

Iran's Nuclear Program: TIME TO NEGOTIATE

Founded in 1980, originally as the Council for a Livable World Education Fund, the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation has been at the forefront of efforts to end the proliferation of nuclear weapons for more than two decades.

The Center remains steadfast in its opposition to all nuclear weapons, whether in Iran or anywhere in the world.

However, we firmly believe that Iran does *not* currently pose an imminent threat to the United States, and is unlikely to do so for several years, perhaps not for more than a decade.

Thus, there is ample time for the U.S., Iran, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and other interested parties to resolve the dispute through diplomacy and negotiation. Such diplomacy must be real and not simply window dressing. It must include direct dialogue between the U.S. and Iran.

Military force should *not* be considered at this time, and should *not* be exercised at some later point unless and until basic requirements are met, such as the explicit support of Congress and the United Nations. In addition, there should be no use of force unless the U.S. Administration can first answer a set of fundamental questions—the same questions that should have been answered before the U.S. invaded Iraq.

The Center for Arms control and Non-Proliferation insists that Iran, the United States, and all the other countries that signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty meet their obligations under the treaty, and urges all parties to follow the lead of the International Atomic Energy Agency in resolving this issue.

Furthermore it is our conviction that a failure to negotiate and the decision to use force will actually have the opposite effect than intended—it will likely guarantee that Iran will pursue nuclear weapons.

Finally, *under no circumstances* should the United States consider the use of nuclear weapons as a military option in dealing with Iran.

Introduction

The Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation opposes the pursuit, possession, and spread of nuclear weapons in all forms. Since its founding in 1980, the Center has been at the forefront of efforts to end the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the dangers their existence and possession pose. All nuclear weapons are inherently dangerous. If terrorism is defined by the indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians, then nuclear weapons represent the ultimate terrorist threat. No American can ever be safe as long as countries possess nuclear weapons.

Accordingly, the Center strongly opposes any potential nuclear weapons program in Iran.

At the same time, the Center is deeply troubled by the current direction of the discussion about the Iranian nuclear issue, particularly by the Bush Administration, which appears poised to repeat the errors that led to the costly war in Iraq. The Center's position on resolving the Iranian issue is shaped by several guiding principles.

Guiding Principles

The most important guiding principle on which the Center's position is based is international law, and in particular the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), of which Iran and the United States are members. The NPT is the world's most important international agreement on non-proliferation and has been repeatedly cited by President Bush and past American Administrations as the cornerstone for efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.

Simply understood, the Treaty is a bargain in which countries that do not possess nuclear weapons agree to forgo such weapons. In return, they receive two commitments: 1) the right to the benefits of peaceful nuclear technology and 2) a pledge from the nuclear weapons states, including the United States, that they will work in good faith to eliminate their arsenals.

Accordingly, we insist that Iran, per its international obligations under the NPT, cannot engage in any nuclear weapons activity and also that Iran is entitled to peaceful nuclear activities such as nuclear energy. We welcome Secretary of State Rice's statement in May



2006 affirming Iran's right to peaceful nuclear technology, a statement that repre-

sents a welcome change in U.S. policy. We also insist that the United States follow through on its NPT commitments, an obligation recognized by the International Court of Justice.

Reports that the Bush Administration is considering a preemptive military attack against Iran using nuclear weapons are especially disturbing and fly in the face of international law. The United States should rule out the offensive use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances.

Second guiding principle—the Center believes that U.S. policy to prevent a possible Iranian nuclear bomb program must be smart and sustainable. In other words, U.S. policy has to be able to achieve its objective and be able to win the support of other nations, i.e.—it must be seen as legitimate.

Most Iran specialists, including nationally recognized experts at the Center and on its Board of Directors, believe that the main factor driving Iran's interest in nuclear technology—be it civilian or military—is national pride. Unfortunately, the current U.S. Administration's policy of publicly threatening and insulting Iran has the counter-productive effect of strengthening Iranian hardliners and weakening the position of anti-nuclear moderates and other dissident elements in Iran.

In addition, continued threats of military attack (stating that military strikes are “on the table”), including the possibility that the Administration may be considering the use of tactical nuclear weapons, isolate the U.S. from its allies. For the U.S. to be successful, it must adopt a smarter policy that 1) empowers rather than undermines Iranian moderates and 2) wins support from other countries, particularly in the Muslim world.

Third guiding principle—the use of military force should only be considered in the face of a pressing or imminent threat and that the use of nuclear weapons against Iran must be clearly ruled out.

This is an especially important principle. It is even more important given the fact that no credible source believes that Iran is close to achieving a weapons capability. John Negroponte, America's top intelligence official and Director for National Intelligence, has stated that Iran “might” be able to develop a nuclear weapon by the “beginning or middle of the next decade.” In other words, Iran might have a nuclear weapons capability in ten years—or it might not.

Despite that estimate by the highest ranking intelligence official in the United States, White House officials have labeled Iran the “single greatest threat to U.S. security.”



It is highly questionable that Iran is a greater threat than Al Qaeda or North Korea, which recently conducted a nuclear test of some kind and which, according to U.S. estimates, already possesses nuclear weapons. The gap between U.S. intelligence estimates and White House claims is particularly disturbing and raises unsettling parallels with the run-up to the war in Iraq.

In sum, Iran's suspected nuclear activities do not constitute an imminent threat, and military action should not be considered at this time.

Resolving the Nuclear Dispute

Diplomacy and Negotiation

Since Iran is not an imminent threat to U.S. national security and is unlikely to be for several years, and perhaps for more than a decade, the Center believes that U.S. policy should focus first on diplomacy and negotiation. Given the particulars of the Iranian dispute, negotiation offers the best chance for an effective and sustainable resolution of the issue.

The Center welcomed the U.S. Administration's announcement in May 2006 that it might enter into direct negotiations with Iran, and we urge the U.S. to engage immediately in such negotiations to be conducted in parallel with international talks. The White House has said that it supports a “diplomatic solution,” but what it means by “diplomatic solution” appears to be merely having sanctions imposed by the United Nations, not conducting direct talks with Iran. This is not diplomacy.

Failure of the U.S. to negotiate directly with Iran will make it impossible to achieve any sustainable resolution of the nuclear issue.

Agreement to talk with Iran is a necessary and long overdue first step, necessary but not sufficient. The U.S. cannot enter into talks simply to appease its allies or to make a good public show. The U.S. Administration must enter into talks as an honest negotiator, i.e.—ready



for the give and take required for a diplomatic solution. It cannot use diplomacy as it did during the months leading up to the Iraq war: going through the motions so that it could claim that diplomacy had been “exhausted.”

A diplomatic resolution to the Iranian nuclear dispute can be achieved by the United Nations Security Council, the IAEA Board of Governors, or a set of interested parties (e.g.—the so-called P5+1—Britain, China, France, Russia, the U.S. and Germany). Whatever the venue and whomever the participants, it is important that Iran, the United States, and other parties give first priority to the findings and views of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the organization with both the mandate and the expertise for assessing Iranian nuclear activities.

Iran cannot continue to dismiss the IAEA as a tool of U.S. foreign policy. The Agency has repeatedly demonstrated its independence, as when it publicly disagreed with U.S. intelligence before the war in Iraq. Nor should the White House attempt to side-step, minimize, or denigrate the role of the IAEA, as it did in the months leading up to the Iraq invasion.



As the U.S. government’s investigative findings have made clear, the IAEA was correct in its assessment of the Iraqi nuclear program prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Moreover, its inspections forced

Saddam Hussein to close down his illicit programs. Of all the actors on this issue, the IAEA is widely perceived as having the greatest international legitimacy and expert knowledge. In addition, the Agency’s Nobel Prize winning Director, Mohammed El Baradei, has made it clear that the Agency will not rest until it is assured of the peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear activities.

Use of Force

As previously noted, Iran’s nuclear activities do not present an imminent threat to the United States and therefore military force should not be considered an option at this time. Moreover, the Bush Administration’s repeated threats to use military force have the counterproductive effect of strengthening pro-nuclear elements in Iran and undermining the American position with its allies and partners.

If at some point in the future, however, Iran’s nuclear activities require that

the U.S. consider the use of force, the Center believes that the use of force must be legitimate and must be likely to achieve its objective at an acceptable cost. *This position precludes the use of nuclear weapons.* The use of force should not, for example, result in even greater threats to U.S. and global security, e.g.—by contributing to the growth of terrorism. The war in Iraq provides an object lesson in the dangers of inappropriate military action that is unwise and unsustainable.

Accordingly, the Center believes that any use of military force against Iran would have to meet certain requirements. These include the following:

1) Explicit authorizing legislation passed by the U.S. House and Senate.

This authorization cannot be a vague, open-ended, Gulf of Tonkin-style resolution, but instead should directly address the issue of military force.

2) A United Nations Security Council resolution authorizing the use of force.

The U.S. sought and won such an authorization for the 1991 Gulf War but did not win authorization for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The consequences of having failed to win the support of the international community are now obvious.

3) Support from allies in the Muslim and non-Muslim world.

Again, prior to the 1991 Gulf War, the United States had the broad support of traditional allies as well as from most Muslim countries, particularly countries in the Middle East. The U.S. failed to win the same support for the invasion of Iraq, instead relying on a “coalition of the willing.” It soon became evident, however, that this “coalition” did not translate into significant troops on the ground or burden sharing. Instead, the U.S. has paid the greatest price virtually alone.

In addition to meeting these basic requirements, the Center believes that before opting for force, the government would be wise to consider important lessons from the war in Iraq. To ignore these lessons would be inviting a disastrous repetition of history.

The war in Iraq makes it painfully clear that the U.S. cannot go into war without first having clear answers to some fundamental questions. These questions include the following:

▲ How credible is the intelligence?

According to the special U.S. commission on Weapons of Mass Destruction

intelligence, U.S. intelligence on Iran is as bad or worse than it was on Iraq prior to the 2003 invasion. Before initiating military strikes, U.S. intelligence must be far better than it is today.

▲ What impact will a military attack on Iran have upon American chances for success in Iraq and Afghanistan?

Many analysts fear that the war in Iraq hurt the U.S. effort in Afghanistan. Now that the U.S. is in Iraq, the Administration must be clear about the consequences upon the struggle against terrorists of military intervention in Iran.



▲ More specifically, how would an attack on Iran affect U.S. troop levels and deployment times for Americans serving in Iraq?

Most analysts believe that prior to an attack on Iran, the U.S. would have to increase troop deployments to Iraq in anticipation of possible Iranian retaliation. How many more Americans would have to go to Iraq? How much longer would their deployment times be extended? It would be irresponsible to authorize the use of force without clear answers to these questions.

▲ What are the potential economic and security costs of an attack on Iran?

Prior to the war in Iraq, Administration officials testified that the war would pay for itself. Three years and hundreds of billions of dollars later, it is clear that this was wishful thinking.

One Nobel economist has projected that when one calculates the final cost of the war (including veterans’ benefits, medical care, interest on the debt, etc.), the cost will exceed a trillion dollars.

Perhaps most poignant of all is that many experts believe the war in Iraq has had the opposite effect than envisioned—it has helped fuel the spread of terrorism rather than reduce it. Indeed, the latest State Department report on terrorism finds that terrorist attacks have jumped since the invasion of Iraq.

Before attacking Iran, the American people deserve to know the true costs of military action, as well as all the potential side-effects, so they and Congress can make an informed decision that weighs those costs against the potential benefits.

The Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation is adamant that there is plenty of time to conduct negotiations with Iran and there is absolutely no need to rush to military action.



MEET THE BOARD



Dr. James Walsh is a Research Associate at the Security Studies Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where he is leading two series of dialogues on nuclear issues, one with leading figures in Iran and another with representatives from North Korea. Before joining MIT, Dr. Walsh was a Research Associate of Harvard University’s Managing the Atom Project at the John F. Kennedy School of Government. Dr. Walsh’s research and writings focus on international security and, in particular, topics involving weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, and the Middle East. Dr. Walsh has testified before the U. S. Senate on the issue of nuclear terrorism.

Dr. Walsh’s comments and analysis have appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Times of London*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and numerous other publications. He has appeared on a variety of television and radio programs, from the BBC to MTV. Last year, Dr. Walsh served as historical consultant for the documentary, *Fortress Australia*, which opened at the Melbourne Film Festival and was later broadcast by the Australian Broadcast Corporation. Dr. Walsh is the terrorism and international affairs analyst for the NBC-TV affiliate in Boston and is a frequent contributor to CNN and National Public Radio.

Dr. Walsh’s writings have appeared in several scholarly journals including *Political Science Quarterly*, the *Nonproliferation Review*, *International Studies Review*, and *Contemporary Security Policy*. Dr. Walsh is founder and chair of the Harvard International Working Group on Radiological Weapons. He is also editor of the book series, *Terrorism: Documents of International & Local Control*, and is currently working on a book about Iran. He is the author of “Nuclear Terrorism: Risk, Consequences, and Response,” a chapter which appears in Countering Terrorism: Dimensions of Preparedness (MIT Press, 2002).

Dr. Walsh was previously a visiting scholar at the Center for Global Security Research at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, one of the country’s three nuclear weapons labs. He was named a Jennings Randolph Peace Scholar by the United States Institute for Peace, and he won the Hubert Humphrey Fellowship from the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

Dr. Walsh received his Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

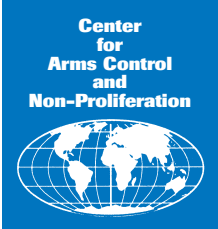
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