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# Dual Intransigence: An Assessment of the US-Iran Conflict and Prospects for Rapprochement

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**Dual Intransigence: An Assessment of the US-Iran Conflict  
and Prospects for Rapprochement**

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University of San Francisco  
December 2012

# Dual Intransigence: An Assessment of the US-Iran Conflict and Prospects for Rapprochement

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTERS OF ARTS  
in  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

By  
Chad A. Lama  
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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

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Dean of Arts and Sciences	Date

**Abstract:** *In the months leading up to the 2012 Presidential Election, a number of Republican candidates that were vying for the nomination against the incumbent, Barack Obama, made sensational claims regarding the “Nuclear Iran Question”. This study discusses the issue of a nuclear Iran, what this means for regional stability, and what America’s options are in dealing with the Islamic Republic. Specifically the researcher addresses the consequences of a strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities, conducting a discourse analysis for the purposes of demonstrating the polarizing affect this issue has had on some of the leading scholars, theorists and practitioners. The central argument of this study states that the growing consensus of military intervention in the US and Israeli defense community must be curbed. Military action against Iran would produce more negative than positive outcomes. Despite recent claims from President Obama, diplomacy has not been exhausted. Therefore the author suggests the need for an overhaul in diplomatic measures toward Iran. In order for the US, Iran, and Israel to begin an era of warmer relations, the US is in the best position to begin negotiations based on equanimity and tolerance.*

**Keywords:** US-Iran relations, Iran-Israel relations, Nuclear Non Proliferation, 1953 overthrow of Mohammad Mossadegh, 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran-Iraq War, track I Diplomacy, Rapprochement, Rogue state narrative.

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## Introduction

In the early months of the 2012 United States Presidential election, a number of Republican candidates made their views on American foreign policy known at the various debates that took place around the country. Their tone was shrill and aggressive, imploring and sensationalistic. The exception was Congressman Ron Paul, whose foreign policy views have received harsh criticism from other candidates. At one debate in South Carolina, when asked about America's Middle East policy, Paul made a statement suggesting the removal of all forces from both Iraq and Afghanistan, and allowing Iran to proceed with its nuclear research unchecked by international bodies, citing the Golden Rule of “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. It was no surprise that Paul’s isolationist views received jeers from the audience. On the other hand, the characterization of Governor Mitt Romney’s position on the “Nuclear Iran Question” is nothing short of fear mongering; leading those who watch to believe that a nuclear Iran is *undoubtedly* a threat to US national security. In reality Iran has provided no substantive reason to believe an attack on the US—or Israel, for that matter—would result from obtaining nuclear materials. The views of many hardline Republicans echo that of Israel's Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, who is outspoken in his belief that Iran's nuclear program must be stopped—by force.

In examining the multitude of newspaper articles that have been published between 2010 and 2012, there emerges a sense of frustration from Israel, which has made repeated threats to attack Iran in spite of President Obama's policy to proceed with sanctions and negotiations. Phrases that repeatedly crop up in articles include “All options on the table”, “Imminent threat” and “Preemptive Strike”—in other words,



phrases denoting confrontation, intolerance and a frightening readiness to engage in warfare. Obama's decision to pursue backchannel diplomacy in the face of increasing pressure from Israel is a somewhat positive indication that the United States foresees the dangerous road to which escalation can lead. And since President Obama has been reelected, there is a good chance the conflict will enter a new stage of either escalation or closure during his second term.

Though these events are unfolding as we speak, scholars, theorists, journalists, and military and political strategists have been theorizing what might result from a direct assault on Iranian soil. *The New York Times* recently released an article that disclosed that a classified war simulation was held in March of 2012 to “assess the repercussions of an Israeli attack on Iran”. However, the results of the simulation are quite alarming: “The strike would lead to a wider regional war, which would draw in the United States and leave hundreds of Americans dead” (Mazzetti, 2012). In another article published by the *Atlantic*, a panel of academics, policymakers and journalists were assembled to assess the likelihood of war starting between Israel and Iran. The results found that, as of March 2012, the chances of war occurring by the next year is 48%. This percentage comes in light of a recent note of urgency that has permeated Israel's rhetoric regarding Iran's nuclear development program being an existential threat to Israel. Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said recently in an interview: “Whoever says 'later' may find that later is too late”. Barak has also implied, along with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, that Israel would not warn Washington before launching a unilateral strike on Iranian underground nuclear facilities (Tierney, 2012).

In my thesis, I ask the questions: Is warfare the best approach to dealing with Iran? If so, what would be the long-term consequences of a strike on Iranian soil? And finally, how can the US avoid a collision course with Iran? In answering these questions, I argue that in order to understand how significant and possibly destructive an attack on Iran can be, the perspective of Iran must be taken into consideration—which is surprisingly scarce in much of the contemporary academic literature from some of the leading forums and publications. Understanding Iran’s motives is important because the Iran the world knows today—the ultra-religious and violently repressive theocracy—is a result of its long and checkered relationship with the United States. To support this assertion, I use a historical lens to chart America’s role in Iran from World War II until the present time, focusing on key events—such as the overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953, the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and the US embassy hostage crisis in Tehran—and showing how they came to shape relations between the two nations. For this section I ask the question: What is the origin of the mutual enmity that currently exists between Iran and the United States? What factors contribute to Iran’s perceived need for nuclear technology?

Going back to the question of whether or not warfare is the best option for dealing with a nuclear Iran, I argue that a better alternative would be to pursue diplomacy. However, in order for diplomacy to be effective there needs to be a significant overhaul of current diplomatic measures toward Iran; meaning the policy of sanctions and isolation must be eliminated, or at the very least mitigated, in order for fruitful negotiations to take place. If the United States and Iran are in fact willing to truly begin a new era of warmer relations, Track I diplomacy, which requires face-to-face negotiations between

government officials, such as diplomats, and in some cases leaders, must be reestablished. The benefit of using Track I diplomacy is that face-to-face interaction will almost certainly remove the channel of *misinformation* that exists between the US and Iran, which allows more hearsay than truth to reach both sides. This being said, it should be acknowledged that no American president has had direct talks with an Iranian leader since the administration of Jimmy Carter. In short, establishing formal channels of diplomacy will facilitate transparency between the two governments.

In presenting this argument, I review the opinions of international relations scholars and practitioners, many of who are in favor of a preemptive strike on Iranian nuclear facilities. However, most analysts recognize the absurdity of escalating the conflict. In conducting my research, I trace the current state of tension to America's role in the overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953. This set off a chain of events that resulted in terminating formal relations between the two nations, and the emergence of the current theocratic regime in Iran. From this historical lens it is clear the US was the instigator. It is also clear that it is ultimately the responsibility of the US to initiate the first overture expressing, if not goodwill, a willingness to participate in an exchange of equitable negotiation.

Returning to Ron Paul's comments at the South Carolina debate, when he discussed US intervention in Iran, the crowd rejected the idea that the American government would do something as egregious as removing a democratically-elected leader in favor of a megalomaniacal monarch to suit its interests in the region. Unfortunately, that is exactly what we have done. This brand of collective ignorance is another consequence of the lack of dialogue between the two nations. In any case, lack of

information—whether it is the president, presidential-hopeful, or average citizens—is a dangerous thing. The most important point I would like readers of this study to take away is that, in deciding how to deal with an intransigent Iran, it is paramount to examine the historical events that have led to this stage in the protracted conflict. Moreover, understanding the relationship between these nations can hopefully allow one to make an informed decision as to whether or not diplomacy has in fact been utilized to its full potential. In doing so, one can truly understand the implications of bringing Iran to war.

## **Literature Review**

### Historical Background – Chapter One (1940 – 1960)

In the first section of my thesis I discuss the origin of US-Iran relations, dating back to the 1940s. In my analysis of scholarly works relating to the 1953 overthrow of Mohammad Mossadegh, there seems to be a bifurcation of opinion as to the initial reason for US participation in the coup. One school of thought claims the US became involved in response to what many scholars refer to as “Containment Theory”: steeped in the paranoid mentality of the Cold War rhetoric, this theory suggests that in the late 1940s and early 1950s the US feared the spread of communism in underdeveloped nations in the Middle East, Latin America and Asia. Rather than allow countries to fall under communism, the US would discretely embed itself into a vulnerable country and subvert the current government with a puppet regime. In addition to Iran, evidence of this can be found in numerous countries, such as Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay (Johnson, 2004).

A second school of thought insists the encirclement theory is a front for true US intentions: US intervention was a result of Iran nationalizing its oil in 1952. In 1951, newly elected Prime Minister Mossadegh set out to break Iran from colonialist powers, and integrate it into the world economy. To do this, Iran had to take control of its vast oil reserves, which were under the control of the British. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) had been created in the late nineteenth century when a British geologist named William Knox D’Arcy was sent into Iran to check for oil fertility. Once it was discovered that Iran was quite fertile, the British came in and began drilling. The British believed they were being magnanimous when they gave Iran a seventeen percent share of the

profits, while they assumed the remaining eighty-three percent. For decades Iran went along with this with little protest. Around the time Mossadegh was elected, however, there was an outcry from Iranians who felt they were being unfairly exploited. Mossadegh utilized this discontent and made reclaiming Iranian oil the platform of his campaign. Encouraged by the oil agreement between the US and Saudi Arabia (which was not necessarily more equitable in terms of profits, but the US offered Saudi Arabia more concessions and security), as well as the American-Venezuelan agreement, in which profits were split 50/50, the Iranians requested a new contract be drawn up giving Iran a controlling share of their oil (Abrahamian, 2001). The British were taken off guard, believing that the Iranian population was complacent about British presence, and promptly refused. Mossadegh proceeded to nationalize Iran's oil, which enraged the British government, who went to the United States for assistance.

It is at this point where scholarly works diverge on opinion. The uncertainty lies around the question: Why did the US get involved in Britain's oil dispute? As I have mentioned, the first school of thought believes the US went along with the initial plans for a regime change because they feared Mossadegh was too progressive—essentially that he was a target for Soviet influence. This belief was reinforced by the support Mossadegh received from the communist Tudeh party toward the end of his tenure as prime minister. The other school of thought, which I am inclined to agree with, asserts that the US ultimately decided that it was in its best interest to have such an abundant oil producer under control of a primary US ally, the British. As Ervand Abrahamian explains in his essay “The 1953 Coup in Iran” (2001): “If Iran had this power [to control its oil], it

could influence world prices and even choose to keep oil underground for future generations”. He goes on to explain:

The security of the free world is dependent on large quantities of oil from the Middle East. If the attitude in Iran spreads to Saudi Arabia or Iraq, the whole structure may break down along with our ability to defend ourselves (Abrahamian, 2001).

In short, if oil would provide Iran with leverage and autonomy, then the US was going to make certain that Britain maintained its control over Iranian oil.

Abrahamian also discusses the events leading up to the coup, along with its execution, in the context of the “secret history” of the CIA and British intelligence. Early on in his essay he discusses the shroud of secrecy surrounding America’s role in Iran, explaining that most historical accounts from the US State department have either been “sanitized”—altered to make culpability more difficult—or presumably removed from the archives. He is able to put pieces together through documents forwarded from British agents stationed in Iran to the British Foreign Office in the months leading to the coup. This essay is distinct from much of the other historic accounts of the coup because of Abrahamian’s access to the “sordid details” of the overall orchestration. Examples of this include a smear campaign against Mossadegh in which American and British officials hired Nazi and Muslim terrorist groups to claim Mossadegh as one of their own, and the use of assassinations to destabilize the government (Abrahamian, 2001). His use of brief memos and other correspondence between agencies offer the reader striking insight into Operation Ajax.

In examining the facts about the decision of Iran to nationalize its oil, an essay by Monsoor Moaddel of Eastern Michigan University, titled “State-Centered vs. Class-

Centered perspectives on International Politics: The Case of the US and British Participation in the 1953 Coup against Premier Mossadeq in Iran” (1989), offers an in depth discussion of the impact this decision had on the future of Mossadegh and the constituency that ultimately—following the successful smear campaign—failed to support his policies when it was needed most. The fact that the article was written in 1989 does not take away from the relevance of the author’s arguments. This is the case because, as an historical assessment of Iranian class relations during the 1950s, nothing has emerged that could dispute the author’s thesis. Furthermore, as an Iranian who lived through the coup and the ’79 revolution, this lends credibility to Moaddel’s view, as opposed to Western writers, or non-Iranian writers, who base much of their research on secondary sources. My decision to use Moaddel rests on the fact that it is difficult to uncover research that deals with *inter*-Iranian unrest as it relates to domestic policy. By and large, most of the research available looks at Iranian civil unrest as it relates to America’s role in the overthrow of Mossadegh, decades after the fact.

In his essay “Internal Dynamics versus External Intrigue” (2008), author Fariborz Mokhtari further explicates class relations by exploring the factions that existed at the time—mainly modernists and traditionalists—that supported Mossadegh’s progressive vision of Iran. This aspect of Iran’s history is especially important as it looks at the role religion has played in Iran, before and after the coup and the Islamic Revolution. As the author explains, religion has always been an important part of Iranian civil society. Clerics (religious authorities) have always had a significant position, or status, both in society and in government. With the emergence of Mossadegh, an outspoken secularist, the role of the clerics was in danger of being marginalized in favor of a new



constitutional democracy that gave the parliament more say on the legislative process. This is contrary to the previous system, under the shah (Son of Reza Shah; ruled intermittently from 1941-1979; briefly fled the country in 1953; was deposed in 1979), where the clerics had final say on all legislation that was passed. This is important because it shows how damaging America and Britain's actions were toward the future of Iran: whereas under Mossadegh Iran was going down a legitimate path toward democracy (legitimate because it was supported by many Iranians), with the influence of the clerical class becoming marginalized; the overthrow of Mossadegh and the installation of the shah abruptly stopped Iran's bid for democracy, but the state remained secular. However, the shah's tenure was so detrimental to the growth of Iran, compounded with the knowledge that Western powers were responsible for the current government, that the resulting anti-American sentiment that burgeoned during this period created a platform for the clerics that eventually staged the 1979 revolution, and is still in charge to this day.

#### Historical Background – Chapter Two (1960 – 1980)

The second section of my thesis discusses the “Blowback”, or unintended consequences, of US interference in Iran. The term “Blowback”, according to Chalmers Johnson, author of *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (2004), is a CIA term first used in March 1954 in a recently declassified report on the operation to overthrow Mohammad Mossadegh in Iran. Chalmers explains that it is a “metaphor for the unintended consequences of the US government's international activities that have been kept secret from the American people” (Johnson, 2004). Though repercussions of US activity in Iran would not surface for another three decades, the operation to overthrow

Mossadegh was so great that many CIA operatives feared there might ultimately be some form of blowback for its egregious interference in the affairs of Iran (Johnson, 2004).

Iran scholar Stephen Kinzer has written extensively about the coup, as well as the unintended consequences, and the policies of the current theocratic regime. In his book *All the Shah's Men* (2003) Kinzer discusses the changes that occurred in Iran's government, as well as the people, under the grand coordinator of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini. What Kinzer offers to the surplus of literature that exists regarding the 1979 revolution is a dual lens that illustrates the changes affecting Iranian civil society and foreign policy, and the realization in the US that this was becoming too unruly for simple shuttle democracy. Additionally, he writes extensively about how different US presidents—from Carter, Reagan and then Clinton—scrambled to find a place for Iran in each administration's policies. This section is particularly useful to my research, as I provide a brief profile of presidents Carter, Reagan, Clinton, Bush and Obama, and the doctrines they followed in dealing with Iran.

Also for this section I explore the origin of commonly used terms such as “rogue state”, “axis of evil”, “deviant regime” and “outlaw state”. The majority of literature for this topic comes from Alexandra Homolar's essay “Rebels Without a Conscious: The Evolution of the Rogue States in US Security Policy” (2010), along with Dr. Stephen Zunes' essay for *Middle East Policy*, titled “The Function of Rogue States in US Middle East Policy” (1997). Zunes' essay explores the criteria by which the international community—but specifically the United States—deems a country to be “rogue”. Along with Iran, Zunes charts how countries like Libya, Syria, Iraq and North Korean became involved in the rogue cluster. Further, Zunes discusses how US policymakers were able to

“take advantage of a widespread American prejudice” toward Islam in order to promote, or add credibility to, economic policies. He also examines the role of rogue states in US policy through a Cold War lens, asserting that “with the demise of the Soviet Union” the US was essentially looking for another “other” to place its attention. He quotes former National Security Advisor Anthony Lake:

Our policy of must face the reality of recalcitrant and outlaw states that not only choose to remain outside the family [of nations] but also assault its basic values...[and] exhibit a chronic inability to engage constructively with the outside world (Lake, 1994).

In my search for academic articles pertaining to the origin and function of the “rogue state”, I have found very little in terms of scholarly research that discusses how the US government, which has relied on the media as an agent of dissemination, began labeling uncooperative countries. This section is important in understanding the larger implications of US foreign policy toward Iran because it presents a clearer picture of the current US narrative and how it is shaped by political rhetoric in the upcoming Presidential election.

Alexandra Homolar focuses on how post-Cold War defense policy came to be focused on “irrational”—but militarily inferior—adversaries. Case studies she cites include the North Korea nuclear crisis of 1993 and the Persian Gulf War of 1990. According to Homolar, the three criteria by which a state will be labeled as “rogue” is as follows: (a) rogue states violate international human rights norms; (b) the desire of these regimes to acquire weapons of mass destruction; and (c) government's state support of terrorism (Homolar, 2012). Although she does not include Iran as a case study, it is clear

that Iran fits these characterizations. Using her three criteria, I analyze how Iran fits into the discursively constructed narrative of a rogue state.

### Historical Background – Chapter Three

On of the most important points I address in my research are the motives and rationale behind Iran's bid for nuclear development—particularly Iran's resolve to do so in the face of international reproach. This is a subject that gets little consideration, both in the media and the academic realm. The larger argument I make asserts that the United States must restore diplomatic channels with Iran. I demonstrate in my “Results” section how establishing formal relations will benefit both the United States and Iran. In defending this argument, it is of utmost importance to understand how, when, and why nuclear development became such an important part of the Iranian narrative. In order for the US and Iran to begin working towards formal talks—with negotiations and concessions being the goal—the US must understand and accept Iran's reasons for pursuing nuclear technology. Only then will the cycle of intransigence and distrust be broken, and both nations can move towards a new era of progress. Briefly, I state that Iran's reasons for pursuing nuclear development are as follows: (a) security and deterrence; (b) international prestige and status; (c) and what Rene Girard refers to as Mimetic Desire.

In his book *From Violence to Blessing* (2002), Vern Redekop discusses Rene Girard's theory of Mimetic Desire, in which he states: “we form desires by imitating the desires of others” (Redekop, 2002) By framing this discussion with the theory of Mimetic Desire, I conduct a comparative of analysis of Iran and Israel's nuclear programs,

respectively. The goal in this section is to show that, historically, Iran and Israel have similar reasons for wanting to go nuclear.

Presently Israel is the only nuclear state in the Middle East region. In his essay “Israel’s Nuclear Weapons: The White House Factor” (2010), Dr. Jeremy Salt makes the claim that it was inevitable to expect one of Israel’s neighbors to develop a deterrent of its own, arguing that “the states around Israel would never resign themselves to living forever in the shadow of Israel’s nuclear ‘deterrent’” (Salt, 2010). Salt presents what I find to be an unbiased assessment of Israel’s monopoly on nuclear arms, and how it has been a contributing factor to Iran’s perceived need for nuclear development. This suggests that Israel is what Redekop calls a Model, of which Iran has chosen to replicate. However, the focus of his essay is to tell the story of Israel’s nuclear plant in Dimona. The main factor behind Israel pursuing nuclear technology was their very creation out of Palestine, which placed it in a dangerous neighborhood consisting of Arab states. In response to this perceived insecurity, Israel signed into a nuclear-cooperation agreement with the US in 1955 under President Eisenhower’s Atoms for Peace program. Shortly thereafter Israel began construction on a small “experimental” reactor at Nahal Soreq (Salt, 2010). In a public statement Israel claimed it was developing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Through Salt’s analysis, it becomes clear that initially Israel had the support of the US. However, as the Cold War began to take precedence, US policy began to shift toward strict nonproliferation:

Henry Owen, chairman of the State Department’s Policy Planning Council...outlined the dangers of an Israeli nuclear-weapons capability: other countries would be more likely to develop nuclear weapons and less likely to sign the NPT, while Arab frustrations in the region would

increase, and US influence would suffer a major setback (Salt, 2012).

Despite America's disapproval, Israel continued to surreptitiously develop nuclear technology. Salt concludes that the US and Israel entered into what he refers to as a "semi-formalized charade", in which Israel developed arms over the course of ten years, while the United States looked the other way. The US did, however, stipulate that Israel must keep its nuclear program opaque.

In Gawdat Bahgat's essay "Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran" (2006), he explores the idea that nuclear development for Iran represents a point of pride, or what he refers to as "collective image". The factors that support the collective image concept are as follows: (a) Iran is larger and more populated than most of its neighbors; (b) unlike most of its neighbors, Iranian nationalism and the traditions of the nation-state have been in place for a long time; and (c) the Iranian's throughout history have perceived themselves as victims of foreign powers' expansion and manipulation (Bahgat, 2006). Essentially, Iran believes that without foreign powers' intervention—that being Russia, Britain and the US—Iran would have "established and maintained its status as a prominent and regional and global power" (Bahgat, 2006). Especially since the revolution, large swathes of Iranians respond to a powerful national myth that Iran was prematurely cut down in terms of growth and international participation, and nuclear development can perhaps "restore Iran to its rightful place as a Great Power" (Bahgat, 2006).

In examining Iran's reasons for pursuing nuclear technology, one of the most compelling factors is security and deterrence. Looking at the timeline provided, one can

see that Iran has historically been victim to occupation, pillaging, behind-the-scenes manipulation of its government, and isolation in the face of a ruthless enemy. It is fair to say Iran, like Israel, is an insecure country. But of all the wrongs done to Iran, perhaps the most damning was the role of the international community during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). After the Islamic Revolution, Iran experienced a power vacuum that was at once filled by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini. However, as quick as Khomeini was in coming to power, the dramatic transition left Iran in a vulnerable state. Joost Hiltermann explains in his essay “Deep Traumas, Fresh Ambitions: Legacies of the Iran-Iraq War” (2010) how the vacuum created by the fall of the shah allowed Saddam Hussein the opportunity to neutralize a threat to the Iraqi Ba’athist movement: the Shi’a majority in Iran. Moreover, initially at a loss by the revolution that removed the US from Iran in 1979, the US also saw an opportunity to weaken and contain Iran. With discreet assistance and encouragement from the US, Iraq launched a ruthless attack on Iran:

The war proved both traumatic and unifying. Iran felt it was caught unawares at a moment of internal havoc. Iraq’s air and missile strikes on its cities, oil infrastructure and shipping, combined with its chemical weapons use, crippled the economy and eroded public morale (Hiltermann, 2010).

Hiltermann claims Iran’s worst enemy was itself. The purpose of the 1979 revolution was to remove foreign powers from Iran, which was achieved. Yet the isolation induced by the revolution and the 1980 US embassy hostage crisis “left Iran bereft of allies even matters of great international concern...such as Iraq’s targeting of civilians and its gas warfare” (Hiltermann, 2010).

#### Chapter four - Results & Recommendations for Rapprochement

In discussing US-Iran relations since 1979, in which all formal channels of diplomacy had been severed, scholar Richard Maher explores sustainable strategies of relations between Iran and the US. Like myself, Maher believes it is in America's interests to restore formal channels of diplomacy with Iran. In his essay "Informal Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Iran: A Sustainable Strategy?" (2008), he argues that America's hardline approach toward Iran will be ultimately detrimental to the greater Middle East. Moreover, the US will be hit the hardest if turmoil overwhelms the region as America's precarious economy would be rocked by an inevitable increase in gas prices. Iran has maintained a veneer of infallibility with respect to the waves of sanctions and embargoes that the US, UN and EU have placed on Iran. The most salient point I have taken away from his essay is the discussion of the different forms of "informal" diplomatic relations have taken place since 1979, and how efficient these have been in terms of achieving US strategic aims vis-a-vis Iran's nuclear development.

A key question of this section asks: Has Iran's pursuit of nuclear development created an imperative to consider a future where diplomatic and economic coercion is exhausted, and no options remain other than military action? A more urgent question asks: Would military action against Iran result in a wider regional war? And finally: What does the US expect to gain from a possible attack? Many strategists and scholars have offered speculations to the latter that range from access to Iran's vast oil reserves, to a regime change that would allow the US to contain Iran. If this were the case, the results would be dubious. In 2003 the US invaded Iraq and installed the Karzai government—but only after nearly a decade of war and trillions of dollars and hundreds of lives. Only this



year has the US finally managed to extricate itself. In an article by Lieutenant Colonel Leif Eckholm of the Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate of the Pentagon, titled “Invading Iran: Lessons from Iraq” (2010), he asserts that with many similarities Iraq and Iran share, the one major difference is that, unlike the Saddam Hussein government, the current regime in Iran has not only consolidated its power by running the legislature as an extension of clerical councils (*mullahs*) who “collectively rule above the fray of electoral politics”, but have also “consistently exploited the anti-American sentiment that remains a dominant narrative with most Iranians”. What this means for the US, Eckholm portentously states, is “invading forces would need to be prepared for a deeply embedded enduring insurgency” (Eckholm, 2009).

To further understand what containment of Iran would mean, authors Dalia Kaye and Eric Lorber discuss this topic in their essay “Containing Iran: What Does It Mean?” (2011). This article is particularly important to my research because of the way in which Kaye and Lorber frame their argument: they assert that trying to contain Iran would have a variety of negative consequences. A large part of their work focuses on how effective containment was when applied to the Soviet Union. Yet they are quick to point out that the nature that enemy is different than the problems Iran poses. Their primary concern with trying to contain Iran is that “policymakers relying on containment as a foreign policy strategy do not properly understand its requirements and limits” and therefore “risk unduly circumscribing alternatives or applying it appropriately” (Kaye & Lorber, 2012). This brings up a point that I address in my thesis: why have policymakers insisted on pursuing the same policies meant to contain and isolate Iran when there has been no improvement in Iran’s status as a rogue state?

In the article “The United States, Iran and the Middle East’s New ‘Cold War’” (2010), authors Flynt and Hillary Leverett discuss relations between the US and Iran in a strategic context, arguing that relations need to be “analyzed and understood...in terms of their bilateral dynamics” (Leverett & Leverett, 2010). The authors describe how the international community is divided between states and are willing to work within the framework of US hegemony, such as Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia; while on the other side of this divide are “Middle Eastern states and non-state actors that are unwilling to legitimize American (and...Israeli) hegemony over the region” (Leverett & Leverett, 2010). Though their essay covers a wide range of topics, essentially the authors support my central argument for establishing bilateral relations:

We argue that the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran should transcend the prospects for hegemonial war or strategic standoff and seek a fundamental realignment of their relations, in a manner similar to the realignment in relations between the United States and the People’s Republic of China during Richard Nixon’s tenure in the White House (Leverett & Leverett, 2010).

In three sections, the authors outline recommendations for the US to implement a realignment of diplomatic measures toward Iran. However, what has benefited my particular research interest is that the author’s labors to achieve this while considering the perspective of Iranian interests. Important theorists I utilize in conducting my research on the section “Prospects for Rapprochement” include Hillary and Flynt Leverett, and Richard Maher. Whereas Maher lays out the options available to the United States that will bring it closer to establishing warmer relations with Iran, The Leverett’s have been outspoken in their position, which I share, that the diplomatic measures taken toward Iran

since the 1980s have not been effective; further, these measures have in effect solidified the protracted nature of the conflict:

To achieve [rapprochement], Washington needs to pursue a genuinely comprehensive and strategic approach to diplomacy with Iran. Such an approach would be grounded in the reaffirmation of America's commitment in the Algiers accord not to interfere in Iran's internal affairs and in the prospect of a US guarantee not to use force to change the borders or form of government of the Islamic Republic (Leverett & Leverett, 2010).

However, in order to establish a sound argument supporting the need for rapprochement, there needs to be an in-depth exposition of the potential costs and consequences of such a decision— of which there is no shortage of opinions. The difficulty in gathering data has been in handpicking authors who hold high statuses in the defense community.

Additionally, in attempting to present a comprehensive discourse analysis, the inclusion of authors whose position on the “Nuclear Iran Question” I argue against is paramount in creating an inclusive or “four-sided” discourse.

Perhaps one of the biggest proponents of launching a direct strike on Iran is Mathew Kroenig. A Stanton Nuclear Security Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and a professor of politics at Georgetown University, Kroenig wrote a recent article, succinctly titled “Time to Attack Iran” (January/February 2012) for *Foreign Affairs*. In his article, Kroenig offers information and opinions about a potential attack on Iran for its nuclear development program, such as the issues of cost, military strategy, risks for civilians, and global security associated with a US attack (Kroenig, 2012). Kroenig's central argument states, “The only thing worse than military action against Iran would be an Iran armed with nuclear weapons”. Therefore he argues that a military strike, if

managed carefully, could “spare the region and the world a very real threat and dramatically improve the long-term national security of the United States” (Kroenig, 2012). However, Kroenig does not pretend that the risks associated with such a strike would not be significant. He also discusses the dangers involved with conducting a strike on Iranian oil facilities:

Even if the United States managed to identify all of Iran’s nuclear plants, however, actually destroying them could prove to be enormously difficult...[as] Iran’s nuclear plants are dispersed across the country, buried deep underground and hardened against attack, and ringed with air defenses, making a raid complex and dangerous. In addition...Iran has purposefully placed its facilities near civilian populations, which would almost certainly come under fire in a US raid, potentially leading to hundreds, if not thousands, of deaths (Kroenig, 2012).

In outlining such risk to the civilian population, Kroenig defends his position by claiming the US could mitigate the risks by using precision-guided missiles to pinpoint specific centrifuge-manufacturing sites “while leaving their surroundings unscathed”. Moreover, the US can reduce the collateral damage even further by “striking at night or simply leaving those less important plants off its target lists” (Kroenig, 2012).

In direct response to Kroenig’s article, Colin Kahl, a Senior Fellow at the Center for a New American Security, and also a professor in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown, published an article in *Foreign Affairs* titled “Not Time to Attack Iran” (March/April 2012). Responding to Kroenig’s assertion that the consequences of conducting a “surgical strike” targeting Iran’s nuclear facilities would *not* outweigh the prospects of a nuclear-armed Iran, Kahl states that Kroenig is making the same mistake as those who advocated for invading Iraq: One of the key lessons that should come out of

Iraq, as America's last preventive war, is that "Washington should not choose war when there are still other options". Furthermore, the United States should not "base its decision to attack on best-case analyses of how it hopes the conflict will turn out" (Kahl, 2012).

What I find particularly striking about Kahl's article is the statement he makes regarding Iran's uranium enrichment capacity, in which he asserts "there is no hard evidence that Supreme Leader Khomeini has yet made the final decision to develop [nuclear weapons]". This distinction is quite important as a US preventive attack on Iran, without properly establishing an intention to develop WMD's, would be both a war crime and a violation against US law. As Yale law professor Bruce Ackerman explains, "Since the US is a signatory of the UN Charter—a treaty ratified by the Senate—its provisions banning aggressive wars have become, under Article of the Constitution, an integral part of US law". Ackerman goes on to cite Israel's bombing of the Osirik nuclear reactor in Iraq in 1981. In this case, he points out, the US voted for a unanimous UN Security Council Resolution condemning the attack. He quotes Margaret Thatcher, who was then Britain's prime minister, as saying, "Armed attack in such circumstances cannot be justified. It represents a grave breach of international law" (Ackerman, 2012).

I further utilize Dr. Kahl's campaign to prevent the US from going to war with Iran by drawing from one of several testimonies delivered before the US House of Representatives. In one testimony from March 21, 2012, titled *Iran, Hezbollah, and the Threat to the Homeland*, Kahl states that, indeed, Iran's nuclear ambitions represent one of the greatest threats to US national security. Kahl revisits President Obama's record regarding his policy toward Iran, highlighting that Obama has established that: (a) The Iranian nuclear weapon is unacceptable; (b) All options—including military force—

remain on the table; (c) The administration does not endorse a policy of containing a nuclear-armed Iran. His thesis, however, maintains that military action should continue to be a last resort— “and it should not be used until all non-military avenues have been exhausted” (Kahl, 2012). Kahl argues that it would be both strategically unwise, but also setting a bad precedent, to stage an attack on Iran when the “threat from their nuclear program is growing, but not yet imminent”. Moreover, contrary to Kroenig’s pro-strike position, Kahl argues that the costs of military action are very high, “both in terms of the escalatory potential”, as well as its “regional and global effects”. The examples he uses illustrates how spillover will undoubtedly be difficult to manage on all sides; namely that Iran may retaliate with missile strikes against US bases in the Gulf, activate proxy and terrorist attacks against US diplomatic facilities in Iraq and elsewhere, as well as harassment of international shipping in the Strait of Hormuz (Kahl, 2012).

The final section of my thesis draws on recommendations from researchers from various think tanks in the United States and Britain, primarily being the Center for New American Security, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and the Oxford Research Group. In a proposal from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy titled *Engaging Iran: Lessons from the Past* (2009), author Patrick Clawson advocates for the US to engage Iran in “productive diplomatic talks” based on “clear understanding of the geopolitical context and of the best procedures to use” (Clawson, 2009). His thesis rests on the fact that the United States presently—and historically, I am inclined to add—lacks “understanding of the complexities of Iranian society and the dynamics of the Iranian leadership”. In the effort to pursue negotiations with Iran, the US must improve their understanding of the reasoning behind the Iranian regime’s bid for nuclear development:

“These steps would facilitate and indeed expedite political and economic reform in Iran” (Clawson, 2009). The Center for New American Security also makes several recommendations for policymakers in cultivating a foundation of mutual understanding and a willingness to make equal concessions, in order to ensure the functionality of negotiations. Though the CNAS maintains the position that a nuclear-armed Iran “poses a significant threat to Israel’s security and increases the prospects for regional conflict”, it disputes the claim that diplomacy has been exhausted. The priority of US policymakers, therefore, should be to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, “rather than adopting a policy of nuclear deterrence and containment” (Kahl, 2012).

#### Significance to Existing Literature

In my research I have come upon numerous books and scholarly articles that discuss the role of the US in the current atmosphere of tension with Iran and Israel. There is also an abundance of literature related to the overthrow of Mossadegh, as well as how the Islamic Revolution transformed the relationship between Iran and the US. As for contemporary issues, including nuclear proliferation, US-Iran relations and Iran-Israel relations, journals such as *International Studies Quarterly*, *Foreign Affairs* and *Foreign Policy* provide extensive articles on the “Nuclear Iran Question”. Various think tanks, such as the Center for New American Security, the Oxford Research Group, and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, offer several relevant proposals that support my central argument, which is that the Obama administration should continue to pursue diplomacy, as well as the steps by which successful diplomacy can be utilized in order to result in positive negotiations for both the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

However, there is a surprising lack of literature that provides an in-depth analysis of factors that have caused the relationship between the US and Iran to develop into what it is today. Though there are numerous works that touch on each of the aforementioned headings, there is little available that adequately discusses each heading as it relates to the current standoff among the US, Israel and Iran. What I am to provide in this study is a timely assessment of the US-Iran conflict, comprising a thorough analysis of events that have been instrumental in shaping US-Iran relations, and demonstrating how using a historical lens is important in understanding the situation that will be unfolding in the coming months.



## Methodology

As a great deal of my research discusses the historic events that have lead to what I refer to as the state of “dual intransigence” that exists between Iran and the United States—and has existed for the last thirty years—I gathered qualitative data in the form of secondary research. In the first section, the question I seek to answer is: What is the origin of the atmosphere of mutual distrust between the US and Iran? In answering this question I focused on several notable scholars’ accounts of key events, such as the overthrow of Mohammad Mossadegh, the Islamic Revolution, the US embassy crisis, and the Iran-Iraq War. Specifically I searched for existing research pulled from archival documents, such as State Department memos between intelligence agencies. Using this historical lens is important to the overall goal of my research, as it shows how the motives of the defense community developed from the Cold War era. This supports my argument that the defense apparatus was designed initially to deal with the communist threat; and instead of gradually changing after the fall of the Soviet Union, the apparatus has remained largely intact, though it has proven to be unsuited to the new *other*: “unstable” Third World regimes.

For section two I also analyze scholarly works for specific details regarding the domestic unrest in Iran as a result of the shah returning to power. I pay close attention to academic books and articles in order to ascertain information on the affects the Iran-Iraq War had on the Iranian narrative. Since my goal for this section is to show how the US took the instability in both Iran and Iraq as an opportunity to contain both countries, I determine that the best way to research this subject is to conduct an analysis of academic articles, newspapers and government documents. To do this I analyze newspaper articles

that were released almost a decade after the war. These articles come from such reputable publications as the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. The journalists who produced the stories acquired their information from leaked government documents that provided details related to the role of the United States in the war.

Section three is a comparative analysis of Iran and Israel's respective nuclear programs. This requires historical data, which I obtain from various academic articles. My goal is to find parallels between both countries perceived need for nuclear technology. Additionally, I research the State Department intelligence archive in order to examine the language used when different government officials—such as IAEA monitors, diplomats, as well as the President of the United States—discussed Israel's nuclear program through memos and documents. The primary question for this section asks, “Why has nuclear development become so embedded in the Iranian narrative?” To frame my study, I establish three criteria: Deterrence, prestige, and what Rene Girard calls Mimetic Desire. At its most basic level, Mimetic Desire—for my purposes it will be in the context of competing states—means the act of copying or replicating actions and goals of a “Model” in order to achieve the same status. In examining academic articles, scholarly books, and government documents, I establish that both Israel and Iran fit each criterion.

For the “Results” section, the central questions are: Is warfare the best approach to dealing with a nuclear Iran? What would the consequences be of a strike on Iranian nuclear facilities? And, How can the US avoid a collision course with Iran? In answering these questions, I conduct a discourse analysis of some of the prominent actors debating the “Nuclear Iran Question”. This includes some of the Republican candidates vying for

office during the election (which Barack Obama has since won), as well as policymakers and scholars from some of the top institutions. Significant to this discussion is an up-to-date overview of rhetoric that has been used in the year leading up to the election. Since Israel plays a large role in advocating for a strike on Iran, I analyze recent statements made by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Shimon Peres, and Defense Minister Ehud Barak. I also examine the rhetoric of Governor Mitt Romney, who labored towards the last few months of the election to galvanize his Jewish constituency.

In order to understand the consequences of a strike on Iran, I consult various proposals, studies and testimonies written by some of the leading think tanks that influence US foreign policy, such as the Center for New American Security, and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. However, my goal in this section is to present both sides of the argument: Those who share my belief that the US and Israel should not attack Iran; those who are proponents of launching a military strike; and those who advocate for nuclear proliferation as a natural deterrent.

One potential limitation of this study is that the US-Iran conflict appears to be currently reaching a dubious new phase: Israel is pressuring the US to sanction a preemptive attack, a position which many hardliners in the US share. President Obama has just been reelected, so it will be difficult to make projections as to what his plans are in dealing with Iran. However, the goal of this study has not been to try to find a solution to the US-Iran conflict. Rather, my goal from the outset is to provide a comprehensive, thorough analysis of Iran's evolution as a monarchy, to a democracy, to a theocracy—and all the while demonstrating: (1) The role of Western powers in Iran's development; (2) The backlash against foreign intervention, which resulted in the severance of formal

relations; (3) How nuclear development became an important part of the Iranian narrative; (4) and finally, that an overhaul of diplomatic measures is required for any progress to be made.

# Chapter One:

## Enter the United States

(1940-1960)

*“America has not dictated to other nations; we have freed other nations from dictators”.*

-Mitt Romney.

### Introduction

Iran has a rich cultural history that dates back to before the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is a history rife with territorial dispute, resource conflict, religious fundamentalism, and revolution. Dwight D. Eisenhower once said that certain aspects of Iran’s modern history come right out of a dime-store spy novel. Regardless of Iran’s long history, it has been the victim of colonialists that used its oil-rich land for personal gain, at the expense of Iran’s political, social and economic development. In this section of my thesis, I argue that the current state of Iran—its ultra-religious government, inchoate economy and struggling democracy—is a direct result of British and especially US intervention. I pay special attention to the 1953 *coup d’état* orchestrated by the CIA, and how this seminal event forever changed the political landscape of Iran, as well as its relation to the West.

## Enter the United States

At the outset of WWI Iran declared itself neutral. But Iran was still under control of Russia and Britain, both of which had committed to a treaty that gave Britain more territory, including the oil-rich south. Additionally, Iran's hopes of remaining neutral were further dashed by the fact that it was “strategically located...and four powers used it as a battlefield”. The war had a devastating result, leaving much of Iran's farmland in ruins. This led many to desire for a “strong and independent government” (Keddie, 1981). But the control of the British quelled this movement. They consolidated more power, until, in 1918, the British devised a new government for Iran that was constitutionally subservient to Britain, handpicking key political figures. Furthermore, the Anglo-Persian Treaty was drawn but not yet ratified in 1919, which stated that the British would place advisors in Iran's government, a larger British army would be assembled, and transportation would be established. Nationalists resisted the treaty, but were powerless to stop British control. The end of WWII established the US as a hegemonic power. The US expressed an interest in aiding Iran, with an eye on its vast oil reserves. The State Department issued a statement that criticized Britain’s control over Iran:

The Department has taken the position that the monopolization of the production of an essential raw material, such as petroleum, by means of exclusive concessions or other arrangements is in effect contrary to the principle of equal treatment of the nationals of all foreign countries (Keddie, 1981).

With the sudden intervention of the US, the British began rethinking the treaty, and started to seriously rethink their control over Iran. By 1921, Britain drew away from their treaty, but still kept a prominent presence in Iran. It wasn't until WWII that the US

began to have a real interest in Iran. In 1942, Iran asked the US to help fix their financial situation. The US sent Dr. A.C. Millspaugh, an economist, to remedy the situation. He was unable to make much of a difference, as he described Iran's industry as being “corrupt and inefficient” (Keddie, 1981: 115). Over time, this led to the emergence of oppositional organizations and protests. An example of this is the Tudeh Party, which was the official communist party of Iran, who were gaining popularity at this time.

### Mohammad Mossadegh

Mossadegh was a member of the Majlis, a fervent nationalist who supported progressive reform. Mossadegh's motives were shaped by the belief that “Iranians must rule themselves and not submit to the will of foreigners”. Mossadegh studied in France at l' Ecole de Sciences Politiques, where he developed various illnesses that would stay with him for the rest of his life. Due to his illness Mossadegh was forced to resettle in Switzerland, where he earned a doctorate of law—the first Iranian to do so at a European university. As a member of the Majlis, he was not afraid to proclaim that he thought Iran was not reaching its potential. He went so far as to call other members traitors and unpatriotic for not trying to unburden Iran from foreign control (Kinzer, 2003).

Even before he would go on to become prime minister, when he was the director of National Front—a coalition of political parties, trade unions, civil groups and “other organizations dedicated to strengthening democracy and limiting the power of foreigners in Iran”—Mossadegh was not liked by the two major occupying powers (Kinzer, 2003). Britain disliked Mossadegh because of his staunch anti-foreigner view, which prevented them from getting the Supplemental Oil Agreement passed. This agreement would have

retroactively altered the concession the British had with Iranian oil primarily by allowing the British to receive higher royalty payments. Mossadegh and the National Front opposed this agreement on the grounds that it did not “give Iran a greater voice in the management of the company” (Kinzer, 2003). In response to the agreement, the Majlis created an eighteen-member committee to officially review the Supplemental Agreement. This upset the British, who immediately sent word to the shah that this must be suppressed. Though the shah acquiesced to the British, he was unsuccessful at stopping the committee. As Mossadegh was named head of the committee, he promptly put the item under review and, as everyone expected, denied the agreement:

Mossadegh did not care about dollars and cents or number of barrels per day. He saw the basic issue as one of national sovereignty...[which was] being undercut by a company that sacrificed Iranian lives for British interest. This is what infuriated him about the government's willingness to compromise—and it was what made him decide unequivocally that the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had to go (Kinzer, 2003).

Aside from his fiercely anti-foreigner stance, Mossadegh renounced the agreement in light of an agreement made at this time between the Arabian-American Oil Company (Aramco), which would divide all profits between the US and Saudi Arabia down the middle. As word of this agreement spread, nationalists began to grow angrier with the British, who they saw as a “corrupt ruling class”. One employee of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) wrote a letter to a member of the company's board of directors, Edward Elkington, saying the company needed to “recognize the awaking nationalism and political consciousness of the people of Iran” and show “tolerance for other people's views” (Kinzer, 2003). The people of Iran, meanwhile, called for nationalization of their oil. Mossadegh himself considered this, but ultimately thought it



farfetched; he decided to deal with the situation one step at a time. If they could remove the agreement from the table, they would begin to think about subsequent steps.

Knowing in advance how Britain would react, the committee added only one stipulation to the agreement: that the profit be split 50/50. Of course the answer was no, and when the Majlis sat down to vote they ended up voting to nationalize Iran's oil.

The British, now under a new conservative government headed by Winston Churchill, were not going to capitulate without a fight. They ordered Reza Shah to dissolve the Majlis. They also ordered him to hire a British-appointed official as prime minister. Additionally, the British appealed to the United States, urging President Truman to basically not speak out against their point of view (Kinzer, 2003). Finally, Britain rallied for worldwide support to boycott on Iranian oil. The plight of the British notwithstanding, the US *did* care if Iran nationalized its oil. In a show of support of the boycott, the US sent a letter to the American ambassador in Italy, which was showing interest in purchasing Iranian oil. The letter was a warning that British and American oil companies would “most likely resent it strongly, and remember it”. Moreover, the letter also mentioned America's aid toward restoration in Italy after WWII, stating that the “American people...might regard this as ungracious” (Kiddie, 1981). Despite the pressure applied by the US and Britain, Mossadegh was gaining in popularity. On April 28, 1951, he was voted in as prime minister of Iran. Mossadegh told the Majlis that he would accept the position of prime minister on the condition that they pass an act he had written up, which stipulated that a “parliamentary committee would audit Anglo-Iranian's books, weigh the claims of both sides for compensation, and begin sending Iranians

abroad to learn the skills to run an oil company” (Kinzer, 2003). This was an unexpected turn of events that angered the shah and took the British by surprise.

### Fear of Encirclement

The year 1950 was the peak of the Cold War. The US was engaged in the Korean War, fighting what the American government, as well as its people, saw as a “relentless communist advance”. To the American consciousness communism was spreading at an alarming rate:

Soviet power already had Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Communist governments were imposed on Bulgaria and Romania, Hungary and Poland...In 1949 the Soviet Union successfully tested a nuclear weapon. That same year, pro-Western forces in China lost their civil war to communists...From Washington it seemed that enemies were on the march everywhere (Kinzer, 2003).

Despite a meeting that took place at Potsdam two months after the end of WWII, in which leaders pledged allegiance to pro-democratic forces, the US was still not convinced. In response to a growing sense of insecurity, President Truman approved the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency. Its mandate, which would broaden greatly in the next five years, was to “carry out functions and duties related to intelligence affecting national security”. Moreover, the National Security Council drafted a document called NSC-68 that “asserted the need for the US to confront communist movements not only in regions of vital security interest, but wherever they appeared” (Kinzer, 2003).

America's worst fear was the consolidation of communist forces. They felt that if enough of Europe and Asia turned to communism, they would naturally bound together and turn against the US. In response to this fear, the US made plans to implement NSC-

68—to launch a preemptive strike against any country with even the slightest leanings toward communism.

### Planning a Coup

Still resisting the nationalization of Iranian oil, the British considered invading Iran. The US warned against this, urging that the Iranians could conceivably turn to the Soviets for help. This

concern was legitimized by the success of the communist Tudeh party under Mossadegh.

Britain subsequently implemented a plan to cripple Iran's economy by boycotting their

oil. The first step taken to carry this out was to sabotage the National Iranian Oil

Company's refinery in Abadan. In doing so, Iran was forced to advertise in Europe for

specialists who could lend much-needed assistance. British diplomats, however, made

sure that no specialists made it to Abadan. Additionally, they persuaded Sweden, France

and Germany would go along with this by denying visas to interested applicants (Kinzer,

2003).

The efforts of the British were effective. Iran's economy was suffering hugely by

the boycott and unemployment went up. Mossadegh's popularity held, but his hero status

was waning. As a final measure, Britain tried to get Mossadegh removed from power by

paying off members of the Majlis. The plan of the British was to “fill the Majlis with

deputies who would vote to depose Mossadegh...it would be a coup carried out by legal

means” (Kinzer, 2003). However, this did not work in Britain's favor. They again

suggested invading Iran, or even staging a “proper” coup against Mossadegh to the US,

but Truman was still staunchly opposed to taking such measures, and the British were not willing to carry it out without the US.

### Operation Ajax

When Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected president of the United States, Britain had a renewed sense of optimism for their plans for Iran. Whereas Truman was afraid how his participation in the overthrow of Mossadegh would reflect on his administration — as the plans were drawn up toward the end of his term — Britain felt that they could convince Eisenhower to see things their way. Furthermore, Eisenhower's election campaign was very conservative and fiercely anti-communist. The ensuing coup staged against Mossadegh was originated by British Intelligence, but was finalized and eventually carried out by the CIA. A British spy named C.M. Woodhouse was an agent who had been removed from Iran under Mossadegh. Because he had been involved with the conflict since the Supplemental Agreement Plan, he was one of the few who knew how desperately Britain wanted control of Iranian oil. But the British plight was unimportant to him. The American view was far more pressing. Woodhouse agreed that the more salient threat implicit in the continuing conflict was possible Soviet influence. In a statement written to Eisenhower and his CIA counterparts, Woodhouse said:

...even if a settlement of the oil dispute could be negotiated with Mossadegh, which was doubtful, he was still incapable of resisting a coup by the Tudeh party, if it were backed by Soviet support. Therefore, he must be removed (Kinzer, 2003).

Eisenhower agreed with this view. The plan drawn up by both government's intelligence — called Operation Ajax — entailed manipulating public opinion toward Mossadegh and

turning as many Iranians as possible against him: 1) paying off thugs to stage attacks on religious leaders and make it seem like they were ordered by Mossadegh; 2) meanwhile, military officers and politicians were bribed to be ready for whatever action was needed after the coup; 3) on the day of the coup, thousands of paid demonstrators would stage a massive antigovernment rally. The Majlis would subsequently respond with a “quasi-legal” vote to dismiss Mossadegh; and Mohammad Reza Shah would be restored as the State's monarch (Kinzer, 2003).

As it happens, the coup was disastrous. Because so many people were involved, and the elapsed time between confirming the key principles and execution was so long, Mossadegh became aware of the coup and was able to foil the plan. However, losing the element of surprise was only a minor setback. They staged another much less graceful coup a few days later, which included bringing the Iranian army to Mossadegh's home and literally chasing him away. He was found several days later and brought before a military tribunal where he was charged with “inciting the people to armed insurrection”. Of course this was not true. Nevertheless Mossadegh was sentenced to three years in prison and house arrest for life. In his appeal Mossadegh stated: “My only crime is that I nationalized the Iranian oil industry and removed from this land the network of colonialism and the political and economic influences of the greatest empire on earth” (Kinzer, 2003).

As planned, Reza Shah returned as monarch of Iran. The agent who is known as being primarily responsible for the success of Operation Ajax was named Kermit Roosevelt, the grandson of former President Theodore Roosevelt. He went to visit the shah afterward, and the shah poured two glasses of vodka, proclaiming: “I owe my throne

to God, my people, my army—and to you” (Kinzer, 2003). The Americans were pleased with their good work. But what they didn't know was that the power they handed to Reza Shah would create huge social and economic problems for Iran — and later for the US. What mattered to the US was that the perceived threat of a communist takeover in Iran was quelled.

### New Man in Charge

There were many things that changed as a result of Reza Shah's restoration. General Ardeshir Zahedi, the man who complied with the US and replaced Mossadegh as prime minister, was forced to resign from office. The shah consolidated his power, with the hopes of creating a dictatorial regime. He pursued this course with full support of the US, who gave him \$1 billion in the decade following the coup (Kinzer, 2003). Moreover, the shah ran Iran under a secular administration. This further consolidated his power, as it meant the ulema clerical class had lost any influence it was granted during the drafting of the constitution. Under his rule, the ulema “gradually lost all their seats in the Majlis” as well as “control of the educational and judicial institutions” (Moaddel, 1993). Any Iranians who had hopes for a continuing democracy in Iran were sorely disappointed. The shah secured his grip on every sector of Iran, stifling any sort of dissent and making deals with foreign companies that made him richer, without any significant benefit to the Iranian economy. The US and Britain did not step in or criticize the shah's regime because “American and British companies, Western governments and corporations felt safer with a centralized government under a pro-Western ruler” (Kiddie, 1981).

According to Monsoor Moaddel, “a combination of effective state repression, the growth of a radical faction among the ulema, and tactical errors, and disorganization” of secular political groups allowed for a mass conversion to Islam as an “alternative revolutionary ideology to both communism and national-liberalism” (Moaddel, 1993). As conditions worsened the shah's reforms meant to modernize Iran became increasingly unpopular by the people, as well as the ulema. Rather, people began to turn to Islam as a way to resolve Iran's problems. A movement began to emerge that espoused Islamic discourse and the overthrow of the shah. The main proponent of this movement was Ayatollah Khomeini, a shrewd and respected cleric. Khomeini called for an establishment of an Islamic government that would be under the control of a supreme religious leader:

It is the duty of Islamic scholars and all Muslims to put an end to this system of oppression and, for the sake of the well being of hundreds of millions of human beings, to overthrow these oppressive governments and form an Islamic government (Moaddel, 1993).

The subsequent Islamic Revolution, which emerged victorious on February 11, 1979, gave Khomeini free reign to expand the discursive field of revolutionary Islam. The early reforms he implemented included justifying the ulema's direct rule in society. This meant reconstituting the government in favor of the clerics—an Islamic Republic. Whereas previously the ulema had a recommendatory role on legislation, the new constitution established them as supreme religious leaders. Additionally, Khomeini removed the standard calendar used by the monarchy, replacing it instead with an Islamic calendar. The goal of this was to provide “a means to negate and contradict the ideology of the monarchy” (Moaddel, 1993). This turn of events was not expected by the US. It

would not be until the Clinton administration, forty-seven years later, that the US accepted responsibility for the 1953 coup that dramatically hindered Iranian political development. According to Iran scholar Mark J. Gasiorowski, “had the coup not occurred, Iran's future would undoubtedly have been vastly different”. Kinzer supports this, saying “the US role in the coup...was decisive for the future of US relations with Iran” (Kinzer, 2003).



## Chapter Two:

### Blowback

(1960-1980)

*“**Blowback** does not mean simply the unintended consequences of foreign operations. It means the unintended consequences of foreign operations that were deliberately kept secret from the American public, so that when the retaliation comes the American public is not able to put it in context, to put cause and effect together. This leads to questions like, ‘Why do they hate us?’”*

-Chalmers Johnson, CIA 1967-1973

#### Introduction

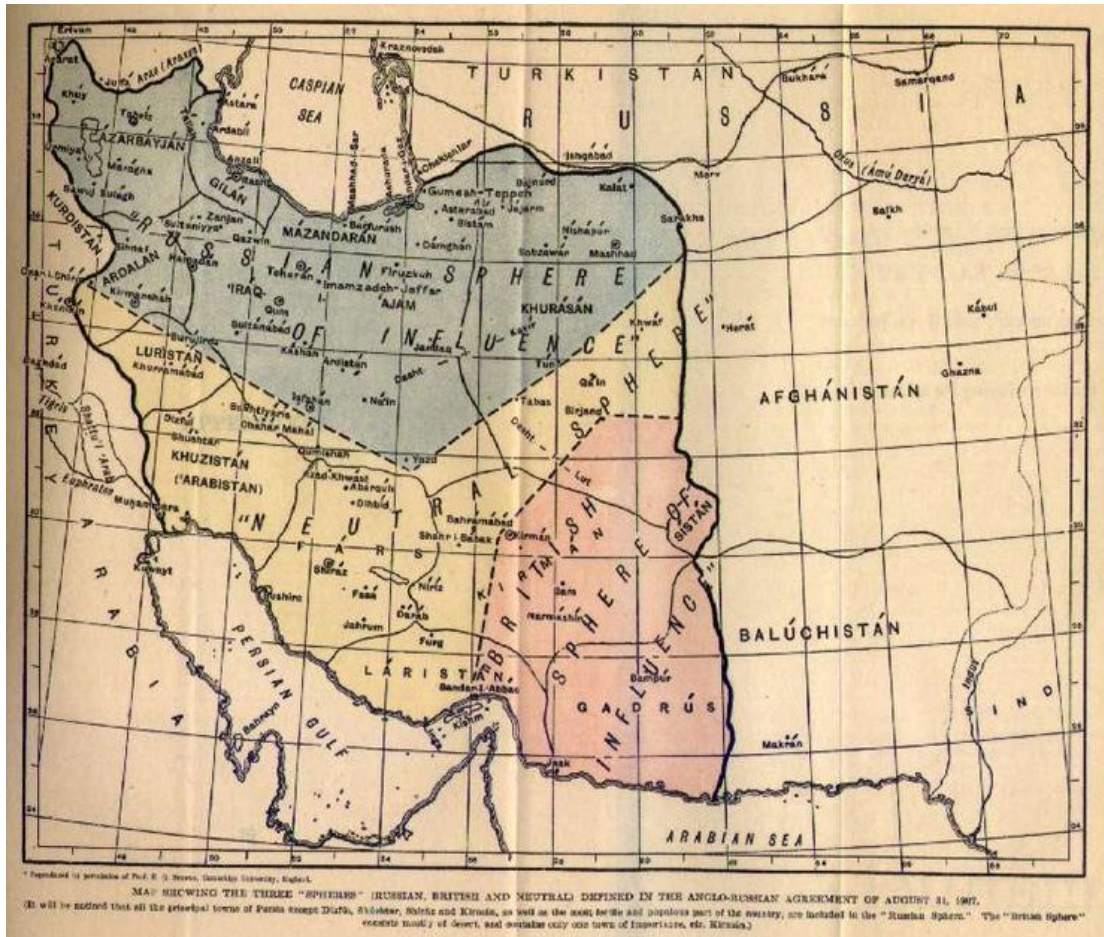
To this day a debate continues as to what exactly America’s motives were for initially intervening in Iran after World War II—which, to some, represents the beginning of US-Iran relations. Others, including many Iranians, consider the CIA’s overthrow of Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953 as the start of the long and checkered relationship. As was discussed in the previous section, Iran did initiate the first overture to the US to help assist in a land dispute between its two occupying powers, Russia and Britain. However, as the US inserted itself, its interests in Iran’s affairs—both politically and for its oil rights—began to take form over the course of several years, ultimately establishing a mutual dependency in which the US needed Iran as an ally in an important region, and

Iran needed the US in order to establish itself as a great power. The result was a revolution, in which America's dreams of having Iran as their "second pillar" in the Middle East was crushed; and a 444-day hostage crisis that stood as a testament to Iran's resentment of US intervention, which served as the event that would terminate any form of diplomacy between the two countries.

In this section I discuss US-Iran relations, post-Mossadegh. I also discuss social and political life under Reza Shah Pahlavi, including pivotal events that facilitated the Islamic Revolution of 1979. I pay close attention to the US embassy crisis of November 4, 1979, as it determined the future of US-Iran relations. One important event following the severance of diplomatic relations between the US and Iran was the Iran-Iraq war of 1980. Finally, I highlight the buildup of war between the neighboring countries, which was tacitly encouraged by the United States, and how it subsequently allowed the US to contain Iran.

### Forming U.S. Policy in Iran

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Iran was under the leadership of Reza Shah Pahlavi, whose objectives as monarch was to centralize the government and free Iran from foreign interest. The latter was unlikely, as Iran had been forced to cooperate with the two occupying powers, Britain and Russia. Iran's economy was divided: The British controlled southeastern Iran, which was the site of Iran's vast oil fields; and Russia had the northern territory. Whereas the British gave Iran a small percentage of the profit made from the oil produced, Russia established itself as Iran's primary trading partner.



An early map from the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. Under this convention, Persia, as it was then known, would be split into three zones: A Russian zone in the north, a British zone in the southeast, while the remaining land was a neutral “buffer zone”. Map courtesy of *The Strangling of Persia* (1912) by William Morgan Shuster.

This worked towards Iran’s detriment, as it ensured Iran’s dependence on an outside power. Reza Shah then decided to turn to the US for assistance: The US was the new hegemonic power, yet it did not have the long history of colonialism and imperialism that the previous great powers had. Reza Shah felt Iran could ask the US to intervene and force Russia and Britain to scale back its consumption of Iran’s resources. Ideally, Iran would establish a fairer agreement with both countries, while maintaining a higher level of autonomy, which would allow Iran to grow economically. The US accepted Iran’s request, and in 1942 formal talks began among the Great Powers. The US insisted that

Iran be able to operate with less restriction than Russia and Britain had been allowing. Showing deference to the new hegemonic power, Russia and Britain ceded, giving Iran more control over the use of its oil, and also allowing them to extend their trading with other countries.

The first special emissary to Iran was Patrick J. Hurley. Under Roosevelt, Hurley was sent to mediate the discussions between Iran, Britain and Russia. During his time spent in Iran, he began to see how Iran could be a strategic partner for the US. In a memorandum to Roosevelt, Hurley explained how the conflict between the Russians and the British could actually work in America's favor. He asserted that, in all probability, the two would cancel each other out, thus allowing the US to play a "strong, independent role in Iran" (Kuniholm, 1980). In assessing its options the US began to consider its interests with Iran. Also, as the Cold War was just beginning, the US began to have reservations about allowing Russia to stay in Iran:

American-Russian relations...were impeded not only by language, but by Russian standoffishness, and by the emerging belief that the Soviets were scheming to take over all of Iran" (Kuniholm, 1980).

In an expressed desire to promote "lasting peacetime conditions in Iran", the US put its support behind the British. In another memorandum, Hurley discussed how the US could "transform Iran's destiny" by becoming an ally of the US. Roosevelt was receptive to this idea, and continued developing policy in Iran.

It was proposed that the US must ensure peace and controlled autonomy of the Iranian monarchy, while also recognizing Iran's value as a supply route, its strategic location, and its abundance of petroleum. More importantly, US diplomats stationed in Iran pointed out that Iran "constituted a test case for the good faith of the United Nations

and their ability to work out among themselves an adjustment of ambitions, rights and interests which would be fair not only to the Great Powers...but also to the small nations associated with them". As the hegemonic power, the US alone felt responsibility for freeing Iran from the traditional Anglo-Russian rivalry. They sought to do this by encouraging an independent, positive program of economic and professional assistance that would reduce "postwar friction", and help make the principles of the Atlantic Charter effective.

In the early stages of implementing policy towards Iran, the US diplomats involved were unclear as to what these policies were supposed to achieve. Roosevelt felt that America's top priority should be to promote the American model of self-government and free enterprise—essentially an assumption that Western values would prevail, and the general welfare of Iranian people would be assured. If this were to work in Iran, then it would serve as a model to be used with all nations suffering from monopolies, aggression and imperialism (Kuniholm, 1980).

### Iran Under the Shah

The years following the overthrow of Mossadegh were bleak for Iran. The people were at the mercy of the power-hungry shah, who had taken steps to consolidate his power by eliminating any oppositional forces established during the Eisenhower administration. The Tudeh party, which was his primary supporter toward the end of his career, was disbanded by royal decree: of the captured members, 27 were executed, 134 were imprisoned for life, 119 were sentenced to 15 years in prison, and 115 were placed in

solitary confinement (Ramazani, 1987). It should be mentioned that the shah implemented these measures with full US consent.

Moreover, the US played a significant role in building up Iran's security and intelligence. In 1957, the US, British intelligence, and Israeli intelligence created SAVAK—the Iranian intelligence agency and secret police. SAVAK was the main arm of the Shah's repressive regime. Known for inhumane methods of punishment, SAVAK did not confine itself to physical torture: It also engaged in censorship of media and universities, shadowing, harassment, and other activities. Almost all of these methods were used against those considered to be intellectual dissidents, which included college professors, journalists, and activists. According to Ann Lambton, an Iranian scholar, anti-American sentiment was high from this point forward. She asserts that even British relations were preferred because “they at least bothered to learn Persian, and were by and large respected, if not liked”. America was accused of “throwing money about in Iran to little purpose and indeed of positively encouraging corruption”. The Americans themselves were aware of this sentiment, and it served as a catalyst for redoubling efforts to adopt a more “robust attitude towards their Iranian interlocutors” (Ramzani, 1987)

One event that reinforced this negative sentiment was the US push towards land reform in Iran. In 1960, the US impressed upon the shah that the country's social structure was in need of a “fundamental change if the new dynasty was to survive and not succumb to communism”. So began what is referred to as the White Revolution. This entailed an “exercise in *Bonapartism*”, in which “feudal tenants were replaced by small landowners with a vested interest in maintaining and defending the land, cultivating both economic regeneration and nationalism” (Ansari, 2007). The shah readily agreed to this because, as

he saw it, it would be an opportunity to disenfranchise the aristocracy and further centralize his power. But the outcome of the land reform was not quite what the US expected. The immediate result was the “alienation of both the landed aristocracy and the ulema”. Moreover, the reform proved to be detrimental to both the shah and the US:

Both groups had been essential to facilitating the overthrow of Mossadegh in 1953 and were vital to the domestic sustenance of the institution of the monarchy. In attacking them, the shah was alienating the pillars of his regime with a view to replacing them with a grateful enfranchised peasantry. He grew more dependent on the US, while America, increasingly divorced from alternatives in Iran, grew more dependent on him (Ansari, 2007).

As a result of US dominance and its policies in Iran, tensions began to surface. Mainly they lay with the various Islamic groups who felt Iran was drifting away from the teachings of Islam. Ayatollah Khomeini, an influential cleric that was exiled following the overthrow of Mossadegh, specifically disputed the separation between religion and government. As he saw it, though the clerics served as arbiters of legislation, their role was not substantial enough for an Islamic republic. In the mid-seventies he was living in France, but still had significant influence in Iran, where he had begun advocating for the overthrow of the shah and replacement by an Islamic state based on Islamic law (*Shari'a*), as well as the rule of *Faqit* (Islamic jurisprudence). Furthermore, Khomeini denounced the US, as well as the British, as colonialists, and rejected the contemporary international system of states: “the world is the abode of mankind under god. State entities were the creatures of man's limited intellect” (Ramazani, 1987). These sentiments resonated with many Iranians, who were desperate to get out from under the shah—and America's—rule.

## The 1979 Islamic Revolution

The 1970's represented a particularly robust decade of diplomacy between Iran and the US. Under the Nixon administration, Iran was heralded as equal to that of France and Britain, in terms of economic growth and income. The shah was welcomed effusively in the US, who encouraged Iran to invest in Western companies such as Mercedes and Krupp in West Germany. The shah also showed an interest in pursuing nuclear technology. Having already acquired a research reactor in 1959, the shah was encouraged by the US to expand his nuclear interests with an ambitious program for nuclear energy (Ansari, 2007). The US was interested in helping to bring nuclear technology in to Iran because it would provide Iran with a “diversified electricity supply” and facilitate the “release of more oil for sale abroad”. In 1974, the US signed a ten-year agreement to supply Iran with enriched uranium. That same year, Iran announced its intention to order five nuclear plants from France, and Britain offered to train Iranian nuclear scientists.

Despite its reassurances, behind closed doors the US held reservations about Iran's nuclear program. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger argued for the establishment of international collaborative agents to manage and oversee enrichment, “thereby preventing any one (developing) country from having an independent facility”. Therefore, in 1972 President Nixon established Iran as a policing power in the region. Additionally, he gave Iran *carte blanche* to buy “any military hardware it liked”. The shah was satisfied because he felt, for the first time in its recent history, Iran was getting the respect it deserved; and likewise, the US was happy because being an exclusive seller to Iran meant the military complex benefited from the shah's “extensive yearning for high-tech military



weapons”. Reported sales of military equipment in the US had amounted to \$10.4 billion between 1972-1976, making Iran the single largest purchaser of US arms (Ansari, 2007).

However, average Iranian citizens were not included in the newfound warmth that permeated Iran-US relations. As Iran experienced an economic boom from the burgeoning security and weapons sector, those that benefitted most were the American expatriates living in Tehran. But the American presence was weighing on Iranian people, who rejected the US on cultural as well as ideological grounds. American culture was equated to a Great Satan, who is considered in Islam to represent temptation. US culture, with its emphasis on material goods, represented material temptation in Iran. The shah, meanwhile, did not sense that anything was amiss.

In 1978 a mass uprising broke out, in which close to *7 million* Iranians turned out to protest against the current government. The slogans of the protestors were “Death to the Shah” and “Death to America”. The shah sent SAVAK, police and the army to neutralize any civil dissent, which bought him little time. Awaiting instructions from the US as to how he should proceed, the shah had no choice but to flee the country. Soon thereafter, Ayatollah Khomeini flew in from France to replace the shah as the Supreme Leader. Immediately after his return, Khomeini replaced Iran's secular government with a theocracy ruled by Islamic religious leaders called mullahs. The goal of the revolution, like that of the French Revolution, was to “reorganize the international order in its own image, liberating the oppressed through an export of its revolutionary ideals” (Ansari, 2007).

It is clear the US—wanting to leave a “limited human footprint” in its behind-the-scenes manipulation of Iran—overlooked several glaring warnings that revolution was

coming to Iran. First was the erroneous assumption that the shah's reforms, as dictated by the US, would inevitably stabilize the country. Savitz argues that by fostering a more open country, it was believed that these reforms would undermine any residual opposition to his government. There is in fact considerable evidence to suggest that the shah's reforms had actually accelerated his downfall. One reason is that the shah's reforms were more “cosmetic” than real: His goal was to appease domestic and international critics, rather than actually affecting change in Iran. Second, the state of peacefulness in Iran at the time (President Carter, just two years before the revolution, had toasted Iran as an “island of stability”) reflected just how little US diplomats knew about the situation on the ground. It is worth noting that it was known that dissent was brewing, but the US believed the shah to be “beloved and invincible”. As one CIA report indicated: “Iran is not in a revolutionary or even pre-revolutionary situation”. The US had put all of its efforts into ensuring that Iran did not fall to communism, and those in charge of Iranian relations failed to understand the significance of the radical Islamic movements taking place (Savitz, 2009)

Third, morale was low in Iran. The shah was seen as a puppet of the US, which “disillusioned Iranians about their ruler and who his supposed masters were”. Additionally, the growing populations of Americans living in Iran were viewed by many as “disdainful of Iran's culture, history, and people”. Rather than creating a sense of mutual understanding and tolerance, the exchange between Iranians and Americans “inflamed Iranian's” sense of being imposed upon by people who did not respect them. Lastly, and above all, the seemingly spontaneous nature by which the Iranian Revolution occurred demonstrates the limit of US intelligence. This was the case for several reasons. For

example, American officials conducting dealings with Iran rarely spoke Farsi; the fact that many well-educated, pro-Western Iranians (who were not representative of the population as a whole) spoke English was taken advantage of by American diplomats. Perhaps if Americans had made an effort to speak in the native language, they might have sensed the loss of confidence of many Iranians. Furthermore, Americans did not accept the unacceptable: diplomats, as well as the US government, refused to believe that unexpected developments—such as a revolution—could very conceivably occur (Savitz, 2009).

### Losing the Second Pillar

If the Islamic Revolution told the US that their policy in Iran was severely misjudged, a second incident—this one a direct affront to the US—casted them alone as the villain: the 1979 US embassy hostage crisis. The events that serve as a direct cause of the takeover is as follows: First, primarily responsible was the knowledge, which was common by this time in Iran, that the US had orchestrated the coup against Mossadegh in 1953. Remembered as a man that promised legitimate reform—defined by secularism and modernization, unlike the Shah's cosmetic reforms that benefitted only the US—and was then overthrown to suit the needs of the US and its irrational fear of the spread of communism, young Iranian students considered this the ultimate offense to their self-determination as a nation-state. Second, rather than flourish under its own constitutional democracy, the US supported the shah and his reforms, when it was clear that Iran was not developing as it should have been. The US, who claims to uphold the values of

democracy, always and everywhere, condemned Iran to live under a megalomaniacal monarch

that had no interest in modernizing Iran.

Lastly, when the shah fled Iran at the time of the revolution, he went into self-exile to Egypt, Morocco and Panama. In October of 1979 it had become widely known that the shah had cancer. He asked Carter that he allowed to come into the US for treatment. Knowing how this would look to Iranians, and the rest of the world, Carter did what many considered the decent thing, but not necessarily the right thing, and allowed him entry. As predicted, this enraged Iranians, who wanted the deposed shah to be tried in Iran. Carter's decision prompted a group of student radicals working under Ayatollah Khomeini to storm the US embassy in Tehran. They held 52 Americans hostage for 444 days, from November 4, 1979, to January 20, 1981.

This incident determined the contemporary view of Iran as a dangerously unstable state, whose actions have proven incompatible with American values. Partly in response to public opinion, the US changed its approach to dealing with Iran: whereas members of the informed American public generally agreed with Iran's rejection of US imperialism, the hostage crisis distinctly changed the mood from sympathy to that of anger. American media followed the crisis every step of the way: Americans organized vigils for the diplomats taken hostage, and a campaign of yellow ribbons were passed around as a sign of solidarity. Pressured for an immediate response, the first thing the Carter administration did was to sever all diplomatic relations. He then froze Iranian assets abroad, and imposed economic sanctions.

### Forming a New Policy for a New Iran

The role of the US in the ensuing Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) is a matter of much dispute. Having lost Iran so unceremoniously the previous year, the US was scrambling to find a new ally in the region to complement its ties with Saudi Arabia. The US reached out to Iraq's often-scandalized leader, Saddam Hussein. The principal actor pushing for war between Iran and Iraq was Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski. Though to this day Carter pleads ignorance to any discussions of promoting war, Brzezinski has been traced from numerous sources to having had correspondence with Hussein. To warm initial relations, Brzezinski suggested the US allow firms to do business with Iraq. He also advised the US to enter into agreements for oil exploration and exchange health-care equipment and airplanes (Fayazmanash, 2008). Iraq had at that point been blacklisted as a country that supported international terrorism. So when it did finally become known that the US was resuming diplomacy, the international community understood immediately what America's motives were in encouraging Iraq to start a war: to further destabilize the emerging Iran, now under the guidance of Ayatollah Khomeini.

In light of America's role in Iran since 1953, it is clear it was trying to dig itself out of a self-made hole. But in trying to goad Hussein to invade Iran, not only was the US digging itself even deeper: it was also unknowingly fraying future relations with both Iran and Iraq. If the US had simply allowed Iran to grow as it saw fit under its new Islamic regime, events may have turned out differently. As it happens Iraq did invade Iran, and the ensuing violence was that of a new level in warfare. One of the criticized tactics by which Hussein attacked Iran was the use of chemical weapons meant to seriously maim and disfigure those it came into contact with—worse even than that of

napalm in the Korean War and Vietnam. Hussein's unrelenting and unscrupulous attack on Iran yielded no condemnation from the US. In fact, on September 24, 1980, Carter publicly pledged not to intervene in the Iran-Iraq war by declaring: “Our own position is one of strict neutrality and we're doing all we can through the UN and other means to bring a peaceful conclusion to this combat” (Fayazmanash, 2008). But the US was clever in hiding evidence of its collusion with Iraq. It wouldn't be until soon after the Gulf War in 1991 that evidence of America's vital role in the war would be made public.

In 1984, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* revealed documents that provided undeniable truth that not only was the US instrumental in Iraq's war, but that they were well informed of Hussein's unethical approach. The newspapers stated that the US “knew in advance that Saddam Hussein was going to use chemical weapons against Iran, as well as exactly when they first started to use them”. Furthermore, the Reagan administration publicly condemned the use of chemical warfare, but “privately thought it was justifiable if Saddam Hussein's government survived”. The question of whether the US had given Iraq chemical compounds capable of developing such devastating weapons were also divulged at this time. The *Washington Post* reported that, in all probability, the US did not give Iraq fully formed poisonous chemicals; rather, they provided them chemical compounds that had many industrial and commercial uses that could be easily converted into poison gas (Fayazmanash, 2008).

In 1987 the UN Security Council drafted resolution 589, which was meant to end the war. However, Iran immediately rejected it, as it “said nothing about who started the war, how it began and why it had happened”. The resolution was clearly one-sided and in favor of Iraq. Iran requested that it be added that Iraq was clearly the aggressor, but the

UN refused to do so. Because of Iran's unwillingness to abide by resolution 589, the US then threatened to impose a worldwide arms embargo on Iran. In the end Iran capitulated. Khomeini's response showed just how demoralizing this was for Iran: he openly described signing the resolution as being “worse than swallowing poison”. This was a huge win for Iraq. But the real winner, of course, was the United States: Eight years of war had left Iran “so devastated in terms of human and economic losses that it could pose no serious challenge to the US and its client states, particularly Saudi Arabia and Israel” (Fayazmanash, 2008).

### Policy of Neglect

Upon examining America's past with ideologically opposed states, one can see how the “othering” of a country has given the US license to impose Western values supposedly meant to promote the welfare of its people and protect its right to self-determination. Most notably in US history, Russia had been branded as the “other” for their past commitment to communism. Since the end of the Cold War we have entered into a new era, and as such, a new “other” has emerged: America's foreign policy after 9/11 shifted the spotlight onto the Middle East. However, Iran was not immediately put under scrutiny. In a speech given by George Bush on January 29, 2002, he made reference to Iran—which had up to that time been largely cooperating in efforts to combat Al-Qaeda—as part of what he called the “Axis of evil”, along with Iraq and North Korea. It is worth mentioning that the inclusion of North Korea came largely—aside from being, in America's view, a recalcitrant state—from intelligence suggesting that it was providing Iran with nuclear technology. From Iran's perspective, they were surprised, and insulted,

to be bunched so haphazardly into the Axis. Until that point, Iran had been blacklisted due to its unwillingness to demonstrate the appropriate deference to American hegemony. And of course the events of the past cultivated an atmosphere of mutual distrust and, on some level, paranoia of the other.

However, what preceded this sudden interest in Iran was the US policy of neglect. This strategy sought to legitimize inaction through the “allocation of a recognizable brand name: a decision to perpetuate indecision”. The unofficial paradigm under the Clinton administration was that Iran could do as it pleased—still operating under various economic and arms sanctions—as long as it did not bother anybody else. Additionally, the appointment of Warren Christopher as Clinton’s Secretary of State made matters worse. Christopher was a veteran of the hostage crisis, having negotiated with Iranian captors, and many, including the media, saw his personal bias towards Iran as “unabashedly overt”. However, as the crisis was still fresh in people's minds, this was not given the attention it deserved. The US allowed personal antipathy to dictate policy toward Iran; and the policy of neglect grew stringent still (Fayazmanash, 2008).

In 1992 Christopher fiercely advocated for a sanction called the Iran-Iraq Non-Proliferation Act. The act stated that the US would “oppose and urgently seek the agreement of other nations to oppose any transfer of technology” to Iran. The veiled subtext of this act was meant to prevent Iran from acquiring technology that would enable it to develop biological or nuclear weapons. This act had larger implications for US policy towards Iran: it represented a paradigm shift that would influence the Bush administration and his branding Iran as a “rogue” state.



### Origin of the “Rogue State” in the Dominant U.S. Narrative

With the Cold War coming to a close in the early 1990s, the United States found itself with a fully formed defense apparatus that had been growing steadily since the 1950s, but with no one to direct it against. Policymakers entering the post-Cold War era had no clearly defined enemy, or *other*, against which security interests could clearly be defined. Additionally, reproductions of “prior ontological assumptions” persisted in dictating how US national security should be shaped. Suddenly finding themselves in an *uncertain environment*, policymakers drew upon “existing practices and policy goals to seek to maintain the status quo” (Homolar, 2012). Alexandra Homolar of the University of Warwick states that after the Cold War, the US defense community experienced a systemic shock that had significant impact on existing institutions, and the configuration of extant institutional arrangements that influenced how actors responded to structural crises:

While conflicts may suddenly come to an end and strategic opponents may literally disappear from the strategic map as the Soviet Union did in 1991, the infrastructure, institutions and networks that have been built up in preparation for armed conflict exert considerable staying power (Homolar, 2010).

Uncertainty is the biggest threat to national security. Therefore, in need of an *other* to direct its attention, the US began to recalibrate its national security narrative to a new enemy: Unstable Third World regimes seeking weapons of mass destruction. At the core of this fear is the perceived irrationality and unpredictability exhibited by regimes such as Iraq, Iran, Libya and North Korea, who were, in the 1990s, considered international “norm deviants” for their willingness to “employ WMDs and international terrorism to

achieve their goals”. Moreover, norm deviants were considered highly dangerous because it was believed that “they could not be influenced or contained by appealing to existing international standards of behavior”, especially as it relates to the development of nuclear or chemical weapons (Homolar, 2010). It did not take much effort to convince both Congress and the media—which in turn influences public opinion—that these unpredictable regimes were worth maintaining the existing defense budget. The Persian Gulf War of the 1990s was testament enough. But North Korea's bid for nuclear technology between 1992 and 1994 further clinched the deal. Take into account Iran's affront to the US in the early 1980s, and their history of acquiring nuclear technology with the assistance of the US and Britain in the 1970s, all of which served to galvanize support for a defense strategy against the Third World. Once the campaign was secured, policymakers began drafting guidelines by which to define a rogue state:

- Rogue states violate international human rights norms with respect to their own populations;
- Participate, if not independently engage or sponsor terrorism;
- Finally, rogue states seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction, as well as the means to deliver them across state borders.

Prior to the 1990s, “rogue” or “outlaw” governments were deemed as such based on their domestic politics, primarily as it relates to human rights violations, violent oppression on its own society, and were used to describe oppressive regimes including those of Pol Pot in Cambodia and Idi Amin in Uganda (Homolar, 2010). However, by the 1990s the use of the “rogue state” label gradually shifted away from the domestic politics of a regime, to their conduct to neighboring states: essentially, any state that threatened international stability engineered by the US during and after the Cold War became a chief threat to US national security—ergo, a rogue state. The use of state-sponsored terrorism

as perhaps the most important rogue criteria began during President Reagan's administration, as he began “rhetorically connecting the repressive nature of regimes that were viewed as hostile to the United States with sponsoring acts of international terrorism”. The linking of terrorism to rogue regimes represented a gradual shift in focus with respect to peripheral US security concerns, from concentrating on terrorist organizations per se to state-sponsored terrorism, and from the illicit conduct of domestic policy as the main criterion for a “rogue” in the international community of states, to the violation of behavioral norms in international affairs (Homolar, 2010).

The existence of rogue states, however, does not account for the reconfiguration of US threat scenarios during the 1990s. This new direction can be traced back to the “political bargaining processes among US policymakers over the future shape of the US defense sector”. Homolar asserts that this process began in response to:

Indications of a diminishing Soviet threat and a domestic political and economic climate in which Congress and the US public increasingly demanded the rethinking of US defense policy in general, and the reduction of military budgets in particular (Homolar, 2010).

But in order to establish a base of support for this new foreign policy strategy, policymakers needed a “overarching security narrative” that could serve as a persuasive rationale to justify and rally support behind this force-planning approach (Homolar, 2010).

Two episodes that were responsible for providing the support needed to show the importance of maintaining the Cold War era defense budget were the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and the North Korean nuclear crisis of 1993-4. These were crucial to the promulgation of the idea that Third World rogues represented the *principal threat* to US

national security objectives. Furthermore, both episodes stood as a testament to the force-planning community of potential regional instabilities in the less-developed world as the “conceptual foundations for determining size, structure and capabilities of the armed forces of the post Cold War era” (Homolar, 2010). Fostered by what Homolar refers to as “Catalytic Events”, Iraq and N. Korea helped evolve the rogue state security narrative from a peripheral security concern to the single greatest threat to US national security, “thereby providing a rationale that allowed US defense policymakers to align new threat scenarios with existing strategic models” as well as “furnishing a credible strategic rationale for resisting more radical restructuring proposals and deeper cuts to military spending” (Homolar, 2010).

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait provided an opportunity for the US to show that a military posture designed originally for military engagement with the Soviet Union could prove to be effective in combating threats “posed by Third World countries that were armed with advanced weaponry”. Second, it validated George H.W. Bush's decision to send a “heavy, mechanized ground force supported by air superiority fighters and precision fighter bombers” (Homolar, 2010). President Bush argued this was necessary, on the grounds that “the brutal aggression” by Iraq against Kuwait had confirmed his, and most of the defense community's, argument that “terrorism, hostage-taking, renegade regimes and unpredictable rulers, now constituent the greatest threat to US national security”, as well as the entire international system (Homolar, 2010). The Gulf War is important in the rogue discussion because it signaled the beginning of its application by key actors in the defense industry to describe potential Third World antagonists. More importantly, the Gulf War also legitimized the need for high defense spending:

The war in the Persian Gulf...provided an opportunity for members of Congress who were reluctant to agree to more extensive cuts in defense spending to emphasize that uncertainty would be the defining feature of the post-Cold War world, rather than a peaceful coexistence among nations. This involved a political struggle between competing narratives to define the nature of the post-Cold War era, the outcome of which has had long-term consequences for the making of US defense policy (Homolar, 2010).

On April 9, 1992, the Senate voted against a proposal brought forward by Senator J. James Exon (D-Neb) to cut Bush's military spending plan by around \$4.2 billion. This proposal was defeated because of the widespread Democratic resistance to deeper cuts in the defense budget. According to Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan), the reason why Democrats joined Republican Senators in rejecting deeper cuts to the defense budget was that past experience had demonstrated that “enemies like Iraq's Saddam Hussein arose unexpectedly” (Homolar, 2010). The Pentagon made efforts to tie Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait to a broader discourse on the threat of the use and proliferation of WMDs by a growing number of Third World countries. Hussein, then, became the scapegoat needed to fully convince any on-the-fence Congressmen of the time-sensitive nature of securing a defense budget. Once this was achieved, the US began applying it to other countries that may have fit the bill, even marginally.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this discussion is to understand where Iran fits in to the category of unstable rogue countries. In the list of rogue attributes listed above, it becomes clear that, conveniently, Iran has at some point satisfied each criterion. However, the hostage crisis

of 1979 allowed for the US to provide what it considered to be concrete proof on just how unstable and nefarious Iran—now under leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini—really was. Suffice it to say, at this time America's role in leading Iran to this point was largely unknown in the United States. Iran was headed in an uncertain direction, and the nascent theocracy was ill disposed to hide its contempt for the US, as well as anyone within Iran who challenged the Supreme Leader. This led to striking human rights abuses. Moreover, unlawful detentions, torture, and overall repression of dissent fell over Iran. And while it is quite indisputable that the US is largely responsible for this emerging Iran, the US also did nothing to mitigate the situation. Since then, the US severed all diplomatic ties with Iran, essentially writing it off as an enemy. Moreover, the US applied tough sanctions that affected Iran's oil and banking industries, in order to isolate it from the rest of the world.

This dynamic remained until 1995, when the US raised concerns about Russia's sale of nuclear technology to Iran. Though legal under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, of which both Russia and Iran are signatories, the US was uncomfortable with this relationship. It should be noted that it is “unlikely that the nuclear reactor built by Moscow” would allow Iran to develop a nuclear bomb simply because “of the low-grade nuclear material it would produce”, as well as Iran's “lack of necessary infrastructure for weapons production”. When pressed for its reasons for acquiring nuclear technology, Iran responded that its “motivations are entirely peaceful” (Zunes, 1997). This position has not changed in nearly twenty years.

Iran's bid for nuclear technology also supports other areas of discontent that has been a central tenet of Revolutionary Iran: Iran is a country with a rich history and, until recently, stability, and should therefore not be treated as unstable; Iran has many reasons

for wanting to be self-reliant, a prime example of which is the Iran-Iraq War of 1980 and the international community's deliberate inaction; In the opinion of Iran's leaders, there exists an asymmetrical power arrangement in the Middle East. The latter alludes to Israel's undeclared nuclear stockpile, the only one in the region. Iran has openly taken issue with what it perceives as a US-centric proliferation policy, in which the United States is in charge of handpicking which countries may or may not develop nuclear technology. This last point will be the subject of a larger discussion in the next section.

## Chapter Three:

### America's Role in Raising the Specter of Nuclear Proliferation

(1980-2012)

*“The irony of the present dispute between the West and Iran is that, for three decades up to the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the Europeans and American’s helped, in fact earnestly encouraged, Iran in the development of its nuclear program”.*

-Adam Tarock

#### Introduction

My goal in previous chapters has been to demonstrate how US intervention in Iran since the 1940s has ultimately created the 'rogue' state the world sees today. Briefly I will reiterate these points. The period between the 1940s-1960s illustrates how the seeds of the theocracy, lead by the ayatollahs, was sown in Iran. Largely responsible is the United States, whose support of Reza Shah Pahlavi after the 1953 overthrow of Mohammad Mossadegh ushered in a period of uneven development and growing social stratification in Iran. Economic reforms meant to boost the US economy, coupled with the dissemination of the sordid knowledge of America's role in installing the shah, caused a severe and multi-faceted backlash that provided a window for the clerical class (ulema) to seize the dissatisfied population's attention and encourage a 'rally round the flag'



movement, which ultimately gave rise to the ayatollahs. This also coincided with the beginning of the end of bilateral relations between Iran and the United States.

The second chapter—1960s through 1980s—highlights specific incidents that have created the state of dual intransigence that exists. One important event is the 1979 Islamic Revolution, in which 7 million Iranians called for the end of the shah's rule, resulting in the removal of US presence. The second event was the US embassy hostage crisis. This was perhaps the single most important event in terms of shaping the dominant US narrative of Iran as “deviant” or “rogue” state.

In this chapter, I discuss Iran's reasons for acquiring nuclear research and materials in the face of international opprobrium. I will argue that in order to fully understand Iran's position, it is necessary to understand which events were precipitating factors in Iran's current bid for nuclear technology. These reasons are, respectively, security, prestige, and imitation of Israel, the only country in the region that has gone nuclear.

Using Iran and Israel and case studies, I argue that both nations historically have commensurate reasons for pursuing nuclear capabilities, citing these similarities through background on each country's need for nuclear power. To frame my argument, I use Rene Girard's theory of mimetic desire, as explained by Vern Redekop in his book *From Violence to Blessing* (2002) in which he explains “we form desires by imitating the desires of others”. Moreover, “we not only imitate the behavior of others, but we have a deep impulse to copy the interiority of others” (Redekop, 2002). In using Israel and Iran's nuclear programs as case studies, it becomes apparent that it was not a decision reached arbitrarily by either country to acquire nuclear technology. Quite the contrary—there are

issues of security and deterrence, and international prestige, both of which fall under the rubric of mimetic desire.

In this section I demonstrate that Iran's nuclear program serves three purposes:

- *Security and deterrence*: during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons that were indirectly supplied by the United States on Iran. The results were striking and horrifying. Since the conflict, Iran's government has vowed never to be vulnerable as they were. In contemporary affairs, Iran's insecurity is far from assuaged since the deposition and death of Saddam Hussein. The threat now lies on the only nuclear country in the Middle East—Israel;
- *International prestige, status, and pride*: Iran is a country with a rich history that has, in its view, been stunted in terms of international participation. Acquiring nuclear capabilities, for whatever purpose, could “enhance [Iran's] prestige and status not only in military terms, but in other ways” (Alexander, 2004);
- Finally, I argue that Iran and Israel's bid for nuclear technology is a form of *Mimetic Desire*: Since the late 1950s Israel has been nuclear in an unofficial, or “opaque”, capacity. Though the US was initially reproachful of Israel's bid for nuclear arms, a deal was reached in which Israel was allowed to develop nuclear weapons with the help of France and Norway on the condition it had to maintain an undeclared status. Resentful of this uneven distribution of power, I argue that Iran currently uses Israel as the Model by which to replicate.

Dr. Jeremy Salt asserts that Iran perceives the current configuration of nuclear powers as an asymmetric power distribution, in which the US alone gets to decide which states are allowed to have nuclear capabilities, and which are not. The Iranian government considers this decree as “discriminatory treatment”, or “treatment [of Iran] as a second-class citizen” (Salt, 2012). Furthermore, Iran argues that it has historically been either a pawn for US interests in the region, or else deliberately brought into conflict in order to diminish its international standing. Similarly, Israel's need for a nuclear bomb stems from the shadow of the Holocaust: Israel wanted to ensure Jews were not as

vulnerable to an antagonistic third party as they were when six million Jews were brutally exterminated in World War II. Therefore, the argument could be made that Israel's nuclear ambitions were created as a response to surrounding Arab states that may have been planning a retaliatory attack on the new country on behalf of the Palestinians.

However, though this is a satisfactory argument, it is incomplete. In acquiring the bomb, Israel could not only use it for deterrence purposes, in a sense staving off any unwanted enemies, but also the bomb was important in securing Israel's credibility as a new country — in other words, elevating it to the status of a major international player. Iran, I argue, has been pursuing the same path to achieve the status of a respected world power. In short, Israel chose the United States as the Model by which to imitate in order to become a major international player in global politics. Likewise, Iran has chosen Israel as their Model. But as I demonstrate, there are many striking parallels between the events surrounding both countries' bids for nuclear technology; yet because of the protractedness of the US-Iran conflict, Iran has not received the same treatment Israel did when it began its nuclear program in the 1950s.

#### Israel's Nuclear Program (1958 – 1970)

The Israelis began constructing a nuclear center in 1958 in Dimona, a city in the Negev desert. The US would not become aware of this until 1960. Though virtually unconditionally supportive of Israel, the US attempted to discourage the Israeli government from a nuclear path. This reflected John F. Kennedy's foreign policy at the time — the Cold War — that stressed global nonproliferation. Israel's argument, however, was compelling and irrefutable: From the point of view of the US, Israel was a

“small and friendly state surrounded by much larger enemies [Arab states] vowing to destroy it” (Salt, 2010). The need for a nuclear arsenal, therefore, was justified. Israel determined that becoming a nuclear power, like the existing Great Powers, but specifically the US, was necessary for its security. According to Redekop, Israel’s determination to emulate the US is indicative of Mimetic Desire: “We choose Models to imitate. From them we pick up clues about the satisfiers necessary to meet our needs for meaning, action, connectedness, security and recognition” (Redekop, 2002). The US, however, felt Israel would be safer without nuclear arms than with them; this, again, goes along with the reasoning that one country with a nuclear arsenal may provoke others in the region to do the same. In 1967, around the time of the Six-Day War, the US learned that Israel had crossed the nuclear threshold. Lyndon Johnson sought to enlist Israel into the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a nonnuclear state, but Israel was resistant. In her essay “When an Ally Goes Nuclear: The Nature of the American Response to the Israeli Nuclear Program” (2007), Maria Zaitseva of Cornell University discusses the response of the US in learning that Israel, independent of the US, was developing nuclear technology. She labels the three stages of America’s response “Ambivalence”, “Bargaining” and “Acceptance”, which took place approximately between 1958 and 1970.

### *1. Ambivalence*

When the US first became aware of Israel’s secret nuclear program it was in its nascent stage. Israel provided verbal assurance to the US that its intentions were for “entirely peaceful purposes”; furthermore, it would serve to “develop scientific knowledge and thus to serve the needs of industry, agriculture, health and science”.

However, rather than turning to the US for materials, as Israel lacks the raw materials necessary to start a nuclear program, they imported them from France and Norway (Zaitseva, 2007).

## *2. Bargaining*

By the administrations of Kennedy and Johnson, the US began to devise ways to encourage Israel to abandon its nuclear program. The belief in the US was that it could exercise a certain amount of leverage over Israel, such as inspections of the Dimona nuclear facility, and the “linkage between the sales of advanced American military equipment and technology to Israel and the nuclear issue”. A third point of leverage was in the “security guarantees the US implicitly provided since Israel’s inception” (Zaitseva, 2007). Also at this time, the US Atomic Energy Commission began to question the true purpose of Israel’s nuclear program. In a memo to the State Department, it stated that:

The Israeli government had no intention to undertake the development of production of nuclear weapons but could not be expected bind themselves to an undertaking on this point forever, especially if circumstances changed (Zaitseva, 2007).

Regardless of the implications of this message, the US was intent on keeping the news quiet: More important than deterring Israel was making sure the surrounding Arab states did not learn of its nuclear program, as it might lead to certain Arab states feeling the need to go to the Soviets to supply them with nuclear weapons of their own (Zaitseva, 2007).

Utilizing the first mode of US leverage against Israel, the US requested an inspection of the Dimona facility. However, Israel retained strict control of the inspection, from “timing, access to specific areas, the choice of accompanying personnel, the length

of inspections, and permitted note-taking”. Unsurprisingly, the inspection yielded no evidence that Israel was developing nuclear weapons. According to Zaitseva, the reason US leverage fell short was due to the fact that Israeli scientists were denying access to any part of Dimona that would reveal incriminating evidence. She goes on to speculate that this was in fact part of a “semi-formalized charade” in which the Americans allowed themselves to believe they were “making headway in their attempt to thwart the Israeli nuclear program”. Israel, meanwhile, in an attempt to appease the US, formulated its official nuclear policy, stating it would “not be the first country to *introduce* nuclear weapons in the Middle East” (my emphasis). Far from appeasing the US, this policy further complicated the issue by obscuring the meaning of the word “introduction”. For the Americans it meant physical possession of nuclear weapons, whereas for Israel it meant the actual use of weapons in a conflict situation (Zaitseva, 2007).

### 3. *Acceptance*

There was little the US could do to deter Israel, so the US decided to uphold its undeclared nuclear status. Moreover, the US resolved to stop insisting in private that Israel sign the NPT; to lend public support for Israel's opaque position on the nuclear issue; not to pressure Israel to reveal its nuclear status; and not to couple the nuclear question with any other issues in the US-Israeli relationship, such as arms sales. Israel, on the other hand, promised the US that in return it would not “disclose publicly its nuclear status” and not to “test a nuclear device” (Zaitseva, 2007). This understanding was pivotal for US-Israeli relations, as well as America's current and future non-proliferation policy. Policymakers began to mitigate Kennedy's global proliferation norms to include strong democracies, arguing, “They are our friends and are like us, and can be trusted”. In

fact, the US seemed to change its position on nonproliferation altogether by deciding that “the increased ability of Israel to defend itself is important to the security of the United States”, adding that “a strong and self-sufficient Israel was...in line with American national interest” (Zaitseva, 2007).

Therefore, largely based on the decision to support Israel's undeclared nuclear program, the US continued promoting Kennedy's global nonproliferation agenda, but tailored it so that it became a decision based on a country-to-country basis, rather than an absolute policy. This shift did not go unnoticed by Iran, which, forty years later, would challenge the legitimacy of this policy. Iran's main argument is that the asymmetrical power distribution in the Middle East should not go on. In other words, if Israel gets a bomb, so should Iran. Redekop's discussion on *Selfness as a Function of the Self-Other Relationship* asserts that a “sense of what we aspire to...is formed in relation to the other and the appraisal of where we are...is likewise formed in relation to the other” (Redekop, 2002). In the case of Iran, Israel's possession of nuclear technology became the Model to which it should aspire to replicate.

#### Iran's Nuclear Program (1960 – 1980)

Iran's pursuit of nuclear capabilities goes as far back as the 1960s. Ironically, the United States was the first country to help Iran acquire nuclear technology: It supplied Iran with a five-megawatt research reactor that began operation in 1967. In 1968 Iran signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and ratified it in 1970 (Ozcan, 2009). Article IV of the treaty recognizes the signatory's ‘inalienable right’ to “develop research, production and the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination, and to

acquire equipment, materials and scientific and technological information” (Tarock, 2006). US encouragement of an Iranian nuclear program can be attributed to the fact that Iran had strategic importance: Iran had 200 miles of common border with the USSR and it was viewed as an important shield against communism in the region. It is noteworthy to mention that Israel supported Iran’s nuclear ambitions, which made Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia “the pillars of the Western powers in the Middle East, with the latter two reliable suppliers of oil to the West” (Tarock, 2006).

From the perspective of the US, Iran, under the US-installed shah, was a good candidate for receiving assistance in acquiring the technology necessary for producing nuclear energy, and thus “reducing its own energy needs for oil reserves”. Preserving Iran’s vast oil reserves was of vital importance to the US, which encouraged Iran to expand its non-oil energy base because “Iran needed not one but *several* nuclear reactors to acquire the electrical capacity for its industrial development”. Additionally, Iran made an agreement with German and French contractors: Germany’s Kraftwerk Union agreed to build two 1,200-megawatt reactors at Bushehr, while a French company agreed to supply two 900-megawatt reactors. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology also signed a contract with the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) to “train the first cadre of Iranian nuclear scientists in 1975” (Ozcan, 2009). According to declassified confidential US government documents, President Ford and the shah reached in agreement, called “The US-Iran Nuclear Energy Agreement” (1978), by which the Iranian government planned to purchase eight nuclear reactors for electricity generation purposes (it should be noted the agreement was started under President Ford but carried out during the Carter administration). The agreement was designed to “facilitate Iranian-



American nuclear cooperation, including the purchase of equipment and material from the United States and help in the search for uranium deposits” (Ozcan, 2009).

However, Iran’s nuclear ambitions were scrapped along with the dissolution of US-Iran relations following the Islamic Revolution. The primary factor contributing to Iran’s decision to abandon its nuclear program was the political upheaval that took place before and after the revolution. Both the first prime minister after the revolution, Mehdi Bazargan, as well as Ayatollah Khomeini, concluded that Iran did not need nuclear energy and discontinued the project. By 1979, Iran had had one nuclear reactor, Bushehr 1, which was at 90 percent completion, with 60 percent of its equipment installed; and Bushehr 2 was at 50 percent completion. During the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq bombed Iran’s nuclear reactors and research centers six times. Iran’s isolation notwithstanding, Iran’s need for electricity expanded after the war. President Rafsanjani tried to revive the nuclear program, seeking international technical assistance and collaboration from Germany, Argentina, Spain, Poland, Italy and the Czech Republic. These attempts, however, were “prevented by the United States as part of the dual-containment policy” (Ozcan, 2009).

#### Iran’s Reinvigorated Interest in Nuclear Development

The 1980 Iraqi invasion in Iran was the result of Saddam Hussein’s fear of how the new Shi’a Islamic order that had come to rule Iran would affect Iraq’s internal situation, given Iraq’s “Shi’a majority and the existence of [the *Da’wa*] that sought to overturn Baathist rule by violent means”. Additionally, Iraq saw Iran’s new theocratic regime as being vulnerable due to the nascence of its transitional government, and attempted to shape

Iran's politics to Iraq's advantage (Hilterman, 2010). Though Hussein's ambitions were ultimately fruitless, it is nonetheless important to emphasize how unrelenting his efforts were to undercut the new regime in Iran, as well as how it helped shape the Iranian sense of isolation and the need to become self-sufficient. Worst of all, from Iran's perspective, was the knowledge that the US indirectly supplied Iraq with the capability to develop chemical weapons. The US also supplied Iraq with key intelligence that allowed the Iraqi armies to direct chemical strikes more effectively at Iranian staging areas (Hilterman, 2010).

Finally, there was the inaction of the international community: "There were perfunctory condemnations by the UN, which, when it either could not or would not identify the culprit". For Iran, this was the latest in a series of "Western-instigated attempts to thwart its ambitions in the Gulf" (Hilterman, 2010). This was viewed as retaliation from the US, along with the broader international community, for Iran's perceived intransigence, specifically in ejecting the US from the country, thus spoiling America's grand plans for Iran. According to Joost Hilterman, the global silence surrounding the atrocities being perpetuated by Saddam Hussein, sanctioned and aided by the US, is "particularly unconscionable, but perfectly understandable when one considers Iran's ostracizing (Hilterman, 2010).

One could also view the Iran-Iraq war as another unexpected consequence of US intervention. Hilterman asserts that Iran, rather than protesting the lack of assistance from the international community, utilized it as a means to rouse a sense of national cohesion:

Having no true choice, Iran turned its sense of abandonment into a badge of honor and an opportunity to mobilize support for the regime, foster economic self-sufficiency and develop

its own defenses in the absence of international enforcement of Iraq's treaty obligations, for example, those pertaining to chemical warfare (Hilterman, 2010).

The unintended consequences, or blowback, have been multifaceted. In an attempt to contain Iran by choosing to support the Hussein regime, the US did three things: (a) diminished its credibility as a peace-seeking nation by providing Hussein with chemical components used against Iranians; (b) encouraged the introduction of a new and dangerous generation of chemical agents on the battlefield; and (c) set off a race between Iran and Iraq to develop biological and nuclear weapons (Hilterman, 2010).

In light of this, the conflict between Iran and Israel is considered a large factor in Iran's nuclear ambitions. But as I have demonstrated, Iran's need to acquire nuclear capabilities is symptomatic of other deep-rooted issues. It also points to what Redekop describes as mimetic rivalry. Essentially, he states that mimetic rivalry begins with mimetic desire: The international community is refusing to allow Iran to join the Nuclear Club, of which Israel is a member. According to Redekop, the Model (Israel) is closely identified with the object it "jealously keeps for [itself]", which leads to a "self-sufficiency and omniscience that the subject can only dream of acquiring". The end result, Redekop concludes, is that the "object is more desired than ever". Furthermore, "the object becomes a satisfier to *identity* needs—the object must be acquired for one's identity to be complete" (Redekop, 2002).

To further intensify Iran's insecurities, in 2001 the US invaded Afghanistan and in 2003 invaded Iraq, stationing troops along Iran's eastern and western borders. Hilterman argues that the decision to place US forces along the borders was for the purpose of instilling a sense of encirclement in Iran (Hilterman, 2010). Additionally, in his State of

the Union address in 2002, George W. Bush included Iran in his “Axis of Evil” along with Iraq and North Korea. Finally, the invasion of Iraq is indicative of America’s willingness to launch a preemptive strike in order to prevent the proliferation of WMD. However, to many of the hardliner members of Iran’s government, nuclear capability is essential to serving as a “guarantor of the nation’s independence and the regimes survival”. The aim of acquiring such a capability would be to deter the US and Israel before they can bully the Islamic Republic (Hilterman, 2010). Using Redekop’s theory, as the mimetic rivalry escalates, the issue becomes a question of “those who are dominated and those who dominate”. By this logic, having nuclear capabilities is a way to prevent this type of bullying from taking place. However, the drawback is that this type of relationship can never achieve stability; the rivalry will only escalate into violence (Redekop, 2002).

### Conclusion

My aim in this section is to draw parallels between the Israeli and Iranian bids for nuclear technology. Both emerged out of deep-rooted insecurity, yet the origin of Israel and Iran’s insecurity varies; so too does the response from the United States. Israel’s insecurity came from nearly each of its neighbors, all Arab states, after its triumph in the Six Day War. The US was initially reluctant to accept a nuclear Israel, but eventually acquiesced, as illustrated by Zaitseva’s discussion of the three phases of America’s response over a period of twelve years. Iran, on the other hand, has historically never been an instigator of conflict or violence; it was rather unwillingly brought into conflicts, withstanding violence and instability for the purpose of serving US national interests.

The examples in this section chart the rise of Iranian suspicions of US motives after the coup against Prime Minister Mossadegh, ushering in a period of civil and political stagnation. It also shows the development of Iran's feelings of insecurity and isolation: The eight years during which Iran had to endure Iraqi attacks left the country with deep traumas that have since instilled the idea of nuclear capabilities as a necessity for future security. Moreover, the inaction from the international community established that Iran would have to become self-sufficient, which gave rise to the use of Israel as the Model to which Iran should aspire to become. Despite Iran's justifiable claims for protection, the international community has denied Iran from developing nuclear technology, even for civilian purposes, citing the bellicose comments made by President Ahmadinejad regarding the validity of Israeli nationhood as a legitimizing reason to believe Iran intends to develop weapons of mass destruction, and use them against the state of Israel. Far from making an opinion as to whether or not the international community *should* allow Iran to develop nuclear technology — either unchecked or contained — it is worth noting the striking similarities between Iran and Israel's nuclear programs.

## Chapter Four:

### Nuclear Iran: The Biggest Threat to U.S. National Security

*“Ten years after the beginning of the nuclear talks between Iran and the West, each side is trying to set the stage for blaming their possible failure on the other while at the same time insisting that the only way to deal with the crisis is through negotiation”.*

-Mohsen Asgari

#### Where Should The Red Line Be Drawn?

In August of 2012, Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney paid a visit to Israel's President Shimon Peres and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. His timing was auspicious: Israel was becoming impatient with Obama's resolve to continue to apply pressure on Iran through the implementation of crippling sanctions. As Netanyahu was quoted in saying: “Neither sanctions nor diplomacy has yet had any impact on Iran's nuclear weapons program”. Though he has been very cautious about openly criticizing Obama on foreign soil, Romney has pandered to his conservative Jewish constituency by standing by Netanyahu and declaring that Obama's strategy is too soft, adding that he

would “respect any decision taken by Israel on the matter [of Iran] if he is elected” (RT, 2012).

My goal in this section is not to display a partisan slant. Rather, it is to conduct a discourse analysis on both presidential candidates, as well as the opinions of some notable policymakers and scholars. The difference between both parties' approach when dealing with Iran and Israel can be attributed, quite plainly, to the upcoming election. Moreover both candidates' attempt to secure the all-important Jewish vote—of which Israel is instrumental in convincing the various American-based groups, such as the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). I will state, however, that, though I fundamentally disagree with both candidates' stance on Iran, I believe the rhetoric espoused by Romney and Netanyahu is inflammatory and implicitly encouraging the path of warfare as the only option in dealing with a nuclear Iran. Obama's decision to continue with diplomatic means to exert pressure on Iran is, in my view, the lesser of two evils. Romney's support of Israel's preemptive attack strategy will have deleterious results that will only perpetuate the series of unintended consequences that the US has had to face. Mike Mullen, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, echoes this concern: He was quoted in 2010 saying a military strike on Iran would be his “last option”, and has warned of the unintended consequences of such a strike (BBC, 2012). Moving forward with Obama's plan will at least maintain the current standoff, rather than ushering in a new period of escalation and uncertainty. Former defense secretary Robert Gates had stated publicly that an attack on Iran would be detrimental to US interest, explaining it could “prove catastrophic, haunting us for generations in that part of the world” (BBC, 2012).

At the 67<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly meeting, held on September 27, 2012, Prime Minister Netanyahu took the stage and immediately launched into a speech, of which the underlying message was that Israel has historically had many enemies, those who have sought to destroy it, but never to any avail. Iran is the new aggressor. In using a diagram of a cartoon-like bomb, Netanyahu demonstrated in simple terms the urgency needed by the international community in creating a limit for just how far Iran should be allowed to go in developing nuclear materials. In his speech he described the three phases of uranium enrichment: 1<sup>st</sup> stage is low grade; 2<sup>nd</sup> stage is medium grade; and the final stage is high-grade uranium, which is enough to create a weapon. According to Netanyahu, whose information he states comes from the reports of the IAEA, Iran is currently at the second stage, concluding that by spring/summer of 2013 they will have

finished the medium enrichment, and moved onto the final stage. From there it's only a few months, possibly a few weeks, before they get enough enriched uranium for the first bomb (UN General Assembly meeting, 2012).

Netanyahu then asks, "Where should the red line be drawn?" He went on to draw a line between the second stage and final stage and declared:

Before Iran completes the second stage of nuclear enrichment necessary to make a bomb. Before Iran gets to a point where it's a few months away or a few weeks away from amassing enough enriched uranium to make a nuclear weapon. Each day that point is getting closer...that is why everyone should have a sense of urgency (UN General Assembly meeting, 2012).

The red line, of course, represents the threshold at which the US must take a stronger stance on Iran—in other words, when diplomacy has been exhausted and use of force becomes necessary. According to Netanyahu's speech to the UN General Assembly,



military action will become necessary by spring or summer of 2013. This at least is an improvement from earlier claims from Israel that an attack on Iran was imminent before the end of the year (see War Dial discussion from Introduction). It also says that, though Israel may be giving the US time to heed its warning, Netanyahu is not “backing down an inch on his insistence that much harsher warnings must be delivered to Tehran” (BBC, 2012).

### Power Begs to be Balanced

At this point the central question is whether Iran—assuming it develops a nuclear bomb in the timeframe outlined above—would launch a preemptive attack on Israeli soil. Are Israel's fears legitimate? Does Iran pose an existential threat to the state of Israel? And finally, does the United States share Israel's unshakable certainty that Iran will launch an attack if it develops nuclear weapons? Going back to the earlier discussion of the origin of Israel's nuclear development program (see historical background, section three), Israel currently has a regional nuclear monopoly that Iran has claimed creates an asymmetrical power imbalance—allowing Israel to be the sole nuclear power in the Middle East. In a recent article from *Foreign Affairs* titled “Why Iran Should Get the Bomb”, author Kenneth Waltz asserts that such power imbalances reduces the chance of regional stability, whereas “by reducing imbalances in military power, the new nuclear states generally produce more regional and international stability, not less” (Waltz, 2012). Waltz goes on to point out “in no other region of the world does a lone, unchecked nuclear state [such as Israel] exist.” Moreover, this arrangement has “long fueled instability in the Middle East”.

There has never been a full-scale war between two nuclear-armed states. If Iran were to acquire the bomb, deterrence would be the likely motive. Waltz urges the international community and policymakers to take comfort from the fact that “where nuclear capabilities emerge, so too does stability” (Waltz, 2012). This, of course, follows the assumption that the Ayatollahs and the president are rational actors. According to Waltz, Israel's fear of Iran is unfounded, which he claims is “distorted by misplaced worries and fundamental misunderstandings of how states...behave in the international system”. This analysis supports my broader argument, in which I assert that unfounded fears and misunderstandings are bound to occur when there is no dialogue between two (or in this case three) states. Perhaps it is unlikely to expect Israel to sit at a negotiating table with Iran, but the US is arguably in a better position to negotiate Iran's nuclear status. However, more than thirty years of punitive measures and a lack of sustained engagement have made this prospect seem daunting. This said, it has been difficult for the US to gain a clear picture of the goings-on in Iran. The US would have a much clearer idea if the relationship between the two states participated in direct-engagement. Transparency would perhaps also help to dispel the irrational actor model which the US and Israel believes is driving Iran's decisions.

Looking at the discourse analysis of Republican candidates and Israel's leaders, it is clear the irrational actor model, as discussed in the rogue state discussion in chapter two, prevails, and US and Israeli officials tend to portray Iran as being irrational and insulated from reality, which has allowed them to argue that the logic of nuclear deterrence does not apply to the Islamic Republic (Waltz, 2012). Furthermore, the position of the international community remains that if Iran acquires nuclear weapons it

would “not hesitate to use it in a first strike against Israel, even though doing so would invite massive retaliation and risk destroying everything the Iranian regime holds dear” (Waltz, 2012). Yet, as the Washington Institute for Near East Policy's Michael Einstadt notes, the perception of Iran as irrational and undeterrable is “both anachronistic and wrong”. While Iran's revolutionary leadership has repeatedly supported Islamic militancy and used violence abroad to promote its ideological agenda, “Iran has also demonstrated a degree of caution, sensitivity to costs and the ability to make strategic calculations when the regimes survival is at risk” (Kahl, 2012). While a lack of dialogue makes it impossible to truly understand Iran's intentions, and Iran's inflammatory rhetoric tends to suggest an underlying aggression, it is much more likely that acquiring nuclear weapons would be for the purposes of security rather than improving its offensive capabilities, which would be an act of self-destruction. In short, despite Iran's bellicosity, the belief that the Iranian regime is irrational to the point that it would launch a suicide mission in attacking Israel is not a palatable reason for escalation. Iran, like every other nation, acts to secure its own preservation (Waltz, 2012).

According to Paul Rogers, in a proposal he authored for the Oxford Research Group, titled *Iran: Consequences of War*, the perception of Iran as a major threat to the US stems from the Iranian Revolution of 1979: How the Iranians could have coordinated such a massive effort—in the form of a revolution—under the nose of the US, and the US-installed shah, confounds the US to this day. As I have already discussed in previous chapters, having Iran as America's second pillar in the Gulf meant a guarantee that US interests in the region was secure:

After the sudden regime collapse, followed by the traumatic impotence of the United States during the hostage crisis, and

bitter antagonisms to the US demonstrated by the Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini, meant Iran was henceforth a direct and persistent obstacle to US regional interests (Rogers, 2006).

To be clear, by “regional interests” it is safe to assume that the Gulf's vast oil reserves, as well as America's increasing dependency on foreign oil, is at the bottom of it. This directive has not changed since WWII, when the US became increasingly aware of its depleting domestic oil reserves. It is a large part of US intervention in Iranian politics in the early 1950s, which resulted in the overthrow of Mossadegh and the installation of the shah. Gulf oil is only becoming more desirable, and not just to the United States: China, a formidable runner up for global hegemony, is also in need of access to foreign oil reserves. Having two of the strongest countries vying for access is going to make the Gulf region of profound geopolitical significance in the next thirty years (Rogers, 2006).

#### Consequences of a Strike on Iran

Considering Netanyahu's implicit demand that military action should be taken against Iran by spring or summer of 2013, there is a very real chance this may actually happen. Many scholars and practitioners disagree, and so do I, but it is nevertheless important to understand what is meant by launching an attack on Iran. Furthermore, what will the consequences be of a strike on Iran? Who will be involved? And how will this affect the current geopolitical climate?

There are two reasons for the US initiating a strike against Iranian nuclear facilities. One would be to damage the overall program so that any plans to develop nuclear weapons would be delayed by several years. The second is more symbolic: to

make it clear to Iran that the US is prepared to take “significant preventative military action” against Iranian activities that “it might find unacceptable” (Rogers, 2012). The problem with both of these scenarios is they are contingent on military action. This means once a precedent is set by which military action is used, it would be “virtually impossible to maintain any relationship with Iran except one based on violence”. President Obama's reluctance to do as Netanyahu suggests and draw a red line indicates that he may very well agree that instigating violence would set off a dangerous series of events; namely, full-fledged war, a global economic crisis, increase in the price of oil, and an arms race in the Middle East.

Matt Kroenig, a Stanton Nuclear Security Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, is perhaps one of the strongest proponents of launching a strike on Iran's nuclear facilities. In an article published in *Foreign Affairs*, titled “Time to Attack Iran” (January/February), Kroenig asserts that a military strike, if managed carefully, could “spare the region and the world a very real threat and dramatically improve the long-term national security of the United States” (Kroenig, 2012). Kroenig explains the problem is not that Iran will launch a suicidal attack on Israel, but rather that the “volatile nuclear balance between Iran and Israel could...result in a nuclear exchange that could draw in the US”. This contradicts Waltz's argument, which states that proliferation would actually create a balance. Kroenig, then, asserts that Iran obtaining the bomb would necessarily result in an escalation of the current conflict.

Kroenig believes the US must conduct a “surgical strike”, in which Iran's nuclear facilities are the primary targets. One problem with this recommendation is that Iran's nuclear facilities are dispersed across the country and buried deep underground.

Additionally, whether deliberate or not, Iran has placed its nuclear facilities near civilian populations, which, Kroenig admits, “Would almost certainly come under fire in a US raid”. Furthermore, any attack on Iranian nuclear facilities will be a surprise attack, which will catch many people—be they civilian or military—unaware and unprotected; there will be no opportunity for people to move away from likely target areas (Rogers, 2006). Faced with this decision, Kroenig concludes that it is in America's best interests to carry out a surgical strike, and “absorb the inevitable round of retaliation, and then seek to quickly de-escalate the crisis”. Kroenig's logic rests on the assumption that an attack now, before Iran actually has a weapon will “spare the US from confronting a far more dangerous situation in the future” (Kroenig, 2012).

Contrast Kroenig's pro-military position to Dr. Colin Kahl, a Senior Fellow at the Center for New American Peace. In an article titled “Not Time To Attack Iran” (March/April 2012), which directly challenges Kroenig's piece, Kahl asserts that Kroenig's vision of a clean, calibrated conflict “is a mirage. Any war with Iran would be a messy and extraordinarily violent affair, with significant casualties and consequences” (Kahl, 2012). Kroenig has said that in order to mitigate the attack, the US must be explicit that it is targeting only the nuclear facilities and *not* overthrowing the government. Kahl counters this by pointing out that the leaders of Iran have “staked their domestic legitimacy on resisting international pressure to halt its nuclear program”. Therefore, the Iranians would “inevitably view an attack on that program as an attack on the regime itself” (Kahl, 2012).



Iran's key nuclear sites. Large civilian populations surround many of these facilities. Courtesy of BBC news, 2012.

The goal of a military strike would be to set back Iranian nuclear potential for several years. The best way to do this is to a) destroy as much of the nuclear facilities as possible; and b) kill the most competent scientists. The latter would have a much more substantial impact of any efforts to redevelop nuclear capabilities. Moreover, since it is known that many of the scientists working in Iran are foreign nationals, it would serve as a deterrent to the involvement of others in the future (Rogers, 2012). However, Rogers lays out all of the possible Iranian responses to a strike on its soil:

### **Redevelopment of Nuclear Program**

A preemptive strike on Iran may push the Iranians to withdraw from the Non-proliferation treaty. This can lead to them reconstituting the damaged infrastructure and working quickly and secretly toward redeveloping it in a more survivable manner. This

means that prior to an attack it would have been conceivable that the Iranian regime would settle for a “threshold nuclear capability instead of a fully-weaponized arsenal”, but if an attack occurs, “any prospect of Iran's stopping short of a fully-weaponized arsenal would probably vanish”, which would almost certainly guarantee an overtly nuclear-armed Iran for decades to come.

### **Strait of Hormuz**

In January of 2012, the EU nations agreed on an oil embargo as part of the sanctions over Iran's nuclear program. In response to the embargo, Mohammad Kossari, deputy head of parliament's foreign affairs and security committee, issued a statement declaring that if any disruption happens regarding the sale of Iranian oil, Iran would see to it that the Strait of Hormuz would be closed. The international community responded by carrying out naval exercises meant to display not only its unparalleled military superiority, but also the consequences that would follow any disruption of traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, which accounts for 40 percent of the world's seaborne oil exports.





The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow channel that can be easily blocked to disrupt the sale of oil around the world. The Strait of Hormuz accounts for 40% of the world's seaborne oil exports. Map courtesy of BBC news.

*This time* Iran backed down. However, if Iran were to undergo an attack, there is no guarantee that it wouldn't repeat the threat to shut down the route, but this time it would have nothing to lose, since the initial attack already occurred. If Iran managed to even temporarily disrupt the flow of traffic, oil prices would increase. As Kahl explains, the oil market is and has been in a very precarious state, but “even in the absence of such escalation, a preventive or US strike could rattle markets and push oil prices higher at a fragile time for the global economy” (Kahl, 2012). In order for the US to ensure that the

oil market is not affected by the conflict, Rogers explains that the operation would have to be “near total in its effect on Iranian capabilities”, which would be “difficult if not impossible to achieve” (Rogers, 2006).

### **Hezbollah**

Iran could also be expected to activate its proxies in Southern Lebanon. According to Rogers, this would be an almost immediate response on the part of Iran. The result would be calamitous. Hezbollah is in possession of surface-to-surface missiles with a range equipped to reach most of Israel, including Dimona, thirteen kilometers southeast of the Negev Nuclear Research Center. Israel, of course, is aware of this and would respond immediately.

### **Revolutionary Guard**

An attack on Iran would almost certainly result in a 'rally round the flag' effect in Iran. Most likely the first attack would be against Guard facilities, as a way for the US to warn them to step down, “the effect would be short-lived, and the links which already exist between Guard units and Shi'a militias would be activated rapidly”. Such Iranian involvement in the Iraqi insurgency would result in an

escalating US military response involving cross-border attacks on Iranian logistics. This would increase Iranian civilian casualties, cause economic disruption and also further increase internal Iranian support for the current regime (Rogers, 2006).

## **Wider Regional Response**

Another concern—perhaps even the most salient—has to do with the potential backlash from the overall region. Regardless of Iran's status within and without the Middle East, as well as the Sunni-Shi'a divide, it is still a Muslim nation. Looking at America's history of involvement in the Middle East, primarily in Saudi Arabia and the Arab-Israeli conflict, there has been significant resentment that many observe culminated in the attacks on September 11, 2001. Paul Rogers explains that although there is an uneasy relationship between Iran and the al-Qaida movement, and between Iran and the Arab world, any attack on such a significant Islamic republic would “inevitably increase the anti-American mood in the region and beyond, giving greater impetus to a movement that is already a global phenomenon” (Rogers, 2006).

If the United States and Israel decides to launch an attack on Iran, this would also mean the US would likely be prepared to extend its current military operations in neighboring Afghanistan to Iran. It should be mentioned that this would be occurring nearly a year after US troops pulled out of Iraq. If this were to take place, groups that espouse anti-American principles would be likely to respond—perhaps with violence (Rogers, 2006).

## **Dual Intransigence**

It was during the Clinton administration that Iran's nuclear program was discovered in 1994. Even then Benjamin Netanyahu warned that Iran could develop a bomb within a year. Clinton, however, responded not by creating dialogue, but by more stringently enforcing existing sanctions. Likewise, President Bush refused to negotiate with Iran for

their nuclear ambitions. Instead the administration articulated several preconditions Iran must adhere to—including permanent cessation of all research on nuclear technology, a full accounting of its nuclear history, and unequivocally renouncing either the production or acquisition of nuclear weapons—in order for direct negotiations between the US and Iran to take place (Maher, 2008). On November 14, 2004, Iran—along with Germany, the UK, and France— signed onto the Paris Agreement, which affirmed that, according to Article II of the NPT, “[Iran] does not and will not seek to acquire nuclear weapons”. It also agreed to suspend all “enrichment related and reprocessing activities”. Most importantly, under the agreement Iran will suspend “the manufacture and import of gas centrifuges and their components” (ambafrance.org, 2012). Then in 2006, Ahmadinejad sent an 18-page letter to Bush, which was “framed broadly in religious terms” but it also rehashed American rhetoric and made populist appeals. The letter was quickly dismissed by the president as a “screed” and was given no real attention. Yet this was an important moment as it marked the first form of direct contact between an American president and Iranian head of government since formal relations were severed following the Islamic Revolution (Maher, 2008).

More recently, during President Obama's first year after being elected in 2008, he made an overture to the people of Iran on Persian New Year appealing for a “new beginning” for the United States and Iran. Supreme Leader ayatollah Ali Khomeini responded with less enthusiasm, stating it would take more than a “change in words” from Washington to rectify nearly sixty years of conflict (Karon, 2009). Rather than appearing stubborn, Iran's response to Obama's overture is, from Iran's perspective,

entirely justified. Khomeini has said he would judge the US by its actions and not its words:

We are observing, watching and judging. If you change, we will also change our behavior. If you do not change, we will be the same nation as thirty years ago (Karon, 2009).

In short, if the United States were sincere in its efforts to forge a new era of “engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect”, then changes in policy would accompany Obama's verbal assurances. However, Obama's strategy of threats and appeasements is not a winning approach to achieving a new beginning. Dennis Ross, the State Department official who played an influential role in the Obama administration’s Iran policy prior to his resignation in 2011, echoes this point, arguing that rather than forcing Iran into a corner where it must lose face by relinquishing its nuclear ambitions, harsher penalties must be “tied to diplomatic outreach that includes more incentives that allows Tehran to back down without being humiliated” (Karon, 2009). But neither side wants to negotiate from a position of weakness. This has been the case for each president since Jimmy Carter. And it is this paradigm in US policy towards Iran that is inherently dysfunctional, maintaining the relationship of mutual mistrust and reinforcing the cycle of intransigence.

Instead, if a new era of normalized political relations is on the agenda for both the US and Iran, there needs to be a dramatic overhaul of current diplomatic measures. Moreover, it must be initiated by the United States. The reason for this is simple: Iran is used to the extreme conditions with which the US and the broader international community has chosen to impose on it since the 1980s. Since the decision was made by President Carter in 1979, the severing of diplomatic ties with Iran—along with harsh

economic sanctions and the freezing of Iranian assets—have achieved less than satisfying results for the US (Maher, 2008). In short, Iran has relatively nothing left to lose, whereas it is in America's best interests to reconstitute formal channels of diplomacy, or else risk exacerbating an already incendiary situation.

In his article “Informal Diplomatic Relations between the US and Iran: A Sustainable Strategy for the Future?” (2008), Richard Maher outlines ways in which an absence of formal diplomatic relations creates challenges from a strategic US standpoint. First, as was mentioned briefly, the US loses key negotiating leverage over Iran. One example Maher cites is America's inability to turn to “highly symbolic acts” such as recalling its ambassador from Tehran. Nor can the US threaten tougher measures such as cutting off foreign aid or imposing unilateral sanctions. These have all been done already and the Iranian regime survived (Maher, 2008). Second, the absence of formal ties invites misunderstandings and potential miscalculations between the parties. Since official government-to-government dialogue is prohibited, officials from the US and Iran must communicate through third-party intermediaries. One major problem with this system is the threat of “core strategic interest and values” that may be misunderstood between both parties. An example of the risk of misunderstandings relates to Iran's purpose in acquiring nuclear development. In the US, the common belief is that Iran is developing nuclear capabilities exclusively for security purposes, when in reality (as is explained in detail in chapter 3) Iran seeks to assert its “rightful place in the regional security system”. In other words, “Iranian nationalism trumps Islamist ideology” (Maher, 2008). A common complaint against current US policy of containment appears to affect the citizens of Iran much more than its leaders; in maintaining the current policies, the US “alienates the

Iranian people”, but it also “loses important sources of soft power by isolating Iran politically” by refusing to move towards normalizing ties (Maher, 2008).

### Prospects for Rapprochement

In a testimony before the House of Representatives Homeland Security committee regarding the Iranian threat to the US, and the possible consequences of US military action against Iran's nuclear program, Dr. Colin Kahl of the Center for New American Security (CNAS) stated that diplomacy has not been exhausted, as many hardliners in the US have declared; that the immediate goal of reaching a diplomatic settlement should be to provide “sufficient transparency and assurances against weaponization efforts” while “respecting Iranians rights to a civilian nuclear program under the NPT”, even though, Kahl admits, this will be “more difficult to achieve”. He goes on to say, however, that unlike military action, this is the most sustainable solution (Kahl, 2012). Furthermore, while diplomats work with members of the P5+1 (the permanent UN Security Council members, plus Germany) to find a solution to the Iranian nuclear threat, Congress should dismiss the notion that a starting point for negotiations with Iran relies on Iran suspending enrichment activities: As much as the United States would like to impose its will on the struggling nation, insisting on such rigid parameters for talks will only serve to aggravate the leadership in Iran and continue stalling negotiations. Rather, for future negotiations the United States must cast aside the ideal “grand bargaining” strategy in which every imaginable point of difference is repaired, and instead switch to a gradual approach that focuses on mutual concessions and reciprocity, which is a far more viable policy at the initial states of engagement (Maher, 2008).

However, the usual state of diplomacy—enmity, non-transparency, miscalculations—must also undergo a severe realignment if negotiations between the US and Iran are to create meaningful change. America must pursue a genuinely comprehensive and strategic approach to diplomacy with Tehran that is “grounded in the reaffirmation of America's commitment to the Algiers Accord” (Leverett & Leverett, 2012). After nearly three decades of US policy towards Iran emphasizing isolation and escalating economic pressure have served to damage the interests of the US and its allies in the Middle East:

US-Iran tensions have been a constant source of regional instability and are an increasingly dangerous risk factor for global energy security. As a result of a dysfunctional Iran policy...the American position in the region is currently under greater strain than at any point since the end of the Cold War (Leverett & Leverett, 2010).

One notable example that supports the imperative for a comprehensive realignment—or a fundamental overhaul—of US-Iran relations lies in President Nixon's reorientation of American policy toward the People's Republic of China during the early 1970s. Recognizing that that a quarter century of efforts to isolate and weaken China had not served US interests, Nixon “recast America's China policy so that it would serve those interests” (Leverett & Leverett, 2010). Though the rationale behind rapprochement with China was different from that of Iran (the US wanted to “triangulate” against the Soviet Union), the element of mutual interests is roughly the same. As the authors explain, the main goal of rapprochement with China was essentially to align US and Chinese interests to deal with an array of strategic challenges. Pursuing this type of realignment with Iran would also align US and Iranian interests in the region.



Specifically, if the US advocated for rapprochement with Iran, it could conceivably achieve much of its high-priority objectives in the region, such as reaching negotiated settlements to the Arab-Israeli conflict, stabilizing Afghanistan, curbing nuclear proliferation, neutralizing Hezbollah and ensuring an adequate long-term flow of oil and natural gas to international energy markets (Leverett & Leverett, 2010).

### Internal Factors Hindering Negotiations

The problem, however, does not lie solely with US unwillingness to carry out the necessary overhauling in order to make diplomacy a viable tool of rapprochement. The current regime in Iran very likely views rapprochement with the US as a threat.

Improving relations with the US would mean not only “abandoning one of the core tenants of the Islamic Revolution, but also risking a broader opening to the West”, which may endanger the regimes control of the country (Clawson, 2009).

The current regime originated from the Islamic Revolution. The platform by which the current theocracy was able to secure prominence was on the platform that Iran must remove itself from the auspices of the United States—otherwise known in Iran as the “Great Satan”. Using this platform, the Iranian regime has been able to exploit and enrage anti-American sentiment in Iran, masterfully engineering a powerful rally round the flag affect that has served to concretize the legitimacy of the government. However, in examining the Green Movement, which gained prominence during the 2009 Presidential Election in Iran, there is evidence that the Iranian people may no longer fully internalize the principles of the government. As I have mentioned previously, one of the likely results of renewed bilateral relations between the US and Iran will be transparency.

This will not come about without a certain degree of openness on Iran's part, however. For decades the Iranian regime has sought to shield the Iranian population from virtually everything outside of its own borders; certainly everything Western and American is doggedly withheld from its citizens. Sanctions banning the sale of American and European products amplify the isolation—everything from cars to DVD's and music products. This insulation will likely not continue if bilateral relations are restored. Iran will once again be exposed to products, images and ideas of the West. Moreover, as an ally of the West, Iran would be strongly encouraged to allow for civil society to progress and express itself in Iran. With a burgeoning civil society comes the empowerment (however limited) of groups espousing ideas and opinions. Certainly the *Shi'a* doctrine will be questioned by a number of groups.

Overall, the platform of America as the “Great Satan” will be diminished; and with it the pillar that has allowed the revolutionary government to maintain its stranglehold over the people of Iran for thirty years. Within Tehran exists two precepts: those that believe the enmity with the US is a chief tenet of “founding father Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's worldview and is “central to the identity of the Islamic Republic”. For them, making peace with the United States will undermine the very foundation on which their system is built. The other dogma within Iran is the “Constructionists” who understand the original “Great Satan” culture of 1979 is obsolete in 2012. Constructionists recognize that that “Iran will never be able to fulfill its potential as long as relations with the United States remain adversarial”. While there are certainly many constructionists within Iran—specifically the political elite and the youth—Iran's

hardliners who uphold the tenets of 1979 have “inordinate influence at the moment”

(Clawson, 2009). In other words:

If the United States were to engage Iran, open an embassy in Tehran, and attempt to reintegrate it into the global economy, these steps would facilitate and indeed expedite political and economic reform in Iran. And for precisely this reason, [Ayatollah] Khomeini is deeply ambivalent if not downright opposed to this prospect (Clawson, 2009).

### Recommendations

A nuclear-armed Iran is unacceptable. Though it is unlikely a nuclear-armed Iran would deliberately use or transfer nuclear weapons, the prospect of Iran with nuclear capabilities remains a threat to the stability of an already volatile region. Moreover, “it would probably become more aggressive in supporting militancy and terrorism in the Levant and elsewhere”, which would necessarily threaten Israel's security and “exacerbate an already dangerous Israeli-Iranian rivalry, raising the small but potentially devastating risk of nuclear escalation” (Kahl, 2012).

However, my purpose has been to show that though this threat exists, and Iran is still on the path of developing nuclear capabilities despite international condemnation, Iran would be more disposed to end its nuclear program through diplomatic solutions. Force should remain an option, but only as a last resort. For example, if Iran proves unwilling to participate in direct negotiations with the United States, and Iran has made a “clear move towards weaponization”, only then should become a viable option. Even then, force should be used “only if it can significantly impair Iran's nuclear program”, and if the international community “is sufficiently united to manage the consequences and aftermath of a military attack”(Kahl, 2012).

Therefore, I will endorse four recommendations, as put forth by Dr. Colin Kahl, which outline ways policymakers should deal with Iran at this particular juncture:

### **Preventing a Nuclear-Armed Iran Should Remain Priority**

Regardless of Iran's purposes for nuclear capabilities, a nuclear-armed Iran poses a threat not only to Israel, but the stability of the broader Middle East. As prevention is paramount, the US should “help establish mechanisms for direct dialogue between American and Iranian leaders”. Furthermore, the US should “encourage Iran and Israel to adopt 'no first use' pledges and technical safety measures to reduce the risk of accidental, or inadvertent, escalation” (Kahl, 2012).

### **The US Should Avoid Taking Steps that Limit Diplomatic Options**

The primary goal of the US in engaging Iran diplomatically should be to prevent Iran from developing “actual nuclear weapons”, as opposed to a “vague capability that could include many activities technically permitted under the NPT”. The process will inevitably require great care and skill, but as Kahl states: “Iran's current near-threshold status is preferable to a threshold capability”, which is also preferable to “a fully weaponized nuclear arsenal” (Kahl, 2012).

### **Using Force Should be Last Resort**

Due to the possible consequences of using military force on Iranian nuclear facilities, it would be prudent for policymakers to consider employing military force only as a last resort and “only under very stringent conditions”. To briefly reiterate, the

consequences of a strike could have many unfortunate and devastating effects for US interests, as well as the stability of the Middle East. In regard to the latter, an Israeli or US military strike on Iran could “destabilize the Middle East profoundly”. As a result, Iran would “retaliate using ballistic missile strikes and proxy and terrorists attacks against US or Israeli targets”. This would result in a potentially high number of casualties (both American and Arab) and “further destabilizing a region already roiling from the Arab Spring” (Kahl, 2012).

### **Israel Should Not Attack Iran**

The main reason a strike on Iran is a poor idea is due to the risk to reward ratio. Any strike would set off a ripple effect across the region, which the US and Israel would be forced to deal with and contain for years to come. The reward of a strike, on the other hand, would be setting back Iran's nuclear program for one to three years (Kahl, 2012).

## Conclusion

What I provide in my thesis is a thorough and chronological outline of US-Iran relations, and how it all relates to the current relationship of dual intransigence, which is largely absent in the fields of international studies, political science and history. Every day articles appear debating when Israel will attack Iran, whether the US will come to its aid, or, if attacked, if and how Iran will retaliate. The mainstream media seems determined to forget America's hand in shaping contemporary Iran, and the theocratic regime that exists today. Instead, the media, along with many notable public officials, focus on the human rights violations that have taken place, the bellicose comments made by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and the threat a nuclear Iran poses to the rest of the world.

By examining key events through a historical lens, I establish a correlation between foreign powers' intervention in Iranian politics during the early- and mid-twentieth century, showing how each of these events were contributing factors to the mistrust, even enmity, that exists between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the international community. To reiterate, I trace the beginning of this relationship to the overthrow of Prime Minister Mossadegh in 1953. The purpose of the coup was to restore the shah as a puppet regime, essentially carrying out policies meant to benefit the United States. This, then, led to more than twenty years of economic stagnation, unemployment, and diminishing civil society in Iran. For nearly thirty years the people of Iran were unhappy but complacent, until widespread discontent culminated in the Iranian Revolution, in which close to 7 million Iranians took to the streets and removed the shah, as well as America's presence, from Iran. One important point I make in this study is to

show how the upheaval following the revolution created a power vacuum that was promptly filled by Ayatollah Khomeini. Bitter by the sudden loss of one of its pillars in the region (next to Israel and Saudi Arabia), the United States exploited this vacuum in order to neutralize the threat posed by the new Islamic Republic. Moreover, I make a connection between the role of the US in the Iran-Iraq War—particularly in the silence of the international community while Saddam Hussein carried out a heinous chemical war on Iran—and Iran’s deep-rooted sense of insecurity. The need for Iran to become self-reliant is a significant factor in Iran’s nuclear ambitions. In my discussion of Iran and Israel’s nuclear programs, it is clear that not only does Iran resent the nuclear monopoly that exists in the Middle East, but also that the continuation of US policy of isolation, neglect and containment that has, historically, added fuel to the fire, so to speak, making progress impossible.

The use of historical background is necessary in order to see the big picture: Iran has historically been a victim, a pawn in the grand schemes of the Great Powers. Though I maintain that a nuclear Iran is unacceptable—due primarily to the unpredictability of the government, but also in light of Iran’s record of supporting Hezbollah, Hamas, and Assad’s regime in Syria—I strongly emphasize the need for a severe realignment of diplomatic measures toward Iran. In essence: end the cycle of intransigence, and instead the US must forgive Iran its past transgressions, and begin a new chapter in the long and checkered history between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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