

IRAN AND THE UNITED STATES: THE NUCLEAR ISSUE

Anthony H. Cordesman

Dr. Cordesman holds the Burke Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He is also a national-security analyst for ABC News. (See full article at www.mepc.org/journal_vol15/keyissues.asp.)

It is easy to call for a dialogue between the United States and Iran. Few, other than ideological hardliners on both sides, are likely to oppose the need to talk at some level. The last few years of needless war scares have also shown how important a mix of informal diplomacy and formal policy-level statements can be. One has to wonder what would have happened if the United States and Iran had not continued to communicate through second-track diplomacy by various unofficial groups, informal contacts between officials on both sides, and the efforts of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, and various senior U.S. commanders to make it clear that the United States continued to pursue diplomatic options and was not preparing for war.

If nothing else, any form of dialogue helps avoid needless misunderstandings and tensions. Informal talks by private citizens and "experts" can address issues that officials cannot openly deal with, and at least clarify the most contentious and controversial issues on both sides. Informal or "unofficial" official contacts can deal with many lower-level issues and incidents. Limited official talks — like the tripartite

talks between Iran, Iraq and the United States — can go further, often defusing potential sources of conflict or easing the situation in high-risk areas like Iraq and Afghanistan.

The fact remains, however, that dialogue is not an end in itself and cannot bridge fundamental ideological and strategic differences. While dialogue can do a lot to bring parties together, it sometimes can do as much to make it clear that there is no negotiable solution to key issues that both sides will accept. Far too often it can become an exercise in diplomatic gamesmanship and mutually hostile propaganda.

These points are particularly important in light of recent events. Iran and the United States are talking officially, at least over Iraq. Some U.S. candidates, at least on the Democratic side, are also calling for expanded dialogue. U.S. estimates of Iran's progress in acquiring nuclear weapons indicate that there are years to negotiate before Iran will have a nuclear weapon. U.S. reports on Iraq indicate that Iran may have backed away from its most provocative transfers of arms and technology to anti-U.S. forces.

The fact remains, however, that the United States and Iran remain far apart on

a range of key issues where compromise may be difficult or impossible. It is also all too apparent that neither the United States nor Iran has any unified view of how talks should begin. Many of those who are most optimistic about the power of dialogue to bring some broad easing of tensions ignore the depth of the differences on either side.

Both sides would have to make hard, perhaps impossible, compromises to move forward. Each would also have to focus far more realistically on the fundamental issues of interest to the other side and avoid becoming bogged down in ideology, divisive rhetoric, and domestic political priorities. It is far from clear that this is possible. But even a meaningful attempt requires a better focus by both sides on what are the issues that really divide the two nations, and whether they can be resolved.

THE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

There are at least two sides to every story, and it should be stressed that the stories that count in this instance are the ones told by top officials, not outsiders. Iran's leaders will have to speak for Iran in defining its concerns and negotiating position. Similarly, the U.S. president and secretary of state are the only voices that can really define the American position.

It is far too easy for hardliners to make impossible demands and talk recklessly about military solutions or a total lack of compromise. It is equally easy for well-intentioned academics and experts to see major issues as unimportant or far easier paths for compromise than national leaders can possibly take. In practice, it is often an open contest as to whether the ill-intentioned or well-intentioned do the most harm in confusing the issue or making progress more difficult.

The problem in the United States is

further complicated by the coming elections. The Bush administration can certainly make progress in dealing with Iran if it chooses to do so, and has eased tensions over the last year. It is the next U.S. president, however, who would have to forge any major opening and new relationship. This is an as-yet-unknown person who will not take office until January 2009 and whose foreign policy team is unlikely to be in place until June 2009.

It does seem clear, however, from past official statements that there are six basic issues that must be addressed from an American perspective for negotiations to succeed: (1) the history of tensions, charges and recriminations on both sides; (2) the view that the Ahmadinejad presidency and Iran's leadership as a whole have become much more hardline, repressive and difficult to deal with, and that Washington should continue to support regime change; (3) American charges that Iran continues to support terrorism, particularly against Israel, via allies in Syria and Lebanon; (4) Iranian actions in Iraq and Afghanistan; (5) Iran's broader role in the Gulf and the Middle East / North Africa region; and (6) the Iranian nuclear issue.

The question will be how a given presidency chooses to address them, not whether they must be addressed.

THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR ISSUE

The most serious problem affecting U.S.-Iranian relations remains the nuclear issue. This is the only area where the United States has indicated that military options might be used if diplomacy fails, and it remains as critical as ever. The new National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iranian nuclear weapons, "Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities," has redefined the level of tension over the Iranian

nuclear issue.¹ It has also, however, led to a great deal of misunderstanding of what it actually says, and the message is mixed.

On the one hand, the NIE indicates that Iran suspended a nuclear-weapons effort in 2003 and is susceptible to international pressure and negotiation. The U.S. intelligence-community analysis indicates that it is highly probable that the United States and the international community have some four to seven years to negotiate before Iran could become a nuclear power. It provides a major argument against any early military action against Iran, and it refutes much of the hardline rhetoric coming from various neoconservatives. In broad terms, it reinforces the moderate, pro-negotiation positions of

Secretary of State Rice, Secretary of Defense Gates, and Admirals Michael Mullen and William Fallon.

On the other hand, the NIE provides the first solid indication that the U.S. intelligence community had the equivalent

of a "smoking gun" to confirm that Iran had an active nuclear weapons program. It shows far less confidence that this program has continued to be halted than that it was halted for a time in 2003. It states that Iran's enrichment programs allow it to move forward towards a nuclear-weapons effort in spite of any continuing suspension of a formal nuclear-weapons program, and it raises serious doubts as to whether Iran's long-term efforts to acquire nuclear weapons are negotiable. It does not in any way indicate that the UN effort to prevent further Iranian weapons development is

unnecessary or that further sanctions are not needed to limit or halt Iran's efforts.

The latest NIE is 150 pages long and, according to *The Washington Post*, based on some 1,500 intelligence indicators, including intercepts of communications from Iranian military officers. However, it has been made available only as a nine-page summary. It is not an intelligence report. It does not portray the range of opinion or most dissenting views. Nor does it describe the nature of the indicators and analytic methods used. These are critical points; past outside commentary on NIEs and attempts to parse the words in summary judgments have proved to be highly unreliable. Moreover, a "war of leaks" almost

inevitably follows when one policy position or another is advocated.

The summary does not address what the U.S. intelligence community does and does not know about Iran's efforts in each of the five areas the NIE addressed:

[The NIE] states that Iran's enrichment programs allow it to move forward towards a nuclear-weapons effort in spite of any continuing suspension of a formal nuclear-weapons program....

- 1) What are Iran's intentions toward developing nuclear weapons?
- 2) What domestic factors affect Iran's decision making on whether to develop nuclear weapons?
- 3) What external factors affect Iran's decision making on whether to develop nuclear weapons?
- 4) What is the range of potential Iranian actions concerning the development of nuclear weapons and the decisive factors that would lead Iran to choose one course of action over another?
- 5) What is Iran's current and projected capability to develop nuclear weapons? What are our key assumptions

and Iran's key vulnerabilities?

The NIE only indirectly addresses the limits of the U.S. ability to detect and track Iranian covert efforts. It does not address related military developments like Iran's missile programs, many of which only seem to make sense if involving nuclear warheads.

No mention is made of the progress Iran has made in nuclear-weapons design before 2003 or to date. It does not address any key issues indicating that Iran was developing nuclear-missile warheads. It does not address the transfer of nuclear-weapons designs from North Korea and the A.Q. Khan network, the "Green Salt" and "Laptop" issues being addressed by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), or what kind of nuclear weapons Iran was found to be working on in 2003. No hint is made of Iranian progress in completing fission, boosted or thermo-nuclear weapons designs. No effort is made to address key uncertainties in Iran's nuclear program, such as the discovery in January 2008 that Iran had set up far more advanced IR-2 centrifuges than the ones discussed in the NIE and used them to start producing gas that could lead to Iran's having fissile material much earlier than the NIE seems to have estimated.

THE ACTUAL TEXT

Any discussion of how the NIE affects U.S. and Iranian relations must be based on the full text of the judgments the NIE makes about Iran's nuclear program. Press summaries and outside commentary cannot substitute for careful explication of the text and attention to details. The first few pages of the NIE Summary carefully define the meaning of the words used in assessing Iran's efforts. The definition of levels of confidence is particularly important in understanding what the document actually says:

High confidence generally indicates that our judgments are based on high-quality information, and/or that the nature of the issue makes it possible to render a solid judgment. A "high confidence" judgment is not a fact or a certainty, however, and such judgments still carry a risk of being wrong.

Moderate confidence generally means that the information is credibly sourced and plausible but not of sufficient quality or corroborated sufficiently to warrant a higher level of confidence.

Low confidence generally means that the information's credibility and/or plausibility is questionable or that the information is too fragmented or poorly corroborated to make solid analytic inferences, or that we have significant concerns or problems with the sources.²

It is also important to point out that the U.S. intelligence community has made major improvements in its intelligence methods in recent years. Accordingly, while the document provides a summary comparison of the judgments in the new NIE with judgments made in a May 2005 NIE, the intelligence collection and analytic efforts that created the two documents are not directly comparable, and outside attempts to make word-for-word comparisons and judge credibility can be highly misleading.

EXAMINING THE KEY JUDGMENTS

A close reading shows that the U.S. intelligence community made careful caveats about its assessment of whether Iran has halted its program and the level of confidence the intelligence community has regarding Iran's actions.

The main portions of the NIE summary appear below, with key points highlighted in italics:³

A. We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons Program (For the purposes of this Estimate, by "nuclear weapons program" we mean Iran's nuclear weapon design and weaponization work and covert uranium conversion-related and uranium enrichment-related work; *we do not mean Iran's declared civil work related to uranium conversion and enrichment.*) ...*we also assess with moderate-to-high confidence that Tehran at a minimum is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons.*

We judge with high confidence that the halt, and Tehran's announcement of its decision to suspend its declared uranium enrichment program and sign an Additional Protocol to its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Safeguards Agreement, *was directed primarily in response to increasing international scrutiny and pressure resulting from exposure of Iran's previously undeclared nuclear work.*

- *We assess with high confidence that until fall 2003, Iranian military entities were working under government direction to develop nuclear weapons.*
- *We judge with high confidence that the halt lasted at least several years. (Because of intelligence gaps discussed elsewhere in this Estimate, however, DOE and the NIC assess with only moderate confidence that the halt to those activities represents a halt to Iran's entire nuclear weapons program.)*
- *We assess with moderate confidence Tehran had not restarted its nuclear weapons program as of mid-2007, but we do not know whether it currently intends to develop nuclear weapons.*
- *We continue to assess with moderate-to-high confidence that Iran does not currently have a nuclear weapon.*
- *Tehran's decision to halt its nuclear weapons program suggests it is less determined to develop nuclear weapons than we have been judging since 2005. Our assessment that the program probably was halted primarily in response to international pressure suggests Iran may be more vulnerable to influence on the issue than we judged previously.*

B. We continue to assess with *low confidence* that Iran probably has imported at least some weapons-usable fissile material, but still judge with moderate-to-high confidence it has not obtained enough for a nuclear weapon. We cannot rule out that Iran has acquired from abroad — or will acquire in the future — a nuclear weapon or enough fissile material for a weapon. *Barring such acquisitions, if Iran wants to have nuclear weapons it would need to produce sufficient amounts of fissile material indigenously — which we judge with high confidence it has not yet done.*

C. We assess [that] centrifuge enrichment is how Iran probably could first produce enough fissile material for a weapon, if it decides to do so. Iran resumed its declared centrifuge enrichment activities in January 2006, despite the continued halt in the nuclear weapons program. *Iran made significant progress in 2007 installing centrifuges at Natanz, but we judge with moderate confidence it still faces significant technical problems operating them.*

- *We judge with moderate confidence that the earliest possible date Iran would be technically capable of producing enough HEU for a weapon is late 2009, but that this is very unlikely.*
- *We judge with moderate confidence Iran probably would be technically capable of producing enough HEU for a weapon sometime during the 2010-2015 time frame. (INR judges Iran is unlikely to achieve this capability before 2013 because of foreseeable technical and programmatic problems.) All agencies recognize the possibility that this capability may not be attained until after 2015.*

D. *Iranian entities are continuing to develop a range of technical capabilities that could be*

applied to producing nuclear weapons, if a decision is made to do so. For example, Iran's civilian uranium enrichment program is continuing. We also assess with high confidence that since fall 2003, *Iran has been conducting research and development projects with commercial and conventional military applications — some of which would also be of limited use for nuclear weapons.*

E. *We do not have sufficient intelligence to judge confidently whether Tehran is willing to maintain the halt of its nuclear weapons program indefinitely while it weighs its options, or whether it will or already has set specific deadlines or criteria that will prompt it to restart the program.*

- Our assessment that Iran halted the program in 2003 primarily in response to international pressure indicates *Tehran's decisions are guided by a cost-benefit approach rather than a rush to a weapon irrespective of the political, economic, and military costs.* This, in turn, suggests that some combination of threats of intensified international scrutiny and pressures, along with opportunities for Iran to achieve its security, prestige, and goals for regional influence in other ways, might — if perceived by Iran's leaders as credible — prompt Tehran to extend the current halt to its nuclear weapons program. It is difficult to specify what such a combination might be.

- We assess with moderate confidence that convincing the Iranian leadership to forgo the eventual development of nuclear weapons will be difficult given the linkage many within the leadership probably see between nuclear weapons development and Iran's key national security and foreign policy objectives, and given Iran's considerable effort from at least the late 1980s to 2003 to develop such weapons. *In our judgment, only an Iranian political decision to abandon a nuclear weapons objective would plausibly keep Iran from eventually producing nuclear weapons — and such a decision is inherently reversible.*

F. We assess with moderate confidence that Iran probably would use covert facilities — rather than its declared nuclear sites — for the production of highly enriched uranium for a weapon. A growing amount of intelligence indicates Iran was engaged in covert uranium conversion and uranium enrichment activity, but we judge that these efforts probably were halted in response to the fall 2003 halt, and that these efforts probably had not been restarted through at least mid-2007.

G. *We judge with high confidence that Iran will not be technically capable of producing and reprocessing enough plutonium for a weapon before about 2015.*

H. *We assess with high confidence that Iran has the scientific, technical and industrial capacity eventually to produce nuclear weapons if it decides to do so.*

KEY ISSUES

It is important to note several things about these judgments, particularly that they do not in any way resolve the basic issues between the United States and Iran over Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons:

- The NIE points out that Iran continues to develop the capability to enrich weapons-grade uranium and that this is the limiting

factor shaping the timing of any Iranian nuclear-weapons effort. However, formally halting a nuclear-weapons program in 2003 does not affect the timing of Iran's capability to produce a bomb. The NIE summary does not address several facts: (1) Iran's existing 3,000 P-1 centrifuges could produce enough fissile material for a weapon in 12-18 months under optimal operating conditions; (2) Iran plans to scale up its centrifuge effort with a

facility at Natanz that can hold 30,000-50,000 centrifuges; (3) it is planning a heavy-water reactor at Arak that could be used to produce weapons-grade plutonium; and (4) it could cannibalize the fuel rods at Bushehr once its power reactor is fully operational.

- No mention is made of exactly what nuclear-weapons efforts Iran halted and whether they included all covert and dual-use programs.

- The NIE unambiguously says that U.S. intelligence did have high confidence that Iran was actively working on nuclear weapons until 2003, and the intelligence community expresses important levels of uncertainty over whether Iran has resumed its nuclear-weapons effort. It is important to note that the intercepts of Iranian military communications and documents used in the NIE refer to a time frame in which the United States had destroyed Saddam Hussein's army in 10 days after having seemed to shatter the Taliban in 2001. It also came after Col. Muamar Qadhafi had made his own nuclear-weapons program public in ways that publicized the A.Q. Khan network and indirectly implicated Iran, and the exposure of the details of the A.Q. Khan network and the Pakistani government's confining of Mr. Khan to his home.⁴

- Iran's current enrichment efforts have moved and will continue to move it closer to being able to deploy nuclear weapons even if key elements of its weapons-design and production activity have been halted or suspended.

- The NIE does not address any of the major issues and uncertainties still being examined by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The omission of any discussion of the Green Salt, Laptop and warhead issues is particularly important.

- No mention is made of the reasons for

Ali Larijani's resignation as Iran's top nuclear negotiator in October 2007, the criticisms of Ahmadinejad by Hassan Rohani (Larijani's predecessor) or Iranian charges that Hossein Mousavian, a former senior Iranian nuclear negotiator, had passed information on Iran's nuclear programs to the West.⁵

- The commentary on the uncertainty relating to research and dual-use activity is particularly important. Iran is known to have worked on technology that could be used to produce the high-explosive lens, uranium machining, neutron initiator, neutron reflector and other components needed for a fission weapon. Ongoing covert research in each area would be very easy to disperse and conceal. Passive and conventional high-explosive testing of actual warheads and weapons designs using nonfissile material would not provide any indicators other than — at most — those associated with conventional high explosives. Missile testing using warheads with such assemblies and similar bomb testing would probably only be detectable through a major leak by human intelligence.

- No mention is made of Iran's long-range missile programs, but Iran is clearly continuing to improve its ability to develop advanced nuclear delivery systems and has announced two new missile programs within the last month.

In short, the NIE indicates that past European and UN efforts to pressure Iran have had some impact, and there is time for negotiation. It also indicates that the U.S. intelligence community sees Iran's leadership as deterrable, and that Iran's cost-benefit calculations would respond to military alternatives to attacking Iran's nuclear facilities — such as theater missile

defenses — or the containment approach suggested by General John Abizaid. The NIE does not, however, indicate that Iran is *not* moving steadily towards the capability to deploy nuclear weapons or make any promises for the future.

Unfortunately, many have already taken the more positive content out of context to produce statements that do not track with the NIE. They have also attempted to judge its credibility on the basis of comparisons between the 2005 and 2007 estimates, while ignoring the full text of the key judgments and the many areas where the unclassified summary provides more questions than answers. Others have somehow turned the latest estimate into a conspiracy by the U.S. intelligence community to put pressure on the president to halt military action.⁶

IAEA PRIORITIES AND CONCERNS

Some analysts have decoupled the NIE from the recent reporting of the IAEA and Iran's continuing missile efforts. The fact remains that Iran has been shown to have had serious research-and-development programs in every aspect of nuclear-weapons research: beryllium (neutron reflector), polonium (neutron initiator), plutonium separation, high uranium enrichment, machining of uranium (detailed technical drawings provided in 2005 by the

A.Q. Khan network)⁷, reentry-vehicle design, acquisition of North Korean (Chinese) weapons design (A.Q. Khan network transfers), and high-explosive lenses.

The 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group — which is associated with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty — reported on November 15, 2007, that between 2002 and fall 2007, Iran had been blocked at least 75 times from acquiring technology and equipment that could be used to produce nuclear weapons. The equipment included nickel powder, compressors, furnaces, steel flanges and fittings, electron microscopes, and radiometric ore-sorting equipment. This report only included data from seven of the 45 members, and the total was almost certainly much higher. Iran was also found to be attempting to purchase technology using cover organizations, such as engine manufacturers, aircraft and helicopter companies, and schools and universities instead of the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization. Iran also attempted to purchase technology in Australia, Finland, Sweden and the UAE.⁸

The statement issued on November 22, 2007 by IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei on verification of Iran's nuclear program made it clear that there were many aspects of Iran's activities that still needed to be clarified:⁹

...[T]he Agency has so far not been able to verify some important aspects of Iran's nuclear programme: those relevant to the scope and nature of Iran's centrifuge enrichment activities, as well as those relevant to alleged studies and other activities that could have military applications. Iran's past undeclared nuclear activities, together with these verification issues, resulted in the Agency's inability to make progress in providing assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran, and created a confidence deficit about the nature of Iran's nuclear programme. This prompted the Security Council to adopt a number of resolutions calling on Iran to clarify these outstanding verification issues, and to undertake simultaneously confidence building measures, including the implementation of the additional protocol and the suspension of uranium enrichment activities....

As the report makes clear, as regards the first outstanding issue — the scope and nature of Iran’s centrifuge enrichment activities — there has been good progress in connection with the verification of Iran’s past acquisition of P-1 and P-2 centrifuge enrichment technologies. The Agency has concluded that the information provided by Iran in that regard is consistent with the Agency’s own investigation. However, as in all verification cases, the Agency will continue to seek corroboration of this conclusion as we continue to verify the completeness of Iran’s declarations concerning its nuclear material and activities, and as we investigate the remaining outstanding issues — namely, the uranium particle contamination at a technical university, as well as the alleged studies and other activities that could have military applications....

Our progress over the past two months has been made possible by an increased level of cooperation on the part of Iran, in accordance with the work plan. However, I would urge Iran to be more proactive in providing information, and in accelerating the pace of this cooperation, in order for the Agency to be able to clarify all major remaining outstanding issues by the end of the year.

With regard to Iran’s current nuclear activities, we have been able to verify the non-diversion of all declared nuclear material. We also have in place a safeguards approach for the Natanz facility that enables us to credibly verify all enrichment activities there.

However, as with all States that do not have an additional protocol in force, we are unable to provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities. This is especially crucial in the case of Iran, because of its history of undeclared activities, and the corresponding need to restore confidence in the peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear programme. As the report indicates, the Agency’s knowledge about specific aspects of Iran’s current programme has diminished since 2006, when Iran ceased to provide the Agency with information under the additional protocol and additional transparency measures. This relates especially to current procurement, R&D and possible manufacturing of centrifuges. I urge Iran, therefore, to resume without delay the implementation of the additional protocol. The Agency needs to have maximum clarity not only about Iran’s past programme but, equally or more important, about the present. I should note, however, that the Agency has no concrete information about possible undeclared nuclear material or weaponization activities in Iran, other than the outstanding issues I have already mentioned....

I continue to urge Iran to take all the confidence building measures called for by the Security Council, including the suspension of enrichment related activities. This will be in the best interests of both Iran and the international community, and should facilitate the return by all parties to dialogue and negotiations. The earlier that negotiations are resumed, the better the prospects of defusing this crisis. It is only through such negotiations that a comprehensive and durable solution can be reached, and that confidence in the future direction of Iran’s nuclear programme can be built.

The same was true of the statement on the U.S. NIE that the IAEA issued on December 4, 2007:¹⁰

(The Director General)... notes in particular that the Estimate tallies with the Agency’s consistent statements over the last few years that, although Iran still needs to clarify some important aspects of its past and present

nuclear activities, the Agency has no concrete evidence of an ongoing nuclear weapons program or undeclared nuclear facilities in Iran. The Director General believes that this new assessment by the U.S. should help to defuse the current crisis. At the same time, it should prompt Iran to work actively with the IAEA to clarify specific aspects of its past and present

nuclear program as outlined in the work plan and through the implementation of the additional protocol. This would allow the Agency to provide the required assurances regarding the nature of the program.

While calling on Iran to accelerate its cooperation with the Agency, in view of the new U.S. Estimate, the Director General urges all parties concerned to enter without delay into negotiations. Such negotiations are needed to build confidence about the future direction of Iran's nuclear program — concern about which has been repeatedly expressed by the Security Council. They are also needed to bring about a comprehensive and durable solution that would normalize the relationship between Iran and the international community.

These issues take on special urgency because the impact to date of the U.S. NIE has been to delay any further action on sanctions. Russia announced that it would begin to provide fuel for the reactor at Bushehr, and on January 29, 2008, the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) announced that all 82 tons had been received.¹¹ Additionally, IRNA reported on December 25, 2007, that Iranian lawmakers plan to solicit international bids for construction of 19 additional nuclear power plants.¹²

THE MISSILE ISSUE

It is important to note that long-range ballistic missiles lack the lethality to do serious damage even to area targets unless they are armed with a weapon of mass destruction. Iran has scarcely, however, halted such programs.

Iran presented what it claimed was a new medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM), dubbed Ghadr-1 (Power-1), with

a declared range of 1,800 kilometers, at a parade in Tehran on September 22, 2007. The annual parade, which commemorates the anniversary of the beginning of Iran's 1980-88 war with Iraq, has been used to present weapons developed by Iran. The official announcer said that the new missile's range (1,800 km) was "sufficient to put U.S. bases in the Middle East and Israel within its reach."¹³

On November 27, 2007, Defense Minister Mostafa Mohammad Najjar told the Fars News Agency that Iran had built a new missile, with a range of 2,000 kilometers called the Ashoura, which means "the tenth day" in Farsi, a reference among Shiite Muslims to the martyrdom of the third Imam. The minister did not say how the new missile differed from the Ghadr-1 or the earlier Shahab-3. It may be solid-fueled.

THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE

All the key U.S. concerns just discussed are potentially negotiable. U.S. concern for Israel and Lebanon does not mean that the United States will not seek to help the Palestinians or favor any other faction over Lebanon's Shiites. Both the United States and Iran have a broader strategic interest in Iraqi and Afghan stability, and neither can credibly hope to dominate either nation. Differences over the Gulf do not mean either state must move towards military confrontation. The same UN resolutions that now sanction Iran over its nuclear program include a long list of potential incentives for Iranian compliance with the IAEA. The United States wants the kind of broad regional stability that can ensure the growth and security of energy exports; Iran needs to maximize a reliable flow of petroleum export income.

It should also be clear, however, that the issues of concern to the United States

are serious. No amount of dialogue — official or unofficial — may be able to create an agreed position between the two countries. The problem is not a lack of communication but very real differences that involve serious strategic interests.

This list of U.S. demands and concerns will also be matched by a list of demands that still has to emerge from the leaders of the Iranian government. It is clear from the U.S. list alone, however, that a rapid breakthrough will be difficult for a new president to achieve, much less for the

Bush administration, and that progress is far more likely to be incremental and partial, rather than some kind of comprehensive grand bargain.

In short, the key question is whether both governments can agree on some way to go from dialogue to pragmatic government-to-government negotiations that focus on the art of the possible, and take account of the very real differences between the United States and Iran. Calling for dialogue is not an answer; serious, practical negotiations may be.

¹ National Intelligence Estimate, Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities, November, 2007, available at http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20071203_release.pdf.

² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

⁴ See James Schlesinger, "Stupid Intelligence on Iran," *The Washington Post*, December 19, 2007, p. 21.

⁵ Robin Wright, "Iran's Nuclear Negotiator Resigns," *The Washington Post*, October 21, 2007, p. 16; "Nuclear Negotiator Charged With Passing Secrets," *The Washington Post*, November 15, 2007, p. 20.

⁶ The unclassified summary of the NIE provides a direct comparison of the key portions of the 2005 and 2007 estimates, and there is no radical change in their content. The differences can easily be explained by new intelligence collection and more detailed analysis between 2005 and 2007. For reporting that provides unclassified background on the sources and methods used in the NIE, without exaggerating the positive content or descending into pointless conspiracy theories, see Mark Mazzetti, "New Data and New Methods Lead to Revised View on Iran," *The New York Times*, December 5, 2007; David Ignatius, "The Myth of the Mad Mullahs," *The Washington Post*, December 5, 2007, p. 29; Joby Warrick and Walter Pincus, "Lessons of Iraq Aided Intelligence on Iran," *The Washington Post*, December 1, 2007, p. 1; Elaine Sciolino, "Monitoring Agency Praises U.S. Report, But Keeps Wary Eye on Iran," *The New York Times*, December 5, 2007; William J. Broad, "The Thin Line Between Civilian and Military Nuclear Programs," *The New York Times*, December 5, 2007; Nick Timiraos, "Behind the Iran-Intelligence Reversal," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 8, 2007, p. 9; Peter Baker and Dafna Linzer, "Diving Deep, Unearthing a Surprise," *The Washington Post*, December 8, 2007, p. 9; John Ward, "Agency Defends Estimate on Iran," *The Washington Times*, December 8, 2007, p. 1; Peter Spiegel, "Gates Takes Hard Line on Iran," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 2007; Tim Weiner, "Some Hope for Spycraft," *The New York Times*, December 9, 2007; Greg Miller, "CIA Has Recruited Iranians to Defect," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 2007, p. 1; Henry Kissinger, "Misreading the Iran Report," *The Washington Post*, December 13, 2007, p. 35.

⁷ For details, see the reports on the IAEA web page; for a summary, see Elaine Sciolino, "In Gesture, Iran Provides Nuclear Document," *The New York Times*, November 14, 2007.

⁸ Warren Hoge, "Iran Was Blocked from Buying Nuclear Materials at Least 75 Times, Group Says," *The New York Times*, November 16, 2007.

⁹ ABC News, November 23, 2007.

¹⁰ Statement by IAEA Director General on New U.S. Intelligence Estimate on Iran, December 4, 2007, Press Release 2007/22, <http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/PressReleases/2007/prn200722.html>.

¹¹ Associated Press, "Iran Reports Receiving Nuclear Fuel from Russia," *The New York Times*, January 29, 2008.

¹² A day earlier Iran allegedly announced plans to purchase RD-33 fighter jet engines and an updated version of the Ka-32 helicopter from Russia. Agence France-Presse, "Paper: Iran Plans to Buy Russian Copters, Fighter Engines," *Defense News*, December 24, 2007.

¹³ "Iran Builds New Longer-Range Missile," Fars News Agency, November 27, 2007, retrieved from <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8609060446>.