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| Iran Briefing Book |
| For Consideration of the Director of the National Security Council by Cadet Jeremy Sanders |
| A short brief of the importance of Iran to U.S. foreign policy, a history of past relationships, recommended actions to solve the current nuclear issue and the problems facing the United States should such actions be pursued.  |
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VMI



**Findings and Observations on Iran:**

**Why is Iran important?**

 With the current negotiations dealing with Iran’s nuclear program ongoing, the initial shock of these negotiations is starting to wear off. After all, America is used to organizing negotiations, and we expect to negotiate from a position of strength. Yet, we must not let the haggling and seemingly endless discussions detract from the historic opportunity which has been presented to the United States. For the first time in over thirty years the United States has been able to sit down openly discuss solutions to the Iranian nuclear program. The current negotiations, which enabled Iran and the United States to agree to a historic treaty on November 24th, limit Iran’s nuclear capabilities in exchange for relief from the crushing sanctions imposed upon Iran’s economy by international agreement. This is a historic moment worthy of celebration, yet there is still much work to be done. Unless President Obama insures that Iran abides by the terms of these negotiations and follows through with future treaties that prevent the idea of Iran ever obtaining a nuclear weapon from becoming an international issue, the current negotiations will become empty words that merely eased the pressure on Iran’s economy without significantly limiting their nuclear capability. To insure that the current negotiations set the framework for a lasting peace, it is necessary to examine the importance of Iran to American foreign policy as well as Iran’s position of power in the Middle East. To truly gain an overall understanding of the current negotiations, it is also necessary to examine Iranian culture and its relationship to past negotiations, as well as a history of the Iranian nuclear program. By doing so one can ascertain the effects of Iran’s impact on the Middle East and use this information to gauge the actions necessary to insure the effectiveness of current negotiations. Examining these facets of Iranian history and regional importance will also enable President Obama and the National Security Council to take the necessary steps should these negotiations break down and force the United States to rethink its options. Accordingly, by encompassing a broad overview of Iran, this briefing book will hopefully aid our nation’s leaders in their difficult task of negotiating an acceptable treaty with the Iranian regime while at the same time maintaining the security of our nation.

 When dealing with any country, it is important to recognize certain cultural aspects unique to that particular nation. By doing so, the deeper understanding and appreciation of that culture will give a negotiator an advantage over his counterparts. Iran is a unique nation that has many different cultural signatures unique to its Persian heritage. Yet, of the many different aspects to Iranian culture, the most important to remember when dealing with Iran is its national pride. The Iranian people have great pride in the history of their nation and people, which is something the current Iranian regime uses to its advantage when stoking the flames of resentment against the United States. This is certainly true when examining the history of Iran’s relationship with the United States. Iran still bitterly resents past U.S. involvement in its political activities, such as the CIA coup against Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddeq in 1953 which replaced a hostile, yet democratically elected leader with a friendly yet repressive dictator in the form of Mohammad Rezā Shāh Pahlavī. This blatant disregard for Iranian nationalism, although justifiable to the interests of American foreign policy during the Cold War, is still regarded as an affront to Iranian pride.

 Understanding this pride is also vital to the current nuclear negotiations. Iran views its nuclear program as a means of displaying its defiance towards the United States and the international community. Given the many trials and tribulations Iran has overcome to develop its nuclear program to its current extent, the program has also become synonymous with Iranian national will.[[1]](#footnote-1)

 Although the nuclear program has become a symbol of Iranian identity, it must be remembered that the people hold little true power in Iran. Even Iranian President Rowhani who was elected by the people as a reform candidate holds little true power in Iran. The Iranian political structure is a complicated system that basically places the majority of power in the hands of the Supreme Leader. The Supreme Leader and the Assembly of Experts exert control over all aspects of the Iranian government, including foreign policy. Thus, although our current negotiations with Rowhani are historic in nature, these can be transformed at any time by the word of the Supreme leader.

[[2]](#footnote-2)

As demonstrated by the chart above, the Iranian political system is a complicated design, insuring the ultimate power rests in the hands of the Supreme Leader. Thus, it is important that President Obama and our diplomats keep this fact in the forefront of their minds during negotiations to prevent future surprises and to realize that whatever President Rowhani utters is most likely with the tacit approval of Supreme Leader Khamenei. However, recognizing Iran’s peculiar power structure does not mean neglecting that other figures play major roles in developing Iranian foreign and domestic policy.

 Iran’s past policies toward their nuclear program and the United States are also key parcels of information when attempting to tread the often volatile waters of international diplomacy. It is important to recognize Iran’s past actions to determine patterns which demonstrate the long term objectives of the Iranian regime. Since a large portion of the United States relationship with Iran deals with the nuclear issue, it is here that Iran’s true motives and foreign policy goals can be discerned.

 Iran’s nuclear program originated due to assistance from the United States during the 1950s and 60s when Iran was a firm ally under Mohammad Rezā Shāh Pahlavī. The nuclear program was entirely peaceful in nature as the shah had a large military force supplied by the United States and thus had no need to seek a nuclear weapon. The shah took great pride in the nuclear program which became a symbol of his program for increased westernization of Iran. Yet, with the Revolution of 1979 and the deposal of the shah, Iran’s nuclear program fell into disarray. The poverty stricken oppressed revolutionaries felt little sympathy for a nuclear program that had syphoned off money and reminded them of the shah’s modernization efforts. The Supreme Leader Khomeini’s hostility towards the west and the advent of the Iranian hostage crisis saw foreign nuclear aid cut off from Iran. Iran’s nuclear program lay dormant until the outbreak of hostilities during the Iran/Iraq War. Iraq’s use of chemical gas and bombing of Iran’s only active nuclear facility at Bushehr, combined with the lack of international condemnation for such attacks caused Iran to reorganize its nuclear program. It is interesting that the seeds of the current Iranian nuclear program were planted during the war with Iraq, bringing into question Iran’s true aims.

Given that Iran’s only operational nuclear facility had been largely destroyed during the war, the most cost effective strategy to obtain nuclear power would have been to rely on foreign fuel while building up Iran’s own nuclear power facilities. Instead, in part to obtain nuclear energy, as well as the possibility to obtain nuclear weapons, Iran needed the ability to enrich uranium domestically and maintain a complete indigenous nuclear fuel cycle. “To achieve this goal, Iran turned to Abdul Qadir Khan, a Pakistani who had stolen nuclear designs from western nations.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

 These actions shed light on Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Iran rejuvenated its nuclear program during the Iran/Iraq War and began an expensive program of enrichment instead of attempting to build up its nuclear power infrastructure. Furthermore, Iran has a large supply of both oil and natural gas which are both much cheaper than nuclear energy. Thus, their argument that they merely desire peaceful energy becomes even more suspect. It is important to understand these aspects of Iran’s nuclear if the United States is to negotiate successfully with the current Iranian regime.

 One other point in Iran’s nuclear history that deserves mentioning is the negotiations lasting from 2003 through 2005. In late 2002, it was revealed Iran had been hiding its uranium enrichment site at Natanz. This revelation caused the United States and the rest of the world to take action to deal with this increase in Iranian nuclear activity. The IAEA inspectors were eventually permitted access to Iran’s nuclear sites but were only given limited access with little cooperation. Given the obvious deceitful intentions of the Iranian regime, the United States and the United Nations began moving closer to an encompassing set of sanctions. To prevent such actions, Supreme Leader Khamenei appointed Hassan Rouhani, the current Iranian President, to head negotiations between the EU-3 (Great Britain, Germany and France) and Iran. Although Iran temporarily suspended its enrichment for two years, it did not receive any benefits from the west for doing so, other than the delaying of further sanctions. Yet, Rouhani declared that “astonishing results have been achieved on the technical front” during the negotiations and that Iran’s goal had been to merely delay the sanctions which he considered inevitable.[[4]](#footnote-4) And while Rouhani may have been merely playing for the ear of the hardliners in the Iranian regime, this brings into question Iran’s objectives with the current nuclear negotiations.

After the EU-3 talks, Iran continued to progress in its enrichment efforts with increased centrifuge production and construction of other nuclear facilities such as the heavily fortified structure at Fordow.  [[5]](#footnote-5)

As the chart aptly shows, Iran’s centrifuge production expanded exponentially from 2007- 2010 and this represents just one of Iran’s nuclear facilities. Yet, progress on civilian nuclear power infrastructure is sorely lacking in Iran, making claims of peaceful intentions hard to substantiate.

 The rise of Iran’s nuclear capability has made other nations take an active interest in the current negotiations. Aside from Israel’s obvious hostility towards Iran’s nuclear program, there are several other nations in the Middle East who view Iran’s potential nuclear capabilities as reason for alarm. According to the U.S National Intelligence Council report issued in 2008, Iran’s interest in nuclear technology is partially responsible for the increased nuclear interest of other Middle Eastern nations.[[6]](#footnote-6)

 The most obvious nation that feels threatened by Iran’s nuclear capabilities is Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is Iran’s main competitor and sees itself as the leader of the Arab world against a Persian Iran.[[7]](#footnote-7) Given that Saudi Arabia practices Sunni Islam, and Iran is the principle practitioner of Shia Islam, the two nations have yet another reason to view each other as competitors. Iran has often quarreled with the Saudi’s in the past, even attempting to assassinate Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to the United States.[[8]](#footnote-8)

 Should the Saudi’s feel threatened by Iran, or view our current negotiations as too soft, they have the means of obtaining nuclear capability. Saudi Arabia financed Pakistan’s nuclear program and thus could most likely obtain need material and knowledge from the Pakistani nuclear program.[[9]](#footnote-9) Furthermore, many Arab nations fear that even if Iran is pursuing peaceful technology, they do not have the means to pursue such nuclear options safely and may cause a nuclear disaster unintentionally.[[10]](#footnote-10) Accordingly, the interests and concerns of Saudi Arabia and other allies in the Middle East must be given the necessary appreciation when negotiating a long term agreement with Iran.

 The other nation whose actions are of vital concern to our negotiations with Iran is of course, Israel. Israel has repeatedly stated its fear of a nuclear Iran, especially in light of past Iranian statements concerning the Jewish state. The current Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu has called the current negotiations a great deal for Iran and a grave mistake by the United States. It is questionable if Israel would ever launch an independent strike on Iran and many do not expect such a strike to happen.[[11]](#footnote-11) However, given Netanyahu’s words, Israel has not ruled out military strikes against Iran, and this fact must be considered when discussing a long term deal with Iran. Whether Israel could effectively destroy Iran’s nuclear program is debatable as even using a tunneling method with advanced bunker buster bombs, it is unlikely Israel could reach fortified Iranian nuclear sites such as Qom.[[12]](#footnote-12) Israel’s fear of a nuclear Iran may yet be of value however, should Iran not live up to its end of the agreement, or act with deceit towards the IAEA inspectors.

**Recommended Actions: Current Talks and Actions if Diplomacy Fails**

Unfortunately, the current negotiations are currently causing issues as Iran is now declaring that the United States is misrepresenting the terms of the agreement. Several sections of the treaty, such as Iran’s right to enrich uranium and a military option for the United States are being disputed by Iran’s foreign ministry.[[13]](#footnote-13) These accusations are at the very least troubling and must be dealt with quickly to alleviate future issues. The president has several options to pursue with Iran, none of which appear particularly promising in light of these new Iranian claims. However, for the sake of American security and the welfare of our allies, President Obama must take immediate action.

The first course of action is to quell the misunderstandings arising from the treaty. The terms of the negotiation must be clearly laid out, and Iran’s claims of misinterpretation laid to rest. The fact that Iran is already acting in a hostile manner is a warning sign that should not be overlooked by the international community. The IAEA inspectors must immediately be granted access to Iran’s nuclear facilities in accordance with the treaty to insure Iran is not merely stalling for more time, a favorite tactic of Rouhani that we have seen before in 2003. Furthermore, Iran must immediately reduce its entire supply of uranium enriched to the 20% level and abide by the other terms of the treaty. Only by taking a hard stance will President Obama signal to Iran that any deceit will not be acceptable. It will also enable the president to gain support from congress, as both political parties seem skeptical of the new negotiations.

Once the terms of the current negotiations are fulfilled, a new, longer treaty must be enacted that guarantees the continual security of the international community from a nuclear Iran. The treaty must contain strong, clearly identifiable language that makes the stipulations of the treaty obvious. By doing so, Iran will not be able to use its favorite tactic of delay unless it wishes to face international condemnation. The treaty should consist of several key points which limit Iran’s nuclear capability. First, Iran must limit its uranium enrichment to 5% or less and abandon its plutonium facilities. This includes the number of centrifuges currently in operation. Although a total demolition of Iran’s enrichment capabilities would be preferable, Iran will never agree to such a stipulation and thus we must be willing to bend a little to obtain the desired outcome of a harmless Iran. Second, Iran must destroy its supply of uranium enriched to the 20% level, not convert it to uranium dioxide which can be easily reconverted.[[14]](#footnote-14) Doing so will ease the worries of many hardliners within the United States and abroad who are against negotiating with Iran. Thirdly, Iran must agree to thorough and unlimited inspections from the IAEA and United States inspectors. If Iran truly seeks peace, then they should be willing to accept this condition. Lastly, several cases of human rights abuse must be addressed as a condition for any deal. A perfect example of one such case that has been an issue for far too long is that of Saeed Abedini, the Iranian/American pastor detained in Iran. [[15]](#footnote-15)

As the world’s leading nation, it intolerable that we continue to allow such abuses of human rights, especially while we negotiate with Iran. Our insistence will also signal to Iran that we will not turn a blind eye to any affront to American sovereignty and security, which will aid us as well continue discussing the nuclear issue.

In return for abiding by these stipulations, the United States will have to agree to several courses of action to relieve economic pressure in Iran. First, the sanctions imposed upon must be gradually lifted, but only after Iran abides by its portion of the treaty. The United States must also follow up the current negotiations by continuing the release of Iran’s banking assets. By lifting these sanctions, Iran’s economy could grow by as much as 61 billion dollars, an obvious stimulant for the regime to accept the negotiations. [[16]](#footnote-16) Also, by doing so America would signal to our allies such as the European Union to lift sanctions on Iranian oil which were recently broadened in 2011.[[17]](#footnote-17) Finally, the United States should provide Iran with peaceful nuclear assistance, such as enriched uranium for medical experiments. By doing so, we will be demonstrating our desire for peace and reconciliation between our nations.

Although these steps are the most likely to provide peace, such objectives are only possible if Iran acts in accordance with the negotiations. Given that Iran is now arguing about the terms of the agreed upon treaty, they seem to wish to make this process as difficult as possible. Furthermore, while the negotiations were being conducted in Geneva, Iran has been in talks with North Korea concerning developing long range missiles.[[18]](#footnote-18) While ostensibly to develop an Iranian space program, these missiles would be capable of reaching the United States.[[19]](#footnote-19) Given Iran already has a large missile capability, this is further cause for concern.[[20]](#footnote-20) Such actions seriously call into question Iran’s motives.

Given these developments, the United States must seriously consider a contingency plan should Iran not abide by the terms of the treaty. Current Iranian actions in addition to their history of using negotiations as stalling tactics make it extremely foolish for the United States not to develop separate courses of actions. These actions must be direct and signal America will not tolerate any more of Iran’s delaying games.

The first course of action is to set concrete “Red lines” for Iran to abide by the current negotiations. Unlike in past foreign policy, America must not waver from these commitments if we intend to maintain international credibility. If Iran fails to carry out their end of the negotiations, or meet our future demands for the long term treaty, President Obama must take immediate action. Although not a popular course of action, airstrikes capable of leveling Iran’s nuclear infrastructure should immediately negate Iran’s nuclear challenge. These must be fast and direct and limited solely to Iran’s nuclear facilities. With the new Massive Ordnance Penetrator capable of penetrating 200 feet of reinforced concrete, we do not have the problem the Israeli’s have of reaching Iran’s nuclear facilities.[[21]](#footnote-21) Before launching these strikes, we must notify our allies in the region, namely Saudi Arabia and Israel. By doing so, we can warn Israel to avoid the conflict, thereby keeping anti-Israeli sentiment among our Arab allies to a minimum. Involving Saudi Arabia will also garner support among the other Arab countries in the Middle East.

 Immediately following the airstrikes against Iranian nuclear facilities, President Obama must declare that any form of Iranian retaliation will be answered with attacks against Iranian military targets and leadership centers. Furthermore, America must assure both Iran and the world that we do not seek regime change in Iran so long as Iran does not threaten our allies or rebuild its nuclear program.

 There are many who view airstrikes with distain and it has unfortunately become associated with the partisan divide currently entrenched in Washington D.C. This view is unfortunate as an airstrike is the best option available should Iran not abide by the current negotiations. We have spent over a decade attempting a policy of containment which has slowed, but not halted Iran’s nuclear growth. Iran continues to grow stronger and with a nuclear capability, has the potential to obtain regional hegemony and threaten our allies in the Middle East. Containment has seen Iran grow stronger, and respect for American power weaken throughout the international community. Although comparisons with Neville Chamberlain’s handling of Nazi Germany prior to World War Two are not entirely accurate, they nevertheless offer a stark reminder of the price of containment. Airstrikes would signal our resolve to combat tyranny and fear, and signal to Iran they can no longer treat international negotiations as a game.

**Problems With Recommendations**

 Although we have established that airstrikes are the best course of action to take should Iran fail to abide by the current negotiations, it is by no means a perfect solution. No solution to the Iranian nuclear issue is particularly appealing, and indeed, those that are appealing at present merely kick the proverbial nuclear can down the road. Yet, this is not to say the correct course of action is clearly defined our not fraught with problems. There are several issues with airstrikes against Iran’s nuclear facilities that must be carefully laid out to fully understand the consequences of such a strike.

The first problem many have with launching airstrikes is the international condemnation the United States would undoubtedly receive from such countries as China, Russia and countries in the Middle East. This reaction certainly must be considered, as our standing in the International community is already regarded with hostility and jealousy by many nations.

A second issue with airstrikes is the question of how effective airstrikes would be in permanently halting Iran’s nuclear capabilities. Some experts predict that airstrikes would only set back Iran’s nuclear program two years, making a bombing campaign hardly worthwhile. Obviously, if Iran is able to continue rebuilding its program, the United States cannot continue repeated bombings against Iranian nuclear facilities. Those opposed to airstrikes also question that we have the proper intelligence to conduct effective airstrikes as Iran may have facilities hidden from our intelligence community.

The next argument commonly raised by those opposed to airstrikes is that such attacks will lead to escalation and a full scale invasion of Iran. Such an invasion it is argued, will be far more difficult than our liberation of Afghanistan or Iraq. Aside from the difficulty, an invasion would also be far costlier in terms of both blood and money. Given America’s current economic state, it is argued can we really afford such expenses when we should be focusing on domestic issues?

Such questions are valid points that must be addressed. As stated previously, no foreign policy towards Iran is free of issues. It is a matter of limiting such negative consequences and finding the least harmful course of action that will ensure the best possible outcome to the nuclear conundrum The question of international condemnation is certainly a major problem. America’s standing in the world is certainly not as high as in previous decades. American airstrikes would be painted by Iran as aggressive attacks against a nation seeking peaceful nuclear power and undoubtedly cause many nations to censure our actions. Yet, regardless of our actions, nations will continue to despise the United States over our freedoms and economic prosperity. It is time we realize we cannot always play the nice guy, as regardless of our actions, there will be those who do not view our country favorably. By gaining support from other Middle Eastern nations such as Saudi Arabia and keeping Israel out of the conflict, we can limit international and Arab condemnation of our actions. Such rebuke will still be present, but at least it might be limited in nature.

The second problem many have with airstrikes is their effectiveness. We certainly do not want to repeat strikes in the future. Yet, as we have seen in the past with Libya during the Presidency of Ronald Reagan, a sufficient show of force is often capable of dissuading tyrants from pursuing actions contrary to American interests.

Those who argue that we may not know the location of every Iranian nuclear facility miss the point of the strikes. Stating the obvious that we do not know what we do not know is not a reason to cancel airstrikes. If anything, it is a reason to act quickly before Iran is able to build more locations of which we are unaware.

Answering the last and most serious issue with airstrikes; future escalation into a full scale invasion, must be taken seriously as no one wants to see American forces once again tied down in the Middle East. The problem with such an argument however, is that those who make it assume airstrikes have to escalate into a full scale invasion. This is certainly not the case, as we have seen in Libya. Airstrikes do not equate invasion. Yet, for this to hold true, the Iranian regime must be convinced we are willing to invade should they retaliate. When faced with the prospect of either temporary revenge before ultimate destruction or living with the new realities of devastated nuclear program, the Iranian regime will not be willing to give up its hold on power.

Furthermore, should the doubters prove correct and Iran retaliates in such a way that causes an invasion, America would merely be acting in a proactive manner instead of delaying the inevitable. For, if the current negotiations fail, Iran will have demonstrated its ultimate desire of obtaining a nuclear weapon and will have to be dealt with eventually. This is not to say escalation is the desired course of action or that escalation will even lead to an invasion, far from it. The rewards of stopping Iran’s nuclear program outweigh the risks of possible escalation.

Although each of the negative effects associated with airstrikes has been answered to different degrees, this is not to say there are no risks associated with such actions. Merely, these risks are more acceptable than risks associated with the strategy of containment. Hopefully, these recommendations will prove unnecessary and Iran will cooperate fully with the new negotiations. Unfortunately, unless Iran departs from historical norms and its current path, such cooperation seems unlikely. If this proves to be the case, President Obama will be presented with a dilemma that will have lasting implications. Yet, by relying on American resolve, our foreign policy can prevent Iran from threatening our allies and bring a lasting peace to the international community.

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Pollack, Kenneth. Interviewed by author. Brookings Institute, Washington D.C. October 2, 2013.

Annotated Reading List of Essential Cadet Papers

Bailey, Ethan. “A History of Sanctions Against Iran and Their Prospects for Success” *Virginia Military Institute,* 2013*.*

Cadet Bailey’s paper offers a good overview of the history and effectiveness of sanctions against Iran’s economy. Given this has been the primary means of dealing with Iran and are part of the current negotiations, this paper highlights important information concerning whether sanctions offer a successful means of dealing with the Iranian regime.

Hagan, Michael. “Overview of the Economy of Iran” *Virginia Military Institute,* 2013*.*

Cadet Hagan’s excellent paper provides a clear overview of Iran’s economy which supplements Cadet Bailey’s paper on sanctions quite well. Cadet Hagan uses a large number of charts and graphs which clearly present his subject matter and make his thesis easy to follow. He synthesizes a large amount of sources which provide the necessary information to support his arguments concerning the Iranian economy. Overall, this paper is an excellent read for anyone looking for a concise brief on such a vast topic.

Sanders, Jeremy. “A History of the Iran Nuclear Program” *Virginia Military Institute,* 2013*.*

 My own paper offers a concise overview of the history of the Iranian nuclear program and the negotiations between the United States and the Iranian regime. The paper is supported by a vast array of sources drawn from government publications, books, articles, and interviews. It provides a good summary of a topic which is vital to understand, given the current state of the negotiations with Iran.

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4. Therese Delpech, *Iran and the Bomb: The Abdication of International Responsibility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. **David Albright and Christina Walrond “**Supplement to Iran’s Gas Centrifuge Program: Taking Stock” (**Institute for Science and International Security,** *2010). http://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/ supplement-to-irans-gas-centrifuge-program-taking-stock/* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
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