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Military Intervention in Iran: Why and How

Stephen Blanchette, Jr.

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Why and How**

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ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY**

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Foreword

The Iranian nuclear crisis is making many nations nervous about the potential of a nuclear-armed Iran. Despite its claims of peaceful energy purposes, Iran has done little to reassure the world that its intent is not bomb-making. Diplomacy, ardently supported by some as the solution, has limited prospects for satisfactorily resolving the situation, as has been demonstrated by the nuclear weapon situation in North Korea. Meanwhile, Israel and the United States have strong motives to strike unilaterally against Iran's nuclear facilities. Unilateral action, however, presents many risks while offering less than certain outcomes.

This paper argues that multinational military intervention in Iran will be required to resolve the situation, and that such intervention will happen within a year's time. In support of that argument, it reviews the Iranian nuclear situation, contrasting it with that of other states in the news. It then makes the case for *multinational* intervention, recognizing the potential for unilateral actions and explaining why such actions are undesirable. It also acknowledges the difficulty of multinational actions and the limits of military intervention. Finally, it considers some nonmilitary alternatives for resolving the crisis and explains why they are likely to fall short of goals.



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March 2007

Military Intervention in Iran: Why and How

Introduction

The Middle East continues to be a source of unending international drama and conflict. In addition to the recent history of invasion, war, the perpetual Palestinian-Israeli conflict and ongoing nation-building efforts by the United States in Iraq, Iran is working to enrich uranium in defiance of the United Nations. Despite Iranian claims that its uranium enrichment program is strictly for peaceful energy development purposes, much of the world believes the true intent is to develop nuclear weapons in violation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (commonly referred to as the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT).

Although development of nuclear power for peaceful purposes is not prohibited by the NPT, much of knowledge gained along the way is directly applicable to weapons development. Further, while Iran may not be the only state pursuing uranium enrichment, its continued belligerence toward Israel, the West and even some of its Arab neighbors makes the situation there especially tense. Thus, the United States, along with the rest of world, is forced to consider the options and alternatives for dealing with the crisis. Recent developments in North Korea, as well as the nuclear activities of other nations, provide object lessons in the approaches that each side might take.

Why Intervene?

No matter how well justified or well intentioned it may be, interference in the internal affairs of another sovereign nation is always a touchy subject. Further, with the United States currently engaged in two major nation-building efforts already, namely Afghanistan and Iraq, one has to wonder how there could be any contemplation of intervening in Iran at this time. In fact, the heavy U.S. commitment in Afghanistan and Iraq likely influenced the timing of Iran's January 2006 announcement that it would resume its enrichment activities; Iran may be counting on the United States being too involved in those other nations to take action against it. Nevertheless, the situation is one that the United States, and the world, can ill-afford to ignore.

The Situation in Iran

At issue is Iran's claim that its nuclear program is for peaceful, energy-generation purposes only. However, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the organization responsible for monitoring compliance with the NPT, has been unable to answer several vexing questions about the program.¹ In particular, the IAEA has been unable to confirm or refute Iran's claim of peaceful intent, largely due to Iran's lack of cooperation beyond the absolute letter of the law.²

The current flare-up in the crisis stems from Iran's announcement that it had resumed uranium enrichment activity, ending a moratorium it had observed since November 2004 as part of a negotiated agreement with France, Germany and the United Kingdom (UK).³ The IAEA's submission of the case to the UN Security Council prompted Iran's decision to restart its program.⁴ The Security Council, after much debate, issued a nonbinding presidential statement calling on Iran to cooperate fully with the IAEA.⁵ Iran ignored the statement. In April 2006, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced that Iran had "joined the club of nuclear countries" by successfully enriching uranium for the first time.⁶ The Security Council powers have continued to be divided on a sanctions regime or other diplomatic pressures. That fact, combined with the distraction of a well-timed proxy war between Israel and Hizbollah guerillas in Lebanon during August, allowed Iran to establish its second operational network of centrifuges in October.⁷

While Iran has consistently claimed that its nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes, the international community openly questions Iran's motives. Iran has not helped its cause by being evasive with the IAEA. While it might legitimately perceive any cooperation with the IAEA beyond the strict letter of the law as a violation of its sovereignty, the rest of the world can only greet such reticence with suspicion, especially since the IAEA has found Iran to be noncompliant with certain elements of the NPT.⁸ Additionally, Iran's abundance of other energy sources, particularly oil and natural gas, calls its need for nuclear energy into question.⁹ Lastly, the world has a surplus uranium enrichment capacity estimated to be sufficient for meeting worldwide demand for at least ten to fifteen years, and Russia has already offered to supply Iran's needs for legitimate energy production purposes.¹⁰ Thus, Iran's insistence on moving forward leads many to believe that developing nuclear weapons is the real goal.

Iranian Motives

Why would Iran wish to press its luck by rattling the nuclear saber, especially given the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was justified as a quest to remove weapons of mass destruction (WMD) from that nation? The answers are several.

Surprisingly, the 2003 U.S.-led war in Iraq is one of those answers. The Iraq war served to heighten Iran's suspicion that it is next on the list of U.S. targets in the global war on terror.¹¹ With Iran geographically sandwiched between Iraq and Afghanistan, one can scarcely fault Tehran for feeling insecure in this regard. The presence of U.S. forces in each of those countries contributes mightily to Iran's sense of insecurity.¹²

However, even if the Iranian government was not a potential target for a regime change mission, a reconstructed Iraq would still be a threat. Prior to former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's rise to power, the Iraqi city of Najaf was the center of religious teaching for Shi'a Muslims. When Hussein's Ba'ath party suppressed the majority Shi'a population in Iraq, Iran became the new bastion of Shi'a belief in the region. Since the Iranian theocracy derives much of its legitimacy from this power center, a resurgent Shi'a majority in a moderate Iraqi state would greatly undermine that power base.¹³

The Iranian government also has loftier goals, beyond a desire to remain in power. Iran's rulers foresee a future in which Iran is the hegemon in the Middle East region.¹⁴ Indeed, that future is also foreseen, and feared, by other states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).¹⁵ Possession of nuclear weapons would be one way for Iran to achieve that vision.

Finally, Iran may not perceive the risk of hostile military action to be dire. It has watched North Korea skillfully manipulate the NPT system to gain nuclear weapons without incurring an invasion. From North Korea's example, Iran has learned that the consequences of violating the NPT are relatively minor and manageable, while the rewards are great.¹⁶

Why Iran?

To be sure, Iran is not the only state whose nuclear program is of general concern. Certainly, North Korea's public admission in 2005 that it possessed nuclear weapons caused a flurry of international diplomatic efforts, most notably the so-called Six-Party Talks.¹⁷ North Korea's test detonation of a nuclear device in October 2006 resulted in still more diplomatic efforts, including punitive sanctions approved unanimously by the UN Security Council. One might wonder why diplomacy has figured so heavily into the North Korean nuclear crisis but has been largely neglected by the United States in the Iranian nuclear crisis. There are several important differences between the Iranian and North Korean situations.

Even prior to North Korea's admission that it possesses nuclear weapons, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) believed North Korea had passed the uranium enrichment phase and had one or two operational weapons. In addition, North Korea may have enough spent nuclear fuel to support development of up to another six devices.¹⁸ With weapons already in hand, the risks associated with a military option are much greater, questions about the efficacy of North Korea's first nuclear weapon test notwithstanding. Thus, it is too late to conduct a military intervention in North Korea. Iran, on the other hand, is not thought to possess weapons yet.

The Indian and Pakistani nuclear programs also were disturbing to the international community, but since neither India nor Pakistan had been a party to the NPT, there was little to be done in response other than lament the situation. To date, North Korea remains the only state to have withdrawn from the NPT. Iran, by contrast, is still bound by the NPT, putting it in a position of mocking the treaty if it is engaged in a covert weapons program. Yet, Iran cannot make good on threats to withdraw from the NPT without convincing the world that its goal is to possess nuclear weapons.

Thus, by applying the North Korean example, it is most likely that Iran would remain a party to the NPT up to the point it is prepared to declare its possession of nuclear weapons. Such an outcome would send a powerful message about the true value of the NPT.¹⁹ If proliferation makes the world a more dangerous place,²⁰ the international community cannot afford to be seen as not enforcing the NPT.

Another difference between Iran and North Korea is that North Korea remains highly isolated from the international community. Iran, meanwhile, holds some 11 percent of the world's oil²¹ and thus is in a much different position with respect to the world. Further, Iran's opposition to U.S. hegemony in the Middle East gives it a certain cachet among the peoples of the region,²² thereby strengthening its own bid for regional hegemony. The West can no more afford to tolerate an Iranian hegemony over one of the most significant oil producing regions in the world than it could tolerate Iraqi control of Kuwaiti oil fields in 1991. Even China, an ally of Iran, is against Iran having nuclear weapons. In the words of Chinese State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan, "It . . . concerns the peace and stability of the Middle East as well as international energy security."²³

Further contributing to the focus on Iran is its continued antagonism toward the West and Israel. Vitriolic rhetoric from Iranian President Ahmadinejad regarding the destruction of Israel garnered headlines around the world in 2005 and prompted an extraordinary reminder from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to all nations regarding their obligations under the UN Charter to refrain from the threat or use of force.²⁴ Certainly, the Iranian rhetoric is not new; parts of the Arab world have been calling for Israel's destruction since Israel proclaimed its statehood in 1948. The alarming part about Iran's calls is that they come not from the leader of a radical sub-state faction but from the elected head of state. Further complicating matters, Iran's current regime witnessed only the declining years of the Cold War and may have missed the lessons engendered by the peak nuclear fears of that era. Consequently, Iran might not be deterred by traditional Cold War concepts such as mutually assured destruction.²⁵

Thus, Iran is seen as just plain dangerous. North Korea's nuclear arsenal is less concerning because of the state's isolation. In fact, some analysts believe the North Korean government has few interests beyond remaining in power and keeping its enemies at bay. By contrast, Iran continues to display a "revolutionary fervour" and continues to support various struggles for liberation that use terrorism as their means.²⁶

If the concern is development of fissile material (highly enriched uranium or plutonium), one might be surprised to learn that Iran is not alone in such activities. Brazil is just now joining the small number of states capable of enriching uranium.²⁷ Yet, the world has batted nary an eye at Brazil, in part because Brazil has largely lived up to its NPT obligations since joining the regime in the late 1990s (although some critics argue more transparency is needed in the program).²⁸ Nevertheless, the lesson to draw is that cooperation yields tolerance while belligerence and subterfuge yield suspicion and opposition.

The Coming Storm

Military intervention would be a clear violation of Iran's sovereignty, which makes any consideration of such action a serious matter. Stephen Zunes, in a report for Foreign Policy in Focus, argues that there is little legal ground upon which to base an invasion. In particular, he cites the Algiers Declaration of 1981, in which the United States pledged not to interfere with Iran's internal affairs.²⁹ However, the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) notes the legitimacy of preemptive action under international law when an attack is imminent.

The NSS further asserts that the notion of “imminent,” conceived at a time when the massing of conventional forces was the only possibility, must be altered to meet the realities of modern nuclear weapons that can be delivered with little or no warning.³⁰

As a briefing from the International Crisis Group put it, when it comes to the nuclear question, “the U.S. and Iran inexorably must engage, collide or both.”³¹ U.S. participation in a solution, diplomatic or military, is thus required. Iran is unlikely to surrender its nuclear program in exchange for various incentives in a diplomatic solution unless such a deal includes guarantees that the U.S. will not seek to topple the government.³² The United States, meanwhile, seems quite unwilling to make any promises or to consider any solution that does not include substantial changes in both the policies and the very system of Iranian government.³³ Collision, therefore, seems to be the far more likely path.

How to Intervene

The possibilities for military intervention in Iran include unilateral action as well as multinational missions. For a variety of reasons, multilateralism is the preferable path, but it is not without its difficulties.

The Possibilities for Unilateral Action

Perhaps no state has more reason to fear a nuclear-armed Iran than Israel. As Mark Fitzpatrick puts it in an article for *Survival*, Iran’s “unrepentant calls for Israel to be wiped off the map underscore the existential threat a nuclear weapon in Iran’s hands would pose to that country.”³⁴ For Israel, the threat is real and palpable, and its position in the crosshairs forces it to a pessimistic accounting of the situation.

Experts are divided on how soon Iran could have a nuclear weapon; some say less than four years, others say five years, while others think it may be as many as ten years.³⁵ Nevertheless, Israel is measuring the threat in terms of months.³⁶ The key threshold from its perspective is when Iran achieves the knowledge and material needed to operate its centrifuges in cascade.³⁷ Once Iran has marked that achievement, which would enable it to produce sufficient quantities of weapons-grade fissile material, its nuclear program becomes easier to hide and much more difficult to stop.³⁸

Thus, the Israeli position is that the threat from a nuclear-armed Iran is becoming imminent, making Israel a strong candidate to take unilateral action against Iran. Indeed, in early 2006 Kenneth Brower of Spectrum Associates speculated, in a letter to the editors of *Defense News*, that Israel might well be planning a preemptive strike against Iran’s nuclear facilities, and that such a strike would have to occur in 2006 or it would be too late to preempt anything.³⁹ Israel itself is hinting that action may be forthcoming and that such action would be unilateral. David Ivry, a former Israeli Air Force commander and the man who directed the 1981 raid on Iraq’s Osirak nuclear reactor, said that the situation may develop in such a manner as to preclude advance consultation with Washington.⁴⁰

The second obvious candidate to take unilateral action against Iran is the United States. A recent report by the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center (NPEC) concluded that a

nuclear-armed Iran would be positioned to manipulate oil prices higher, which would be of particular concern to the oil-hungry United States. The NPEC report also concluded that once it obtained a nuclear capability to deter Western action, Iran would almost certainly increase its support of terrorist activities to decrease the global influence of the United States.⁴¹

In *Getting Ready for a Nuclear-Ready Iran*, Kenneth Timmerman asserts that once Iran has achieved “breakout nuclear capability” (i.e., cascading centrifuges), the options for the United States reduce to two: capitulation or war.⁴² With the potential for a nuclear-armed Iran to seriously disrupt the status quo of the Western-dominated world, capitulation seems very unlikely. Further, North Korea’s demonstration that the NPT can be subverted through diplomatic sleight-of-hand casts a sobering light on the potential of diplomatic solutions. With the stakes so high, military action may be the only way for the United States to safeguard against the undesirable changes a nuclear-capable Iran would bring to the world.

In the case of a unilateral attack, military action need not be full-scale war. Rather, and perhaps even more likely, a military solution could include military operations other than war (MOOTW). As the name implies, MOOTW encompass the range of military missions short of full-scale combat. They have at their core an “overriding goal to prevent, preempt, or limit potential hostilities.”⁴³ In Israel’s case, for instance, limited air strikes against known Iranian nuclear development facilities would likely be the extent of Israeli military action.

The United States could mount a similar assault, or it could opt for a more subtle strategy. It might employ psychological operations, or PSYOP, which is the “planned, systematic process of conveying messages to and influencing selected target groups.”⁴⁴ Iran has a strong democratic movement that, given some assistance, might be able to overthrow the clerical regime.⁴⁵ Thus, the United States could use PSYOP to bolster Iran’s democratic movement and encourage regime change from within.

There are problems with both of these MOOTW approaches. Limited strikes may be insufficient to resolve the problem, especially since Iran has taken steps to shield and hide some of its nuclear capability. Further, Israel admits that strikes will only delay the program, not destroy it.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, trying to foster regime change from within is a very unpredictable business. It might succeed, but well after Iran gains nuclear weapon capability. It might succeed, but emplace a worse government than exists today. Indeed, it might never succeed.

As a practical matter, any unilateral military action involving force by either Israel or the United States would quickly become a bilateral campaign. Indeed, from the Iranian perspective, there is little distinction between the United States and Israel. Should an Israeli attack occur, the United States would easily be drawn in, ready or not, like it or not. In addition to retaliating against Israel, Iran would likely increase terrorist efforts against U.S. targets, especially against U.S. troops in neighboring Iraq. Similarly, a U.S. assault on Iran would almost certainly result in an attack against Israel.⁴⁷ As a further complication, the escalation from unilateral to bilateral action could have unforeseen consequences, such as other nations siding with Iran.

The Case for Multilateral Action

Considering the temporary effects of limited strikes and the uncertain timeline of PSYOP, something more is called for to bring about a permanent resolution. Further, unilateral action is not a welcomed prospect; Europe, for instance, is very much against U.S. unilateral action.⁴⁸ With operations still ongoing in Afghanistan and Iraq, a large-scale unilateral operation by the United States is almost certainly out of the question. That leaves multinational military action as the most promising approach for handling the Iranian nuclear crisis. There are several benefits to a multilateral approach.

First, one should recognize that the problem is more complex than simply invading Iran and destroying its nuclear facilities. A long-term view is required, one that addresses what happens after the violent conflict ceases. Societal and governance structures will need to be rebuilt. Infrastructure will need repair. Environmental damage will need remediation. Noncombatants will need shelter and assistance just to live their lives while the country is being restored to full functionality. No nation on Earth can address all these facets competently by itself, even in the absence of insurgency. A multilateral approach allows for burden-sharing of these remarkably costly undertakings.

Legitimacy is another reason to prefer a multilateral solution. A unilateral U.S. action would fuel perceptions of U.S. imperialism, or even Zionism, in the Middle East.⁴⁹ A broad-based coalition would be less susceptible to such charges. In fact, Lawrence Cline, writing in *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, notes the frequent desire to build multilateralism into intervention operations, often with as many nations as possible, as a means of legitimizing them.⁵⁰

Interestingly, legitimacy and burden-sharing issues seem to be influencing the American public's thinking about Iran. A poll taken in early 2006 indicates that most Americans think Iran's nuclear program is cause for concern, with 70 percent believing the ultimate goal of the program is to produce weapons. Yet, 47 percent of all U.S. adults think that any action against Iran should be conducted only with support from the United Nations.⁵¹

Certainly, the UN Security Council, under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, can authorize the use of force.⁵² However, while such a mandate is clearly the gold standard for legitimacy in international intervention and should be the preferred path, multinational missions need not include a UN mandate. As noted earlier, there is international legal precedent for pre-emptive and even compulsory action absent a Security Council resolution. Indeed, the NATO bombing of Kosovo in 1999 lacked Security Council authorization.⁵³ Rather, the important contribution of multilateralism toward legitimacy is the dampening of any individual state's self-interest as a driving factor in the intervention.

A broadly representative coalition would limit the potential for uncontrolled or unpredictable escalation. As noted earlier, unilateral action may or may not be coordinated among close allies. In the process of building a coalition, however, the lead nation would necessarily consult with members of the international community in an attempt to secure their participation, support or agreement not to interfere. Such consultation provides the opportunity for nations to express their misgivings about the proposed operation, allowing

the coalition leader to make a reasoned estimate of sensitivities to the mission and make any necessary adjustments. Being able to gauge reactions is critical to understanding how events might unfold once action is underway.

A multinational mission against Iran would diffuse retaliatory terror strikes among the coalition partners. Rather than attack the United States or its interests directly, terrorists might choose to target what they perceive as the weak links in a coalition. Such techniques have met with limited success in the ongoing Iraq war. Spain, for example, withdrew from the U.S.-led coalition shortly after the terrorist bombing of a Madrid commuter train in 2004 led to a governmental upheaval in national elections just days after the attack.⁵⁴ However, a similar attack on the London subway system failed to dislodge Britain from supporting the effort in Iraq. Nevertheless, since the U.S. resolve has proved relatively impervious to sustained insurgency in Iraq, attacks on other participants would be the likely approach to breaking a coalition in Iran. Thus, in addition to sharing costs, a multilateral approach shares the risks.

U.S. participation in a unilateral military intervention in Iran would be somewhat difficult. The heavy commitment of U.S. forces to Afghanistan and Iraq would surely cause some critics to cite any additional U.S. involvement in the region as indisputable evidence of rabid U.S. imperialism. Indeed, additional U.S. involvement might even be seen as a new Crusade against Islam. Further, frequent and/or lengthy deployments have adverse effects on troop readiness levels.⁵⁵ Thus, an already pressed U.S. military would find it hard to step up to another challenge without a break. A multinational effort would reduce the size of the U.S. forces needed, helping both the ability of the United States to participate and the image of the mission overall.

The Difficulty of Multilateral Action

Multinational action is not without its difficulties, however. To begin with, piecing together a coalition is an exceedingly challenging task. Consider, for instance, the difficulty that the UN Security Council had in determining how to respond when the IAEA formally reported Iran's nuclear activity. Just obtaining commitment to participate in a multinational effort is an enormous hurdle. U.S. shuttle diplomacy, made famous in the buildup to the 1991 Persian Gulf War, took months to yield a coalition.

A complication of obtaining commitment to participate in a multilateral effort is defining the goal(s) of the mission. Certainly, one option is simply to eliminate Iran's nuclear capability. Such an approach may fall short in the long term, leaving the Iranian regime unchallenged and perhaps able to rebuild its capability. Thus, regime change also must be considered as a goal. Whatever the objectives, translating them into executable military strategies represents another significant challenge.⁵⁶

Even after forming a coalition with common goals, a multinational effort requires coordination among the participants to carry out the mission. The complexities of such an undertaking are substantial, from developing chains of command, to determining the rules for decisionmaking, to operational security issues. Even among the long-time allies of NATO, such coordination proved difficult during the 1999 bombardment of Kosovo.⁵⁷

It is also possible to initiate multinational action that is multinational in name only. The coalition led by the United States in the 2003 war with Iraq is an example of such multinational action. The coalition consisted of the United States, Great Britain and 29 mostly smaller countries,⁵⁸ but the United States contributed the overwhelming majority of forces. Further, many first tier nations did not participate; indeed, some—most notably France and Germany—actively argued against the mission. A better model for multinational action is the 1991 coalition effort to force Iraq to end its occupation of Kuwait. That effort enjoyed the very broad-based support of the international community and was backed by UN Security Council resolutions that authorized the action.

Unlike the 1991 Gulf War, participation of Arab nations in a multinational campaign against Iran might not be sufficient to enhance the legitimacy of the operation. While nations such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and others are concerned about the combination of Iran's radical fundamentalist leanings with its nuclear ambitions, they have been very quiet during the international debate.⁵⁹ Their sudden participation in a multinational force against Iran might be dismissed as nothing more than caving in to Western arm-twisting. More likely, they would welcome a military intervention in Iran behind the scenes while publicly scorning such action.⁶⁰ Legitimacy would be best served by the participation of one or both of Iran's allies Russia and China as well as some of the less controversial Western nations.

Clearly, a nuclear Iran is an absolutely untenable prospect for Israel, and nearly so for the United States. In the absence of any coordinated, multinational military intervention, one or both of those nations almost certainly will have to take matters into their own hands, consequences notwithstanding. Therefore, it behooves the rest of the international community to take up the challenge first.

The Limits of Military Intervention

Public support is an important aspect of military action, and intervention in Iran would be a challenge in this regard. Iran would be a far different opponent from Iraq. Although the United States and its partners have proved their air superiority and landpower dominance in the 1991 Gulf War and again in the 2003 war with Iraq, the United States has not been significantly challenged at sea in decades. Iran has recognized the value of using the Persian Gulf to its advantage and has planned hit-and-run attacks against oil tankers and warships, assaults on neighboring coastal oil production facilities, and even mining of the Gulf itself.⁶¹ To underscore the point, large-scale Iranian military exercises in April 2006 highlighted the country's maritime capabilities against a larger force.⁶² During those exercises, the U.S. Navy's best mine countermeasures ships, which are permanently stationed in the gulf, were unavailable for service had they been needed, calling into question U.S. preparedness to deal with a serious naval challenge.⁶³

Further, Iran presents demographic and geographic challenges. Iran's population is substantially larger than that of Iraq, as is its land mass, which also is more mountainous.⁶⁴ Thus, military intervention in Iran is likely to be a much more protracted affair than the conflicts of recent memory, which will undoubtedly undercut public support within coalition

partners. Further, as has been seen in Iraq, the military mission is not simply one of winning combat operations but also of providing stability afterwards. The American public in particular has demonstrated great impatience with operations that drag on beyond actual combat.

Public opinion in Iran matters as well. Ultimately, no amount of bombing and killing people will win their hearts, and, despite technological advances, no lethal weapons yet conceived can completely eliminate collateral damage. Even employment of nonlethal weapons would do little to curry favor with the Iranian population in general. Thus, at some point after hostilities are ended, diplomacy and foreign aid must take center stage to forge new relationships and build the trust that will allow Iran and the broader global community to coexist peacefully. Just as in Iraq and Afghanistan, major combat is but the first step in a long process.

Alternatives to Military Intervention

The principal alternative to unilateral, bilateral or multilateral military intervention in Iran is diplomatic negotiations. That has been the tack taken by the international community to date. As mentioned previously, the United Kingdom, France and Germany secured a moratorium on Iranian uranium enrichment activity in 2004. In the current crisis, however, the EU3 (as they have been dubbed) has failed to gain significant traction with Iran.⁶⁵

Many believe that progress toward a diplomatic agreement featuring incentives and punishments (i.e., sanctions) can be made if security guarantees from the United States are part of the bargain.⁶⁶ Timmerman, however, notes that Iran has rebuffed past U.S. offers of security discussions and improved relations.⁶⁷ There also is a significant trust barrier. Both Washington and Tehran are reluctant to trust each other's commitments,⁶⁸ dimming the prospects for a diplomatic solution.

All things being equal, a diplomatic solution would be highly preferable to military actions that would inflict suffering on the innocent Iranian population. Such a solution depends on Iranian leaders performing a rational calculus about the risks and benefits of their current approach. However, as Timmerman suggests, one cannot assume rationality on the part of the current Iranian clerical regime: In 2000, then-president Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani stated that Muslims could withstand casualties of one hundred million in exchange for eliminating Israel. Timmerman says such rhetoric is the "language of genocide."⁶⁹ It is far more serious than that, however; it is the language of murder-suicide, on the scale of genocide. Rafsanjani is suggesting that the Islamic community at large (i.e., beyond Iran) is able to tolerate staggering losses to achieve the annihilation of Israel. The implication is that Iran itself is expendable in the battle against Israel. Such thinking is rather far removed from any Western conception of rationality.

Henry Sokolski argues in *eJournal USA: Foreign Policy Agenda* that the world must consider strengthening the NPT to protect against "unsafeguardable nuclear activities and materials." The alternative is to open the door for other nations to flout the NPT, thereby undoing the goals of nonproliferation.⁷⁰ Certainly, refreshing the provisions of the NPT is in order, but it will do nothing to affect Iran's current activities.

Those who disagree with the diplomatic approach contend that it simply allows Iran to continue its efforts while holding off international reprisals.⁷¹ While diplomacy arguably buys time for Iran, it also buys time for the United States, Israel and the rest of the world. As the lessons of the U.S.-led interventions in Iraq in 1991 and 2003 demonstrate, any multinational intervention requires thorough planning and preparation. In addition, since the international community appears reticent to take up such a challenge in Iran, a great deal of diplomacy will be required to convince the concerned nations of the West, Middle East and elsewhere that their participation is necessary, legitimate and beneficial to their interests. Alternatively, ongoing diplomacy with Iran also gives those nations staunchly against intervention time to dissuade the United States and Israel from any unilateral or bilateral actions they may be weighing.

Thus, diplomacy, sanctions and the like can be tried and will be tried in an effort to dissuade Iran from its current course. In the end, the risks of such approaches being covertly subverted will prove too great for either the United States or Israel, and action will have to be taken. It remains to be seen if those states can convince the world that a multinational military solution is in the world's best interests.

Conclusion

The Iranian nuclear crisis is fast coming to a head. The inability of the IAEA to verify Iran's stated peaceful intentions leaves too many nations nervous about the potential of a future with a nuclear-armed Iran. For its part, Iran is doing little to assuage fears; indeed, its rhetoric and defiance are exacerbating the problem.

Both Israel and the United States have strong motives to take unilateral military action against Iran. Such action is fraught with risks, including uncontrolled escalation into broader conflict. Multinational military intervention, though not without challenges, presents the better chance at a successful long-term outcome.

There is no shortage of antimilitary voices on the issue. Many offer well-intentioned and hopeful strategies for employing diplomacy and U.S. policy changes that would allow Iran a way to back down without losing face. The problem, however, is well beyond historic tensions between the U.S. and Iran. No amount of policy change in Washington is likely to make the governments in Jerusalem, Riyadh or elsewhere in the region feel more comfortable with Tehran's stated intentions.

The lessons of Iraq clearly show the difficulty of mounting a successful military intervention in a sovereign nation. Yet, the lessons of North Korea demonstrate even more clearly that there is no choice but to intervene in Iran. Indeed, beyond the issues of regional peace, security and stability in the Middle East, the showdown with Iran embodies a much larger issue for the world. In the final analysis, the quest to keep Iran nonnuclear is not about Iran at all, but about the future of nonproliferation itself. If Iran becomes a nuclear nation, what is to stop any of the other nonnuclear states from pursuing, even openly, their own nuclear weapons programs?

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