

The Export of Iran's Nuclear Program to Latin America: Implications for United States Security

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Abstract

Iran's nuclear program has been under much scrutiny in the past months, contributing to a possible Israeli air strike against Iran's nuclear sites. President Ahmadinejad has allowed the world to see the advances that Iran has made through worldwide media attention. He made trips to Latin American to hold nuclear talks with President Chavez and Fidel Castro, thus heightening the speculation of illegal nuclear proliferation. Politicians have debated feverishly over Ahmadinejad's intentions, constantly trying to predict his next move. The intention of this paper is to present ideas of why, despite these named events, the United States and Israel should not attack Iran. The religious ideology that drives Iran's decisions, their capabilities both at home and abroad, and the governments that have supported them in their nuclear endeavors will be identified. This paper encourages the use of inventive diplomacy techniques to find a peaceful solution to this nuclear dilemma.

Key Words: Iran, Nuclear, Latin America, Alliances, Chavez, Castro

Introduction

The alliance between Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro is increasing Iran's capability of executing a coordinated, bi-lateral, nuclear attack on the United States and Israel. Several trips conducted by Ahmadinejad lately to South America show that there is an increase of interest devoted to those nations. That interest is assisting several of them in building nuclear capabilities. The concerned parties insist that the capabilities are for peaceful purposes such as energy and other infrastructural uses. However, some believe that there is a more sinister reason hiding beneath the surface. These claims will be explored and analyzed through study of the facts and opinions of many scholars. Although Iran, Venezuela and Cuba are improving their nuclear programs and possibly closing in on the apocalyptic gap of nuclear war, we and/or Israel should not attack Iran. It is important that this venture in undertaken without war-mongering against the said nations, as it is important to build diplomatic relations in this case, rather than to completely annihilate any chances of peace and instill total fear in my readers.

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Since Iran televised their “new” advance in nuclear technology-inserting a rod into a nuclear reactor in Tehran- their nuclear program is in the news daily. There are non-stop interviews of politicians, asking whether the United States should convene militarily, and what the dangers are of taking action. On top of that, the United States is constantly conducting talks with Israel, and advising them not to strike Iran preemptively. This is perhaps the most challenging game of diplomacy the United States has played in recent years. Additionally, with the recent foiled attacks against Israeli diplomats in Thailand, and the emergence of Iranian terrorists found in other Malaysian nations planning the same type of attacks, Israel's government is getting very nervous and “trigger happy (CNN, 2012).”

Challenges Presented by Iran's Program

Several reactor sites currently exist in Iran, buried deep in the earth to protect them from attack. There are centrifuge sites near Natanz and Tehran, and a plant in Qom “that is built into the side of a mountain, representing a more challenging target (Kroenig, 2012).” If we know where they are, why don't we just destroy them? If only this historic diplomatic quagmire was so easy to solve! These are the sites that we know of in Iran, and we presume that we already know every capability of those sites due to the unquestionably perfect intelligence that the U.S. possesses. But, we also know that the Soviet Union has sold nuclear material to Iran in the past, and no bomb has been built to date. Therefore, a preemptive attack against a target that has the “big possibility” of being harmless would most likely hurt our cause rather than help it.

Suppose however, that Iran is using their relationship with Cuba and Venezuela, to hide more advanced capabilities within their borders-essentially in our backyard. In 1962 the Soviet Union sent ships “riding high in the water” to Cuba, delivering missiles. How do we know that Iran is not guilty of the same activity current day? Iranian ships have delivered arms to the Palestinians, and although we know about those activities, can we safely say we know everything that is shipped to Latin America? The relationship between Iran, Cuba, and Venezuela open the possibilities of such things happening. However, let's not jump to conclusions and decide to blow Iran and all its allies off the map just yet. After all, that's the “said reason” Iran wants a bomb in the first place-so it can blow Israel off the map.

Ahmadinejad has conducted several visits to Venezuela and Cuba recently. The dangerous alliance between the three leaders is said to be for the development of local nuclear programs for peaceful purposes. However, it is known that the three rogue leaders share a common dislike of the United States. This could be a coincidence that everyone is overreacting to. On the other hand, it could be a hint of what is to come. Prior to the horrendous attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, there were several such “hints,” that if seriously scrutinized, could have better prepared America. We should not be caught off guard again.

Ahmadinejad has proclaimed that an Iranian terrorist attack on American soil is not unlikely. In the news this week, Ahmadinejad has said he will preemptively strike any nation that intends to attack Iran. He fears no retribution from the U.S. or Israel, or any of their allies. His assertion that Israel and its allies must be destroyed is his motive for a nuclear attack.

Understanding Iran's Ideology

To fully understand why the threat of a nuclear Iran is so disturbing, we must first understand what drives the country's leadership. Ahmadinejad holds the belief that the creation of global conflict and chaos will hasten the arrival of the Mahdi, which gives him a prophetic mission. In addition, his continual struggle for power against the "world arrogant power," meaning America, puts us at greater risk for attack (CNN, 2012). A historical look at Shi'ism will offer up some disturbing facts.

For the most part Shi'ite Muslims [in Iran] believe that the Twelfth Imam, or Mahdi, the last in a line of saints descended from Ali, the founder of their sect, vanished down a well in 941 AD. Shi'ism has different sects, based on the 5th, 7th and 12th Imams, but for this purpose, we will focus on the Twelvers. The majority-the Twelvers- are awaiting the return of the Mahdi. Michael Evans, in his book *Showdown With Nuclear Iran*, explains that

"according to their beliefs, he [the Mahdi] went into a state of 'occultation' like the sun hidden behind the clouds. After a stormy period of apocalyptic wars, the clouds will part, and the sun [the Mahdi] will be revealed. They believe that when he is released from his imprisonment, the entire world will submit to Islam... This belief is the driving force behind Ahmadinejad, Ayatollah Khamenei, and the majority of the central figures in Iranian government (Evans, 2006)."

The Iranian government is comprised of several components, with the Supreme Leader, AKA the Ayatollah, the Guardian Council, and the president that is vetted by the former, taking the lead in importance. Ahmadinejad, along with the Ayatollah and the clerics on the Guardian Council are Shi'a Twelvers, which is the official religion of Iran.

Mark Bowden identified a significant problem with the religion when he said in his book *Guests of the Ayatollah* that "Shia Islam is obsessed with martyrdom (Bowden, 2006)." Trying to diplomatically solve a nuclear crisis with martyrs does not promise the best outcome. However, neither does starting a war, so we must find an acceptable solution quickly.

To further support the argument that Twelvers pose a unique problem, Stephen Kinzer said in his book *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*, "Far more than simply a religious act, this was the single most important step toward creating the Iranian nation. Ismail used shiism to help him build an empire that within ten years of his coronation not only included most of modern-day Iran but

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extended from Central Asia to Baghdad and from the frosty Caucasus to the sands of the Persian Gulf. During Ismail's rule, today's Iran emerged not just politically but also spiritually (Kinzer, 2006).

This passage proves that current day Iran was built on an Islamic belief-semi-radicalized-that set forth the goal of regional hegemony. The fact that Iran is a nation built upon religious ideals is not entirely bad. The fact that those religious ideals are very radical is the problem. It can be said that Ahmadinejad is a war-mongering lunatic that seeks to destroy Israel and the West in the blink of an eye so that he may be a prophetic hero in the Mahdi's presence. But, if that statement were true the U.S. and Israel would be smoking craters filled with radioactive waste, courtesy of illegally procured weapons from the black market. Although Ahmadinejad does possess a high "religiously important" opinion of himself, realistically his "comparatively small number (if he does in fact possess any) of limited capability nuclear warheads would not be much use against our vast, and highly technologically advanced arsenal. Even in saying that Ahmadinejad poses such a threat, to date, we can solely name the Iranian Hostage Crisis as the most radical of Iran's demonic actions.

Historical Clues of Future Problems

The Iranian Hostage Crisis ensued because of the contempt that radical Shi'ite students held for the United States, due to its support of the Shah. Most Iranians of that time thought that the Shah's regime was unusually cruel and oppressive, and they disagreed with his efforts to "modernize" Iran with help from the U.S. Our support of him, as the Iranians saw it, showed that we did not care about their welfare. This was our first real glimpse into what would eventually become a norm in our relationship with Iran. The writings of Shariati, a philosopher whose writings were banned in Iran, were said to be part of the motivation for the hostage crisis. His writings lend insight to why those Iranian students saw America as such a threat, and unequivocally what has kept the nation at odds with us. His words spewed hate as he interpreted "the freedoms and excesses of America and western Europe as a plot to ensnare the virtuous, and enslave the world in a capitalist, godless dystopia (Bowden, 2006)." Because of the "rich history of the Shia faith," radical Iranians lived in a world "suspended in an eternal struggle between good and evil, the evil being the "godless mercantile, devious monster known as the United States of America (Bowden, 2006)."

Iran and Latin America

Recent failures in talks with the Iranian leadership show that they will not compromise on their nuclear capabilities, and they stick to their claims that the program is for peaceful purposes. Under Article IV of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran, as well as Venezuela and Cuba, is able to improve their program for peaceful purposes. Based on the NPT, America and/or Israel

would have to prove that the three nations-individually or collectively-are in direct violation of one of the articles in order to take legal action against them.

This is where the argument to bomb Iran gets difficult. Without absolute proof of wrongdoing, the international community could fiercely condemn the actions of the United States or Israel, which in turn could prove disastrous if Iran were to attack in retaliation. A successful resolution of this nuclear crisis depends on unquestionable support, and a concerted effort of the international community. Knowing that Venezuela and Cuba could also fall prey if the U.S. were to attack Iran, the Latin American nations would have to agree to an operation because of the logistics involved with protecting their borders. The South American nations, especially, may be very involved if such a situation were to occur.

Iran and Venezuela

The disgust of the United States of America, shared by Chavez and Ahmadinejad, fuel their relationship. The two leaders have historically done what they can to be in an “indirect conflict” with us. Now they are supporting each other as members of an “international outsider’s club.” Ahmadinejad’s last visit to Caracas resulted in playfully delivered threats from both he and Chavez. In this case, the United States waited for a problem to erupt before taking heed. Now that the leaders are using playful gestures, and applying indirect threats, the U.S. has started to wonder if Iran is exporting their nuclear program to South America. Regrettably, Venezuela is in close proximity to our shores which poses a new threat.

The history between Iran and Venezuela is quite strong and has been so for many decades. The beginning of this alliance started when they founded the [Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries](#) (Opec) “to ensure themselves better terms from foreign oil companies.” Venezuela has enjoyed several benefits from this relationship with the promise of many more. It was reported in 2008 that the two nations have signed a variety of agreements in agriculture, petrochemicals, oil exploration in the Orinoco region of Venezuela, and the manufacturing of automobiles, bicycles, and tractors. Iran and Venezuela also reported in April 2009 that there was a new development bank for “economic projects in both countries, with each country reportedly providing \$100 million in initial capital (Sullivan, 2010).”

More problematic for the United States is that the two countries began international flights connecting Iran and Syria with Caracas. Immigration concerns have surfaced in light of 9/11 with many documented cases of terrorists gaining entry into the Americas with fake passports, visas, and other “allegedly official” documents. Now that there are flights leaving directly from “hot-spots” in the Middle East and going to Venezuela, there are more “less-complicated” ways for terrorists to gain access to the U.S.

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Additionally, terrorists have attacked several targets in South America. Hezbollah allegedly attacked the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires that killed 30 people in 1992, and the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association (AMIA) in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people in 1994 (Sullivan, 2010). Although these attacks occurred almost 20 years ago, one should not underestimate the new threats that post 9/11 terrorists pose. These direct flights cited above, would almost assuredly put Latin American nations at higher risk for repeat attacks. Hezbollah is an Iranian proxy, and with the heightened tensions between the U.S., Israel and Iran-compounded by the alliance between Ahmadinejad and Chavez-the U.S. State Department is growing weary of the flights.

The alliance that has grown increasingly stronger because of "nuclear energy," could in turn violate the sanctions imposed on Iran's ability to move nuclear materials. This is significant to us because if Iran tries to "export" their nuclear program to South America, it places America dangerously inside the strike zone for a nuclear attack, just as Israel is at present. New sanctions could be applied to Iran, but that will increase the hardship on the population, thus instilling more hate towards us, while doing little to push the leaders into "doing the right thing." However, the probability of increased and more volatile terrorist attacks is very high.

Another issue with the "nuclear bond" between Venezuela and Iran is that any uranium that is mined in Venezuela could possibly be shipped to Iran, thus increasing their capabilities. This may seem off-beat but according to Rodolfo Sanz, Venezuela's minister of basic industries and mining, "Iran is helping Venezuela with geophysical aerial probes and geochemical analyses... We could have important reserves of uranium." Hence, this relationship is two-fold with both sides benefiting greatly.

Once again, despite the many reasons not to trust the relationship between Ahmadinejad and Chavez, we return to the claim that President Chávez whole-heartedly supports Iran's development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. There are also plans for a "nuclear village" in Venezuela with Iranian assistance so that "the Venezuelan people can count in the future on this marvelous resource for peaceful purposes," according to the president. This means that the "locally mined uranium that Iran is assisting Venezuela in acquiring, would have to be used for the village, or else, Iran would be in violation of U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), and 1803 (2008) that imposed restrictions on Iran's nuclear technology transfers (Sullivan, 2009).

Because of the discussed activities, Venezuela is also feeling the effects of U.S. sanctions. However, it is still allying with Iran, maintaining that they are doing nothing wrong. According to Foreign Policy magazine however, "Chávez has been developing the [nuclear] program for two years with the collaboration of Iran, a nuclear rogue state, and that Venezuela is helping Iran obtain uranium and evade international sanctions. The article goes on to say that "in

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November 2008, Iranian and Venezuelan officials signed a secret "science and technology" agreement formalizing cooperation "in the field of nuclear technology."

The two nations may be somewhat protected under the NPT for their "peaceful nuclear projects" but that protection does not override the sanctions emplaced. After supposedly signing the secret agreement, a source within the Venezuelan government, "revealed that an Atomic Energy Committee has been managing the nuclear program since 2007 (FP)." After almost five years, why then, is the U.S. inquiring about the program, and so concerned with Ahmadinejad's visits? Perhaps, this intense attention is due to new intelligence that encourages more action, or maybe it is simply because Iran is the culprit, and therefore Venezuela is guilty by association. Either way, the alliance between Venezuela and Iran is proving problematic.

Iran and Cuba

Another Latin American nation that Iran has been supporting for some time is Cuba. The two nations are in cooperation on economic, diplomatic, and military levels. In November 2009, Iran and Cuba signed a memorandum of understanding "to expand bilateral economic cooperation." This means that Cuba's credit line was raised [by Iran] to 500 million euros-an increase of 300 million. Factories, engineering facilities and imports will be the focus of this economic Endeavor (Sullivan, 2011). Iran is also assisting Cuba with its infrastructure by building roads and implementing business plans. Iran's help came at a good time in Cuba's history-the time they needed help most- at the end of the Cold War.

Cuba was severely affected by the break-up of the Soviet Union, as "more than 80 percent of Cuba's trade had been with the former Soviet bloc (Alvaredo, 2012)." Within a three year period, 1991-1994, Cuba's economy declined by 85 percent. This huge crisis forced Cuba to find new allies if it wanted to continue its nuclear program. India and Iran stepped up to the plate, with the later eventually taking the Soviet Union's place as "big nuclear brother." At the time, Castro said that "nuclear energy is a plus." This was not so much a problem except that approximately 30 years earlier the United States almost went to war with the Soviet Union over the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 shows that the United States has recognized nuclear capabilities in the Caribbean as being a true threat to U.S. interests. However currently, instead of fighting a possible nuclear war with the Soviet Union, as we did in 1962, we now look at Iran as the aggressor. The threat is not the transatlantic shipment of missiles as was the case in 1962, but rather the very calculated plan of building nuclear capabilities under the protective umbrella of "peaceful purposes." Cuba was rather late to sign on to the NPT, as it happened in 2002, exactly 40 years after the missile crisis. This was a step in the right direction, but with Cuba's latest dealings and support for Iran, their loyalty to the NPT is questionable.

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Cuba's retired president, Fidel Castro, has shown significant support for Iran's nuclear program, claiming that Iran has every right to move forward in the research and manufacture of nuclear capabilities for peaceful purposes. Castro, however, warns that "a confrontation pitting the U.S. and Israel against Iran could result in a nuclear exchange (usatoday, 2012)." Is he covertly admitting that Iran does possess a nuclear weapon or is in the process of building one? Again, his dealings with Ahmadinejad are questionable, and his dislike for America is certain. This is speculation of course, but it is possible that Castro knows more than one might think.

In a gracious return for Cuba's support, considerable monetary exchanges have happened, with Iran providing money for Solomon Island students to attend medical training at the University of Havana, on top of funds for transportation, and energy improvements (usatoday, 2012). There are reports showing that trade between the two nations more than doubled, from \$22.9 million in 2007 to \$46.4 in 2008. This is a result of a bilateral trade agreement signed by Cuba and Iran in 2007 "which promised to increase trade between the two countries by decreasing tariffs on Iranian goods imported into Cuba by between 10 and 30 percent on 88 different products including textiles, industrial machinery and furniture (usatoday, 2012)."

The same newspaper, USA Today, published a story about Ahmadinejad's trip to Cuba in early January of this year. He spoke at the University of Havana-which awarded him with an honorary doctorate-about the evils of capitalism and the United States, rallying more hate and strengthening his allegiance with the Cuban people. He described "the relationship of the two countries as solidarity between two revolutionary peoples." Iran and Cuba have created a lasting relationship based off the hatred of the U.S. Still, as is the case with Venezuela, one nation cannot justifiably attack another because of an alliance. We can learn lessons from the Cuban Missile Crisis and be more vigilant, but we must try to solve the situation diplomatically, just as President Kennedy did.

Thus far, with the examples of Venezuela and Cuba, we can see that the link between Iran and Latin America is nothing new.

Iran and the Others

Who can forget the infamous Iran-Contra hearings, involving Oliver North and the illegal sales of arms to Iran in exchange for hostages held in Lebanon by Hezbollah? That situation now brings Nicaragua into the "family portrait" of allegiances. Although there have been recent claims that Iran was building a "mega-embassy" in Nicaragua, such a building has never manifested. Several other "big dollar" projects that Iran was to undertake, a hydroelectric dam and a deep-water port, never manifested either. According to the Washington Post's July 13th, 2009 article, "Iran's Invisible Nicaragua Embassy; Feared Stronghold Never Materialized," Iran

did open a small embassy and did build a clinic in Managua, but there has been little Iranian investment other than those projects. This article also cites Bayardo Arce, a Nicaraguan economic advisor, as saying “Iranian investment in Nicaragua has fallen short of the expectations of the cash-strapped government (NYTimes, 2012).” However, the failure of Iran to provide Nicaragua with funding has not stopped the nation from supporting Ahmadinejad.

The existence of Iranian embassies throughout Latin America has helped Ahmadinejad’s nuclear hopes. He has made several trips to South American nations during his tenure, making promises for economic assistance, and receiving rights to mine for minerals that will assist his nuclear program. Ecuador is one such nation that has agreed to Iranian mining programs. Reports have come from reliable sources that approximately \$120 million has been transferred to Ecuador for their generous help. This relationship was allegedly put into play with the help of Hugo Chavez. There could be a possibility that Iran is procuring uranium from Ecuadorian mines, and enriching the mineral in the Iranian nuclear facilities. If that uranium is being used for the purpose of a nuclear weapon, Ecuador would join Venezuela on the list of nations in direct violation of the NPT and numerous U.S. sanctions against Iran..

If the facts presented thus far are true, then Iran has a minimum of four unwavering allies in Latin America that are willing to break sanctions to help him with his nuclear program. Venezuela, Cuba, Ecuador and Nicaragua have plenty of reasons to keep their friendship strong with Iran. Their economies and social conditions are seeing improvements because of the alliance with Ahmadinejad. Since they are receiving funds to improve their infrastructure, will they also be willing to receive a nuclear weapon, keeping it safely hidden until Iran decides to use it? This scenario is quite possible. To date there is 19.8 kilograms (43.6 lbs) of uranium missing from Iran, according to an IAEA report (CNN, 2012). It could be hidden in a bomb housed at one of Iran’s plants, it could be hidden somewhere in Latin America, or maybe the IAEA miscalculated.

Other nations such as Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay, Colombia, and Chile have been on his scope, but some are not so willing to degrade their relationship with the U.S. This means that the possibility of working with South American governments to stop the export of Iran’s nuclear program is possible. We have good diplomatic relations with a number of Latin American nations-Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Argentina, Colombia, and Panama- as well as other smaller countries that share common interests in keeping Iran at bay. The key ingredient to success is to stay actively engaged in their economic progress, while not overstepping our bounds when it comes to politics. This is a popularity contest, if you will, that is very important for us to win.

We have free-trade agreements on the table with Colombia and Panama, which should not be ignored, as the exchange of many of the two nations natural products will help us and them significantly. As they enjoy the economic growth resulting from trade, we enjoy many of the life sustaining staples they provide. Many of our agricultural products come from them, and

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who in America really wants to live without sugar and bananas? Beyond the food, we also use minerals acquired from within their borders. As we can see from the "failed investment attempts" on behalf of Iran to Nicaragua and Bolivia, it suits us to stick to our pledged support. We have a "natural in" by filling the gaps in the South American economic stimulus left by unfulfilled Iranian promises. It is also important to note that these nations share borders with Venezuela, so it would behoove us to win their support.

Policy Considerations

If we get involved in this predicament-at any level-there are many things to consider. The United States has increased sanctions against Iranian transfers of "products" into South America to no avail. This has given Ahmadinejad and his allies something to laugh at. Chavez and Castro join Ahmadinejad at poking fun at American diplomacy efforts and do as they please regardless. We can continue stacking up more sanctions, but we would ultimately hurt the general populations of the nations, instead of the intended targets. Voting the nations "off the island" so to speak would not work either, since they are already "outsiders" to the international community.

U.S. foreign policymakers must take into grave consideration the end result of their decisions. If they preemptively strike Iran, they may open the metaphoric "Pandora's Box." If they do nothing to stop the export of Iran's nuclear program, Israel or the U.S. may fall victim to a nuclear attack. John McCain, in an interview with CNN's Wolf Blitzer cited President Obama as saying "Iran with a nuclear weapon is unacceptable. So imagine if you will that Iran moves their nuclear capabilities into South America in order to claim innocence. It is probably safe to assume that that scenario would also be "unacceptable," as a South American nation would have a nuclear weapon that is readily available for Iran's use.

This also goes for Israel, and in their case as Senator John McCain points out, "Israel understands the threat to its nation, and "I think their judgment is going to be made on their view of what the threat is...and I'm sure the Israelis view that [Obama's statement] the same way. After all, they're probably the first target."

Israel has always been a target of Iran's hatred. The 1992 and 1994 bombings in Argentina were linked to Hezbollah, who took direction from Iran. The large Israeli community that existed in Argentina at that time put the nation in the dangerous sights of Iran's leadership and others who call for the destruction of the Zionist state. Those attacks-that happened over two decades ago-along with more recent attacks such as the botched attack in Thailand, could be grounds for Israel's fear.

On the flip side of this argument-speaking of fear-, Lee Smith, author of *The Strong Horse: Power, Politics, and the Clash of Arab Civilizations*, charges that "Iran's nuclear

program is not in itself the main issue” but instead the fear that the program creates is a “distraction” that keeps “Washington and the international community from recognizing that it is merely one instrument with which Iran can accomplish its strategic aims: to overturn the U.S.-backed regional order, send the Americans packing, and become the strong horse in the Persian Gulf (Smith, 2011).”

This statement coincides with Ahmadinejad’s continual “eye for an eye struggle” with America. As an example, he says that since the U.S. has warships in the Persian Gulf, he should be able to have warships off American shores; since Israel has nuclear weapons, Iran should also be allowed to have the weapons. He wants to be able to instill fear amongst the Western nations, as they instill fear in the Middle Eastern nations. Ahmadinejad’s wish for regional hegemony does not support a reason to bomb Iran; neither do his offshore investments and activities, even if they are in our backyard.

Whether the United States or Israel decides to attack Iran preemptively, it is crucial that everyone understand the implications of such an action. Unfortunately, a simple “fly over, bomb, and disappear into the night would not be an option. There are only two nations that would carry out such an attack, and seeing that Israel does not alone have the capabilities to do it, we would certainly be to blame. With a nuclear bomb [or a few], Iran will be catapulted into equality with Israel and the United States. With equal power Israel will no longer be able to keep the Arabs at bay, and lose regional superiority. Nuclear bombs in Iran would force Israeli leadership to reconsider any ill-planned attacks on their Middle Eastern neighbors, thus diminishing their ability to “protect themselves.” Unluckily for all other inhabitants on the globe, the antics of Israel and Iran are not just confined to them, but are in fact globally dangerous. If a nuclear exchange broke out, every nation would feel the effects of the radioactive fallout providing they survived the initial blast. A small strike, precisely aimed at Iran’s facilities would prove to be a better option, but that too comes with consequences.

Matthew Kroenig recently wrote an article about attacking Iran’s nuclear program. He outlines the dangers of a preemptive attack and discusses a few options the U.S. can take. He cited that “proponents of a strike have argued that the only thing worse than military action against Iran would be an Iran armed with a nuclear weapon...[but] such an attack could have potentially devastating consequences for international security, the global economy, and Iranian domestic politics (Kroenig, 2012).”

Ahmadinejad has already threatened to close off the Strait of Hormuz, and he has cut off oil supply to parts of Europe which is “bidding up the price of oil.” Kroenig also said that Iran could “activate its proxies abroad, stirring sectarian tensions in Iraq, disrupting the Arab Spring, and ordering terrorist attacks against Israel and the United States (Kroenig, 2012).” We saw that Hezbollah was responsible for attacks as far off as South America which proves that the activation of proxies is possible (Sullivan, 2010). We should hope not to incite more attacks in

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Latin America as a result of action against Iran or its South American allies. The staging of Iranian warships off the coast of Syria, and the "assistance" that Iran has given to the Syrian regime is also proof that Kroenig's assumptions are correct. However, this is still not a justifiable reason for a preemptive attack. In addition, to keep Iran at bay for any substantial length of time, America would have to invest more time and resources to constantly observe every activity that happens in Iran [and elsewhere], and have forces dedicated for follow-on attacks should the need arise. The United States does not have the time or resources to devote purely to Ahmadinejad. Also, the more attention we give to him and his travels to South America will not deter him, but rather encourage him and his allies to push the envelope. There is a more promising alternative to these inherently expensive intelligence tactics and military action.

The 2009 election victory of President Ahmadinejad over Mir Hossein Mousavi spurred days of national protest and showed that the Iranian people want change. Many Iranian's alive today do not know anything other than the oppressive clericalist regime in Tehran. This is a "key advantage" for the United States, as David Kilcullen explains it, but he warns that "a lack of diplomatic representation in Tehran, along with limited willingness to engage in discussion with Iran's leadership group-engagement that would of course have to be backed by force and international consensus, and addressing the broadest possible range of issues in partnership with the other Muslim allies-severely limits U.S. options and restricts situational awareness (Kilcullen, 2009)."

The problems that he identified above are the same problems that have led us down the road to a possible attack against Iran. As said earlier, it is very hard to hold diplomatic relations with a fanatically religious leadership, but destroying them is not a plausible solution either. Therefore we must choose the hard right over the easy wrong. General (Ret) Wesley Clark said on CNN's show Erin Burnett, "it's easy to get into a conflict, but harder to see an end to the conflict," and he believes that "inflating the rhetoric of military action at this point in unnecessary." He cited the Shock and Awe campaign in Iraq, and the more recent bombing campaign in Libya as a deterrent for Iran to pursue a nuclear bomb. His points should be absorbed into the minds of policymakers in the U.S. and Israel as they decide what to do about Iran.

However, General Clark also said that the Iranian regime is "following the standard operating procedure (SOP) for a government that is trying to hide what they are truly planning." With such uncertainty surrounding the true capabilities of their program, a vote for military action could go either way. It is said that "war happens when diplomacy fails." In this case we need to give diplomacy a chance to fail before going to war, rather than assuming it will fail right off the bat.

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The Guardian Council just released a newly vetted list for the March 2012 elections. Adversaries of the current President were among the candidates, which mean his current policies may not be the policies of the near future. In the midst of internal political turmoil caused by disagreements between Ahmadinejad and the Ayatollah, the prospects of change could mean more or less problems for the West, hopefully less. In addition, President Chavez's term will also be up soon. These two changes may enable us to hold peaceful talks, and encourage exciting new diplomatic relationships. No matter what the outcome of the political elections, the one goal that we must try to obtain is a better diplomatic relationship with Iran. Only time will tell what we have to look forward to, but for now, the thing that should be most important in the minds of U.S. policymakers is how to deal with this huge debacle of a Nuclear Iran.

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