

TRILATERAL COMMISSION (EUROPE) ESSAYS ON
IRAN & NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

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COMPLEMENTARY PAPER TO THE DISCUSSION PAPER
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IS THERE A “PLAN B” FOR IRAN?

INTRODUCTION

The decision by the International Atomic Energy Agency in March to refer Iran and its nuclear program to the UN Security Council sparked off a nasty exchange of threats. Iranian officials said Iran would bring “harm and pain” to its critics, especially America, if punishments are meted out to it. American officials responded by labeling Iran and its apparent nuclear ambitions as the country’s biggest current challenge. For the moment, the great powers—America, France, Germany, Britain, Russia, India and China—seem unified in the view that all options bar referral to the Security Council have been exhausted.

Beyond that, however, agreement may well be far harder to reach on appropriate forms of punitive actions.

What might be the way forward? Three questions need to be answered, in order to explore the possible scenarios:

- Is the prospect of a regime change in Iran plausible?
- Is pre-emptive military strike a viable option?
- Can diplomacy and creative compromise be an alternative?

I. IS THE PROSPECT OF A REGIME CHANGE IN IRAN PLAUSIBLE?

- **Some think Iran is such an enigma that this question is unanswerable**

The reply from a European point of view is straightforward: hardly!

- It is a country of 68 million people against 35 million, twenty five years ago;
- It has a GDP of 182 billion \$, 40 billion \$ in hard currencies and proven oil reserves of 133 billion barrels with a yearly production of 4 billion barrels;
- 40% of the people live below the poverty line and Iran has 2 million of drug users.
- The Islamic regime established numerous new universities, housing an estimated one million students at the same time. In this situation, approximately one million university graduates join the labor market every four years, most of them remaining unemployed. Iran's official unemployment rate currently stands at 15% - 17%, with most of the unemployed being university graduates. Their actual number is significantly higher than that indicated by official sources;
- The inflation rate in Iran is rising and has officially reached 18% a year (the real percentage is much higher). This situation is not alleviated by the regime, which does not redistribute the immense profits it has made thanks to the rise in oil prices, in order to prevent additional increase in Iran's inflation rate. According to a World Bank report, 60% of Iranians between the age of 30 and 49 live in poverty, and more than 1.3 million people earn less than \$1 a day;
- The change of generations has led to a significant increase in the number of senior officers retiring from long military service (primarily in the Revolutionary Guards), who now struggle to seize their places in the regime. This is exasperated by the rift within the reformist bloc, which is still a part of the regime. This rift was best seen in the regime's inability to offer an agreed-upon candidate for the presidential elections (June 17th, 2005), as well as through the reformists' failure to present an agreed-upon candidate on their own behalf;
- Each year, some 150,000-200,000 citizens leave Iran, most of them possessing the best education available, and if Iran's doors were truly to open we would be witnessing a major exodus of people. This phenomenon, stemming from the interior pressure on one hand and the influence of the Iranian Diaspora on the other, is a permanent and dominant factor that is shaping the Iranian society;
- The restlessness among the ethnic groups composing the Iranian society has grown stronger, even though there is no coordination between these groups and no indication of an organized movement. Nevertheless, the Arabs in Khouzestan, the Iranian Kurds, the Balouchis, the Khorasanis and others are affected by regional happenings (Iraq, Afghanistan, Kiev, Lebanon, and so on);

In brief, Iran presents most of the characteristics of a developing country endowed with considerable oil resources. But there is more to Iran than oil and misdirected riches. The Iranians' "national psyche" is deeply historic and nationalistic. The survival of the Persian language and Persian art testifies to the robustness of this civilization and to their demand for recognition of their strategic centrality.

Another facet of Iranian identity is Shiite particularism (and, today, Iran remains the only nation with this proclaimed faith enshrined in its constitution). The political manipulation of this Shiite branch of Islam has developed an ideology based on ostensible dogmatic religious principles. It provides draconian legal justification for suppressing human rights. This is manifested in the discrimination towards the non-Farsi and religious minorities in Iran (Bahais, Armenian Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians,) and in the regime's ostracism towards Israel and the Jews.

In fact, violations of human rights, imprisonment and torture, mass executions, arrests of Iranian journalists and intellectuals, bans and excommunications in the name of religion, have all increased since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

At the same time Tehran has become the centre of radical militant Islam and the focus of support and direction of Islamist terrorism around the globe, which is presently actively involved in a proxy war between Sunnis and Shiites causing the disruption of coalition efforts to create a stable democracy in Iraq. Some do not believe that Iran is trying actually to incite civil war in Iraq. This would destroy the chances of the elected central government that will be led and dominated by Shia when it is eventually formed, though the threat of this may be what is meant by “harm and pain” to America. Iran is involved in efforts to derail any hope of an Israeli-Palestinian settlement, in fomenting belligerency in the Persian Gulf and, last but not least, in its incessant efforts to achieve nuclear weapons. The blatant disregard by the Islamic regime of basic human rights and civil liberties stands in contradiction with the goal of a “Greater Middle East” founded on democratic values and promoted by the USA.

The election of Tehran’s mayor, 48-year-old Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, an unknown personality at the time both inside and outside Iran, as Iran’s new president last year is turning out to be a choice made expressly to address the political, economic, and military challenges posed to Iran and its regime by the new US-led situation in the Middle East. There is now no doubt that his landslide victory over one of Iran’s most powerful leader, Hashemi Rafsanjani, was an engineered result of advance planning, organization, and exceptional efforts on the part of key figures of the Iranian regime’s leadership.

Ahmedinejad ran on a populist platform pledging to redistribute oil wealth to the poor, removal of the elite who dominate the oil industry, and a better economic future for long-suffering Iranians. He tapped into the vein of popular anger against corruption and cronyism by promising jobs to unemployed youth, better salaries to underpaid workers, along with food and housing for the poor.

His opponent, Hashemi Rafsanjani, suffered recent accusations--by the imprisoned journalist Akbar Ganji--that he profited handsomely as President from commissions on military purchases during the long and bloody Iraq-Iran war. Rumored to be the wealthiest man in Iran, Rafsanjani was unelectable. Ahmedinejad’s radical promises jeopardized the vested interests of the Iranian business class whom Rafsanjani represents. Although, Rafsanjani lost dramatically, he remains a crucial powerbroker and head of the Expediency Council, which now has oversight over the President.

What happened in Tehran was, in fact, an important regime change brought about by so called “democratic” means: it has become more “Islamist”, more Khomeinist, more militant, and more Nationalist. This new government brought to power the second generation of Islamic revolutionaries, the commanders of the Revolutionary Guards who, by and large, subscribe to radical, militant policies in all that concerns Iran’s internal as well as foreign affairs. They may well represent the last, desperate act by hard-line extremists to evoke once again a revolutionary resurgence in a society who has moved far beyond the tired slogans of the past and is considered by most analysts to be the most pro-western society in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the president and his allies consider themselves committed to follow Khomeini’s teachings to the letter. These include:

- Aspiration for leadership over the Islamic world and an unconditional return to radical fundamentalist Islam;
- Hatred of the West and its culture led by the US as the symbol of evil: the “Great Satan”;
- Denial of Israel’s existence and a constant striving to harm it in any way possible, perceiving it as the symbol and spearhead of the West in general and the US in particular.

There is little question that Ahmadinejad hopes to take on the mantle of Khomeini. In the 1970s Khomeini declared that “the Shah’s illegal regime must disappear”, and it happened. He also said that “the USSR would disappear”, and it happened. He even said “the evil Saddam must be punished”, and there he is, standing trial in his country. He added that the “occupying regime of Al-Quds (Jerusalem)

must be wiped off the map of the world, and with God's help we will soon witness a world without America and Zionism, despite those who doubt it."

Above and beyond oil, nationalism and Islamic fervor, some additional dimensions are necessary to understand the dynamics at work with Iran:

- **Demography is a destiny:**

With 30 million Iranians below the age of 30 there is a huge latent human power basis which can be mobilized in opposite directions. It can become the fertile ground for popular unrest and political instability.

Iran has one of the most youthful and educated populations in the Middle East. The literacy in the generation under 30 is well over 90%. In 2005, more than 65% of those entering university were women. Those who have lived throughout the Iranian revolution of 1979 are now a minority. Few doubt, that it is this generation that will ultimately determine the future of Iran.

As the gap between the rulers and the ruled widens, extremists have raised the volume of their hard-line rhetoric trying to reassert Iran's radical credentials. Yet, according to surveys by Iran's own ministry of Culture and Guidance, fewer than 1.4% of the population attends Friday prayers!

But effective subversion requires massive soft skills, time and money. So far exiles do not appear to be having much impact persuading young and nationalist Iranians, most of whom are proud of the nuclear program. In fact, the vast majority of Iranians of all political persuasions--from the arch-conservative right to liberal democrats on the left--maintain adamantly that Iran's nuclear program is a national right, a question of honor, a sign of progress, and a symbol of scientific achievement. Even with regime change, it should be expected that a democratic regime would assume the same position.

The skill sets and commitment of a modern version of Radio Free Europe are not yet available. The bridge to the young people has not been built up. Resentment against the dire economic circumstances has not been transformed into rebellion. Brutal crackdowns that crushed the student movement and popular demonstrations over the past decade have ingrained a profound fear of violent reprisals. This fear has kept disaffected Iranians off the streets.

So far the leadership of Iran has seized on the one strategy that touches a sensitive chord among millions of Iranians. It is in search of regional preeminence not unlike France at the turn of the 19th century and of Germany later on. Such a dream can mobilize youth in Iran. It can create the psychological and political environment to attempt to neutralize the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and replace him with a man close to his own convictions. Khomeini has been startled by Ahmedinejad's disruptive tendencies. Yet he has reacted and he has granted the Expediency Council (the non-elected body headed by Rafsanjani) oversight over the presidency. In fact, the current president has less legal power than any of his Islamic Republic predecessors.

- **The present regime has also demonstrated considerable political and diplomatic skills:**

Let there be no doubt where power rests today. It is with the clerical rule, i.e. the Supreme Leader, the President, the Guardian Council, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard, the Expediency Council and the recently strengthened police forces (Law Enforcement Forces). These structures counterbalance the Parliament and the regular Army. They provide great resilience to the acting elites who are allocating considerable resources to finance them and thus to shore up their power basis. The police and paramilitary forces are often garrisoned near populated areas and dispersed throughout the country. They will be difficult to rebel against in a way that would loosen the regime's grip on power.

In addition the regime is a shrewd observer of the tectonic changes in the world geopolitical relationships. Having lived for decades in a siege mentality they are determined to seize what they perceive to be a historical opportunity for Iran, all the more as the Iranian first hand knowledge of the United States is most limited

They feel they can exploit to their regional advantage the rise of China and India, with their competing interests with the US, the nuclear and military technology and greed of Russia, the declining legitimacy of the United States and the very soft power indeed of the European Union.

Russia and China in particular are perceived as *ad hoc* strategic allies for procurement of military and nuclear technology, for oil exports, gasoline and other imports and for political support against any potential American intervention. Together with India they are now primary not secondary players in the Iran standoff. The announcement in 2005 of the flight of \$50 billion of Iranian foreign assets from European banks signals a strategic move to eliminate Europe's critical leverage.

Finally the Hamas gains in Palestine and more importantly the Shiite success in Iraq are sweet victories for Iran's theocrats. The latter point is the most fundamental. The Shiite in Iraq have become the objective ally of the USA in Iraq.. It is the Sunni insurgents who are killing American troops. It is the Sunnis, with Fundamentalist Saudi financing, who are refusing to accept the new reality. To put it in simple terms American interests are now squarely in the hands of Shiite leadership to secure and pacify Iraq. The Shiite Iraqi leaders will never accept or support a US attack on Iran. These are major trump cards in their future negotiations with the United States, together with Iran's leadership knowledge that the global weapon is energy.

In reality Iran may increasingly look east to China as their future success model: a single party political control coupled with an expanding prosperous economy and a strong military capability may be their only hope of survival. Indeed Iran may feel protected by their Asian and Russian economic partners because of their conviction that they will veto at the UNSC any proposal for military action.

But the West still holds major trump cards. It represents 75% of global wealth and 95% of world military power. Democracy is gaining some initial momentum in most of the Middle East, from Lebanon to Jordan, from the United Arab Emirates to Saudi Arabia.

The West should be alert to but not yet taken in by the theatrics of the present regime. Iran is not irrational and can be deterred. Several generations of leaders since Khomeini in 1979 have had the supremacy of state interests at the top of their agenda beyond the doctrine of the Revolution and/or religious purity. Decision-makers have sought to minimize risks. They have shunned direct confrontation. They still provide the IAEA with the minimum information required to keep the process alive. They use surrogates such as the Lebanese Hezbollah for violent actions. They are keen observers of what it takes to survive.

The appeal and the impact of Ahmadinejad's declarations and diatribes must be put into context unless he topples the Supreme Leader. He is constrained by his minority Shiite sect considered as heretics by 90% of the Moslems in the world since the 7th century, by the Persian language and by Iranian ethnicity. For instance, there are violent Sunni groups in Pakistan that have declared Shia as non-Muslim. Al-Qaeda leaders have called for war against Shia in Iraq, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt reject Shia beliefs. Both forms of political Sunni Islam--al-Qaeda and the Brotherhood--have common ideological origins. Both have their roots in anti-secular opposition in Egypt, a conservative reading of Sunni Islam, and the wealth and religious zeal of the Saudis. For the Saudi Wahhabis -- eager funders of most expressions of contemporary militant Sunni Islam from Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Bosnia, Chechnya, and Europe--the greatest threat on the horizon is not the West, but rather Shia Iran and now, Shia Iraq.

All of this is understood and perceived, inside and outside Iran, and may markedly reduce any threat of Ahmedinejad's emergence as a populist Islamic leader. We should not underestimate the true scope of the religious struggle within Islam and the relative weakness of Iran's brand of Islam, all the more so as Najaf in Iraq is fighting the city of Qom to regain its primary role within the Shiite community.

Finally the West has not yet begun to mobilize its resources in a coherent and integrated way to neutralize this 19th century form of an old European disease: fascism in its Islamic version.

Non military options for Europe and the United States could include demonstrating their seriousness by taking off the PMOI (People's Mujahedin of Iran) from the list of terrorist organizations, seeking systematic actions that hurt the regime, from labor unrest in the oil industry to sharp reductions in the export to Iran of finished oil products. Iran imports 145 K bd of gasoline from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi. There is soaring gasoline consumption in Iran. It is forecast to rise to 400 000 bd with domestic refineries being able to produce 245 000 bd. If oil products exports to Iran were partially or totally blocked with the support of India which has a gasoline surplus, the internal impact on Iran could be massive.

In conclusion, the likelihood of a regime change in Iran induced by internal opposition receiving support from outside, is distant. But there is no reason for the West not to work intelligently to weaken the grip on power of the present theocrats. Reaching out to pragmatists through backchannels is an important strategy to consider. Many pragmatists are in conflict and disagree with the direction that the current radicals are taking. Ahmedinejad is increasingly viewed as an extremist loose cannon. The three losers in the controversial Presidential election are noteworthy figures—Mehdi Karroubi (onetime speaker of parliament), Mostafa Moin (ex-education minister), and Hashemi Rafsanjani (ex-President)—each represent factional power-blocs within Iran and have continued to mock Ahmedinejad. The internal rivalry between the right and the extreme right now offers an opportunity for reformists to regroup. Many pragmatists in the Iranian power structure do not agree with the radical faction's attempt to isolate Iran internationally for its own ends. They may be willing to back down on the nuclear issue to save the economy, their own careers, and the Islamic Republic.

What is needed is a transatlantic commitment exercised in a discreet and integrated manner, while recognizing that the ultimate solution must also deal with Iran's security problem. There is justification for Iran to feel surrounded by potential enemies--Pakistan, Iraq, Russia, the USA--and hence to build new ties notably with China and India. But should China, India and Russia prove to be moderately supportive of the US/UN approach, the West still has significant trump cards to play.

II. IS PRE-EMPTIVE/PREVENTIVE MILITARY ACTION AN ALTERNATIVE?

The military option raises issues at several levels: geopolitical, moral and tactical.

A. Geopolitical Issues

All parties concerned are confronted with a high risks' situation, definite rewards and a complex set of circumstances, many of which are unpredictable. Why? Because Iran is today at the centre of an interdependent world: developments and geopolitical choices of the major actors have an impact on all of the others. This is why their relative strengths, motivations and redlines need analysis in order to better understand the framework within which action can take place.

- **IRAN:**

Iran's primary national interests lie in the Persian Gulf (Iran's "mare nostrum"). Above and beyond security, they include maritime export routes for oil, demands on the Gulf States for territory and reduced oil quotas to obtain higher prices for Iranian oil. Their key strategic goal today is to raise the ante for

American involvement in the region through the use of religious incitement, military threats and terrorism. Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah are receiving monies and weapons valued in the high eight figures from Iran. The threat to Israel of the rocket infrastructure located in South Lebanon and manned with the help of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and the support of Syria is real. A nuclear Iran may have a watershed effect on the balance of power between Iran and its neighbors and it could coerce some of them into accepting actions detrimental to them or to their neighbors. As Iran gets closer to a military nuclear capability with long-range delivery systems, a non-conventional arms race between its neighbors becomes more likely. This concerns Egypt; Saudi Arabia may ask for Pakistani assistance.

Let us also remember that when France sold military equipment to Qatar, Bahrain and the UAE, they were provided, as part of the sale, with security guarantees. The UK did the same with Oman. These countries may soon start calling in those promises.

Finally there is the possibility that a nuclear Iran might provide nuclear material to terrorist organizations or to other “states of concern”.

- **EUROPE:**

The European initiative of 2003 had benefits and shortcomings. It allowed all parties concerned to gain a much clearer understanding of Iranian nuclear activities. Thanks, to no small extent, to the radical declarations of President Ahmadinejad it helped build a multilateral consensus against Iran. However, time may have been gained but the Iranian challenge has not yet been confronted. Two assumptions have been proved unfounded: the rate of democratic reform in Iran has not preceded the maturation of its military nuclear program. Furthermore, engagement has not mitigated Iran’s radicalism and strengthened the reformist camp. The question remains whether there continues to be a window of opportunity that will remain open for the US and Europe and enough time to allow for constructive diplomacy. It might if the US and Europe continue to develop first an integrated approach, then with high urgency lines of communication and cooperation with China, India, Japan and Russia who are major customers, suppliers, neighbors and military powers and can influence Iran. A predominantly US, Eurocentric diplomatic approach is unlikely to succeed.

- **RUSSIA:**

Russia is in transition, as highlighted by the Trilateral task force on this country reporting at our Tokyo meeting by Roderic Lyne, Strobe Talbott and Koji Watanabe.

The question remains whether there is room for a partnership with Russia on Iran? The answer could be positive if it is constructed in a way perceived by Russia to be in its national interest. Russia has an intimate knowledge of the leadership in Iran and of the arcane structure of power in that country. It has been and is a major provider of nuclear technology and advanced military equipment. It is all too aware of the 200 million Chinese on its Eastern frontiers compared to the 20 million Russians living beyond the Urals and on the Pacific. So Russia, with its huge land boundaries, its current threats in the South and China’s increasing military assertiveness, will over time have to collaborate with the other members of the Group of Eight.

Russia knows that the Iranians are cheating, even with them. They have several thousand Russian nuclear technicians on the ground in Iran. But, they appear at this juncture unlikely to support serious sanctions at the Security Council. Any future deal will need to be constructed in a way where Russia gains a great deal financially, industrially and in terms of prestige.

But the fundamentals remain what they are. From a point of view of its national self-interest, where diplomacy must start, no nuclear power likes to see its geopolitical influence diluted by an expanded club, and Russia is no exception to this. The Russians also share the concern that any military intervention will

be fraught with uncertain and uncontrollable consequences, including the real risk of pouring oil on the fire of Muslim fundamentalism.

Nevertheless the Russians are still considering what approach they should take in case Iran rejects their offer of a nuclear joint venture. In their judgment, Iran is not afraid of economic sanctions and they perceive a military strike as having as dire consequences on Iran as on the West. The Russians are aiming at a two-year moratorium on reprocessing and enrichment, perhaps because they are in the process of delivering to the Iranians their most sophisticated anti ballistic missiles. They are doubtful that the Iranians will support this basic request as they insist on continued research on their territory. This may explain their extreme concern about the present situation.

- **INDIA:**

India has strong geo-strategic ties to Iran. Such convergence was demonstrated by the jointly coordinated support from India, Russia and Iran for the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan.

India's rate of growth and economic power are becoming formidable. In addition, it is the largest democracy in the world and for 200 million Indians a quasi-English speaking democracy. Its economic ties to Iran are developing rapidly:

- India has signed a USD 25 billion gas contract with Iran centered around a pipeline which would pass through Pakistan;
- An ambitious steel manufacturing complex is to be built in Iran by India's giant Tata conglomerate;
- India still has a surplus of finished oil products which Iran may need;
- From a political point of view, few in the West have focused meaningfully on the Pakistani element in the Iranians' nuclear program. These are complex and dynamic connections where India could make a significant and positive contribution.

It is interesting to note that Western statesmen keep mouthing the thought that power is shifting to Asia. But when it comes to the Iranian crisis, which is three quarters in Asia, few senior political figures from Europe, are visiting the real power points of Delhi and Beijing.

- **CHINA:**

With over 100 million very poor Chinese at the door step of their cities, with over 87 000 uprising in China in 2005 mainly due to pollution, graft and land seizure, with a massive problem with their aging population, the Chinese economy needs to achieve a rapid growth rate over the next 10 years if it wants to maintain peace on the home front. This is why it will be loath to see drastic shocks to its external energy supply or to oil prices. It is estimated that oil price increases of 15 dollar a barrel causes a 0.8% decrease in China's GDP. China is the second largest oil consumer in the world. It obtains 12% of its oil from Iran and has a 50% stake in Iran's Yavadaran, the world largest undeveloped oil field, along with India 20%.

Within that context, it is unlikely that China will support drastic actions that could ignite the fuse to a military conflagration. It stands to reason that China's Iran policy is not centered entirely on oil. Like India, they seek a higher profile in world affairs; that means *hic et nunc* in the development of a response to the emerging Iran crisis. They would like a major role in the recasting of the Non Proliferation Treaty so as to cope with the reality of the present geopolitical situation.

- **THE UNITED STATES and ISRAEL:**

The United States' official position is a *“Nuclear Iran is not acceptable”* or, as Israel puts it, *“Iran creates an existential risk, the gravest risk since the creation of the State of Israel”*.

It is clear that the Iranian regime is posing a significant threat to the US, to its policies and to Western interests:

- The infighting between Shiites and Sunnites are affecting negatively the American ability to transition Iraq to a democratic regime.
- A regional non-conventional arm race becomes more likely.
- Iran's leadership credentials in the Islamic world are becoming enhanced.
- As a result, the balance of soft power in the Gulf could be shifting against the US and Israel, and possibly soon the balance of hard power. This is important at a time when there is an anguished domestic debate in the USA about the eventual use of force against Iran. In spite of the domestic support to Israel of 60 to 70 million “born again Christians” there may be, if not a rift, at least opposing tactics between the Conservatives and the cautious non-interventionist side of the Bush Administration. This may explain the present perception that American decisiveness is at a low level, at a critical time.

However let there be no doubts: the US together with Israel have the dominant naval, air force, military and intelligence power in the Persian Gulf. The latter has been transformed into a virtual American Gulf.

Within this context, there is a geo-strategic question that needs to be asked: Do the United States, together with Europe and Israel, have the right institutional framework within which to deal with Iran, given the tectonic changes in relative power that have taken place in the world over the last ten years? Can the US and Israel move forward with a soft or a hard approach without mobilizing Beijing, Delhi, Moscow Brussels and Tokyo who are additional primary players in the stand off with Iran? If they are not mobilized and if the tension escalates and erupts in an open conflict, would not the diplomatic fall out for the West and especially for the United States and Israel be as grave as the impact of the Suez Crisis of 1956 on Great Britain and France?

B. The moral issue

All of these geo-strategic considerations are in flux, complex, often contradictory and intertwined. As importantly they are all impacted in the global world of 2006 by moral considerations: will a preventive strike be perceived as legitimate by the world at large and important is such a consideration ?

In today's world the level of legitimacy is, to no small extent, shaped by the verdict of the IAEA and of the UN Security Council. They currently represent the moral standards essential to generate an international consensus on whether or not Iran's nuclear developments represent a threat to international peace.

Nobody will deny that “Realpolitik” still plays a role. The ambiguities of Russia and China, with which Iran has important trade and military links, are probably here to stay: each have their own strategic agenda. They do not share yet the Western value system. Thus, there is a possibility that they will at the last minute “sit on the fence” and fail to support decisive action at the UN Security Council. In the Moslem world at large, the actual fear that Iran could be the catalyst to upset the power structure within Moslem communities or States is less than the concern over the implications of a direct military confrontation with the United States.

Internally, in Iran, the nuclear program appears to be the single most popular policy associated with the present regime, even if it is so only because Pakistan – a Sunni state – already has nuclear weapons and because most of the leadership in Iran sees a window of opportunity to gain durable pre-eminence in the Middle-East.

In addition, nuclear energy is viewed in the developing world as an essential alternative to oil resources which are becoming depleted and hence as a prerequisite to future economic development.

This reverberates on many other parts of the Moslem world. So it is doubtful whether world opinion at large would support a preemptive strike against Iran by the U.S.A. and by Israel if Iran violates IAEA injunctions. A military intervention could prove to be politically quite volatile in the current climate and much more difficult to implement than a few years ago. There could be uprising and lasting resentment of large segments of the world population against the West unless Beijing, New Delhi and Moscow condemn the misbehavior of Iran, which they are unlikely to do.

C. The issue of tactical implementation

World public opinion is a second dimension. **The third factor concerns the operational prospects of a pre-emptive strike.**

A pre-emptive strike by Israel alone looks problematic. Politically, Israeli planes to get to Iran would have to fly over Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia: will permission be forthcoming? In addition, given the dispersion of the nuclear sites in Iran, a large aerial force, including attack aircraft, interceptors and support aircraft would need to fly up to 1700 km to reach their desired targets. These targets will be difficult to hit: the most advanced Iranian missiles (SHAHAB 3 with a range of up to 1900 km; GHADAR with a range of 2500-3000 km) are in the process of being built in underground townships several tens of meters below 300 m high mountains. The same applies to the Karimi Industries, the most secretive part of the program, which deals with nuclear warheads. Striking at these underground sites may require ground forces and low intensity nuclear weapons to destroy them. Finally, there are at least 19 detected significant nuclear facilities including Natanz and Arak. Satellite imagery, human intelligence and the work done by the IAEA may not have yet provided a complete picture of Iran's nuclear capacity.

Nevertheless, few doubt that the USA, the "indispensable nation", together with Israel would have the military muscle, the sophistication, if there is a will, to deal a devastating blow to the existing Iranian nuclear capacity. Can they go beyond direct Air Force and missile strikes and commit ground troops? To a limited extent: the US are constrained by their budget deficit and their debt ceiling to send more soldiers to the Middle East and NATO has few ground troops available except from Turkey.

For the U.S. and Israel, the stakes are high. The argument in favor of a rapid, pre-emptive strike against Iran's perhaps imminent nuclear weapons would be that such **a course of action would reduce several risks inherent to the development of a nuclear Iran:**

- The risk that a nuclear Iran be viewed and used by Russia and China as a powerful card to check U.S. power in the Middle East, along the present borders of Russia and in the Far East;
- The risk that Israel's strategic primacy will be challenged with regional consequences for itself and for the United States;
- The risk that Saudi Arabia, with its Shiite minority in the Eastern oil producing region (province of al-Hasa) could feel directly the heat of a nuclear Iran, should it, for instance refuse to decrease production; for Saudi Arabia the Shia majority government represents their worst nightmare.

- The risk that Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapon could encourage its neighbors, notably Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Algeria, whose regimes may not be friendly to the West, to purchase and/or develop their own nuclear option;
- The risk for the survival of Israel: Iran's nuclear program, combined with a radical Islamic regime and a long-range missile capability, represents the biggest threat to Israel's existence since its creation.

In brief Iran is threatening the pre-eminence of the United States and the process of democratization and peace in the Middle East.

It is Iran that can effectively veto movement towards peace and stability in either Palestine or Baghdad through its effective support to, and manipulation of, the political agendas of regional terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. It is Iran that has the capacity to destabilize the flow of oil out of the Gulf.

It is Iran that determines how much of the oil and gas coming out of the Caspian Basin may be safely accessed by both India and China. And it is Iran, which, by virtue of being one of the top-five player in both oil and natural gas and a longtime diplomatic pariah as far as the United States is concerned, that offers Asia the best possibilities for locking in long-term bilateral energy ties, a process already begun by India and China.

All of these factors underpin the statement made by Senator McCain "there is one thing worse than the US exercising the military option, that is nuclear armed Iran".

On the other hand, **violently intrusive tactics can generate chain reactions** that are hard to anticipate, and even more to control:

- The prospective risk of a "tit-for-tat" is evident. At the very least, the Iranian Government will attempt to hit directly Israel and the U.S. installations, to attack neighboring oil facilities across the Gulf disrupting oil flow to the West and Asia, to block the Hormuz Straits, to engage in naval mining in the Gulf area and to trigger an explosion of Shiite anger and violence across Iraq with weapons turned against US troops.
- A preventive war, even authorized by the Security Council, could alienate a large part of the Moslem world and trigger waves of uprising and terrorism against the United States, its European allies and most powers with Moslem minorities, on an unprecedented global scale. Attacks on targets should be expected in regions and in manners unforeseen by current defense planning. The intelligence level of Iranian operatives is a level above their Arab counterparts. Saudi Arabian oil installations bordering the Gulf will become obvious targets for retaliatory strikes. A successful strike could panic markets and seriously disrupt oil supplies;
- America's \$500 billion investment and 3 years of sacrifice in Iraq could be placed at risk by Shia politicians—under pressure by mass public demonstrations—demanding the withdrawal of US forces. Upon the news of the first bombings, Shia militias can be expected to attack Coalition forces openly threatening the current Shia-US alliance prevailing in Iraq. Moqtada al-Sadr—head of the al-Mahdi militia—has publicly stated this threat during his most recent visit to Tehran.
- Oil disruptions will send markets into panic and spark short-term economic shocks. The duration of the shock would depend completely on the success and efficiency of the mission. Yet, it should be assumed that Iran will exercise its threat to cut oil exports. Oil supplies will be removed from markets for a timeframe, either by *force majeure* or by Iran's decision. This shortage will shock the global economy and encourage protests in numerous urban centers throughout the world.

- There are over 20 Iranian nuclear facilities and an effective strike might require a major air force and military effort all the more as Iran can be assumed to resist and attenuate their effects. The time-frame needed for the strikes is in question. One recent analysis put forward by Mr. W. Patrick Lang—military head of Middle East intelligence at the Defense Intelligence Agency—estimates 1,000 military strike sorties. (NY Times article, Jan. 22, 2006, *Why Not a Strike on Iran* by David Sanger). This estimate will require a longer time than a 24-hour window. Should the bombing strike last more than 48 hours, the attack will be considered by in public opinion to be a war—not a strike. No media spin will change this definition in world public opinion. Coverage by international media will unleash a negative public reaction.
- The risks of significant collateral damages on civilian populations would be considerably high given the fact that many nuclear plants are close to cities; the possibility of a Tchernobyl type of disaster cannot be eliminated. Not only will millions of Iranian civilians be exposed to nuclear fall-out (the city of Isfahan, for example), but also citizens of Bombay, Dubai, Baghdad and other population centers may well be put at risk. The panic prior to the attack could lead to startling exodus out of these population centers as the threat builds. Should the US not give an ultimatum, then planners will consciously place millions at risk. The exposure of innocent civilians to radioactive fall-out will also receive great attention in the TV coverage and provoke a prolonged debate on this action. This is a neglected consideration in the current debate over Iran and prove to be another turning point as significant as the Abu Ghraib scandal and the global perception of the decline of America's moral standing in the world.
- An attack may be portrayed in the world as an “anti-Islamic” initiative and stimulate Islamic extremists from Indonesia to Europe and Japan. In Pakistan, the most volatile Islamic nation, mass rioting could threaten Musharraf's tentative hold on power and even place nuclear warheads into the hands of Islamists extremists within the Pakistani military, triggering a response from India;
- There could be an awkward dilemma over timing unless the nuclear-weapon program was solidly and publicly provable. At present, IAEA and Pentagon analysts estimate at least 6-10 years before Iran would obtain nuclear weapon capability. A US/Israel strike in the next year risks being branded as a premature. Like with Iraq, a vibrant debate may condemn the pre-emptive US/Israeli actors and redeem the Iranian regime, if such an attack occurs before all diplomatic options are exhausted. Such an action may find its legitimacy questioned in the global media and “Muslim hearts and minds” for years to come. Hence, the need to consider The Grand Bargain first and as a real option;
- A preventive war without the seal or approval of the UN could mark the end of the UN era.. Will the U.S. and its allies have the legitimacy to formulate and help implement a new set of international governance rules after having emptied from their content the rules of international law established sixty years ago?
- The permanent removal of the nuclear bomb capability in Iran might lead to actions similar to the Iraq pattern of imposed regime change;
- Finally, the risks of disaffection towards the Bush doctrine inside the U.S. would be high. America's current load of security commitments worldwide is already enormous. Would the U.S. public support their government taking on another formidable task, the one of leading a pre-emptive strike against Iran's nuclear installations, with probably little power reserve left to deal with the unexpected chain reactions?

It is not suggested that the military option be ruled out. There is little doubt that a determined strike by missiles and aircrafts could set back the Iranian nuclear weapon program by at least several years. Yet, it clearly might not eliminate the threat entirely. In the end, there is no guaranteed success in the preventive war, nor to be objective in the option described as “the Grand Bargain”. Such a bombing campaign might rally the country around its radical leaders. The immediate repercussions of a strike might strengthen the regime—giving the hardliners the opportunity to eliminate the numerous opposition figures within Iran. Undoubtedly, the regime would also accelerate its nuclear activities in any surviving facilities -- removed from any scrutiny of IAEA inspectors -- and secure nuclear weapons as soon as possible.

But then we have to think through with what effect, at what cost, with what coalition and hence with what sustainability. The balance sheet of that option can probably only be established by the United States and Israel in consultation with EU3. The same thought process applies to the other alternative, the diplomatic option: Can Russia, China, India and Japan be brought in to exercise responsible power over Iran if the present paradigm, the conceptual framework were changed? Under that assumption, could there be a different level of commitment by the leaders of the European Union?

These remarks should be complemented by two sets of facts: They concern the United States and Iran and their respective redlines.

Let us focus first on the United States. The USA are indeed at the center of the Middle East and to a large extent of the world. They alone have the ultimate military capacity. Having practiced superior power for the last sixty five years, the U.S. have the resources, the knowledge and more importantly an instinct of how to use it which put them clearly ahead of the pack. At this stage it is essential to develop a clear understanding of where the USA presently stand :

- The United States have reached a level of military pre eminence, unparalleled in the history of mankind. Among others, they have developed a nuclear capacity sufficient to launch a strike guaranteed to wipe out Russia and China without the risk of suffering a return strike.
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- Given that raw power and the inherent will and ability to use it, the United States are determined not to accept any policy that will force them to alter the “American way of life”, predicated notably on massive domestic oil consumption, which means an increasingly heavy reliance on imports.
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- There is no reason not to take the US rhetoric on Iran seriously. The publication of the 2005 Global Strategy paper, the declarations made in March 2006 by Vice President Cheney and Ambassador Bolton, at the American/Israel Public Affairs Committee, confirm that this Administration is determined to prevent the Iranians from deploying the nuclear bomb,. The concept of deployment is a significant issue for the Americans to address; it is still opened and unresolved. When will Iran obtain nuclear capability.? Estimates vary sharply. There is no consensus inside the US/Israeli/Euro 3 intelligence Community.
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- Finally, the US administration has changed its views on the relevance and usefulness of AEIA and the UN Security Council. Deeds appear to speak louder than words. The results of President Bush’s visit to India demonstrate that he is against a general principle about nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons per se are not the problem. “Bad guys” with them are. It follows that the heavyweight leaders of this administration, the Cheney, Rumsfeld, Bolton and even Rice, tend to reject the fundamental premises of NPT. They do not seek anymore to create the conditions for the eliminations of nuclear weapons, but to eradicate the “bad guys” and their nuclear armament, leaving the “good guys” free of nuclear constraints.

Against that background, the first US redline is to block the Iranian strategy to alter the balance of power in both the Gulf region and in the wider Middle East. To that effect they are ready to do the heavy lifting!

Another redline for the US is Israel. There is taking place at the present time a significant deepening of the US defense guarantee to Israel as expressed by President Bush to Prime Minister Olmert. This is not and will not be incorporated in the foreseeable future into a formal document; but it does represent a pronounced shift. President Bush declared that the United States will protect Israel from an Iranian attack.. It may be a step towards formalizing a USA/ISRAEL defense pact which would require approval by the US Senate.

There are necessarily many other issues; it may be useful to mention those that are unlikely to prevent the USA from adopting a hard stance:

- China and Russia: Their military strength dwarfs in comparison to that of the United States. Their internal situation is sufficiently fragile for them to want to avoid any risk of a direct confrontation with the USA.
- Potential civilian casualties in Iran and beyond in case of a nuclear preemptive strike on the Iranian nuclear facilities. Such considerations are traditionally of secondary importance as illustrated by Hiroshima, Dresden and Saint Nazaire.
- The religious/civil war in Iraq.. It is a significant constraint in the US ability to preempt the Iranian nuclear program. Time will tell.
- Moslem public opinion: from an American point of view, it is an issue but not an overriding one. Several hundred thousand militant Moslems resident in the United States have been asked to leave the country. And the protection of US Embassies and other installations will be reinforced

And then there is Iran: Above all the clerical regime of Iran wants to survive; Iran's leadership became nervous when US troops landed to the West (Iraq) and to the East (Afghanistan) of Iran. The clerical regime includes three pragmatic factional power blocs: Mehdi Karroubi, Mostapha Moin, Hashemi Rafsanjani, the Leader of the unelected Guardian Council. They all continue to openly criticize the President. He is increasingly viewed as a loose cannon. His Messianic claims have proved more controversial in Iran itself than in the West. Among the President's critics, the "dealmaker" Rafsanjani may be a significant figure, for he represents the business class and the unelected clerics. These three factions may be willing to engage in an opening to the USA for in contrast to Ahmedinejad they do not thrive on a siege mentality or on provoking a clash with the West.

We must then ask the question: What would be the red lines for the conservative Pragmatists? There are no sure answers until real negotiations take place. But we have indications. They are likely to be:

- 1) Assured territorial integrity;
- 2) Security guarantees from the USA and Israel;
- 3) Lifting of US sanctions;
- 4) Assurances of foreign investments with a focus on the oil sector;
- 5) Support of WTO Membership;
- 6) Repatriation of Iranian funds frozen in the United States banks since 1979;
- 7) Continued nuclear research with IAEA inspections;
- 8) Declaration of MKE as a terrorist organization.

So it may be worth raising the question: In a situation of that significance and volatility, where there are new primary players that have emerged and that have played so far an undervalued role, are unilateralism and the extreme use of force the most effective way of dealing with all aspects of the Iranian issue. Should we not investigate and rejuvenate the diplomatic option?

III. CAN DIPLOMACY AND CREATIVE COMPROMISE BE AN ALTERNATIVE?

The diplomatic option needs to be further explored and enlarged as long as the military option remains plausible and constitutes the "*ultima ratio*" in case diplomacy does not bear fruit.

This implies that the United States and the West be ready to recognize the new geo-political landscape and to move with China, India and Russia to convince Iran of the US/The West own redlines. Direct dialogue, time and strength are essential ingredients to help change public opinion and leaders' convictions on the other side of the negotiating table. Slowly but unavoidably, the United States and the West will have to draw the practical conclusions of a the 2006 reality: there is a new balance of power emerging. The "Nomenklatura" of China, Russia and Iran have fundamental points in common. They are in search of national pre-eminence in their traditional areas of influence. Of equal importance is the protection of the personal interests of a few hundred "robber barons" who make up the national oligarchies. To a large extent they have captured the states' wealth of their own countries. The ideology and the propaganda used by each leadership to protect their individual positions vary according to history, culture and expediency.

Within that context three observations are relevant. First the leaders of these three nations are there to stay and can afford it. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Kings of France use to devote 10 to 12 % of the country's GNP to finance the army and the police. Today the figure is around 1,5 to 2 %. The 10 to 15 % of GDP figures applies today to China, Russia and Iran, which is the amount needed in developing countries in order to maintain law and order and eventually project power outside of one's frontiers. These monies benefit a small minority that is getting immensely rich while the majority still labors in relative poverty.

Secondly, the leaderships of these countries will prefer "jaw-jaw" to "war-war", for the latter alternative entails considerable risks for themselves personally. The members of the "Nomenklatura" continue to be keenly interested in creating more wealth, provided they can keep the bulk for themselves. They favor trade as a mean to generate new resources but they will make sure that the masses only get the crumbs. They are also motivated by national pride and by the search for regional pre-eminence. They have a high sense of insecurity and a vivid recollection of external interventions which took place at regular intervals over the last seventy-five years.

China is a case at point. It illustrates the fact that a large measure of free trade and rapid industrialization are still compatible with a ruthlessly autocratic regime.

Most experts would agree that today, sanctions on Iran are unlikely to succeed. Trading remains a step in the right direction to promote "the forward strategy of freedom" even if the ultimate goal may take decades to be reached. Recent history has taught us that the more developing countries are richly endowed with oil, the slower the pace of progress towards democracy. Their leadership can afford the military paraphernalia necessary to keep the lid on the masses.

This seems to be the real world of today and it could be here to stay. In addition we have to keep in mind the experience gathered in Afghanistan and Iraq which illustrates the complexities of causing major political and social changes to happen from the outside. . Within that context, a **"Grand Bargain"** may appear a realistic option, a practical step forward in a long process of mutation of mentalities. It need not be interpreted as a retreat by the U.S. from the project of democratic transformation of the Middle East but as an initiative from the sole military superpower in the world, to develop and implement a 21st Century concept for international security over one or two generations. Such an option would be, in a way, the child of the international institutions created after World War II, essentially by the United States.

We are aware that this was experimented a decade ago with North Korea in the context of the KEDO and the results left much to be desired. But times have changed. There have been fewer cross-border conflicts over the last twenty years than at any time over the last two centuries and the aspiration for peace is universal.

The diplomatic strategy still being applied in North-east Asia with the North Korean nuclear threat remains a case in point. The 6 party talks have engaged the belligerent, erratic North Korean state in a series of negotiations with direct neighbors and regional powers. We should ask whether this diplomatic option offers a precedent which can be applied to Iran to allow its regime the mechanism to "save face"

by widening the negotiations to include the Asian giants with whom its future is strategically tied and not only with Europeans, who may be seen as symbols of a colonial past?

The world is longing for peace, economic growth and eradication of extreme poverty. So it may be ripe for a “Grand Bargain” with Iran initiated and lead by the United States, supported by Europe, Russian, Japan, China and India in a context where it is unlikely that the UN will reform itself within the necessary timeframe to lead such a project.

Finally one should continue to support a UN solution provided it has “real teeth” in it. But the likelihood of such an occurrence remains to be seen.. This is why **A Grand Bargain will need to be essentially political but with an economic dimension.**

The political dimension presupposes that the United States engage directly in a dialogue with Iran and abandon the rhetoric of regime change. They should also recognize the fact that bilateral diplomatic solutions in the case of Iran are insufficient to succeed and that a multilateral approach -- taking into account the interests of the most relevant parties concerned as well as Persian mentalities -- will be necessary to move forward towards a durable peaceful solution.

It is proposed to create a **Regional Middle East Nuclear Council** composed of countries that have the nuclear bomb or have the imminent capacity to develop it and have a close economic and political relationship with Iran. The list is as follows: The United States, Russia, Israel, Iran, China, India, Pakistan, Japan, the UK and France.

The key components of the Grand Bargain would be as follows:

- The U.S. would exploit fully the best possible “second tracks” to indicate an American preparedness to enter into negotiations in order to strike an agreement with Tehran;
- The Regional Nuclear Council would be announced and set up with the visible support of all of the above countries;
- All parties would agree to freeze at their present level their existing capacity to produce nuclear bombs;
- All ten countries would agree on a wide range of measures to prevent proliferation of all material relevant to produce nuclear bombs and would provide and support the means of effective implementation of such policies;
- All parties would agree to a process to neutralize the risks of regional nuclear conflicts through putting into place an early warning system, and insuring that the Regional Nuclear Council is the “hub for crisis management” and has the capacity to develop a common strategic analysis of potential conflicts between existing nuclear powers;
- Israel should be provided with a comprehensive security package both by the United States and such as defined within NATO’s Article 5 Charter;
- Iran will be offered explicit US security guarantees.
- Russia will be offered a U.S.-nuclear cooperative agreement;
- The Montreux Convention would be enlarged to cover the demilitarization of the Straits of Hormuz;

- Iran, and possibly other countries such as Turkey, Algeria and Saudi Arabia, would be guaranteed a supply of nuclear fuel (the Fuel Banks) for peaceful nuclear applications. As a “Chinese wall” cannot exist between peaceful nuclear energy and weapons development, there must be unrestricted access to all IAEA inspection teams;
- The IAEA would continue to play a critical role in a control capacity.

The economic dimension.

It is proposed that -- concomitantly with the creation of a Regional Nuclear Council -- a range of economic measures be taken involving the Trilateral countries and the wealthiest oil producing countries in the Middle East to promote trade and investments in favor of the least developed regional countries such as Palestine, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey, Egypt and Algeria. This is probably over the long term the safest approach to promote security and enhance the chances of a gradual transformation towards more democracy. Within that context, unequivocal support should be given to help these countries access the WTO, create Development Banks and micro-credit institutions that will benefit directly the masses and enhance their infrastructures as well as their health and educational level. In that area, a leading role should be played by Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, the European Development Bank. And other leading private and public institutions.

A Regional Middle East Water Council should also be established to discuss the distribution of the region's rarest resource. Such a council may serve to diffuse potential conflicts—“water wars”—that are plausible in the near future. Countries to be included would be: Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. Such a regional co-operation council would instill a focus on inter-dependency that is lacking in the Middle East, one of the few regions in the world without a regional body (the Arab league is not simply capable of dealing with such a critical issue as water, without Turkey or Israel's presence). As coal and steel agreements eventually led to a united Europe, regional initiatives in water and oil, under a comprehensive security umbrella could re-define and integrate the Middle East.

In conclusion, we acknowledge that:

- **Iran's present policies which may well worsen in the near future are a direct threat to Europe:** because of the advancement of its nuclear missile program; because an Iranian nuclear capacity in the hands of a theocracy could radicalize the Middle East and segments of the Moslem population in Europe; because the emergence of nuclear powers in this part of the world could generate turmoil in the production and distribution of oil with the corresponding impact on world economic expansion. It is indeed a special challenge to Europe; The European Union has a population of 12 million Moslems, with a strong extremist minority, complex and ancient links with the Middle East. Its natural proclivity could be appeasement, to avoid at all cost any type of military confrontation, while the European need to have the character to recognize that there could be circumstances under which such an option will better serve the objectives of peace.
- **Iran is a threat to the long-term strategy of the United States** which is still deeply engaged in Iraq and which seeks to transform the Middle East through democratization. As important are the US perceptions of their national interests and the recognition that unilaterally they have the overwhelming military power to pursue them.
- **Iran is a threat to Russia, Japan, to South Korea and to South East Asia because of their economic ties to Iran, because of their Moslem minorities and** lest oil deliveries be disrupted.

So Iran is a challenge to the free world in its battle against terror, proliferation of WMD and the eradication of radical poverty. It is a challenge to the world at large, notably China, India and Russia in their struggle to develop their own path to democratization (China, Russia), economic prosperity ..

So the key issue, outside the UN process, is how to deal with a threat of that complexity and magnitude. The realistic answer is probably by pursuing all three options in a concomitant, complementary and convincing way, with the ultimate aim to implement a **Grand Bargain** that meets the strategic security and economic objectives of the primary players and of the world at large. There is a scenario where preemptive strikes against Iran may be a necessity, much as it may be against Iran's national interest. We all know that a war, even a limited one, could foster more violence in the Middle East, in Iran, Afghanistan, in Asia and at home, in Europe. It could raise oil prices to recession levels. All these are powerful arguments against the use of the military option. But they do not come close to matching the case of stopping a regime if it continues to be clearly bent on eradicating Israel and the West.

The risks and costs of a military intervention are such they put a premium on intensive and creative diplomacy. The U.S. must take the lead. The Europeans must be associated. The Russians, Chinese and Indians must have a taste of what is in it for them in order to play a primary role. Other Middle Eastern countries are obvious stakeholders. At the outset, everybody must agree to put ideology on the side and take a long-term view. We all know that feudal societies endowed with oil evolve politically at a slow pace. They are unlikely to convert to democracy overnight. Concomitantly, everybody must understand the other's redlines. In the case of the West there should be no doubt in anybody's mind that a threat against Israel would trigger a cataclysmic American-Western response.

Finally the U.S. must realize the limits of unilateralism and of its monopoly over hard power. To address the Iranian issue this year and over the next decade will require that the US leadership carefully blends hard and soft power. The campaign for democracy in the Arab World may, over time, bear unpredictable fruit, as is the case in Palestine. Intimacy between the Trilateral countries may become a critical factor to success. The U.S. may need to recognize the benefits of European values and of the EU experiment. The U.S. should leverage the experience and financial resources of other Middle Eastern countries. They must give China, India and Russia the right level of recognition in terms of power, status and responsibility, which they deserve. They should educate key nations around the world to their change of heart on the NPT.

In brief, the United States must lead an alliance where they accept to share power rather than a crusade... They must encourage Asian and Western leadership to reach out to the various pragmatist power blocs in Iran. They must give them the hope of long-term survival, with the all-important assurance of growth, security and economic renewal for Iran. Finally, they must count on the forces of global information and on the example of successful transitions to democracy, to make grow the seeds of change in closed-up countries and societies. In brief, the United States of America must be at the vanguard of creative diplomacy to achieve their national and international objectives which are basically shared by their Trilateral partners.

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