

Introduction

This collection of essays on a nuclear Iran complements a comprehensive monograph published in early 2007 by the Institute for National Security Studies entitled *A Nuclear Iran: What Does it Mean, and What Can be Done*. The monograph examined ways and prospects for stopping Iran from achieving a nuclear capability. Its principal focus, however, was the various implications of an Iran in possession of nuclear weapons and an analysis of ways to grapple with this potential situation.

The developments of the past year regarding the possibility of a nuclear empowered Iran reinforced the widely held view that time is on Iran's side. True, Iran is subject to several weaknesses. Despite its oil-based wealth it is economically vulnerable and feels exposed to specific threats, first and foremost from the United States. It has no significant allies other than Syria. Its conventional military strength is limited and it is confronted by a host of countries that aim to prevent its achieving a nuclear capability, including the US and European countries, Russia and China, Arab Muslim states, and Israel. These countries have invested in extensive diplomatic efforts and have even supported imposing certain economic sanctions on Iran unless it suspends its nuclear program. The International Atomic Energy Agency has also helped to expose Iran's nuclear activities, and there is a degree of general criticism in Iran of the way the government, particularly President Ahmadinejad, has handled the issue.

These difficulties notwithstanding, Iran has made good use of both its own strengths and the weaknesses of its rivals to further its efforts to achieve nuclear weapons. First, the Iranian regime has demonstrated clearly that no amount of pressure will prevent it from exercising its right to enrich uranium as part of its endeavors to devise a complete fuel cycle – officially for peaceful purposes. In the course of 2007 Iran made further significant progress towards developing nuclear weapons, mainly through

uranium enrichment. Second, although various countries, including Russia and China, are essentially ready to impose economic sanctions on Iran, there is disagreement over the severity of the sanctions, and many are not willing to go further than imposing light sanctions on Iran. Thus, the sanctions imposed to date through the Security Council are not sufficient to motivate Iran to suspend its suspicious nuclear activities. Currently, the imposition of more severe sanctions is not expected.

In addition, the United States' stature in the Middle East has weakened, principally due to its entanglement in Iraq. This state of affairs limits the administration's ability to undertake a military operation against Iran, particularly as it approaches the end of its tenure, and adds to the reservations by the American defense establishment over such a move. The US National Intelligence Estimate of December 2007 makes it even more difficult for the administration to execute a military move if that was its intention. In turn, if Iran also believes that the risk of US military intervention is not high, its determination to maintain its nuclear activities will be reinforced.

In the face of Iran's efforts to achieve a nuclear weapons capability, the prospects for preventive action are not auspicious. The diplomatic route is the preferred approach for all the countries involved. However, experience indicates that negotiations alone will not persuade Iran to stop its program, since in Iran's eyes, obtaining nuclear weapons is a supreme objective that it does not intend to forego unless compelled. Therefore, in the context of diplomatic efforts, several channels – or a combination thereof – remain. A significant increase in the economic sanctions imposed on Iran is the most promising mode of action, particularly as Iran's difficult economic situation is of prime concern to Iranians and was the main issue in the March 2008 parliamentary elections. However, the current prospects of achieving international agreement for imposing heavier and more prolonged sanctions on Iran are not encouraging.

A second option is direct talks between the US and Iran on the nuclear issue. This possibility has yet to be attempted, due to constraints on both the United States and Iran. Even if dialogue between them does evolve it will be difficult to achieve Iran's consent to stop its efforts to develop nuclear weapons. A third alternative is to upgrade benefits proposed to Iran as part of a package deal, in return for Iran's suspension of its nuclear program.

Economic and technological benefits were already offered to Iran as part of a package devised in 2003 by European governments and approved by the US, and further packages were offered in 2006 and 2008, but Iran rejected the deals. It is not clear if additional significant proposals can be devised that will change Iran's stance on the topic. In any case, one should assume that a US-European commitment to neither attack Iran nor undermine the Iranian regime would be included in such a package.

A military option is particularly complicated and problematic. Only two countries – the US and Israel – have stated they have not ruled out a military option if Iran is not stopped from achieving nuclear weapons by other means. Other countries do not support a military move and some explicitly oppose it, although a few European governments have acknowledged that the option might nonetheless be pursued. Some principal elements that may impact on a US or Israeli decision to undertake a military strike against Iran include:

- The chances of the diplomatic route, and an assessment that it will fail in the future. An assessment that the diplomatic approach has been exhausted and there is no real chance of its leading to a halt in Iran's efforts to achieve nuclear weapons is a precondition of a decision to undertake military action against Iran. However, it is difficult to reach agreement on when the diplomatic approach has outlived its usefulness, as there is always anticipation of additional – and more successful – diplomatic steps.
- An evaluation of the potential gain versus the risks involved in a military strike is of crucial importance in the decision about whether to undertake an endeavor of this sort. In this context, the operational capabilities necessary for a successful attack on the nuclear sites and Iran's ability to respond to a preemptive attack should also be examined. However, it is difficult to evaluate in advance the balance between the risks and opportunities involved in the move, partly since there is no precedent for military action of this sort that can contribute to an assessment of the results.
- In this regard, the intelligence needed for such a measure is of prime importance, particularly with regard to the status of Iranian nuclear activity, how close it is to obtaining nuclear weapons, and to the

features of the nuclear sites, whose critical installations are situated below ground.

- The relevant timetable for carrying out a military strike. The timetable will be affected by an assessment of the time remaining until Iran obtains either its first nuclear bomb or a sufficient amount of fissile material to enable it to build the first bomb. The assumption is that subsequently it will not be possible to carry out a successful attack on Iran's nuclear sites.
- The Israeli decision will be influenced by two additional main considerations: first, the decision of the US administration whether or not to undertake an attack on Iran, and its attitude toward an Israeli strike; and second, the assessment of whether Iran's obtaining a nuclear capacity creates an intolerable threat for Israel or instead presents a security problem that can be accommodated.

The corollary to understanding the difficulties involved in trying to stop Iran before it obtains nuclear weapons is that Iran may in fact eventually obtain this capability. In such a situation, Israel will be forced to deal with unprecedented security and political problems, and it is important for it to prepare for them in advance. Such a situation will also involve an examination of a number of issues. What is the significance of a nuclear empowered Iran – with regard to Israel, other regional countries, the US, and European countries? What will be the severity of the threat generated by Iran against Israel? Can there be successful rollback so that Iran dismantles its nuclear weapons after it obtains them? What will Iran's nuclear policy be – with regard to exposing its nuclear capabilities and, principally, the issue of using the nuclear weapons? In what scenarios is Iran liable to use nuclear weapons? What steps should Israel take before and after Iran achieves nuclear weapons? How can it limit the risks involved in a nuclear empowered Iran? Can a stable nuclear deterrent be devised against Iran?

The following collection of papers comprises five essays. Ephraim Asculai summarizes the technical aspects to Iran's development of a nuclear weapons capability, and considers how Iran would act in the international arena in light of its non-proliferation commitments. Against the background of these commitments, the essay then analyzes the alternatives available to Iran regarding deployment of nuclear weapons.

In the essay that follows, Emily Landau looks at the implications of a nuclear empowered Iran with regard to arms control and non-proliferation efforts and initiatives in the nuclear realm. Beyond the ramifications for the non-proliferation regime, the essay considers the possibility of individual states acting to compensate for the weaknesses of the non-proliferation regime, and explores the implications for future non-proliferation efforts and the impetus for forging new arms control strategies toward stability in the Middle East. In the third essay, Yair Evron analyzes the reasons that are liable to generate instability in future nuclear relations between Iran and Israel, and the factors that can impact on the stability of the nuclear balance between Iran and Israel. The essay also considers the effects of Iran's nuclearization on Israel's nuclear posture.

The final two essays deal with elements of defense against a nuclear threat. Uzi Rubin evaluates the central role of missile defense in the deterrence of a nuclear empowered Iran. Assuming that Iran is a fanatical – but also pragmatic – country whose decisions are influenced substantiuey by considerations of profit and loss, the essay argues that a missile defense system can be more significant against a nuclear threat than against a conventional threat. In the final essay of this collection, David Klein reviews the question of building civilian bomb shelters against a nuclear attack based on the experience of other countries. He concludes that since these shelters do not constitute a practical option, it is not justified on a national level to invest in them, and it is preferable to focus on developing other solutions, especially boosting the deterrent ability.

This volume joins the previously published INSS monograph in the effort to explore the principal challenges associated with Iran's potential acquisition of nuclear weapons.

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Nuclear Sites in Iran