

Nuclear rapprochement over Iran: Russia's approach

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Abstract

The article reviews the current situation around the Iranian nuclear crisis and assesses the possibility of its regulation based on an analysis of the talks held between the six world powers and Iran in Istanbul, Baghdad and Moscow in 2012. The article focuses on what factors are facilitating or hindering the negotiation process.

The research emphasizes the importance of achieving a mutually acceptable compromise based on a short timeline. The compromise may involve the limitation of uranium enrichment on the one hand, and relaxation of financial and economic sanctions against Iran on the other. This will allow an extension of IAEA inspection activities, which will increase the level of mutual confidence. Otherwise, the nuclear crisis will continue to escalate, and the talks will be suspended for at least 18 months.

The article shows that the use of force against Tehran would not solve the problem. The simplicity of such an action is deceptive. The repercussions will be severe, primarily for the neighboring states.

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The talks between the six world powers¹ aimed at resolving the Iranian nuclear crisis have become a regular monthly event: a new round of talks was held in Moscow on June 18-19. Two previous meetings held in April in Istanbul and in May in Baghdad did not produce any tangible results.

One of the reasons that Iran was engaging more actively with the international community is that the unilateral and exceptionally strict financial and economic enacted by the EU, U.S. and their allies have had an extremely negative effect.

At a meeting in Brussels at the end of January 2012, EU foreign ministers decided to impose an oil embargo on Iran and to freeze the assets of the Iranian Central Bank. The main reason was not so much the possibility of nuclear weapons development by the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), but the threats by some representatives of legislative and executive powers to close the Strait of Hormuz waterway. About 40 per cent of world oil and oil products, as well as significant amounts of LPG are transported via this Strait. This was the tipping point – the international community could not take any more.

Since then, European companies have not executed any new oil agreements with the IRI. The ban on

such transactions came into force on the 1 July 2012. This was a painful decision for a number of the EU countries. For instance, Greece was on the verge of default as 35 per cent of Greek oil imports came from Iran. Spain and Italy were going through hard times and appeared to be in a similar situation.

Together, the EU countries only consumed approximately 20 per cent of Iran's net oil exports. If the sanctions were only related to oil, the economic situation in Iran would not have deteriorated so seriously. However, there were also tough sanctions in the banking sector, which made payment for Iranian oil a highly complicated process. As a result, in May, oil production in Iran dropped by 20,000 barrels, to 3,100,000 million barrels per day. According to some estimates, in July this may fall even further, to 2.5 million barrels, as the limited imports of Iranian oil cannot be offset by the demands of China, India, the Republic of Korea or Turkey. This was especially painful given that world crude oil prices fell to 108 USD per barrel (i.e. 10 per cent) in May.

Important developments beyond the sanctions were the internal political changes in Iran, which held its first round of Majlis (parliamentary) elections in March. In spite of the opposition's call to boycott, the turnout was 64 per cent, one of the highest in the history of parliamentary

¹ The five permanent United Nations Security Council members, plus Germany.

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elections. This demonstrated a vote of confidence to the government of Iran.

The conservatives, supporters of Iran's spiritual leader Ali Homeyni, had a majority win by 60 per cent. Neoconservatives who supported Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won only 4 per cent of seats in the new parliament. During the second round of elections in early May, the number of Ahmadinejad supporters increased to 6 per cent. Under certain conditions they can be supported by independent candidates (who won 30 per cent of seats in Majlis), but this will not change the situation in reality.

The new parliament will probably block attempts by President Ahmadinejad to extend the authority of executive bodies, and to control the government. Essentially, this could create a 'dual power center', enabling the spiritual leader to manage the main power centers.

The victory in the parliamentary elections allowed the spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Khomeini to take the initiative in the resolution of Iranian nuclear crisis. In Istanbul, Tehran

agreed to limit the enrichment of uranium-235 from to 20 per cent. It was the first proposal of its kind in recent years.

Reasons for Baghdad failures

On May 23, two days before the negotiations in Baghdad, the Director General of IAEA, Yukiya Amano, visited Tehran. He tried to reach an agreement about effective and unobstructed inspections of Iranian nuclear facilities. He was mainly interested in the access of IAEA inspectors to the military facility in Parchin, where, according to Western sources, a neutron detonator – nuclear bomb launcher – had been tested. Amano was not able to solve this issue, which complicated further talks between 5+1 and Iran.

It should be emphasized that the visit to the military facility in Parchin would be allowed if Tehran fulfilled its obligations under the Additional Protocol (1997) to the IAEA Safeguards Agreement. At present, the Protocol has been signed but not ratified by the parliament of the country, which means that there is no legal basis for the visit (Tehran has not confirmed the existence of a nuclear facility in Parchin). The inspection of the facility can only be done on a voluntary basis, if Tehran wants to increase mutual confidence. However, this requires significant progress in the negotiations between 5+1 and Iran on the nuclear crisis.

In order to achieve progress, it was sufficient for Brussels to relax financial and economic sanctions against the Iran.

Thus the Baghdad meeting demonstrated the inconsistency between the positions of 5+1 and Iran. Thus, Iran was again encouraged to exchange the low enriched uranium (LEU) for nuclear fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor, although Iran believes that it can produce this nuclear fuel on its own.

Another discrepancy in the positions referred to the stocks of fissile materials and the construction of new nuclear facilities. Six tons of LEU produced in Iran by early May with 3.5 per cent enrichment enable, after enrichment, the production of at least four nuclear warheads. That is why the West believes that Iran should comply with the Additional Protocol (1997) and the modification of Code 3.1 to the IAEA Safeguards Agreement. These documents contain a requirement to notify the IAEA about the construction of nuclear facilities immediately, not 180 days before nuclear materials are delivered to the facility. This is clearly necessary, as the construction of secret nuclear facilities generally continues over several years.

At the end of 2003, the IRI agreed to fulfill the requirements of the agreements. However, to resist the increasing pressure from the West,

Iran suspended the implementation of the Additional Protocol (1997) in February 2006, and in March 2007 Iran unilaterally suspended the implementation of modified Code 3.1.

Finally, the West demanded the cessation of 20 per cent uranium enrichment by Iran and close control of Iranian nuclear facilities by IAEA. Tehran interpreted this as the limitation of its right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Looking for new incentives

As mentioned above, during the Istanbul talks, Tehran agreed to limit uranium enrichment for the first time in recent years. There was no appropriate response from the West to this promise by Iran, which affected the talks both in Istanbul and Baghdad. In order to achieve progress, it was sufficient for Brussels to relax financial and economic sanctions against the IRI, as they were exceeding the appropriate UN Security Council resolutions. It would then be possible to discuss the conditions of limiting the uranium enrichment at the technical consultancy level: maximum enrichment, the amount of fissile material, storage locations and further use. Instead, the West was insisting on the exchange of the LEU manufactured in Iran. This significantly complicated the negotiations that followed.

There is no doubt that even in the medium term the IRI will not be able to independently build nuclear submarines.

The issue of the exchange of Iranian LEU is no longer quite so urgent, as two fuel assemblies have been produced and are being tested for further use at the Tehran Research Reactor. Certainly, for the purposes of nuclear security it would be advisable to conduct such activities under the control of IAEA, considering the urban location of the research reactor, high burn-up fraction (which resulted in the reduction of its energy capacity from 5 to 2 megawatts) and the lack of experience among Iranian specialists in nuclear fuel assembly. However, in the near future, Iranians will be able to complete the recharge of nuclear fuel for the above reactor.

By mid-May 2012 Iran had accumulated 146 kg of uranium hexafluoride enriched to 20 per cent. The Tehran Nuclear Research Center needs 177 kg of the fissile material for its work. Other operational or emerging nuclear facilities in the IRI do not require such highly enriched uranium-235 for their work, so soon there will be no real reasons to continue uranium enrichment. However, artificial reasons can be generated, for instance by imitating the construction of a light-water reactor or a nuclear submarine (NS).

It is no coincidence that a few days

before the talks of 5+1 in Moscow, Rear Admiral Abbas Zamini of the IRI pointed to the Iranian Navy's plan to build nuclear-fueled submarines. Iran's rapid development in terms of the introduction of new military technologies might seem surprising, but in reality, the timing of the statement seems deliberate - a strategic political maneuver.

There is no doubt that even in the medium term the IRI will not be able to independently build nuclear submarines. First of all, this requires experience in production of at least research nuclear reactors. Iranians do not have such experience: all the active research reactors in the IRI were imported; the production of heavy-water reactor in Arak is being constantly postponed.

Secondly, Iran has only mastered the production of small diesel submarines Ghadir with a displacement of 500 tons, and with the assistance of North Korea. A nuclear unit cannot be placed on submarines of this type due to weight and size restrictions, safety provisions, and the requirements for the physical protection of crew against deadly radiation. For comparison, the first Soviet submarine (project 627 Leninskiy Komsomol), made operational in 1957 but not equipped to carry ballistic missiles, had a displacement of 4,750 tons.

Therefore, the information about the construction of an Iranian nuclear

submarine is clearly a bluff, with the possible purpose of creating the basis not only for the continuation of further uranium enrichment (from 3.5 to 20 per cent) at a high security nuclear facility in Fordo, but also the for the increase of uranium-235 enrichment. Thus, first and second generation nuclear submarines with water-moderated water-cooled reactors used 21 per cent enriched nuclear fuel, while third generation nuclear submarines use 43-45 per cent enrichment. What is worse, the Iranian government will announce the construction of a nuclear energy unit with liquid-metal heat-transfer fluid that uses nuclear fuel with 90 per cent enrichment (this is weapons-grade uranium).

Relative success of Moscow negotiations

The Moscow talks were relatively successful; the negotiations were not suspended. A further meeting between technical experts was held on 3 July in Istanbul, when technical experts discussed the feasibility of an Iranian nuclear program. It is easier for experts to reach mutual understanding on the issues of safe operation of nuclear facilities, control and records of fissile materials, which are the main concerns of the international community. Thus, the establishment of a closed-loop cycle is only feasible if there are ten energy reactors with the capacity of 1 gigawatt (GW). Instead, there is only

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one energy reactor of the required capacity, and it has sufficient supplies from Russia (the research reactors do not require large amounts of nuclear fuel). In addition, the parties were able to enter into detailed discussions of specific proposals raised by 5+1 and Iran respectively. Previously the talks were limited to mutual accusations or the discussion of issues not directly related to the Iranian nuclear program.

It must be underlined that there was a significant misunderstanding during the negotiations. The West cannot tolerate the large stocks of fissile material in Iran and the continuing process of uranium enrichment. Tehran hopes that the international community will accept Iran's right to enrich uranium despite the existing resolutions of the UN Security Council, and that the financial and economic sanctions will at least be relaxed, primarily by the EU. These approaches do not encourage compromise, which put future negotiations at risk of breakdown. Similarly, provocative statements by high officials and military officials, the identification of 27 per cent enriched uranium in the Fordo enrichment plant by IAEA inspectors, and the deterioration of regional security all increase the likelihood that negotiations will collapse down the line.

Considering all of the above, the time factor gains increased importance. In September, the U.S. will nominate presidential candidates, and next year the presidential election campaign will start in Iran. Therefore the negotiations will have to be completed within the next two months. If no agreement is reached, discussions will have to be postponed for at least a year. Meanwhile, Iran will be accumulating fissile materials, which even at present are sufficient for the production of four to five warheads after the appropriate enrichment. This scenario is also deeply worrying for the West; the West is overly reliant on financial and economic sanctions, and this is a dangerous illusion that increases the risk of a regional war with unpredictable repercussions. Thus, the West will go to Iran offering serious incentives for the limitation of uranium enrichment and the extension of IAEA inspections on its territory. In this case, the success of the negotiations will be in line with Western interests if they proceed according to the strategy of phasing and mutuality proposed by Russia.

Ways of resolving the Iranian problem

The Iranian nuclear problem is to a large extent a problem of maintaining a global regime of nuclear non-proliferation. There are a number of potential solutions to it.

1. Give Iran the status of a nuclear power, i.e. a state that has nuclear weapons. Earlier, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called the IRI a nuclear power, in reference to the level of nuclear technologies in Iran. However, the international community has a different opinion: the IRI has a developed nuclear program only partially controlled by IAEA, with overinflated ambitions in this area.

This solution to the nuclear problem can cause negative repercussions. First, it will create conditions for an avalanche-type proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which may result in the military use of nuclear weapons in the relative vicinity of the Southern and Central Caucasus. Second, the UN Security Council sanctions against the IRI will have to be lifted, as these sanctions are designed to require Tehran to cease any activity related to uranium enrichment and plutonium recovery. It will be extremely difficult to substantiate such a decision, and it will inevitably compromise the international status of the UN Security Council, which some unsuccessful states and terrorist organizations would welcome.

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2. Convince Iran not to create a close-loop nuclear fuel cycle. This is known as a “carrot”, whereby Iran will be given various financial, economic and technological advantages, along with international security guarantees against both external threats and internal collapse inspired from abroad. There is also a “stick” – the international community will permanently strengthen various sanctions if the IRI does not implement the resolutions set by the UN Security Council and IAEA.
3. Eliminate the nuclear infrastructure of the IRI by force. This is the most effective way, but may result in unforeseen repercussions, as indicated below.

It is obvious that the international community cannot accept the nuclear status of Iran, so let us review other possible solutions to the Iranian nuclear problem.

Many American non-conservative analysts advised the new administration of George W. Bush against the use of force in the Iranian

problem. They proposed three scenarios:

- Active support of Iranian opposition, which would also mean deposition of so-called “mullocracy” (“colored revolution”);
- Massive missile air attacks of Iranian nuclear, military and industrial facilities (“Yugoslavian scenario”);
- Land operation aimed at the complete destruction of the nuclear infrastructure of the IRI or even the deposition of its theocracy (“Iraq scenario”).

Even putting aside the issue of the absence of supporting international law, the above missions will encounter huge difficulties. In any case, we shall analyze the above options, in the order of their feasibility.

Military land operation

This option is tricky to implement, at least in the near future. In particular, if the Pentagon starts a land-based war with Iran, it must be prepared for significant losses of personnel due to the significant military capability of Iran, which is higher than the military potential of Iraq under Saddam Hussein.

The military capacity of the IRI is the greatest among the Near and Middle Eastern countries. Iran’s military forces gained experience in

the military operations during the war between Iran and Iraq (1980-1988); their operation is based on the military and political objectives of the government, taking into consideration real economic capabilities, as well as national and religious specifics of the IRI. The Iranian military consists of two independent elements: the Army and the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution (AGIR – a sort of military elite). Each of the elements has its own land force, air force and navy with the appropriate management system for both peace and war. The Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution includes Special Forces Ghods (or Quds) and Resistance Forces Basij (backup consisting of trained volunteers).

According to Article 110 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Supreme Commander of all the military forces is the spiritual leader, who holds almost unlimited authority in political and military matters. In particular, the spiritual leader has the authority to announce war, peace, and total mobilization. He appoints and accepts the retirement of the Chief of Defense, commanders of AGIR, Army, and military commanders.

Iran's military potential can be assessed in different ways. It is mainly comprised of a large quantity of various foreign weapons, many of which are obsolete, with insufficient spare parts in stock. However,

the military industry is constantly building its capabilities, seeking to become self-sustaining in this sector. Tehran is also disseminating ideological propaganda among both the military and the civilian populations, and training them in wide-scale subversion activity. Considering all of the above, some American analysts – known as “hawks” – focus their attention on the following. Firstly, military intervention in Iran is the last resort, to be used only in the event that all diplomatic measures fail. Second, such an operation is possible only following the establishment of an anti-Iran coalition between the neighboring states.

American expert James Phillips of the Heritage Foundation believes that the U.S. can be successful in a war against Iran if they join together with all the countries in the region concerned over Iranian nuclear ambitions. Phillips points out that Washington shall develop the basis for the development of a joint strategy that would include both land operation activities, in addition to psychological pressures on the Ahmadinejad government, for instance, through navy maneuvers in the Persian Gulf.²

At first glance, Phillips' recommendations seem reasonable. However, in many states there are

2 Phillips J., “U.S. Policy and Iran's Nuclear Challenge”, *Heritage Lecture*, 2006, June. 2, [Electronic resource], <http://www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/Iraq/h1942.cmf>.

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local Shia communities, ethnic Persians or similar ethnicities (for example, Tajiks and Khazars). All of them can naturally channel the export of the “Khomeini revolution”. The Islamic solidarity based on the provisions of Koran shall also be given consideration.

Considering that Turkey refused to participate in the Iraq campaign in 2003, it seems unlikely that it will act as a partner to the West if there is a military intervention in Iran. As current events demonstrate, Ankara is very sensitive when it comes to the actions of Kurd separatists, which will certainly intensify if a large-scale operation commences in Iran. Although NATO’s high-level officials have insisted that Turkey open its air space and borders in case of war with the IRI, Turkish leaders ignored the request.

It is worth pointing out at this juncture that relations between Iran and Turkey have developed in recent years, in the context of increased political power among Turkey’s moderate Islamists. At the beginning of 2007, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdulla Gul, stated that he had no concerns

whatsoever about any export of “Khomeini revolution”. This exists in tension with ongoing regional competition and significant divisions between Ankara and Tehran, for instance, in relation to Syria.

The U.S. administration can hardly rely on Azerbaijan. Previously, against the provisions of the Azerbaijani Constitution, the location of American military bases was permitted; this would have allowed the U.S. to use Azerbaijani territory as a launch pad for forces across the entire Middle East and Central Asia. However, following a national strategy of “positive balance”, in 2005 Azerbaijani President Aliyev signed a non-aggression pact with Iran which barred third countries from using their territories for offensive operations against one another.

As for “post-Saddam” Iraq, the state is increasingly channeling Iranian national interests.

Thus, among the countries named by James Phillips, only Israel can be deemed a reliable U.S. ally, but Israel’s military and strategic potential is not sufficient for successful land operations against the IRI.

“Colored revolution”

Another option for the use of force is to support the Iranian opposition in overthrowing the theocracy. However, this seems just as unrealistic, even though it seems likely that the George

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W. Bush administration considered this to be the best option. At the end of 1997, U.S. Congress allocated 400 million USD for undercover operations aimed at destabilizing the Iranian ruling regime. This budget was allocated for American special services who organized the support of Iranian opposition – dissidents from Iran and Iraq, and religious and ethnic minority groups. The activity included kidnapping military officers of special divisions of AGIR and their transportation to Iraq to obtain intelligence about the nuclear program and the condition and combat characteristics of Iranian forces. This activity was continued and extended via propaganda in the American mass media.

However, this strategy cannot deliver the expected results within a short period of time, no matter how strong the opposition to theocracy. The problem is that Iran does not have any serious opposition. Almost all the political forces, while unhappy with the status quo, do not oppose the Islamic regime as such, but rather the activities of specific people and groups in power. All of the opposition activities in Iran are conducted under

the existing Islamic regime, without seeking to destroy the foundation of the regime, controlled by Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini. The internal political struggle in Iran concerns only the most effective achievement of the main objective – a transformation of Iran into a super power at the regional level.

Unlike clericals, the supporters of cardinal internal political changes are limited and do not play an important part in the social and political life of the IRI. Furthermore, the opposition that is required to overthrow the Islamic regime and restore the monarchy or a pro-Western liberal state is of limited weight and influence.³

Some American analysts, such as Joseph Kellard, believe that the “young Iranians are fighting for the new state without clericals”. On the basis of this thesis, these commentators come to a conclusion that Washington can easily overthrow the existing regime.⁴ However, a stunning victory by an orthodox “Khomeinist”, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in the 2005 presidential elections showed that the revolution ideology is still supported by a majority, especially in rural areas. This was confirmed in the presidential elections of 2009, although to a lesser extent.

³ Coats D., Robb C., *Meeting the Challenge. U.S. Policy towards Iranian Nuclear Development*, (Washington D.C.: Independent Task Force sponsored by the Bipartisan Policy Center, 2008), 67.

⁴ Kellard J., “Iran Is the Root of Islamic Terrorism”, *Capitalism Magazine*, 2003, Jun. 5, [Electronic resource], <http://www.CapMag.com/article.asp?ID=2888>.

It is necessary to highlight the three main factors that make the theocracy relatively stable. First, according to Dariush Zakhedi, an American expert in Iran and sociology, the current regime more or less corresponds with the interests of the *bazaari*, an influential part of Iranian society. If the Pahlavi monarchy tried to modernize this traditional class, they would meet with resistance from the clericals, many of whom are related to *bazaari*, who opposed such modernization. As a result, for instance, the Islamic Association of the Unions of Tehran supports the conservatives in parliamentary elections, and opposes the over-liberalization of the national economy.⁵

The second factor that bolsters theocratic stability derives from the particularities of Iranian political culture. Iranians, as Shiites, follow the tradition of *marja-i taqlid*, which in European terms affects the party structure among liberals.

Finally, the international status of Iran prevents the expansion of anti-regime movements. The escalation of the conflict between Iran and the U.S. compels Iranians unite around the ruling elite and to shun Iranian liberals who are supported by the U.S. as traitors.

Thus, a military land operation in the IRI or a so-called “color revolution”

is highly unlikely, at least in the near future. The possibility of an ethnic split in Iran is also doubtful, although there are large communities of Azerbaijanis (at least 20 million people) and Kurds (4-5 million people). Certainly, after the Kurds gained independence in Iraq, their aspirations to establish their own state by joining the Kurdish-populated territories of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, grew stronger. However, they faced an active counteraction, especially from Ankara and Tehran. As a result, Iran’s Kurdish problem has been suppressed.

“Yugoslavian scenario”

The final option for the use of force is a series of massive missile air attacks on Iranian nuclear, military and industrial facilities. This strategy seems at a glance to be the most effective. Here it is useful to look to Israel’s destruction of the Iraq’s Osirak nuclear research reactor in summer 1981, which was illegal from the international perspective, but very effective. Fourteen Israeli jets halted Saddam Husseyn’s plans to create his own nuclear bomb.

However, the former Iraqi and present Iranian nuclear programs, not to mention their military and industrial potentials, are incomparable. For instance, the key nuclear facilities of the IRI are well protected; the uranium enrichment facility in Natansa is buried eight meters under

5 Zahedi D., *The Iranian Revolution: Indicators of Regime Instability*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 84, 89-90.

Until recently, Iran had 27 major nuclear facilities protected by air defense forces.

ground and protected by a few layers of reinforced concrete. A similar facility in Fordo is buried 80 to 90 meters deep, inside a mountain. Its connection to the outside world is limited to five tunnels. Thus, any statements about the possibility of localized strikes against Iran are unsubstantiated.

For this reason, any military strike against Iran would have to be completely disabling. Until recently, Iran had 27 major nuclear facilities protected by air defense forces. Their destruction will inevitably result in the IRI using missiles from various launch platforms (land, marine, air). The land-based missiles have the greatest range, which means they would have to be destroyed first, with air and naval bases next on the list. Besides, Iran has its Ghods Force, specifically trained for coups de main. They will also need to be eliminated immediately. What about combat control and communication facilities, warehouses with weapons and military equipment, and military industry facilities? It will not be possible to destroy them via localized strikes, and so there are only two options: either to withdraw from the attack on Iran, or to destroy everything with a decapitating or fully disarming strike.

According to the Russian military expert Vladimir Dvorkin⁶, the approximate scenario of a U.S. military attack on Iran is as follows. U.S. air forces and navy first attack air defense facilities, combat control and communication centers, missile bases, and special military force bases with cruise missiles. At the same time, a mission to suppress communications and disrupt combat coordination is conducted by radio-electronic means. This will upset combat control and establish favorable conditions for the first air attack. Then during further missile strikes, including strikes against nearby air bases, full command of the air will be achieved, allowing unhampered and methodical elimination of Iranian air and naval bases, nuclear, military and defense industry facilities. At this stage, both sea- and land-based aviation can be deployed. The ultimate objective will likely be a complete elimination of Iran's military industry potential. In addition, the territory of Iran will be completely blocked, excluding military imports. This was NATO's strategy during the successful military operation in Yugoslavia in spring 1999.

It is necessary to mention that this type of non-contact warfare does not require any agreements between Washington and Turkey, Azerbaijan,

6 Dvorkin V., Arbatov A., *Solving the Iranian Nuclear Problem by Force: Scenarios and Ramifications*, (Moscow: International Luxembourg Forum, 2008), 7-24.

Turkmenistan or the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf for opening air space or borders with Iran; the composition of U.S. air force concentrated at present in the Persian Gulf and other neighboring areas is sufficient for a disarming strike without the mobilization and deployment of other troops, and therefore can be done on command. The composition includes high accuracy weapons and all necessary infrastructures (military bases, jet carriers and navy strike groups in the adjacent water bodies, groups of permanent air and satellite observation units). The U.S. can independently deploy this mission. However, the existence of plans does not mean they have to be implemented, especially if the political risks are high.

It is clear that the implementation of the Yugoslavian scenario will be deemed more or less legitimate by the western community, if the U.S. can provoke Iran into an act of aggression. An action such as the spring 2007 capture of the British navy, but on a larger scale, could be used as a pretext for the conflict. Considering the anti-Iranian policy of the most European political leaders, along with Britain's desire for revenge, Washington can expect if not concrete assistance, then at least the understanding of key European countries.

While it may seem an initially attractive option, the massive missile strike strategy has multiple

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deficiencies. Firstly, Iran could respond to the military action without using its military capability, via a 'proxy war' strategy. Moreover, the war with Iraq showed that the U.S. has massively superior intelligence as well as a significant arsenal of high accuracy weapons, which allow them to avoid combat and to eliminate the opposing side at remote borders. Certainly, in spite of its numerous statements to the contrary, Tehran lacks the capacity to organize large-scale terroristic acts in Europe and America. However, it can cause the situation in Afghanistan and the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf to deteriorate significantly, as well as fuel the Palestine – Israel and Lebanon – Israel conflicts. Inevitable, further military attacks of the U.S. will follow. As a result, there could be a large influx of refugees into Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkmenistan, with Russia as final destination. Moreover, a large unstable zone will appear, across Afghanistan, Iran, and very probably, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Secondly, massive attacks make sense if they are based on reliable and detailed data. Otherwise, the area of missile attacks will reach an unpredictable level. The George W.

Bush administration, according to Pentagon officials, did not have all the necessary information for the detailed identification of targets. This is not likely to have changed.

Thirdly, all the suspicious facilities are large and geographically scattered. For instance, the uranium enrichment facility in Natansa, a facility with a heavy water nuclear reactor in Arak currently under construction, and a uranium enrichment facility in Fordo. American expert Anthony Cordesman warns that without the necessary intelligence, the U.S. will have to destroy a large proportion of infrastructure that is under construction, or facilities that are not directly related to the military nuclear program, and Iran will be able to rebuild these facilities easily. The action will compromise the credibility of the U.S., already damaged following the failure to prove that Saddam Hussein had nuclear weapons. Furthermore, Iran has been preparing for the American air strikes for a several years and, according to the U.S. intelligence, has managed to strengthen its air defense.⁷

Fourth, it must be noted that AGIR can organize terrorist acts against the American navy base in the Persian Gulf. The incident of spring 2007 proves that this is a possibility; an unknown perpetrator spray-painted

a target on an American war craft docked in Qatar. The source of incident was not identified, but Iranians were suspected.

The activity of diversion groups controlled by IRI secret services will require Washington to take appropriate measures towards neutralization. This will involve a large-scale mission to disable AGIR, which also controls Iran's nuclear programs. This operation is not possible without at least a limited land operation, which also makes a "quick surgery" type of intervention impossible.

Besides, there is also the risk that Iran will sow mines in the Strait of Hormuz. The IRI has 3,500 mines, including bottom mines, which can be deployed by war craft, civilian ships, boats, air craft and helicopters. The mines can be deployed fast and secretly; sweeping numerous and dense minefields comprised of mines of various types and age would be difficult even without the threat of enemy fire and air craft. According to the estimates of American experts, sweeping would require at least a month. In case of war with Iran, regular shipping in the Strait of Hormuz will only possible after the islands of the Greater and Lesser Tunb, as well as the adjacent shoreline.

The Afghan factor is another obstacle to the military solution of

⁷ Cordesman A., *U.S. – Iran Talks on Iraq Useful, but Unlikely to Produce Immediate Results*, (Washington D.C.: Council on Foreign Relations, 2007).

the Iranian issue. The ambiguity of Iranian policy towards this country is deeply problematic. On one hand, the IRI is the main sponsor of the revival of Afghan economy. Since 2003, the countries have established close contact in banking, agriculture and social development. It is no coincidence that Hamid Karzai's first foreign visit was to Tehran. On the other hand, the Iranian government is using the classic methods of export for its Islamic revolution, aimed at strengthening its position in Afghanistan. The IRI is continually deploying officers of its Special Ghods Forces with the purpose of establishment of local military-political organizations. The efforts of these officers have been reasonably successful. In Western provinces, voluntary regiments such as Sepah-e Mohammad were established, and Herat has fallen under the ideological influence of Iran due to the cultural and lingual similarities between the people of Herat and Iranians.⁸

In the event that force is used against Iran, the IRI will both cease any assistance to the pro-American regime in Afghanistan but also will do its best to destabilize the internal political situation there. To do this, Tehran will use its close cultural connections to the local population and will try to involve the Taliban. According to some information, Iran is already trying to act in this direction.

⁸ Clawson H., Rubin M., *Eternal Iran: Continuity and Chaos*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 149.

How feasible is the use of force against Iran? Fortunately, at present the probability of the military scenario is still fairly small; the main reason being that there is no real threat to the US from this direction.

It is more likely that the missile strike against Iranian nuclear facilities will be initiated by Israel. However, its military potential in its standard composition may appear to be insufficient to halt Iran's nuclear program. It is more probable that the Defense Army of Israel will suspend this plan for a few years. However, in a few years, the nuclear status of the IRI will become inevitable, and Israel will be in political isolation from both Muslim and many of the Western states.

The analysis of Iranian nuclear program at its present development level allows one to conclude that the minimum time required for the IRI to create nuclear weapons after the relevant political decision is 18 months. However, with active IAEA inspections in the country, it is impossible to save a significant quantity of fissile materials. Therefore, the countdown starts when the relations between the Agency and Tehran are disrupted (the first sign that the political decision to create nuclear weapons has been made). As long as Iran maintains

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relations with IAEA, and allows it to conduct inspections, the production of nuclear weapons remains highly unlikely.

Thus, perspectives on the Iranian nuclear crisis solution are still uncertain. The regime in Tehran is still fairly stable, which allows the government to control the internal situation, in spite of low-level dissent among the local population. The existing international and inter-confessional disagreements do from time to time cause terrorist acts, in particular, in the Iranian provinces of Sistan and Baluchistan. This is also due to the severe measures taken by the security service and law enforcement authorities. However, the level of terrorist activity in the IRI resulting from various internal conflicts does not pose a serious threat to the existing regime. Therefore, a “color revolution” in the near future, regardless of Western encouragement, remains highly unlikely.

Any use of force to resolve the Iranian nuclear problem will

cause the situation to deteriorate and push the IRI to develop their nuclear capacity. Certainly, Tehran could also take such a decision for other reasons. However, a missile strike on Iranian nuclear facilities will almost certainly lead to the creation of nuclear bomb, though postponed for a few years.

Considering the above, it is necessary to come to an agreement with Iran. It will not be easy, but there is no other way.

