

## **CHAPTER 5**

# **Deterring a Nuclear-Armed Iran from Adventurism and Nuclear Use**

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### **Introduction**

U.S. policy is to deter four kinds of Iranian behavior: (1) Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons; (2) Iranian adventurism abetted by such nuclear acquisition, (3) direct military conflict with Iran's armed forces, and (4) escalation of U.S.-Iranian military conflict to the use of nuclear weapons.

By definition, the advent of a "nuclear-armed Iran" means the failure of one form of U.S. deterrence strategy — the deterrence of proliferation. Both the Obama administration and its predecessor publicly committed the United States to keeping Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons. So in postulating a nuclear-armed Iran, we must accept up front that U.S. credibility — a key component of deterrence — had suffered a serious blow, one that will generally make it harder subsequently to deter various threats from the Islamic Republic.

Of particular concern is nuclear-backed "adventurism," defined here as more risk-acceptant Iranian challenges to regional and global order than currently exist. Examples include heightened levels of: political-military-economic intimidation, support for terrorism and insurgency, clashes with U.S. naval forces in the Gulf, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to others. At the end of this spectrum is the potential for direct combat with U.S. forces and Iranian nuclear use, most likely arising from conflict escalation.

As a Shi'a revolutionary regime, it is not clear how readily Tehran will accept the same nuclear "rules of the road" that governed the Cold War. Therefore, checking Iranian nuclear adventurism and use will hinge, in part, upon our ability to adapt traditional deterrence concepts to the idiosyncrasies of this increasingly militarized theocracy.

As this chapter contends, the United States has a poor track record of deterring the Islamic Republic, and the regime itself seems ill-suited to the demands of nuclear crisis management. These factors pose fundamental challenges to reliably establishing and maintaining deterrence of a nuclear-armed Iran.

### **With All Due Modesty: The U.S. Track Record in Deterring Iran**

In thinking through how to deter a nuclear-armed Iran it is essential to recognize we do not begin with a clean slate. The United States and the Islamic Republic have been locking horns ever since 1979. How Tehran has perceived American motivations and resolve in past confrontations will inevitably color how much credibility it places in U.S. deterrent threats once it acquires the bomb. Two such episodes are instructive in this regard: U.S.-Iranian naval clashes in the late-1980s and ongoing Iranian lethal support for the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan.

#### **U.S. Convoy Operations in the Persian Gulf, 1987-88**

By the late 1980s, U.S. relations with the fledgling Islamic Republic of Iran were bitter. From the 1979-1981 U.S. embassy hostage crisis, to the 1983 U.S. Marine Corps barracks bombing in Lebanon, to the embarrassing Iran-Contra scandal of 1986, Washington had found itself burned time and again by the mullahs in Tehran.

While the United States would have preferred to distance itself from the Iran-Iraq war, Iranian attacks on merchant shipping drew Washington deeper into the conflict in early 1987. At the request of Kuwait, America agreed to reflag a number of Kuwaiti tankers and provide naval escort protection for them.

Deterrence was at the heart of the U.S. escort plan, as it was assumed by U.S. military planners at Central Command (CENTCOM) and the Pentagon that Tehran would not dare risk war with America by directly challenging the escort operations. "CENTCOM had contingency plans should Iran attack a convoy, but U.S. military leaders remained

convinced that the presence of a U.S. aircraft carrier in the region would discourage such attacks.”<sup>1</sup> For good measure, the United States issued a stern warning in June 1987 to Tehran via the Swiss embassy that the use of Silkworm cruise missiles against the Kuwaiti convoys would be tantamount to a declaration of war.<sup>2</sup> Tehran did not respond to the warning.

With the *USS Kitty Hawk* carrier battle group on station in the Arabian Sea, the first U.S. escort mission passed through the Silkworm-ringed Strait of Hormuz unmolested the following month. Further up the Persian Gulf, however, one of the reflagged tankers, the *Bridgeton*, struck a mine laid by Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) naval forces. In essence, U.S. assumptions about deterrence failed before the first convoy even reached its destination. Iran, for its part, denied any involvement, calling the mine attack the act of angels. Based on the limited damage and lack of casualties from the attack, Washington decided not to retaliate.<sup>3</sup> Because U.S. naval forces were unprepared for mine warfare, the convoys were suspended until mine clearing assets could be brought to bear. The following month, Iran extended its mine laying to the Gulf of Oman, where the convoys formed up.

In September 1987, U.S. forces caught IRGC naval forces in the act of laying mines from the deck of the *Iran Ajr*. Tehran maintained its denials, despite the capture of the *Iran Ajr*, its crew and a load of Iranian-manufactured mines, as well as other indisputable evidence. Within days, Iran resumed its attacks against merchant shipping, using missiles and gunfire against a Greek tanker despite the nearby presence of two U.S. warships. In October, Iran used its vaunted Silkworm missile to attack a U.S.-flagged tanker, *Sea Isle City*, wounding 18 sailors. The ship was in Kuwaiti waters and therefore not under the protection of the U.S. Navy at the time.

In contrast to the *Bridgeton* attack, the United States struck back. In Operation Nimble Archer, U.S. forces attacked two oil platforms the Iranians had used to track the *Sea Isle City* and relay targeting data. U.S. warships warned the IRGC crews to abandon the platforms before they commenced firing. Back in Washington, the Reagan administration emphasized this was a “prudent yet restrained response.” Asked if the attack meant the United States and Iran were at war, President Reagan replied, “No, we’re not going to have a war with Iran. They’re not that

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stupid.”<sup>4</sup> While another administration official cautioned, “In no way do we want this to be interpreted as an escalation,” Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger warned “stronger countermeasures” would be taken if Iranian attacks continued.<sup>5</sup> Then-Vice President Bush remarked, “Nobody thinks that this will end it.”<sup>6</sup> Within days, Bush had his confirmation as Iran fired another Silkworm missile into Kuwait’s Sea Island Oil Terminal on Oct. 22, 1987. The following month, Iran launched another mining operation.

In February 1988, the U.S. Navy executed a more aggressive strategy to harass Iran’s naval forces and disrupt its attacks on merchant shipping. Iran countered with another mining operation that hit the *USS Samuel B. Roberts*, causing extensive damage but only minor crew injuries. Washington debated retaliation. The State Department emphasized any retaliation had to be proportionate. U.S. military planners considered a range of responses up to an attack on the Iranian naval base at Bandar Abbas. In the end, two oil platforms that had been used by the Iranians to monitor the convoys and a major surface combatant were approved as targets.<sup>7</sup>

On April 18, 1988, the United States launched Operation Praying Mantis. At the end of it, Iran suffered the loss of a number of ships, including the *Sahand*, which went down with most of its 135 men. The operation marked the end of Iranian mining operations. It did not, however, halt Iranian attacks against merchant shipping, with two more vessels being struck the following week. By month’s end, the United States expanded its protection scheme to include “friendly, innocent neutral vessels flying a nonbelligerent flag outside declared exclusion zones that are not carrying contraband or resisting legitimate visit and search by a Persian Gulf belligerent.”<sup>8</sup>

Flushed with the success of the Praying Mantis operation and coincidental Iraqi battlefield advances at the time, the Reagan administration hoped a more aggressive U.S. naval posture in the Gulf would push Iran to accept a cease-fire to end the war.<sup>9</sup> It seems Washington achieved that goal, although not without tragedy.

On July 3, 1988, U.S. warships operating under the new rules of engagement came to the defense of neutral merchant shipping. During the ensuing firefight with IRGC naval forces, the *USS Vincennes* mistook an Iranian airliner flying overhead for an Iranian fighter, shooting it down with

the loss of all 290 civilians on board. While having pledged to fight until Saddam Hussein was vanquished, Ayatollah Khomeini suddenly announced to the Iranian nation on July 20 that he had agreed to a cease-fire with Iraq "...based only on the interest of the Islamic Republic."<sup>10</sup>

As a test case of American deterrence, the reflagging episode demonstrated a U.S. pattern of misreading Iran. Washington failed to appreciate that because Kuwait underwrote the Iraqi war effort, Tehran would view the U.S. naval escort of Kuwaiti tankers not as the defense of neutral shipping, but as a hostile act against the Islamic Republic. U.S. military planners compounded this misperception by assuming that sheer American "military might" would deter Iran from attacking the convoys. Iran disproved that notion with the very first escort mission. As the U.S. naval commander in the Gulf at that time observed, "The day [the *Bridgeton*] hit the mine was very important because it meant that deterrence would not succeed and the Iranian leadership had decided to take their chances by directly challenging the U.S. The threat of the carrier was not enough — deterrence failed."<sup>11</sup>

The failure of the United States to retaliate for the *Bridgeton* mining underscored American reluctance to antagonize Iran for fear it would escalate terrorist attacks against Americans abroad.<sup>12</sup> In hoping to demonstrate restraint to Tehran, however, Washington likely only convinced Iranian hard-liners that, as with the U.S. withdrawal from Beirut after the bombing of the Marine barracks three years prior, America lacked the stomach for a fight. Two more mining operations followed. By the same token, U.S. retaliation for the October 1987 *Sea Isle City* attack *also* failed to deter further Iranian mining operations. The mixed messages emanating from Washington at the time probably did not help, with the Pentagon warning of more serious consequences if Iranian attacks continued while the White House emphasized it was not seeking to escalate.

In any event, it was not until Iran suffered major naval losses during Operation Praying Mantis in April 1988 that Tehran finally ceased mining and other attacks against the U.S. convoys. Iran continued attacking non-U.S. flagged merchant shipping (with guns and missiles) despite the extension of U.S. naval protection to them in late April, albeit with declining frequency. In short, Tehran made tactical adjustments in

response to U.S. military pressure, but defiantly continued to attack merchant shipping until the July 1988 cease-fire.

Iran also demonstrated a proclivity for keeping its attacks just under the threshold of a devastating U.S. response. It studiously avoided use of its Silkworm missiles against the U.S. convoys as they transited the Strait of Hormuz where they were most vulnerable, an indication that Tehran took seriously the U.S. warning of June 1987. However, Iranian military planners exploited a loophole by using the Silkworm to attack a reflagged tanker once it was in Kuwaiti territorial waters and unprotected by U.S. naval escorts. Iran's navy paid a stiff price for that strike, but the Iranian homeland remained untouched by the U.S. military.

An important dimension of the American deterrence dynamic with Iran was the extent to which U.S. military operations influenced the Iranian leadership debate about courses of action. Throughout the war, pragmatists within the regime, such as then-Parliament Speaker Hashemi Rafsanjani and then-President Ali Khamenei, were constantly at odds with extremist clerics and the IRGC.

To underscore this point, the IRGC launched the *Iran Ajr* mining operation just before President Khamene'i was due to speak at the U.N. General Assembly to complain about the U.N. Security Council's unfair treatment of Iran in its war with Iraq. While the embarrassing U.S. capture of the *Iran Ajr* should have been a boon to Iranian pragmatists, it "actually allowed the radicals to prevail again by arguing that Iran needed to show the Americans that it would not be so easily deterred."<sup>13</sup>

In an apparent compromise, the IRGC launched its Silkworm missile attack against the *Sea Isle City* the next month while further mining operations were suspended.

In early 1988 the mining debate resumed in Tehran. The pragmatists sought to avoid provoking the United States which, in their view, would only increase the American military commitment to the region. Extremists insisted Iran needed to deal a decisive blow against the U.S. Navy.<sup>14</sup> The extremists prevailed although not without further challenge. The regular Iranian navy opposed the resumption of mining and actually tried to sweep the mines laid by the IRGC just before the *USS Samuel B. Roberts* was struck.<sup>15</sup> The heavy U.S. retaliation that followed led to the discrediting of the mining advocates within the top leadership

circle and an end to the practice for the remaining three months of the war.<sup>16</sup>

In 2005, Mohsen Rezaie, the overall IRGC commander during the mining operations shed further light on the leadership's deliberations over the 1987 U.S. naval intervention in the Gulf. According to Rezaie, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini personally advocated attacking U.S. warships as they moved through the Strait of Hormuz, although he left the issue to the military to decide.<sup>17</sup> This fascinating footnote underscores Khomeini was not the least bit deterred by the U.S. warning of June 1987 and apparently had utter disregard for the consequences of attacking U.S. warships. It also highlights the important role regime pragmatists played in attenuating the extremist tendencies of Khomeini and the IRGC and brokering a compromise attack plan – the equivalent of a “guerrilla war at sea” – that would inflict costs on America but remain below its threshold of devastating retaliation against the Iranian homeland.

In the end, the regime came to believe the downing of the Iranian airliner by the *USS Vincennes* was a deliberate signal by the United States it was about to unleash its full power to bring down the Islamic Republic, a factor that weighed heavily in the monumental decision days later to accept the UN cease-fire with Iraq.<sup>18</sup>

### **Iranian Lethal Support to Insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, 2003 to Present**

As they had with respect to deposing the Taliban in 2001, American and Iranian interests converged up to a certain point as the Bush administration prepared to topple Saddam Hussein the following year. While a U.S. invasion of Iraq would remove another of Tehran's sworn foes, it would also complete the virtual encirclement of Iran by U.S. military forces. Having recently been lumped in with Iraq as part of the “Axis of Evil,” Iran's ruling mullahs had reason to suspect they might be next on the Bush administration's regime change list.

Against this backdrop, Supreme Leader Khamene'i convened Iran's Supreme National Security Council in early September 2002, concluding, “It is necessary to adopt an active policy in order to prevent long-term and short-term dangers to Iran.”<sup>19</sup> That active policy entailed a

range of diplomatic, military and paramilitary moves to safeguard Iran's western flank.

Operating under the cover of the Geneva Contact Group on Afghanistan, Iranian diplomats engaged their American counterparts to assess U.S. intentions vis-à-vis Iraq. For American officials, the Contact Group provided an opportunity to elicit Iranian cooperation in the forthcoming invasion, akin to what had been achieved in Afghanistan.<sup>20</sup> Specifically, in early 2003 White House special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad "asked Iranian officials in Geneva to pledge Tehran's assistance for any American pilots downed in Iranian territory. Khalilzad also sought assurances that Iran's armed forces would not join the fighting at any time. According to Iranian sources familiar with the meeting, Tehran agreed to both, but asked for a promise of its own: that the United States would not set its sights on Iran after the U.S. Army toppled Saddam Hussein's regime. American officials reportedly equivocated..."<sup>21</sup>

Evidently still wary of U.S. intentions, Iran strengthened its military deployments in the West, moving up some 40 infantry and missile brigades.<sup>22</sup> The regime's security organs also began to build up networks of Shi'ite militias inside Iraq. By the spring of 2004, the decision to activate those networks appeared to have been made, with the commander of the IRGC Quds Force (IRGC-QF), Brigadier General Suleiman, reportedly instructing the proxy militias that "any move that would wear out the U.S. forces in Iraq should be done. Every possible means should be used to keep the U.S. forces engaged in Iraq."<sup>23</sup>

Before long, lethal Iranian involvement in the unfolding Iraqi insurgency was detected. The initial U.S. response was to lodge a diplomatic protest with Tehran, via the Swiss embassy, in July 2005. The demarche took note of Shi'ite militants that had been trained in Iraq by the IRGC and Iranian-backed Lebanese Hezbollah and supplied with bomb-making equipment. It further noted one of these bombs had now killed a coalition soldier. The protest concluded the United States "will continue to judge Iran by its actions in Iraq." Iran's response the following month flatly denied the allegations.

Having been rebuffed privately, U.S. officials took their case public, with National Security Advisor Stephen J. Hadley noting that bombs used against allied forces, "seem to have a footprint similar to that of devices used by groups that have historically had Iranian support."

Despite the public attention, U.S. casualties in Iraq from Iranian bombs, so-called explosively formed penetrators (EFPs) continued to mount, accounting for about 30 percent by the end of 2006.<sup>24</sup>

Increasingly frustrated with Tehran, the Bush administration adopted a more aggressive strategy. In a speech to the nation on January 10, 2007, President Bush announced:

...Succeeding in Iraq also requires defending its territorial integrity and stabilizing the region in the face of the extremist challenge.

This begins with addressing Iran and Syria. These two regimes are allowing terrorists and insurgents to use their territory to move in and out of Iraq. Iran is providing material support for attacks on American troops. We will disrupt the attacks on our forces. We will interrupt the flow of support from Iran and Syria. And we will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq.

Behind the scenes, the Bush administration had already been employing a program to “catch and release” Iranian operatives in Iraq. With no attenuation of EFP attacks, however, in late-2006 the administration decided to escalate the pressure by authorizing the U.S. military to kill or capture Iranian operatives in Iraq. Within hours of the President’s speech, U.S. forces apprehended five members of the IRGC-QF in the Iraqi city of Irbil.

That month also saw a drop in the number of U.S. casualties from explosively formed penetrators, leading some U.S. officials to suggest that the decline was due to American efforts to publicly highlight Iran’s involvement.<sup>25</sup>

Whatever satisfaction that decline might have provided, Iran’s response to the seizure of the “Irbil 5” was swift. On January 20, an attempt to kidnap U.S. servicemen in a raid on the Karbala provincial headquarters resulted in five American fatalities. The following week, President Bush warned, “If Iran escalates its military action in Iraq to the detriment of our troops and/or innocent Iraqi people, we will respond firmly...we will do what it takes to protect our troops.”<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, the President announced he had no intention of making an incursion into Iran. In March, Iran was hit with a U.N. Security Council resolution on its nuclear program, banning it from exporting arms, a provision directed at its arming of insurgents in Iraq.<sup>27</sup>

The following month, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace, announced that Iranian arms (including explosively formed penetrators) were now being supplied to the Taliban in Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup>

On the diplomatic front, the United States engaged Tehran in direct talks on the security situation in Iraq. In May 2007, U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker confronted his Iranian counterpart with “a number of our direct specific concerns about their behavior in Iraq, their support for militias that are fighting both the Iraqi security forces and coalition forces, the fact that a lot of the explosives and ammunition that are used by these groups are coming in from Iran, that such activities, led by the IRGC Qods Force needed to cease, and that we would be looking for results.” Iran’s Ambassador Kazemi-Qomi, himself an IRGC Command officer, denied the U.S. allegations. Neither Ambassador Crocker nor Iranian officials publicly indicated whether the United States warned Iran of any consequences if it failed to halt its lethal support.

At a second round of talks in July 2007, after the U.S. military publicly announced that the IRGC-QF had helped plan the deadly Karbala raid, Ambassador Crocker pointed out to his counterpart that Iranian-backed attacks had only increased since the initial meeting:

We made it clear to the Iranians that we know what they’re doing. It’s up to them to decide what they want to do about it because a point we have made previously is that Iran’s stated policy of...support for a stable democratic Iraq is not only consistent with U.S. policy. It makes sense in terms of Iran’s own interests...

Crocker also informed the Iranians that IRGC-QF operatives and their surrogates “are not going to be safe in Iraq.”<sup>29</sup> Once again, the Iranian delegation denied the U.S. allegations. In a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki the following month, Iranian officials were more

forthcoming, reportedly pledging to curb their aid to Shiite militias in Iraq.<sup>30</sup>

To help stem the flow of explosively formed penetrators from Iran, the U.S.-led coalition built up its bases and patrols near the Iraqi border in the fall of 2007. In the following months, U.S. officials noted a decline in the use of EFPs. A senior U.S. military spokesman in Iraq and an Iraqi official suggested that Tehran seemed to be holding up its pledge to Prime Minister Maliki.

State Department officials were inclined to see the drop as the result of direct engagement with Tehran, whereas Defense Department officials attributed the decline to U.S. counter-measures rather than a strategic decision by Iran to alter its behavior.<sup>31</sup> Any sense of optimism was short-lived, however, with explosively formed penetrator attacks in January 2008 rising to the highest level in a year.

By spring, General David Petraeus, the overall U.S. commander in Iraq, Ambassador Crocker and CIA Director Michael Hayden had all publicly concluded Iran was waging a proxy war against the United States in Iraq. Petraeus' successor, General Ray Odierno, noted in June 2009, "Iran is still supporting, funding, training surrogates who operate inside of Iraq — flat out...They have not stopped. And I don't think they will stop."<sup>32</sup> The following month, the Obama administration, which was committed to engaging Iran, released the "Irbil 5" to the Iraqi government which promptly turned them over to Tehran.

As a test case for U.S. deterrence of Iranian adventurism, Iran's lethal support for anti-American insurgents ranks as a near total failure. The failure is largely attributable to a misplaced American faith in common objectives with Iran. Iranian assurances in early 2003 not to intervene militarily in Iraq seem to have been accepted at face value without any indication from the United States there would be potentially serious consequences for welshing.

Perhaps the U.S. failure to issue a clear deterrent warning was appropriate in 2003 given Tehran's prior cooperation in Afghanistan, but this faith in common purposes was still evidenced by Ambassador Crocker in the July 2007 round of talks with Iran, which he himself pointed out were being conducted against a backdrop of *increased* Iranian-backed attacks.

Even then, the strongest deterrent threat the United States could seem to muster in those direct talks was a warning that IRGC operatives in Iraq would not be safe. The continued use of explosively formed penetrators and other forms of lethal support for the insurgency indicate what little credibility Tehran placed in that threat.

In essence, Washington failed to anticipate the consequences of not adequately reassuring Iran it would not be invaded next. This is where common American and Iranian interests in deposing Saddam Hussein diverged. For Tehran, bloodying U.S. forces in Iraq under the guise of a Shi'ite insurgency helped ensure the country could not be used as a spring board for an American invasion of Iran. The United States also seemed to underestimate Iran's ability to "split hairs," that is, sticking to the letter of its pledge not to intervene in Iraq with its armed forces while instead employing the IRGC-QF, a military unit the regime does not acknowledge even exists, to train and direct proxies in Iraq.

Washington's deterrence potential was also greatly diminished by self-imposed constraints. Having failed to deter the initiation of Iranian covert support for the Iraqi insurgency, the United States fell back on a posture of deterrence by denial, that is, it aimed to deny Iran the gains it sought from the insurgency by disrupting its networks *inside* Iraq and applying greater force protection measures. In reality, this was part of a wider Bush administration effort begun in late-2006 to confront Iran's growing influence in the region, so as to press Tehran into giving up its nuclear ambitions,<sup>33</sup> an effort which yielded equally dismal results.

In any event, the path of deterrence by punishment was effectively undercut when President Bush took military options against Iranian territory off the table in January 2007, leaving an unenforceable U.N. ban on Iranian arms exports and rather weak U.S. economic sanctions against some IRGC-QF officials.<sup>34</sup> Even the dispatch of a second U.S. carrier battle group to the Persian Gulf in April 2008 seemed half-hearted; with Secretary Gates observing the deployment was a "reminder" to Iran, not an escalation.<sup>35</sup>

The constraints themselves reflected wariness by many U.S. officials to confront Iran while American forces were already overstretched in Iraq and Afghanistan. To Tehran, it must have appeared as an unmistakable lack of U.S. resolve. Thus hampered, Washington had to look elsewhere for influence over Iranian behavior. This led Secretary

of Defense Gates in April 2008 to publicly encourage the Iraqi government to "...bring some pressure to bear on Iran" to stop the insurgents' attacks.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the insurgency debacle was the American reluctance even to attribute Iran's covert activities to its top leadership. In April 2007, Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Pace observed:

"We know that there are munitions that were made in Iran that are in Iraq and in Afghanistan. And we know that the Quds Force works for the IRGC. We then surmise from that one or two things. Either the leadership of the country knows what their armed forces are doing, or that they don't know. And in either case that's a problem."<sup>37</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Gen. Petraeus remarked:

"With respect to how high does it go and, you know, what do they know and when did they know it, I honestly cannot – that is such a sensitive issue that – and we do not – at least I do not know of anything that specifically identifies how high it goes beyond the level of the Qods Force, Commander Suleiman. Beyond that, it is very difficult to tell – we know where he is in the overall chain of command; he certainly reports to the very top – but again, nothing that would absolutely indicate, again, how high the knowledge of this actually goes..."<sup>38</sup>

In essence, top U.S. military commanders publicly connected the provision of explosively formed penetrators and other lethal support to the IRGC-QF and its commander, who they acknowledged reported to the Supreme Leader, but they would not affirmatively tie the activity to the Supreme Leader himself.

This reluctance extended elsewhere. In claiming IRGC-QF operatives helped plan the January 2007 raid in Karbala in which five U.S. soldiers were killed, Brig. Gen. Kevin Bergner noted, "Our intelligence reveals that the senior leadership in Iran is aware of this activity." When asked if Iran's Supreme Leader Khamene'i could be unaware of the activity, Bergner said, "That would be hard to imagine."<sup>39</sup>

Commenting on Iran's lethal support to the Taliban in June 2007, Secretary Gates observed, "...given the quantities [of Iranian weapons] we are seeing, it is difficult to believe it's associated with smuggling or the drug business or that it's taking place without the knowledge of the Iranian government."<sup>40</sup> Indeed, it was not until April 2008 that C.I.A. Director Hayden remarked, "I will share with you my view that it is the policy of the Iranian government, approved to the *highest levels of that government*, to facilitate the killing of Americans in Iraq, okay? So just make sure there's clarity on that."<sup>41</sup>

Some of this reluctance could be attributed initially to a simple lack of incriminating intelligence. However, the American reticence to finger publicly Iran's Supreme Leader endured even as the picture came into focus. The overriding U.S. concern appears to have been not inflaming the conflict further. Indeed, Washington may have been trying to leave the regime a face-saving "exit ramp," namely, the top leadership could act as if it had been unaware of the lethal support and put a stop to it without appearing to have been cowed by "the Great Satan."

Alternatively, U.S. officials may have concluded that to publicly accuse the Supreme Leader for the ongoing killing of U.S. soldiers would have only increased pressures for escalation, something they studiously sought to avoid. In the end, the only exit ramp Tehran was interested in was the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq and Afghanistan. It never wavered from its denials of U.S. allegations or strategically altered its lethal support for the insurgents.

The U.S. failure to hold Iran's top leaders publicly accountable for this lethal support has set a dangerous precedent for deterrence of a nuclear-armed Iran. It needlessly raised doubts at home and abroad that Iran's top leaders might not be cognizant of hostile cross-border acts by their security forces. As explained further below, the Supreme Leader is, in fact, tightly coupled to all sensitive security matters. The episode also has taught Iran's rulers that in the future they can hope to exploit this window of uncertainty over so-called rogue operations and make quick gains before the U.S. builds its case for regime culpability.

Indeed, the implicit potential for Iranian nuclear escalation will naturally extend that window of opportunity by raising the standard of evidence that the top leadership in Iran is, in fact, responsible for a given provocation. Even then, U.S. public diplomacy seems to be easily

checked with persistent Iranian denials of any wrongdoing, helping to delay and deflect pressure on the regime.

Where U.S. deterrence registers with Iran is in the broader sense; as with the mining of the Persian Gulf in 1988, Iran remains wary of engaging American forces in direct conventional combat. This has driven Tehran to rely on asymmetric warfare and plausible deniability. Indeed, the manner in which Iran prepared the Iraq insurgency indicates that the regime does not perceive itself as completely invulnerable to outside scrutiny or pressure. From the outset, Iran adopted a “train the trainer” approach, whereby selected insurgents would receive advance instruction in Iran and then return to Iraq to train others. This was done in anticipation that coalition forces would tighten up the border with Iran and to avoid unwanted attention directed at Tehran.<sup>42</sup>

At the same time, Iran indicated once again it was quite willing to engage in tit-for-tat retaliation, if not escalation, with the United States; in this case planning the Karbala raid that killed five American servicemen. In the end, what Iranian hard-liners are likely to take from this conflict is that even though America’s diplomats, generals and spymasters, not to mention its hawkish president, all publicly conceded Iran was fighting a proxy war against it – with hundreds of American soldiers killed by explosively formed penetrators – the United States was neither prepared to hold the Supreme Leader accountable nor shed Iranian blood to stop it.

### **Is the Ruling Regime Rational?**

The foregoing case studies highlight a key question for future U.S. deterrence planning; namely, can we count on Iran’s rulers to rationally calculate when it is in their best interest to avoid conflict with the United States? Expert opinion on this issue is roughly divided into two camps, deterrence optimists and pessimists.

Generalists among the Iran deterrence camp contend if the United States could successfully deter a nuclear-armed Soviet Union and China, two other “revolutionary” states, it could certainly deter a nuclear-armed Iran as a “lesser included case.”<sup>43</sup> Iran experts in this camp point to various examples of the regime’s rationality. Among them, Ayatollah Khomeini’s dictum that survival of the state supersedes religious

considerations, his acceptance of the cease-fire with Iraq in 1988, and more recently, the growing economic interests of the IRGC, which presumably give the Corps more to lose in a conflict with the United States.

In contrast, Iran deterrence skeptics tend to worry about Iran's capacity for irrational behavior. Indeed, such behavior can be gleaned from the foregoing case studies. For example, Tehran insisted on attacking U.S. convoys in 1987-1988 despite the fact the broader campaign against merchant shipping had no diminishing effect on the Iraqi war effort, while the mining of international waters only served to coalesce the West against Iran, increase the U.S. military presence in the Gulf, and invite the destruction of Iran's navy. Tehran had so badly played its hand by 1988 that the only international condemnation of the *USS Vincennes'* downing of the Iranian airliner came from Syria.<sup>44</sup>

As we have seen, extremist clerics, including Ayatollah Khomeini himself and their equally zealous comrades in the IRGC have shown little to no regard for the consequences of their actions – a key assumption in the rational actor model and deterrence theory. In short, they seemed to discount earthly costs for heavenly gains. While Khomeini is long gone from the scene, religious extremism has not subsided in Iran. Indeed, concern is mounting that an apocalyptic Shi'a sect, the Hojjatieh, is gaining influence in the regime through the efforts of Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Given the shadowy nature of the Hojjatieh sect, it is difficult to assess the group's potential impact on the regime's cost-benefit calculus once it acquires nuclear weapons. What is clear is that Iranians themselves express concern today that religious extremists within the leadership, referred to as the "Shi'a Taliban," should not be trusted with an atomic bomb.<sup>45</sup>

The reality is that the Iranian regime is capable of both rational and irrational behavior, a reflection of the enduring internal struggle for power between pragmatists and extremists. The latter are devoted to metaphysical concepts. They see ideological and armed "resistance" as an end to itself. Once committed, the regime's extremists will stubbornly adhere to a course of action beyond the point where it proves counter-productive and risks self-preservation. Of particular concern in the event Iran acquires nuclear weapons is that these extremists are

disproportionately represented in the regime's intelligence, military and security organizations.

Regime pragmatists play an important role in restraining the irrational tendencies of the radicals. Yet, because the two camps are semi-autonomous, Iran can demonstrate rational and irrational behavior simultaneously, confounding outsiders with such contradictory behavior. Thus, for example, the IRGC with Khomeini's blessing undertakes a risky mining operation in September 1987 that undercuts a concurrent attempt by Iran's president to generate greater international sympathy for Iran before the United Nations. Likewise, in 1994, Iran supports a terrorist attack against the Jewish center in Buenos Aires at the same time it seeks nuclear cooperation with the Argentine government.

Compounding this schizophrenic behavior is a deep-seated religious and cultural predisposition in Iran not to knuckle under to illegitimate power, which, in the regime's world view, means any government besides the Islamic Republic. Refusing to have terms "dictated" to it by "arrogant" powers, Tehran is thus balking at an international offer to convert its low-enriched uranium into fuel rods for the Tehran research reactor, which makes radioisotopes to treat cancer patients but is running out of fuel.

Notably, President Ahmadinejad favors this deal but is being thwarted from within by his political opponents in the traditional conservative, pragmatic conservative and reformist camps. The episode underscores that Iran's extremists do not necessarily have a monopoly on irrational behavior. Indeed, such behavior can be tactically employed for over-arching rational goals (e.g., undermining one's political opponent).

### **Iranian National Security Decision Making**

How rational Tehran's behavior seems to outsiders will also be a function of how well its decision makers hold up under the stress of a crisis. Intra-group dynamics and psychological predispositions have been known to distort rational thinking. Therefore, the resiliency of Iranian decision making processes and key players merits careful consideration.

## Processes and Institutions

In terms of processes, Iranian national security decision making reflects the broader distribution of political power. At the top is the Supreme Leader, former-President Khamene'i, who is constitutionally designated as the commander in chief of the armed forces with the power to declare war. He does not wield absolute power, however, in that he lacks the personal charisma and religious credibility of the Islamic Republic's founder, Ayatollah Khomeini. Therefore, Supreme Leader Khamene'i must balance various other semi-autonomous power centers, grouped into major factions.

Since the end of the Khatami presidency in 2005, the reformist faction has essentially been excluded from national security decision making, leaving Khamene'i to balance the views of pragmatic conservatives like Rafsanjani with those of traditional conservatives such as Ali Larijani, and extremists like Ahmadinejad.

After the disputed re-election of President Ahmadinejad in June 2009, Iranian politics has become increasingly polarized, with the Supreme Leader leaning more in favor of Ahmadinejad, leaving many to speculate how much influence the pragmatists continue to wield. This is an important development, bearing in mind the pragmatists' role in attenuating the regime's more extreme tendencies.

The overall national security decision making process therefore operates on a consensus basis with the Supreme Leader as the highest decision authority. Outwardly, the regime likes to portray the process as one of elite solidarity. Behind the scenes, the intense factionalism translates into a tendency to adopt lowest common denominator policies.<sup>46</sup> Those policies are constantly subject to renegotiation, moreover, as factions challenge decisions not to their liking. This helps explain the on-again, off-again mining operations of 1987-1988 and may also help account for the dialing up and down of lethal support to the Iraqi insurgency since 2003.

The Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) is the highest constitutionally sanctioned deliberative body on national security affairs. It is headed by the President and represents the heads of the ruling system, as well as the IRGC. Decisions of the SNSC do not take effect, however, until they are approved by the Supreme Leader. More secretive sub-

groupings of the SNSC and the Supreme Leader have been publicly reported for particularly sensitive operations, such as cross-border terrorism.<sup>47</sup>

Other institutions also likely play a significant role in Iranian national security decision making, including the Supreme Leader's Office. Among its staff are Ayatollah Khamene'i's most trusted foreign policy and military advisors, such as former-Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati and former IRGC commander Rahim Safavi.

The Leader's Office is also responsible for the network known as the Supreme Leader's Representatives. These "clerical commissars" are embedded in all major security institutions. The Leader's Representatives ensure the political reliability of the armed forces but can also intervene in operations at will, thereby superseding the bureaucracy's chain of command. The Supreme Leader also maintains direct ties to military officers and officials, routinely meeting with them privately on a weekly basis or as events warrant.<sup>48</sup>

These sessions provide another oversight mechanism for the Leader, as well as an opportunity for the officers and officials involved to influence the Leader's views. According to opposition sources, Iran's intelligence apparatus spies on top regime officials and officers, providing tape recordings to the Supreme Leader on a routine basis, further keeping Ayatollah Khamene'i apprised.<sup>49</sup>

In the event Iran acquires nuclear weapons, these mechanisms and processes will provide a basis from which to construct a Nuclear Command Authority (NCA). Undoubtedly, the Supreme Leader will be the ultimate decider on questions of nuclear use. Equally certain is that the IRGC, as the most trusted of security organs, will play a leading role in the control of Iranian nuclear weapons. How widely an Iranian NCA would consult with other heads of the ruling system is an open question.

In peacetime, top regime officials may well be invested with an advisory role on the development of nuclear forces, akin to the Nuclear Development Committee of Pakistan's NCA.<sup>50</sup> An Iranian NCA might also make provisions for consulting the state president on questions of nuclear use, as does Pakistan's NCA Employment Control Committee – time and communication links permitting. It is also possible that Iranian nuclear control arrangements would allow for delegation of nuclear launch

authority to IRGC commanders under certain conditions, such as the incapacitation of the Supreme Leader.

### **Key Decision Makers**

As for the psychological dispositions of the regime's top leaders, a good deal can be gleaned from their tenures in office. Ayatollah Khamene'i generally has proven to be a cautious Supreme Leader. His measured approach to most policy matters probably reflects his diminished authority compared to his predecessor. He simply cannot impose his will in the way Khomeini did. In turn, his questionable religious credentials have forced Khamene'i into an alliance with those most supportive of the concept of a Supreme Leader, militant extremists.

More recently, Khamene'i has acted hastily and clumsily, exacerbating the disputed re-election of President Ahmadinejad by preempting the constitutionally mandated three-day waiting period before endorsing Ahmadinejad's supposed victory. This pre-emption helped solidify the views of the Green movement that the electoral "fix was in."

At other times, Khamene'i can be indecisive.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps to break this indecisiveness, Khamene'i reportedly resorts to *estekhareh*, an Islamic form of fortune-telling, to make critical decisions for the country.<sup>52</sup> In the most common form of *estekhareh*, a cleric takes the Koran in both hands, says some prayers, then opens the book and reads the first line of the page on the right. The cleric then offers his impressions of what God recommends a person should do.<sup>53</sup> A relative of Khamene'i's speculates the Supreme Leader is especially prone to use *estekhareh* when he is depressed,<sup>54</sup> in part the result of listening to the recordings of officials who pledge their loyalty to him face-to-face but berate him behind closed doors.<sup>55</sup>

Publicly, Khamene'i maintains that nuclear weapons are against Islam and has issued a fatwa, or religious edict, prohibiting their development, possession or use by Iran. Behind the scenes, however, he has been a staunch advocate of acquiring the bomb. According to an investigation by the International Atomic Energy Agency, as president in 1984, Khamene'i pushed for nuclear weapons, saying, "A nuclear arsenal would serve Iran as a deterrent in the hands of God's soldiers."<sup>56</sup>

Khamene'i is able to reconcile this duplicity under the Shi'a practice of taqiyya, whereby it is not only morally acceptable but obligatory to lie to one's enemies if that will avert harm. Because it can be practiced collectively, taqiyya makes it difficult to place much stock in the public utterances of Khamene'i or other members of the ruling regime. Likewise, Khamene'i is deeply distrustful of the United States, believing it is intent on regime change in Iran, President Obama's offer of engagement notwithstanding.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in many ways represents the future of the Islamic Republic. He embodies the so-called "second generation" of Islamic revolutionaries, having come of age in the late-1970s and fighting in the Iran-Iraq War as a member of the IRGC. As a university student leader, he advocated the seizure of the U.S. embassy in 1979 and remains committed to the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini. This helps explain his anti-American and anti-Israeli tirades.

As an IRGC veteran, Ahmadinejad has supported the political and economic ascendancy of the Guards Corps. Although he is not in the operational military chain of command, as state president and chair of the Supreme National Security Council, Ahmadinejad has asserted himself as the face and voice of the Iranian government.

Ahmadinejad's decision-making style has a certain "shoot first, ask questions later" quality to it. He is widely criticized within Iran for his arrogance and disdain for expert opinion. He regularly invokes conspiracy theories to explain world events, including the assertion that America staged the 9/11 attacks itself so it would have a pretense to invade Muslim lands,<sup>57</sup> a view publicly shared by Rahim Safavi, the Supreme Leader's military advisor.<sup>58</sup> Ahmadinejad is widely seen as being "...susceptible to neither offers of incentives nor threats of force."<sup>59</sup>

Although not a cleric, Ahmadinejad harbors extremist religious views. He is widely suspected of belonging to a secret apocalyptic society, such as the Hojjatieh. Ahmadinejad routinely invokes the Shi'a messiah, the so-called Hidden Imam or Mahdi, and asserts his return is imminent.

In Shi'a eschatology, when the Mahdi returns he will impose universal Islamic Government and many infidels will be massacred. In contrast to mainstream Shi'a who believe it is impossible to know when

the Mahdi will return, Ahmadinejad seems to believe that his return can be hastened by creating chaos and conflict.<sup>60</sup>

Ahmadinejad's public diatribes closely link the killing of Jews and the Imam's return,<sup>61</sup> an incendiary combination in the event Iran acquires nuclear weapons. In critical situations, Ahmadinejad also reportedly resorts to *estekhareh* to help him decide on a course of action.<sup>62</sup>

Hashemi Rafsanjani is the antithesis of Ahmadinejad. Rafsanjani is one of the clerical founding fathers of the Islamic Republic, having worked closely with Ayatollah Khomeini. After serving as speaker of the Iranian Parliament and two-terms as president, today Rafsanjani simultaneously chairs two key regime institutions, the Assembly of Experts, which has the power to elect or remove the Supreme Leader, and the Expediency Council, which arbitrates disputes between the Parliament and the Guardian Council.

Rafsanjani is known as the regime's top pragmatist. He was largely responsible for persuading Khomeini to end the war with Iraq in 1988. Politically, he lacks conviction and seems to be motivated by whatever cause will best enhance his personal power and wealth, the latter being quite considerable. In the past Rafsanjani opposed the reformists but since the rise of Ahmadinejad and the extremists, he has found common cause with the Green movement. In addition to being a consummate opportunist, Rafsanjani is a pivotal coalition builder. He has tried to bridge the chasm between reformists and extremists in the wake of the disputed re-election of President Ahmadinejad. His lack of progress in this endeavor has led to speculation that his influence, and those of his fellow pragmatists, may be waning in the regime.

In the late-1980s, Rafsanjani publicly advocated that Iran acquire WMD, a key lesson of the war with Iraq. He has been a long-time proponent of Iran's nuclear program, which secretly engaged in cooperation with the A.Q. Khan nuclear proliferation network during his presidency. He supports better ties with the United States, presumably from a position of nuclear strength.

Another key leader of the system is Ali Larijani, the current Speaker of Parliament. Larijani is a sophisticated intellectual, with a Ph.D. in Western philosophy. A traditional conservative, Larijani served in the IRGC and was the Secretary of the Supreme National Security

Council from 2005-2007 when he resigned amid a dispute with President Ahmadinejad.

Ali Larijani is often mentioned as a likely successor to President Ahmadinejad when the latter's term of office ends in 2013. If so, we should not expect the substance of the regime's policies to change. As Larijani has remarked, "Ideologically, I have no differences with Ahmadinejad, but we indeed have differences in style, approach and management."<sup>63</sup>

Scions of a prestigious religious family, Larijani and his brothers have long held special positions of trust with the Supreme Leader. Ali's brother Sadeq previously served as a clerical member of the Guardian Council and was recently appointed head of Iran's judiciary. Brother Mohammad Javad has long been a foreign affairs advisor to Khamene'i. Ali Larijani proved to be pivotal in winning the release of British sailors detained by Iran in 2007, demonstrating greater personal influence within the regime than the Foreign Minister, Manouchehr Mottaki,<sup>64</sup> who has since been fired by Ahmadinejad.

While Supreme National Security Council Secretary, Larijani was the regime's lead negotiator with the West on Iran's nuclear program, and he steadfastly refused to accept limits on it. More recently, Larijani has opposed President Ahmadinejad on the aforementioned deal with the West to exchange Iran's enriched uranium for research reactor fuel. This opposition stems from an opportunistic desire to undercut a political rival, as much as his staunch nuclear nationalism.

Larijani is thought to favor Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons, recently claiming the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to which Iran is a State Party, should simply be ignored.<sup>65</sup> His pro-nuclear stance seems to be influenced by the trauma of the Iran-Iraq War: "We witnessed the effect of WMDs when the Americans and the Europeans provided Saddam with them and he used them, in places like Halabja. I was there when he attacked and I can't wipe the images from my mind. Everything and everyone – children, men, women and animals were exterminated."<sup>66</sup> In effect, while WMD are heinous, acquiring nuclear weapons would deter their use against Iran in the future. As noted further below, Larijani also believes nuclear weapons will give Iran greater freedom of action.

## **Crisis Management**

In terms of crisis management, the ruling regime has demonstrated it can perform reasonably well where there is a build-up of tensions that measures weeks or longer. In the 1998 near-war crisis between Iran and Afghanistan's Taliban, Supreme Leader Khamene'i proved he was capable of resisting domestic pressures for a war that he deemed not to be in Iran's interest. By contrast, Tehran seems less capable of performing under the stress of fast-breaking crises. In both the 2005 false report of an attack on the Bushehr nuclear reactor and the more recent demonstrations against Ahmadinejad's re-election, the regime demonstrated poor situational awareness.

Key leaders were unavailable publicly and lesser officials gave conflicting accounts of events. The leadership also seemed to face difficulty in building a consensus on the proper course of action. As an exalted religious figure, Khamene'i frequently will not even comment publicly on controversial topics for weeks, if then. This can lead to improvisation that carries unintended consequences (e.g., the abuse of protestors in an ad-hoc detention center became a major embarrassment and liability for the regime).

These facets of Iranian decision making under stress will be an obvious and potentially disastrous liability in the event Iran becomes nuclear-armed, setting the stage for the failure of deterrence.

## **The Potential for Deterrence Failure**

There are essentially two modes of deterrence failure pertinent to Iran; instances where regime decision making is not constrained by rationality and cases where rationality is otherwise impaired. In terms of the former, the regime may deliberately undertake a course of action that, by Western standards, seems utterly reckless because it all but assures harsh consequences for itself.

Such would be the case, for example, where the regime discounts costs and focuses primarily or even solely on prospective gains, or where the bearing of costs itself is considered a virtue. The regime demonstrated its capacity to act in such a manner during its war with Iraq. In short, the

regime locked itself into an eight-year-long conflict that nearly brought about its collapse by extolling the virtues of suffering in the name of “justice,” as well as large-scale martyrdom.

It is said that 30 years past the revolution, the regime can no longer inspire such mass martyrdom. Since June 2009, however, the eagerness of Iran’s Basij militia to torture, rape and kill fellow citizens in the name of loyalty to the Supreme Leader should serve as a timely reminder the regime still has a large base of fanatical devotees and a willingness to exploit them. Left to their own devices, apocalyptically-inspired Hojjatieh and other radicals could likewise prove to be undeterrable since conflict with the United States, possibly including even the use of nuclear weapons, serves their agenda.

The latter form of deterrence breakdown involves cases where rationality is impaired by the stress of crisis decision making. This could stem from an inadequate understanding of U.S. national security interests, resolve, and decision-making processes. Here, it is noteworthy that despite top priority access to information, Supreme Leader Khamene’i has acknowledged he does not understand how foreign policy decisions are made in the United States.<sup>67</sup>

Cultural influences could further skew rational decision making in Tehran, given the aforementioned presence of conspiracy theorists among the top leadership, as well as the high political costs of backing down under U.S. pressure. Decisions for war or peace may well hinge on the advice top leaders receive from their estekhareh religious advisors, who likely will have no appreciation for the stakes involved or the implications of their advice.

Bureaucratic politics and standard operating procedures, while certainly not unique to Iran, could similarly lead to a breakdown of deterrence. For instance, Iran’s ability to signal to Washington its intent to de-escalate a confrontation could be compromised by IRGC commanders who countermand orders to stand down, as they have done in the past. Compounded by the lack of diplomatic relations and interaction between Washington and Tehran since 1979, such mixed messaging could well be interpreted by the United States as a deception intended to mask Iranian preparations to initiate nuclear use.

In essence, the seeds for deterrence failure have already been sown in Tehran. The regime’s highly stylized form of decision making seems

ill-suited to the demands of fast-breaking crises where the potential for nuclear escalation exists. Depending on circumstances, there may not be enough time for the regime to achieve consensus on a course of action among the heads of the system. This would tend to shrink the circle of advisers in proximity to the Supreme Leader, probably in favor of hard-liners, who are his natural constituency and are disproportionately represented in that circle.

The results could be skewed in favor of escalation, or if the Supreme Leader is unable to decide, paralysis at the top. The latter outcome carries risks of its own, since a lack of responsiveness may be misinterpreted as non-compliance with U.S. demands. Paralysis at the top might also afford more radical Iranian commanders, including in the nuclear forces, an opportunity to escalate a crisis on their own. U.S. deterrence planning must contend with both potential failure modes.

### **Increasing the Prospects of Deterring a Nuclear-Armed Iran**

As we speculate about the steps necessary to deter a nuclear-armed Iran it is important to set realistic expectations. It should be clear that a Cold War, cookie-cutter approach to nuclear deterrence will find itself out of step with the complex and confounding idiosyncrasies of the Islamic Republic.

U.S. deterrence planning therefore needs to be more culturally attuned and tailored to Iran's decision-making environment if we hope to influence leadership calculations about the wisdom of challenging U.S. interests. Even under ideal circumstances, deterrence is an uncertain business. Despite our best efforts it can fail at different points on the spectrum of conflict and for a variety of reasons.

Along these lines, various forms of adventurism could be quite difficult to deter once Iran gets the bomb. As we have already seen, the Reagan administration was reluctant to confront Iran for fear it would retaliate with terrorist attacks against *Americans abroad*. The George W. Bush and Obama administrations have likewise been reticent to use military force against Iran for fear Tehran would retaliate against *American soldiers* in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Arguably, we are already self-deterred when it comes to Iran. Why would we be any more willing to confront the Islamic Republic once it acquires nuclear weapons and the ability to hold *American cities* at risk?

This is a conundrum that Iranian leaders seem to understand quite well. As Parliamentary Speaker Ali Larijani remarked, “If Iran becomes atomic Iran, no longer will anyone dare challenge it, because they would have to pay too high a price.”<sup>68</sup> We should therefore expect that a nuclear-armed Iran will be even more prone to engage in terrorism and insurgency in the heady days following nuclear weapons acquisition since the leadership’s greatest perceived cost of doing so – U.S. retaliation against the homeland – will likely shrink to zero.

U.S. nuclear superiority is plainly understood in Tehran.<sup>69</sup> American conventional military superiority is likewise acknowledged, though the regime contends asymmetric warfare can neutralize it. What Iran sees as lacking is America’s will to confront it. Indeed, as noted at the outset, Iranian leaders will point time and again to their acquisition of nuclear weapons as proof that American threats have no credibility.

All of this suggests the single most important step the United States can and must take to enhance the prospects for successfully deterring a nuclear-armed Iran is to restore the credibility of its threat to use force against the Islamic Republic.

To rebuild the credibility of its deterrence strategy, the United States must begin by clearly delineating unacceptable red lines for the most threatening aspects of potential Iranian behavior, namely nuclear weapons-related transfers and use. It will be necessary to put the regime on notice publicly and privately that the United States will hold it accountable for transferring nuclear weapons-related technology, materials and the like to others.

Washington should further make clear such transfers to non-state actors will be deemed a direct threat to U.S. national security, subjecting the regime to the full range of military responses. To lend credence to these deterrent warnings, the United States could consider overt or covert operations to interdict other types of Iranian weapons smuggling, as a surrogate demonstration of American resolve.

Deterring Iranian nuclear use is a multi-faceted challenge. To deter such use against the United States, it will likely be necessary to dampen Iran’s initial nuclear euphoria with sober reminders that

America's nuclear arsenal was now specifically targeted against the ruling regime, that America had missile defenses while Iran did not, and that if Tehran was nonetheless foolish enough to use nuclear weapons against the United States, American nuclear retaliation would ensure Shi'a clerical rule and influence in Iran and within Islam more broadly would come to an abrupt end.

For those among the ruling elite who may be apocalyptically-minded, a slightly more tailored message through an appropriate medium would be in order, namely that far from hastening the return of the Shi'a messiah, the initiation of nuclear weapons use by Iran would only insult God by disgracing Shi'ism and triggering the destruction of His Islamic Republic.

Deterring Iranian nuclear use against U.S. allies, in particular Israel, raises challenges of its own. While Iranian leaders routinely castigate Israel for its presumed nuclear weapons stockpile, they nonetheless perceive the Jewish states as particularly vulnerable to nuclear destruction given its lack of strategic depth and concentrated population.

As Hashemi Rafsanjani remarked in 2001, "...the use of a nuclear bomb in Israel will leave nothing on the ground, whereas it will only damage the world of Islam."<sup>70</sup> The issue of a future Iranian nuclear attack against Israel was debated during the Democratic presidential primary campaign in 2008. Then-Senator Hillary Clinton took a decidedly hard line on the issue. Speaking to *ABC News*, Clinton explained:

Well, the question was, if Iran were to launch a nuclear attack on Israel, what would our response be? And I want the Iranians to know that if I am president, we will attack Iran. And I want them to understand that. Because it does mean that they have to look very carefully at their society. Because whatever stage of development they might be in their nuclear weapons program, in the next 10 years during which they might foolishly consider launching an attack on Israel, we would be able to totally obliterate them. That's a terrible thing to say, but those people who run Iran need to understand that. Because that, perhaps, will deter them from doing something that would be reckless, foolish and tragic.<sup>71</sup>

Iran responded to Clinton's remarks by filing a protest at the United Nations. President Ahmadinejad brushed off the comments by claiming that neither Clinton nor her opponent, then-Senator Obama, could ever get elected president.

Obama took a more circumspect stance than Clinton. He acknowledged Israel was America's "most important ally" in the Middle East, and Washington would respond "forcefully and appropriately" to any attack. "But it is important that we use language that sends a signal to the world community that we're shifting from the sort of cowboy diplomacy, or lack of diplomacy, that we've seen out of George Bush. And this kind of language is not helpful." In Obama's view, "When Iran is able to go to the United Nations complaining about the statements made and get some sympathy, that's a sign that we are taking the wrong approach."<sup>72</sup>

Should Iran acquire nuclear weapons during the Obama administration, it will be necessary for the President and Secretary of State Clinton to revisit their respective campaign remarks. Inevitably, the President would be asked by the press if he now endorses the more hawkish views expressed by Clinton in 2008. At a minimum, the President will need to commit explicitly U.S. nuclear forces to the defense of America's allies in the region.

More careful deliberation will be needed as to whether Washington should then also specify that the societal destruction of Iran will be the price Iran's leaders pay for attacking Israel or another U.S. ally with nuclear weapons. It may be the case that most of the deterrence burden can rest on a narrower target set linked to the personal and corporate interests of the ruling elites. In this regard, it will be important to identify those values (e.g., personal wealth; societal control mechanisms such as state-run media, the IRGC and Basij; avoidance of diplomatic isolation, etc.) and how best to imperil them. In many, if not most, cases nuclear weapons will be overkill.

Given the short missile flight times involved, it will also be necessary to beef up the forward presence of U.S. forces in the region in order to: present the President with viable pre-emption options in the event Iran begins preparations for a nuclear attack, otherwise blunt such an attack with integrated and layered missile defenses, and rapidly hold Iran's leaders and military chain of command accountable for initiating nuclear weapons use.

Such forward basing carries risks, however, in exposing U.S. forces to attacks, from Iranian-backed terrorists and IRGC special forces to nuclear-armed ballistic missiles. Therefore, great attention will need to be devoted to U.S. force protection measures, as well. More intense security cooperation with our regional allies, including arms sales and counter-terrorism/counter-insurgency training, will help boost their confidence in resisting Iranian intimidation.

As in other cases of extended deterrence, we should expect Tehran to seek to undermine our allies' confidence in American security guarantees. Firm, consistent, and authoritative declaratory policy backed by the right force posture to implement it, as well as enhanced allied cooperation, should help parry Iran's rhetorical jabs.

To lend further credibility to its red lines, the United States must demonstrate a greater willingness to fight "in the shadows," as Iran does. Even after it acquires nuclear weapons, Tehran can still be expected to probe and exploit loopholes in U.S. deterrent warnings, employing lethal force either overtly or covertly in a manner designed to stay below the U.S. threshold for retaliation. Convincing Iran we will fight below that threshold can only help bolster our deterrence of conflict above it. In short, the demonstrated willingness to hold Iran accountable for lower levels of violence could have a credibility "multiplier effect."

This is not to suggest, however, that a greater U.S. willingness to fight Iran at lower levels of the conflict spectrum will immediately put an end to Iranian adventurism. As we have seen in the Persian Gulf and in Iraq, the IRGC in particular has demonstrated its willingness to engage in tit-for-tat retaliation against U.S. forces. We should therefore expect Iran to reply in-kind to demonstrate that *Tehran* will not be so easily deterred.

How this cycle has been broken in the past is for the United States to inflict major losses on Iran's military capabilities. We will need to be prepared to do so again in the future. Moreover, since we are postulating that Iran would have recourse to nuclear weapons, we will need to act a little Iranian ourselves, modulating our application of force to remain under Tehran's threshold for nuclear use. This will require careful consideration, as Tehran itself may not have a clear sense of when it would use nuclear weapons. In any event, to help keep a lid on the action-reaction cycle, we will also likely need to remind Iran of our escalation dominance.

Lastly, we should expect recurring crises with a nuclear-armed Iran. Indeed, the period immediately after nuclear weapons acquisition could be particularly perilous as Iranian historical grievances, insecurity, ambition and nuclear chauvinism all combine into a volatile mixture. In time, Iran will learn, as all previous nuclear powers have, that nuclear weapons have very limited utility. The question then becomes whether it will take a limited conventional conflict like the Pakistan-India clash over Kargil in 1999 to bring that lesson home to Tehran or will it require a near nuclear war like the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. In either case, we can be sure the United States will be involved.

Therefore, we must be prepared to defuse nuclear crises with Iran. This will likely require greater agility and flexibility on the part of Washington. It will entail careful messaging to the right audiences, a major challenge for our Intelligence Community and our diplomats. It will also likely require us to make important trade-offs.

For example, will it be more important to hold Tehran strictly to a given deadline – which it will be predisposed to defy – or can we allow a deadline to pass if, in doing so, it enables Iran to save face and both sides to defuse a given crisis? Moreover, will we be prepared to accept Iranian proclamations of “victory” over the United States if that helps to achieve our objectives? These are complex and challenging issues that should be explored by our policy and military planners in crisis simulations and exercises.

## Conclusions

Deterrence will have to bear a very heavy load in the event Iran acquires the bomb. The regime’s idiosyncrasies, including intense factionalism, belief in conspiracy theories, apocalyptic messianism and superstitious reliance on fortune telling, all seem destined to impair rational behavior under the intense stress of a nuclear crisis. Add to this environment intent to spread the Islamic revolution and a perception that the United States lacks the will to confront it and the stage seems set for deterrence to fail.

To decrease the risks of deterrence failure, much work will need to be done by U.S. military and policy planners. To begin, they must

recognize America's track record of deterring the Islamic Republic since 1979 is rather poor and they must understand why that has been the case. They will need to tailor deterrence strategy and tactics to Iran's unique decision-making environment. Above all, they will need to rebuild the credibility of U.S. deterrent threats. This will require a greater willingness to employ limited force against Iran despite its possession of the bomb while maintaining U.S. escalation dominance to discourage Iran from initiating nuclear use.

Given the potential for nuclear chauvinism in Tehran, especially in the heady days following acquisition of the bomb, U.S. planners and decision makers should also use simulations and exercises to explore various means by which a nuclear crisis with Tehran could be defused. Even after making these investments, deterrence of a nuclear-armed Iran may still fail. We should also hedge against that possibility by buttressing the full panoply of offensive and defensive capabilities to limit their capacity to inflict damage and to defeat Iranian adventurism and nuclear use.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> David B. Crist, *Gulf of Conflict: A History of US-Iranian Confrontation at Sea*, Policy Focus No. 95 (June 2009), Washington Institute for Near East Studies, 3, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=313>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Andrew Kelley, "Better Lucky Than Good: Operation Earnest Will As Gunboat Diplomacy," U.S. Naval Postgraduate School Thesis (June 2007), 57. <http://www.nps.edu/Academics/Centers/CCC/research/StudentTheses/kelley07.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Steven V. Roberts, "U.S. Ships Shell Iran Installation in Gulf Reprisal," *New York Times* (Oct. 20, 1987), <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/10/20/world/us-ships-shell-iran-installation-in-gulf-reprisal.html?pagewanted=1>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Kelley, *op cit.*, 67-68.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle* (New York: Random House, 2005), 233.

<sup>11</sup> Crist, *op cit.*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Pollack, *op cit.*, 226.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>14</sup> Crist, *op cit.*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Kelley, *op cit.*, 67.

<sup>16</sup> Crist, *op cit.*, 13.

<sup>17</sup> According to Rezaie, Khomeini said, "If I was in your place, I would attack the [U.S.] warship just as it entered the Strait of Hormuz," but he left the final decision to the officials. Later, we arrived at the conclusion that this approach was not wise, and the imam easily accepted our argument." See, "Iran: Former IRGC Commander Reza'i Narrates Memoirs of Iran-Iraq War," Open Source Center, IAP20051002011015 (Sept. 25, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Pollack, *op cit.*, 232. Among the reasons cited by Hashemi Rafsanjani for Iran's decision to accept the ceasefire was, "The Americans had blatantly intervened on Iraq's side..." See "Former Iran President Comments on the End of the 1980s War with Iraq," Open Source Center, IAP20060928950007 (Sept. 26, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Ware, "Inside Iran's Secret War for Iraq," *Time* (Aug. 15, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354.

<sup>21</sup> Afshin Molavi, "Iran-US Relations: A Cold, Fragile Peace," *Eurasia Insight* (April 7, 2003), <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav040703.shtml>.

<sup>22</sup> Ware, *op cit.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Information in this paragraph is drawn from Michael R. Gordon and Scott Shane, "U.S. Long Worried That Iran Supplied Arms in Iraq" *New York Times*, (March 27, 2007), <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/27/world/middleeast/27weapons.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Gordon and Shane, *op cit.*

<sup>26</sup> "Full Transcript: NPR Interview with President Bush," *National Public Radio* (Jan. 29, 2007), <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7065633>.

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Katzman, *Iran's Activities and Influence in Iraq*, Congressional Research Service (Dec. 26, 2007), 5, <http://www.comw.org/warreport/iraqarchive/region.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Says Iranian Arms Seized in Afghanistan," *New York Times* (April 18, 2007), <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/18/world/middleeast/18military.html?pagewanted=print>.

<sup>29</sup> "On-the-Record Briefing: US Ambassador to Iraq Ryan C. Crocker on His Meeting With Iranian Officials," U.S. Department of State (July 24, 2007), <http://merln.ndu.edu/archivepdf/iran/State/88999.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Katzman, *op cit.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Steven Lee Myers, "Americans Release Iranian Detainees to Iraq," *New York Times*, (July 9, 2009), <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/10/world/middleeast/09release.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Dafna Linzer, "Troops Authorized to Kill Iranian Operatives in Iraq," *Washington Post* (Jan. 26, 2007), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/25/AR2007012502199.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Washington designated the IRGC-QF as a supporter of terrorist organizations in late-2007, but pulled its punches and has yet to designate the IRGC-QF as a foreign terrorist organization.

<sup>35</sup> “Gates: 2<sup>nd</sup> Carrier in Gulf a ‘Reminder’ to Iran,” *MSNBC* (April 29, 2008), <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/24377396/>.

<sup>36</sup> Lolita C. Baldor, “Gates: Iran Boosts Support for Militias,” *Washington Post* (April 11, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> Michael R. Gordon, “U.S. Says Iranian Arms Seized in Afghanistan” *New York Times*, (April 18, 2007),

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/18/world/middleeast/18military.html?pagewanted=print>.

<sup>38</sup> “DoD News Briefing with Gen. Petraeus from the Pentagon” (April 26, 2007), <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=3951>.

<sup>39</sup> Michael R. Gordon, “US Ties Iran to Deadly Iraq Attack,” *New York Times* (July 2, 2007), <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/02/world/middleeast/02cnd-iran.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Thom Shanker, “Iran May Know of Weapons for Taliban, Gates Contends” *New York Times*, (June 14, 2007), <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/14/world/middleeast/14gates.html>.

<sup>41</sup> “Transcript of Remarks by Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Gen. Michael V. Hayden at the Landon Lecture Series, Kansas State University April 30, 2008,” Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/news-information/speeches-testimony/speeches-testimony-archive-2008/landon-lecture-series.html>. Emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, *Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and “Other Means,”* Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (Oct. 13, 2008), 64, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/Iran>.

<sup>43</sup> This assumes deterrence actually worked during the Cold War, a proposition Keith Payne and others have called into question. See, for example, Keith B. Payne, *Deterrence in the Second Nuclear Age* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 37-60.

<sup>44</sup> Kelley, *op cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>45</sup> Jackson Diehl, “In Iran, Apocalypse vs. Reform,” *Washington Post* (May 11, 2006), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/10/AR2006051001791.html>. See also, Karl Vick, “In Iran, Even Some on Right Warning Against Extremes,” *Washington Post* (March 27, 2006), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/26/AR2006032600755.html>.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Byman, Shahrām Chubin, *et al*, *Iran’s Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, (Washington, DC: RAND, 2001), 21-23, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR1320/](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1320/).

<sup>47</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iran’s Developing Military Capabilities* (Washington, DC: CSIS Press, 2005), 47.

<sup>48</sup> Mohsen Makhmalbaf, “The Secrets of Khamene’i’s Life: Part I – His Interests” (Dec. 29, 2009), <http://homylafayette.blogspot.com/2009/12/makhmalbaf-secrets-khameneis-life.html>. Makhmalbaf is the Iranian opposition’s main spokesman abroad and claims to have compiled this information from former staff members of the Supreme Leader’s Household and the Intelligence Ministry who have fled abroad.

<sup>49</sup> Mohsen Makhmalbaf, “The Secrets of Khamene’i’s Life: Part II – His Entourage and Household Operations” (Dec. 30, 2009), <http://homylafayette.blogspot.com/2009/12/makhmalbaf-secrets-of-khameneis-life.html>.

<sup>50</sup> “Pakistan Establishes Nuclear Control Body,” *Arms Control Today*, (March 2000), <http://www.armscontrol.org/node/2899>.

<sup>51</sup> Pollack, *op cit.*, 359.

<sup>52</sup> Mehdi Khalaji, *Apocalyptic Politics: On the Rationality of Iranian Policy*, Policy Focus No. 79, Washington Institute for Near East Policy (Jan. 2008), 19, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=286>.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>55</sup> Makhmalbaf, “The Secrets of Khamene’i’s Life: Part II – His Entourage and Household Operations.”

<sup>56</sup> Julian Borger, “IAEA Secret Report: Iran Worked on Nuclear Warhead,” *Guardian* (Sept. 18, 2009), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/18/iran-nuclear-warhead-iaea-report>.

<sup>57</sup> According to Iranian state media, Ahmadinejad described the destruction of New York’s twin towers on Sept. 11, 2001 as a “complicated [U.S.] intelligence scenario and act,” adding, “The September 11 incident was a big fabrication as a pretext for the campaign against terrorism and a prelude for staging an invasion against Afghanistan.” See “Iran’s Ahmadinejad Calls Sept. 11 ‘Big Fabrication,’” *Reuters* (March 6, 2010), <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6251AO20100306>.

<sup>58</sup> According to Safavi, “The events of September 11 were ordered by US officials and Mossad [Israeli intelligence] so that they could carry out their strategy of pre-emption and warmongering and unipolarisation in order to dominate the Middle East.” See “Iran says U.S., Israel Ordered September 11 attacks,” *Iran Focus* (Sept. 6, 2006), <http://www.iranfocus.com/en/special-wire/iran-says-u.s.-israel-ordered-september-11-attacks-08512.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Ray Takeyh and Joseph Cirincione, “ElBaradei is Quietly Managing to Disarm Iran,” *Financial Times* (Feb. 26, 2008), <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/06a1fa90-e4d7-11dc-a495-0000779fd2ac.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Khalaji, *op cit.*, 32.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>63</sup> Sami Moubayed, “‘President’ Larijani: A Star is Born,” *Asia Times* (June 21, 2008), [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/JF21Ak02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/JF21Ak02.html).

<sup>64</sup> Paul Reynolds, “Ahmadinejad’s Final Flourish,” *BBC News* (April 4, 2006), [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/6526359.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6526359.stm).

<sup>65</sup> “Larijani Sees Ulterior Motives Behind West N-hype,” *PressTV* (Dec. 5, 2009), <http://www.presstv.ir/pop/Print/?id=112902>.

<sup>66</sup> Amira Howeidy, “Taking Matters in Hand,” *Al Ahram Weekly*, Issue No. 791 (April 20-26, 2006), <http://weekly.ahram.or.eg/print/2006/791/re6.htm>.

<sup>67</sup> For example, in his 2009 New Year’s address, Khamene’i remarked, “I do not know who is making the decisions in America. Is it the President? Is it the Congress? Or is it the unknown people who pull the strings?” See, “Supreme Leader’s Speech in Mashhad,” (March 21, 2009), The Center for Preserving and Publishing the Works of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei,

[http://english.khamenei.ir/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1076&Itemid=4](http://english.khamenei.ir/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1076&Itemid=4).

<sup>68</sup> Larijani’s 2005 remarks to IRGC commanders quoted in Shahram Chubin, *Iran’s Nuclear Ambitions*, (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 33.

<sup>69</sup> As noted by Iran’s ambassador to the IAEA, “...But let’s suppose that Iran would go for nuclear weapons. How many warheads do you think Iran would have? In a couple of years, let’s say one or two. If we were to get a nuclear weapon we would be at a disadvantage, competing with the United States, which has thousands of warheads. It would be a tactical mistake for our country to do that, and our leaders are clever enough not to do it...” See, “Interview Excerpts: Iran Ambassador Ali Asghar Soltanieh,” *Washington Post* (Sept. 17, 2009), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/17/AR2009091703072.html>.

<sup>70</sup> “Former Iranian President Rafsanjani on Using a Nuclear Bomb Against Israel,” *Special Dispatch Series*, No. 325, (Jan. 3, 2002), Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/582.htm>.

<sup>71</sup> “Iran: Considering Hillary Clinton’s ‘obliterate’ remarks,” *Los Angeles Times*, (April 24, 2008), <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2008/04/iran-considerin.html>.

<sup>72</sup> “Obama: Clinton’s ‘obliterate’ Iran statement too much like Bush,” *CNN* (May 4, 2008), [file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/gilesg/My%20Documents/Iran/US%20Policy/Obliterate%20Iran/5-5-08\\_Obama\\_Clinton%27s%20%27obliterate%27%20Iran%20statement%20too%20much%20like%20Bush\\_CNN.htm](file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/gilesg/My%20Documents/Iran/US%20Policy/Obliterate%20Iran/5-5-08_Obama_Clinton%27s%20%27obliterate%27%20Iran%20statement%20too%20much%20like%20Bush_CNN.htm).