Mr Blair's greatest legacy for posterity. Meanwhile, America's greatest assistance to democracy in Iran would be to give people hope, to recognise Iran's legitimate rights and address her legitimate security concerns. In return, Iran could help stabilise the situation in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Lebanon and the Persian Gulf and help resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Iran's population is young, educated, well-informed and outward looking. Iran has the second highest number of per capita internet bloggers in the world, only second to the United States. Persian is incredibly the fourth most commonly used language on the internet. 70% of Iran's 70 million population is below 30. Literacy is at around 80% nationwide, and over 90% among those below the age of 25. There are 22 million pupils in schools and close to 3 million university students, over 60% of them girls. That population can be won over with a genuine hand of friendship, not with threats and bullying. Israel's security, meanwhile, would best be served by an Iranian government that is more engaged with the West than one that is isolated, or by inflicting yet one more disastrous conflict on the region. The policy of sanctions followed by military action and regime change has failed, and is bound to fail again.

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