Rethinking US Policy Towards Iran's Nuclear Programme

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Western support for Iran's nuclear programme gave way to opposition when it was realised that alongside non-military use, the Islamic Republic was pursuing a nuclear weapons programme. Driven by Tehran's policy of aggression in the Middle East and elsewhere, Western states under US coordination intensified the pressure on Iran to abandon its alleged nuclear weapons programme. Rather than halting uranium enrichment in Iran, however, years of stifling economic, scientific and military sanctions have only caused the country to take a more clandestine approach. Though US-led restrictions have slowed down the pace of Iranian nuclear development, they have been unable to make Tehran come clean about its plans. While maintaining the correctness of the US position on Iran's nuclear ambitions, this work argues that the policy of restrictions must be reshaped in order to limit its effect on ordinary Iranians. These citizens are identified as potential drivers of change. Seeking their support is crucial for the success of global efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons – hence, the need to restructure restrictions.

Keywords: Iran, nuclear weapons, United States, policy, sanctions, restrictions

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Introduction

The nature of nuclear activities in Iran suggests that the country is on a path to nuclear weapons production. In heading there, it has taken two routes: highly enriched uranium (HEU) and plutonium production. Despite the denials of Iranian government officials, components of the

state's programme and the secrecy of its nuclear dealings bolster the claims of world powers that there is a military dimension to the Islamic Republic's uranium enrichment plans. For decades now, the United States – with the support of the United Nations Security Council (of which it is part) as well as the European Union and other countries such as Australia, Canada, South Korea, India and China – has been pressuring Tehran to relinquish its nuclear weapons ambitions. Nevertheless, the country continues to insist that its uranium enrichment is for peaceful purposes only.

The pressure mounted on the Islamic Republic of Iran has to date been monumental. Worst hit by the US-led restrictions is the economy. The resulting sky-high prices of goods and services have more impact on ordinary Iranians than on the policy makers who are their real targets. Overall, the consequences in the country have been colossal, and the controversial nuclear programme has also suffered under the weight of US-imposed and -influenced blockades. Despite these visible effects, however, restrictive policies have been ineffective in compelling Iran to jettison its plans to develop nuclear bombs. Thus, although sanctions have succeeded in slowing down Iran's nuclear development, I argue that they should now be reshaped in order to insulate ordinary Iranians from their effects.

This study proceeds by shedding light on Iran's nuclear history, which it traces through to the current state of nuclear developments and their military indicators. It next outlines the sanctions imposed on the country in order to force the redirection of policy; the analysis goes further to provide justification for the Western opposition to Iran based on the latter's aggressive conduct in the Middle East and elsewhere. Finally, this work concludes that current sanctions should be restructured in a way that makes them acceptable to ordinary Iranians. This will create cracks from inside the Islamic Republic.

Historical Overview of Iran's Nuclear Programme

The current tension around Iran's plans to go nuclear – that is, to weaponise its nuclear capability – cannot and should not be divorced from the complicated history of the country's nuclear ambitions. In fact, the intensity of the controversy surrounding Iran's nuclear weapons drive

can be seen as a product of that complex history. Understanding that history, thus, provides a much needed context for the Western disapproval of Iran's desire to weaponise its nuclear power.

To be sure, relations between Iran and the West have not always been conflict-ridden. Britain, for instance, is known to have enjoyed excellent relation with Tehran when economics permitted and the public held that Tehran's dealings with London were not hostile to British interests. The demise of the Anglophone influence created leeway for Washington, which supported Iran's development of nuclear power in the mid-20th century. Iran's nuclear history can therefore be divided into three phases: Western support for Iran's uranium enrichment; Western suspicion of an atomic Iran; and the development of the country's nukes with non-Western input (a stage of conflict).

Interestingly, more than four decades of bumpy US-Iranian relations can be traced to the very nuclear programme which the US helped create and which is now at the heart of global controversy. Iran's efforts to develop nuclear energy date back to 1957; they were linked to a push from the Eisenhower administration which ultimately resulted in the establishment of military-cum-economic ties.[1] The apparent honeymoon between Tehran and Washington spanned decades and ostensibly hinged on Iran's lack of interest in attaining the same status as its US partner when it came to nuclear capability. For its part, Iran was keen to maintain this mutually beneficial situation. Hence, it signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty on 01 July 1968, the day the treaty opened for signatures. Six years later, the state also concluded a safeguard agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).[2] This points to an attitude of compliance rather than dissent and suggests that at the time Tehran was pursuing a peaceful nuclear programme. This compliance contrasts sharply with the defiant behaviour that has characterised Iran's relations with the West for much of the last four decades. It also calls into question the country's nuclear objectives – an issue analysed in-depth further on in this study.

Notably, Tehran's nuclear dealings were not restricted to the US and it also obtained assistance from other Western powers. In the mid-1970s, for instance, Iran signed contracts with Western firms including France's Framatome and Germany's Kraftwerk Union on the construction of nuclear plants and the supply of nuclear fuel. Still, the support from

the US remained substantial: under the 1957 Agreement for Cooperation in Research in the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy, the United States provided nuclear technology, supported Iran's scientists and sold the country nuclear reactor fuel. Furthermore, Iran's first nuclear station in Bushehr was built under US supervision.

Iran's Nuclear Programme

To be clear, this was never a one-sided expression of goodwill. In other words, rather than being parasitic, relations were largely symbiotic. The US also stood to benefit from maintaining such close and friendly ties with Iran. In return for its goodwill, the US enjoyed the purchase of Iranian oil at favourably low prices. What factors, then, lay behind the shift from Western support for Iran's nuclear programme to the opposition of Tehran's nuclear ambitions? To sketch an answer, we need to return to the lead-up to the Islamic Revolution of 1979: Western support for Iran's nuclear drive began to erode after US special intelligence forces suggested in 1974 that the Shah's ambitions could lead Iran to pursue nuclear weapons. This concern prompted the withdrawal of Western support for Iran's nuclear programme. But it was the seizing of US hostages and breaking off of diplomatic relations after the 1979 revolution that strained US-Iran relations to the degree assumed in the 21st century.

It is widely known that the US is at the forefront of the Western opposition to Iran's nuclear programme. Washington has used sanctions to try to compel the Iranian government to fulfil its nuclear non-proliferation commitments under international law. Over the years, the case against Iran has been strengthened by the clandestine nature of its nuclear activities. (In contrast, Zarif argues that it was efforts 'to avoid the US-led restrictions that led Iran to refrain from disclosing the details of its programme.')[3] Such US disapproval of Iran's nuclear ambitions has significantly slowed their achievement, but it has failed to bring them to a halt; this is in spite of all recent talks. Though Washington has stepped in on several occasions to block nuclear deals between Iran and each of Argentina, China and Russia, these efforts have on the whole achieved minimal results.

While Washington's attempts to frustrate Tehran into holding dialogue have, for the most part, been unsuccessful – even as US-initiated sanctions undermine Iran's economy – these moves have developed local capacities with some foreign non-Western assistance. Iran may still be a long while away from producing nuclear bombs, but the state

has undoubtedly managed to assemble at least the essential ingredients for nuclear weapons capability. In 2003, *Iran Watch* reported that the world had

> realised that Iran had built or was building everything needed to produce enriched uranium, which could fuel nuclear weapons as well as nuclear reactors…the sites included a uranium mine at Saghand, a yellowcake production plant near Ardekan, a pilot uranium enrichment plant at Natanz, and a commercial-scale enrichment facility on the same site. In addition, Iran was continuing work on a 1,000 megawatt nuclear reactor at Bushehr and was building a heavy water production plant at Arak, next to which Iran planned to build a 40 megawatt heavy water reactor.[4]

From very modest beginnings, Iran has managed to set up a torrent of nuclear installations. A partial list of their names underlines this success: Bonab Research Centre, Chalus Nuclear Facility, Darkhovin Nuclear Power Plant, Fordow Uranium Enrichment Facility and Isfahan Nuclear Technology Centre, Lashkar Abad Plant, Karaj Research Centre, Lavizan-Shian Technical Research Centre, Parachin Military Complex, Tehran Nuclear Research Centre, Yazd Radiation Processing Centre and Qom Uranium Enrichment Plant.[5]

The Possible Military Dimensions of Iran's Nuclear Development

In line with its safeguards agreement, Iran has informed the IAEA about sixteen of its nuclear facilities as well as nine location outside facilities (LOFs) where material is regularly used. In 2010, Tehran also announced the construction of ten new enrichment facilities.[6] It has yet, however, to provide the IAEA with any details of these plans. The current Iranian nuclear infrastructure is extensive. It includes three known uranium enrichment plants: the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant (PFEP), the Fuel Enrichment Plant (FEP) and the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP).[7] The first two are located in Natanz while the FFEP is in Fordow near the city of Qom. In addition, Iran has at least one known enrichment research and development facility. This is Kalaye Electric in Tehran.

The FEP is the main enrichment facility which uses an IR-1 centrifuge.[8] It is a centrifugal enrichment plant brought into operation in 2007 for the production of low enriched uranium (LEU), enriched up to 5% U-235. The

PFEP is a pilot facility which has mainly been used to test centrifuges of various types (IR-1, IR-2, IR-2M, IR-3 and IR-4). It is also a LEU production plant and commenced operation in October 2003.[9] Like the FEP, the FFEP is an underground facility; the existence of both plants was revealed by the US in September 2009. Since that disclosure, the FEEP's purpose has been modified several times; it now appears to be dedicated to producing 20%-enriched UF6. Additionally it is used to generate UF6 enriched up to 5% U-235.[10] Iran is constructing a uranium mine in Saghand and has a milling facility at Ardakan and a small (20-tonne per year) uranium mining/milling installation in operation at Gcchine. It is also continuing to build its heavy-water-moderated reactor at Arak though it has yet to disclose the amount of heavy water to be produced.[11] It is estimated that once in operation, Iran's 40MWth reactor at Arak will be able to produce plutonium for one nuclear weapon a year.

Since the initial August 2002 announcement of the construction of the heavy-water production plant at Arak, there has been little doubt in the minds of many people that in parallel with its uranium enrichment programme, Iran is now pursuing a plutonium route to the production of fissile materials for military use. Note that plutonium–239 is the preferred component for nuclear weapons production. This is significant given that most states which have launched a military nuclear weapons programme did so at first via one method – either HEU or plutonium production – and only later achieved military nuclear capacity through both routes. This was the case for the five nuclear weapon-owning states as well as for India, Pakistan, Iraq and North Korea. Though far more difficult to produce, plutonium has certain advantages, particularly since a smaller quantity of it is needed to create the same nuclear explosion yield and warheads are consequently smaller. This is immediately reflected in the size of, for example, the missile payload and the distance it can reach with a plutonium warhead when compared with an HEU warhead.[12]

Furthermore, many analysts have raised serious questions about the nature of Iran's nuclear research, development and production facilities. Cordesman, for instance, notes that the country has large and well-distributed state industries and military facilities that it can use to hide its activities or to shelter and disperse them.[13] These factors – together with Iran's reduced cooperation with the IAEA, non-implementation of the Additional Protocol, failure to answer longstanding questions about the programme's alleged military dimension and its hide-and-seek games in

negotiations on its nuclear activities – increase the opacity of this nuclear dossier and further justify intensified pressure on the Islamic Republic.

The view that Iran is secretly creating or else intends to develop nuclear weapons is also supported by military, political and technical indicators. Effectively assessing the country's nuclear path therefore requires consideration of all these dimensions; the permutations become complex as various elements enter the mix. Nevertheless, an effort can be made to show that from both technical and political standpoints, Iran has hinted to the world about its desire for nuclear weapons. Iran has enormous reserves of oil and gas deposits which are more than sufficient to generate electrical power, and so nuclear energy should not ordinarily be needed to power the Islamic Republic. The government insists, however, that its final goal is the export of nuclear technology. When we consider that Iran has fairly modest uranium deposits and it relies largely on imports for the major components of its nuclear programme, the country's nuclear plans become quite glaring. This is all the more true since these nuclear investments – often made in secret and dominated by black market purchases – do not appear to be consistent with a strictly peaceful nuclear programme. A.Q. Khan's covert network of business associates in Europe, Asia and Africa is one of the most important suppliers of the essential components of Iran's nuclear reactors.[14]

The heavy-water production plant near the town of Arak about 250 kilometres from Tehran and two gas centrifuge plants under construction at Natanz, forty kilometres from Kashan, are suspected to be part of Iran's nuclear weapons programme. With a capacity of eight kilograms of plutonium a year, the Arak plant is capable of producing two nuclear weapons per annum.[15] Contrary to the relevant UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions – 1696 (2006), 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008), 1835 (2008) and 1929 (2010) – Iran has not suspended its enrichment-related activity at these controversial sites. Tehran is also yet to permit the IAEA to take samples from the heavy water stored at its uranium conversion facility.[16] This attitude gives credence to the suggestions of many analysts that Iran has carried out activities relevant to the development of nuclear weapons. It is also worth emphasising that the UNSC resolutions which require all uranium enrichment activities to be halted at heavy-water reactors, reflect the efficiency of these plants at producing plutonium for nuclear weapons.

Politically, Iran's gestures both belie the country's outward claims and reveal its desire for nuclear weapons. This desire dates back to the Shah's regime and was identified in a 1975 memorandum from Henry Kissinger to the then US secretary of defence in which the former proposed constructing a multinational reprocessing facility in Iran as a fall back to his first choice, Iran's participation as an investor in an enrichment plant in the US.[17] Why, however, does Iran feel the need to possess nuclear weapons? A clue can be found in a 2003 *Le Figaro* interview which Akbar Elemad, the founder and first president of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI). In this interview, Elemad noted that he had asked the Shah in the mid-1970s if he wanted to build a bomb. The Shah, he said, responded that it would be premature to build a bomb as this would isolate Iran and prevent transfers of nuclear technology, but if in ten to twenty years, Iran's security situation had changed or other states had begun to acquire bombs, the nuclear military option would become at priority.[18] This gives weight to Kemp's view that the Shah's nuclear programme was partly motivated by nuclear threats from Israel, Iraq, Pakistan, India and the Soviet Union.[19]

According to Perry, the Iran-Iraq War taught Iran a valuable lesson about the importance of having a credible deterrent force of its own; the Iranians had possessed none and been left extremely vulnerable.[20] Top Iranian government officials at the time, thus, reiterated the desire for weapons of mass destruction. For instance, in an October 1988 address to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the then speaker of Iran's parliament, Hashemi Rafsanjani called for the development of nuclear and other unconventional weapons based on the country's wartime experience. Rafsanjani told the gathering: 'We should fully equip ourselves both in the offensive and defensive use of chemical, bacteriological and radiological weapons.'[21] Militarily, Iran's conduct in the Middle East – specifically in Lebanon and Syria – suggests the use to which the country would put nuclear weapons should it be allowed to acquire any.

Notwithstanding Iran's reporting obligations under its safeguarding undertakings, IAEA Board of Governors' resolutions and numerous UNSC resolutions, or the attempts made by the P5+1 to seek a political solution and concurrent rounds of sanctions (as discussed below), the country remains adamant as it proceeds with uranium enrichment. As a result, I surmise that though rigorous safeguards and accompanying restrictions

are key to addressing the Iranian nuclear question, repackaging sanctions is equally crucial if any significant headway is to be achieved. Further analysis of this standpoint is contained in the last sections of this study.

Granted that Iran desires nuclear weapons, does it possess the wherewithal to produce them? The answer is affirmative though the country will first have to augment its enrichment capacity to the point that it can make sufficient weapon-grade uranium quickly and secretly. This course of action also seems viable given Iran's extensive nuclear physics and engineering experience and the fact it has been operating nuclear research reactors for decades: the country has a cadre of trained personnel who could be switched to a nuclear weapon programme. As Barnaby has noted, 'if [Iran] produces the fissile material – highly-enriched uranium or plutonium or both – needed for nuclear weapons, such weapons could be built in a relatively short time of months rather than years.'[22] Contrary to the claims of President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif that Iran is not interested in acquiring nuclear bombs, the evidence available suggests that it is actively heading down this path.

The direct costs of Iran's nuclear pursuits are enormous, and keeping the nuclear weapons option open has staggering indirect costs for the nation in terms of both political and scientific isolation and economic sanctions.[23] However, Iran is maintaining this course. This indicates the need for changes to the strategies being used to force a redirection of national policy. The consequence of failing to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons will be dire: instability in the region will be worsened by the resulting race for nuclear weapons. Iran's history, detailed further below, also suggests how Tehran would behave if it possessed nukes. In contrast, a successful nuclear deal – if brokered by the US – could provide an enormous boost for beleaguered global non-proliferation efforts. This could also lead to a productive American-Iranian relationship which might tackle the many complex security problems impeding stability in the Middle East.

The US Engagement with Iran

In dealing with the Iranian question, the US has adopted a dual approach: imposing restrictions on the Islamic Republic while seeking avenues for political engagement. What this means is that while the US appears to be

vehemently committed to the sanctions against Iran, it has also preserved the possibility of reaching a compromise through negotiations. In other words, sanctions are imposed while avenues for dialogue are left open. Given, however, that sanctions remain the principal tool relied on in the effort to compel Iran to stay committed to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and its safeguards agreement, the discussion below charts the various economic, scientific and military restrictions which have been imposed on Iran by the US, the international community at the behest of the US or by way of the UN Security Council.

In November 1979, Iranian government assets, including bank deposits, gold and other properties, worth $12 billion (USD) were frozen. This was followed by a ban on weapon sales to the Iran Republican Guard Corps (Qods Force) (IRGC) in 1984. Then, in October 1987 came a prohibition on the export and import of any goods or services from Iran; it was reinforced in April 2012 by specific restrictions on the supply of technology which had been used to track down dissidents, who were later abused, tortured or killed. In March 2005, the US prohibited trade with Iran's oil industry. This strengthened a ban on US trading with Iran's financial, military, manufacturing and oil sectors in place since May 1995. In June 2005, the assets of individuals connected with Iran's nuclear programme were frozen. In September 2006, the US government prohibited dealings between US financial institutions and Bank Saderat Iran. The year 2008 saw the freezing of over $2 billion (USD) held for Iran in Citigroup accounts. Finally, the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act (CISADA) was adopted in June 2010. This law enhanced restrictions on Iran, including by rescinding authorisations for Iranian-origin imports such as rugs, pistachio nuts and caviar.[24]

Either on their own initiative or under US pressure, several other nations and multinational bodies have imposed sanctions which prohibit nuclear, missile-related and other military exports to Iran as well as investments in the Iranian oil, gas and petrochemical industries. They have also banned refined petroleum and medical product exports along with business dealings with the IRGC and banking and insurance transactions and shipping. For instance, on 23 December 2006, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution which prohibited the supply of nuclear-related materials and technology to Iran and also froze the assets of individuals connected with Iran's nuclear programme. This was followed by the imposing of a UNSC arms embargo on the IRGC on 24

March 2007. On 03 March 2008, the freezing of assets was extended to top Iranian officials connected to the country's nuclear programme. On 09 June 2010, the UNSC tightened the arms embargo, expanded travel bans to cover more individuals involved with Iran's nuclear programme and froze the funds and assets of the IRGC and the Islamic Republic of Iran shipping lines. The Australian government has also placed financial restrictions and travel bans on individuals connected with Iran's nuclear programme. Canada has banned dealings in the property of Iranian nationals and imposed a complete arms embargo along with restrictions on the sale of oil-refining equipment and items that could contribute to Iran's nuclear programme. On 17 March 2012, the European Union initiated the disconnection of twenty-five blacklisted Iranian banks from the SWIFT financial messaging network.

In additional international measures, the Indian government has banned the export of all items, materials, equipment, goods and technology that could contribute to Iran's nuclear programme. Meanwhile, Tehran's sworn enemy, Israel has prohibited business dealings with Iran and unauthorised travel to the country. South Korea has blacklisted 126 Iranian individuals and companies involved in the country's nuclear programme. In July 2012, the European Union placed an oil embargo on Iran and froze the assets of Iran's Central Bank. This was accompanied by a Swiss ban on the sale of arms and dual-use items to Iran. Switzerland has also excluded the sale of products that could be used in the Iranian oil and gas sector along with financing to this sector and put a restriction on financial services.

It is noteworthy that though the sanctions imposed on Iran have had crippling effect on its economy and other sectors – including the nuclear programme which is the source of the crisis – they have largely been ineffective in changing the course of Iran's nuclear drive. In fact, Iranian leaders have hinted at plans to develop an "economy of resistance" that would allow the country to neutralise sanctions and even put it in a position to impose boycotts on hostile states.

Grounds for the Western Opposition to Iran's Nuclear Programme

Western hostility to Iran's uranium enrichment stems largely from the United States' designation of the Islamic Republic as a rogue state. This

perception of Iran hinges on the country's notorious role as a sponsor of terror – a status which it attained after the October 1983 bombing of US marine barracks in Lebanon. Iran is constantly being accused of aiding terrorism in the Middle East and other parts of the world. Byman notes that 'Iran has backed not only groups in its Persian Gulf neighbourhood, but also terrorists and radicals in Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Bosnia, the Philippines, and elsewhere.'[25] Iran's propensity for acts of terror is closely associated with the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Iranian leaders believed that aggressively promoting the revolution was a sure way to ensure its success.[26] But, if over the years Iran has demonstrated a proclivity for terrorism, how exactly has this manifested itself? Has Iran's involvement in terrorism been covert, taking the form of support for terrorists, or has it been overt and entailed the actual, direct and undisguised planning and execution of terrorist acts? These questions are addressed below.

Immediately after the revolution, Tehran began to work especially actively with Shi'a Muslim movements around the world. In many countries in the Muslim world, the Shi'a faced oppression and discrimination, and the revolution inspired them to both take action and look to Tehran for support. Iran backed Shi'a groups in Iraq, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Kuwait and elsewhere.[27] The ideological support which Tehran still provides to Shi'a movements has sparked hostility towards Iran from both outside and within the region. In response, terrorism and subversion have been the major weapons in Iran's toolbox. Iran's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism is boosted by Tehran's close connections with the Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip.[28] Tehran is seen here as relying on terrorism to further Iranian foreign policy interests.

Today Iran feels itself to be under growing pressure from the international community through both diplomatic and economic sanctions. From the stuxnet virus to the assassination of Iranian scientists and the defection of Iranian agents, the state sees itself as increasingly the target of Western intelligence services in general and Israel and the United States in particular.[29] But have these forces hindered Iran's nuclear programme? The answer, as we have seen, is not clear. In fact, the desire to avenge attacks on Tehran's scientists along with the sanctions targeting its nuclear programme has only fuelled Iran's aggressive tendencies. Is this then a question of failing tactics or one of an insatiable quest to

spread terror? A mixture of both is likely. Iran's role in a spate of terrorist attacks targeting US (and its allies') interests, including bombings in India and Georgia, shows its readiness to promote terror to further its foreign policy objectives. Failing to stop Iran's acquisition of nuclear missiles will, thus, only succeed in strengthening the state's use of terror as a foreign policy tool.

Iranian leaders have often endorsed the spread of terror as a plausible form of engagement. According to the CIA, while Iran's support for terrorism is meant to promote its national interests, this policy also stems from the clerical regime's view 'that it has a religious duty to export its Islamic revolution and to wage, by whatever means, a constant struggle against the perceived oppressor states.'[30] In 2011, Muhammed Hejazi, the deputy head of Iran's armed forces was quoted as saying that Tehran was in a position to order proxy militant groups in Gaza and Lebanon to fire rockets into Israel. He commented, 'Our strategy now is that we will make use of all means to protect our national interests.'[31]

Iran is known to support a number of militant groups active in the Middle East and elsewhere which have been designated as terrorist associations. Among the many groups that Tehran sponsors are the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Hamas and Iraqi Shia militias.[32] In addition, some Iranian state bodies have also been accused of staging terror attacks. They include the IRGC (identified by the US State Department as a terrorist group), the Ministry of Intelligence and Security and the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Other non-Iranian terrorist proxies include the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain/Abu Dhabi/Qatar, Hizballah Hijaz and Turkish Hezbollah, Tehreek-Jafria Pakistan and Suni organisations such as Al-Qaeda and the Egyptian Al-Gamiah Islamiyya, which may be outwardly anti-Shiite but maintain covert relations with Iran.[33]

Israel has been one of the major targets for Iran-sponsored terrorism. Since the country has long been one of Iran's foremost enemies, Tehran is willing to spare no resource to secure its annihilation. Iran views the state as not simply an enemy regime, but an *enemy entity*; as such, Israeli civilians are also seen as legitimate objects for attacks by the Islamic Republic. These attacks are further evidence that terrorism has become so entrenched in the Iranian state that it has the status of a foreign policy option. Byman notes that 'in addition to giving Iran a way to weaken its neighbours, terrorism [has] allowed Iran to influence

events well beyond its borders… Iran has used terrorism to project power, particularly in the Arab Israeli arena but also against Iraqi targets and in Europe.'[34] These assaults have mostly targeted Israel, the US and other regimes in the Middle East and elsewhere which are sympathetic to both countries. Iran has either been directly involved in their planning and execution or active through proxies such as Hezbollah and Hamas. Jaber reports, for instance, that 'with Iranian guidance, the Lebanese Hezbollah dramatically captured America's attention with devastating suicide attacks on the US embassy in Beirut in April 1983, where 63 people died, including 17 Americans, and on the US Marine Barracks in October, 1983, where 241 US Marines were killed.'[34]

Iran has also been held accountable for the June 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers housing complex, which was home to American, Saudi, French and British service members in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. Earlier, in 1983, Iran was accused of bombing the US marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon. It has since masterminded numerous other attacks: the kidnapping and execution of American hostages in Lebanon; the hijacking of US planes; multiple suicide bombings targeting Israeli civilians; and the assassination of scores of Iranian dissidents in the Middle East and Europe. Tehran was also allegedly involved in the fatal bombing of other American facilities in Saudi Arabia in 1995 and 1996. It supervised the 1992 bombing of Israel's embassy in Buenos Aires and has been implicated in the 1994 bombing of the city's Jewish cultural centre.[35] Iran has, thus, been able to compensate for its comparative lack of military power by relying on terrorism.

As can be gleaned from the above, there is overwhelming evidence to substantiate the claims of Western powers about the true aims of the nuclear programme being pursued by Tehran; this evidence also justifies the US location of Iran within the "axis of evil." Further, it points to the potential use to which nuclear weapons will be put if Tehran is allowed to develop them. In other words, this discussion makes clear that by failing to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, the world will create a ready source of atomic bombs for terrorist organisations.

Reshaping Restrictions

One major factor that accounts for Washington's inability to force a review of Tehran's nuclear programme is the fact that the US cannot gain the approval of ordinary Iranians. This is itself a function of

doubts about the real motives for the US opposition to Iran's nuclear programme. Though the dominant view abroad is that Iran intends to enrich uranium beyond 20% (the maximum needed for non-military purposes), the impression at home is that Iran, being a sovereign state, has simply reserved the right to pursue a nuclear programme if it so desires. In fact, Iranians have come to see the US as the aggressor. This is partly the result of government propaganda but mostly because of the hardship which US restrictions impose on them.

On the whole, the US argument against Iran's nuclear programme is germane, but Washington has chosen an inappropriate strategy in its effort to ensure Tehran's retreat from plans to weaponise its uranium enrichment. The success of any new approach will be limited by the distrust that Iranians feel towards the US. This is largely a product of the 1953 coup which ousted Prime Minister Mossadeq and was orchestrated by the US. Such operations were not restricted to Iran, and the US has been accused of organising similar coups in Guatemala and Chile. In these cases, as in Iran, the US is seen as having applied indirect force in pursuit of its foreign policy interests. Building trust among ordinary Iranians is thus crucial if the US wants to see a comprehensive resolution of the Iranian question.

While there has been talk of possible military action by the Israeli and US governments against Iran's nuclear installations, this path should not be taken unless all other avenues have been exhausted. Military action – if it is at all considered – should be the last resort.

Ultimately, the only strategy that appears workable when it comes to halting Iran's nuclear weaponisation agenda is to create cracks from within the Islamic Republic itself. But how can this be achieved? The existing regime of crippling economic sanctions has certainly weakened the Iranian economy and so constrained the Tehran regime. The depleted economy has resulted in sky-high inflation that is still sapping the purchasing power of Iranians. The objective here was always to attack the economy and so compel Tehran to join the negotiating table. However, these efforts have had an additional, albeit unintended outcome. Where sanctions were meant to create dissent within Iran and so force the government to change its path, they have instead become veritable tools of state propaganda against the West. In fact, the US strategy could only ever have been effective in a truly democratic setting where public opinion was respected and able to force a change in government policy.

Conclusion

To be sure, the majority of Iranians object to the weaponisation of their country's nuclear programme. However, while they are discontent with their government, they appear unwilling to accept a tactic which does most harm to the ordinary man on the street. The current regime of sanctions mostly affects Iran's middle classes, who are in fact the agents of change in the Islamic Republic. Thus, rather than an over-emphasis on sanctions, what is needed is a shift towards intensified peaceful diplomacy. While the government in Tehran may appear less than disposed to talks about its nuclear ambitions, it remains equally true that the only plan that can gain the backing of ordinary Iranians, and thus, create fractures from within, is one which those citizens are not made to pay for. Moreover, since sanctions have proven ineffective, there should be an increased stress on dialogue. If Iranians no longer feel that they are being beaten into submission from outside, it is very likely that their disapproval of the potential military dimension of nuclear development will grow bolder and create dissent from within the population. Recent experiences in the Middle East reflect the strength of people power. I would suggest therefore that this option be explored.

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Notes

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