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Can Iran be thwarted?

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Although the recent Commission on Intelligence Capabilities of the United States' report regarding weapons of mass destruction is critical of U.S. intelligence failures regarding Iraq's programs of WMD development, one fundamental fact is undeniable: The net balance now and in the foreseeable future is tilting toward the risk of suicide nuclear terrorism. This shift should be a matter of urgent concern to the international community.

A case in point is the current and future challenges posed by Iran. What is particularly alarming about the regime's integrated strategy of systematic and carefully orchestrated terrorism are two intensifying trends. A glimpse of the first accelerating phenomenon is related to Tehran's expansion of "jihad" (holy war) and "shahada" (self-sacrifice). In January, Iran's leader Ali Khamenei praised the culture of shahada and called on the young generation of students to follow the path of martyrdom because "this is the most beautiful human value." This assures the centrality of the suicide weapon in its arsenal of terrorism, which is currently conventional and will ultimately be unconventional.

The second disturbing trend is the regime's decision to pursue actively a policy of nuclear development. Iran has repeatedly claimed that this project has been designed as a "peaceful" undertaking and will "never" be diverted to weapons production. In fact, Iran's nuclear infrastructure consisting of six major sites, coupled with the real possibility that Iran has also a clandestine program not subject to any international verification and safeguards established by the International Atomic Energy Group, does not provide the world any "objective guarantees" that Tehran will not construct atomic weapons.

Thus, Iran's apparent intentions to create a military application to its nuclear program, coupled with that nation's traditional utilization of suicide terrorism abroad, make it possible, if not probable, that the regime will determine it would deploy the ultimate weapon - from a primitive "dirty device" to a more sophisticated bomb - through a terrorist "proxy."

Can the United States and like-minded nations deny Iran nuclear capabilities and their utilization as terrorist weapons? Is a military response to such a threat a realistic option for the United States and other countries?

Iran is not Iraq, where Baghdad's nuclear research program at Osirek was destroyed in June 1981 by an Israeli air strike. Even if Israel and the United States were to decide to mount air strikes against multiple-targeted Iranian nuclear facilities, the challenge would be Herculean.

After all, Iran has already deployed advanced air defense systems to guard its nuclear sites, and the dispersed and underground nature of the facilities make potential air strikes difficult and without guarantee of success. Finally, any air attack would prove to Tehran that its conventional defense capabilities are too weak to protect itself from an "aggressive" external threat leading the regime to accelerate its nuclear weapons program.

The more drastic military course of action is a cross-border invasion of United States or coalition land forces. However, the danger with extreme military action is that it is likely to elicit international outrage, incur higher casualties and create a much longer period of intense, widespread insurgency than experienced in Iraq. It would also result in continued strain on the overall U.S. military structure and its available resources, affecting long-term sustainability of any such operation.

In view of the foregoing, two parallel nonmilitary actions are needed: first, to allow Iran to keep its nuclear power plants if it agrees to stop its uranium enrichment program in exchange for outside sources of nuclear fuel; and second, to secure pledges from Iran to stop sponsorship of terrorism in exchange for a massive commitment of foreign investment in the order of about \$18 billion required to generate an optimum economic development in the country.

Such incentives are realistic in light of the recent policy shift of the U.S. administration in supporting the "engagement" efforts of European nations. The world community has one more diplomatic opportunity, particularly after Iran's presi-

dential elections in June, to move forward to prevent nuclear terrorism with devastating consequences for global security concerns. However, if Iran refuses to cooperate in this area within a reasonable time frame, then the U.N. Security Council should consider smart sanctions as well as military options.

In sum, the carrot-and-stick approach of both incentives and punishments will suffice for the moment. Hopefully, Iran's prime concern with its national self-preservation will dictate willingness to consider the profound observation of the French diplomat Charles Maurice de Talleyrand: "True strength restrains itself - true greatness sets its own limits."

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