

Double Trouble: Iran and North Korea as Challenges to International Security

*Edited by
Patrick M. Cronin*

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DOUBLE TROUBLE

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PRAEGER SECURITY INTERNATIONAL
Westport, Connecticut • London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Double trouble: Iran and North Korea as challenges to international security /
edited by Patrick M. Cronin.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-275-99960-5 (alk. paper)

1. Nuclear nonproliferation. 2. Nuclear weapons-Iran. 3. Nuclear
weapons-Korea (North) 4. United States-Foreign relations-2001- 5. Security,
International. I. Cronin, Patrick M., 1958- II. Title: Iran and North Korea as
challenges to international security.

JZ5675.D68 2008

327.1'747095195-dc22 2007035888

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

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reproduced, by any process or technique, without the
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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2007035888

ISBN-13: 978-0-275-99960-5

First published in 2008

Praeger Security International, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

www.praeger.com

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the
Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National
Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Earlier versions of chapters two and seven appeared in the Institute for
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their apologies for any omissions.

Better never trouble Trouble
Until Trouble troubles you;
For you only make your trouble
Double-trouble when you do.

Attributed to poet David Keppel

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Preface

This volume emanates from the intellectually rich research program of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). For half a century, the IISS has provided comprehensive, international, fact-based analyses of salient global security issues, at once defining the field of strategic studies and describing the major contours of international security.

In the first decade of the Institute's prestigious series of monograph studies, the Adelphi Papers, some of the intellectual giants of Western strategic thinking set out their thoughts about problems related to nuclear weapons and proliferation, including Michael Howard, Bernard Brodie, Sir Solly Zuckerman, Raymond Aron, Lester B. Pearson, Curt Gasteyger, Sir John Slessor, Thomas Schelling, Morton Halperin, Albert and Robert Wohlstetter, Alastair Buchan, Philip Winsor, Coral Bell, Hedley Bull, and Pierre Hassner. In the past decade the Adelphi Papers have sought to delve into the domestic political variables driving proliferating state and nonstate actors in order to provide a more complete account of the challenges posed by them and the potential levers on which outside nations might pull to help contain these challenges. For instance, Robert L. Carlin and Joel S. Wit, both seasoned American nonproliferation specialists, wrote Adelphi Paper No. 382 in 2006 on *North Korean Reform: Politics, Economics and Security* and Shahram Chubin, a contributor to this volume, wrote Adelphi Paper No. 242 in 2002 on *Whither Iran? Reform, Domestic Politics and National Security*.¹ Significantly, in recent years, the Institute has also published in-depth net assessments or dossiers on Iran and North Korea.² Numerous

other analyses have appeared in the IISS journal *Survival*, the Institute's annual publications *Strategic Survey* and *The Military Balance*, and in the Institute's series of short analyses known as *Strategic Comments*.

Each year the Institute's staff and members come together with other leading strategic thinkers from around the world for an annual Global Strategic Review. In September 2006, I wove into the agenda detailed assessments of Iran and North Korea from different international points of view. Many of those initial papers and presentations have been updated through April 2007 and incorporated into this volume. Some have been significantly rewritten and only two have been printed before in earlier versions. All of the sections that I have written are new and represent the understanding of the problem as of the spring of 2007. I have put together appendices providing selected chronologies of events and key documents and statements to make this volume a useful reference source.

There are many people to thank for this volume, not least the complete cast of contributing authors whose perspicacity has certainly broadened and deepened my own understanding of the twin challenges posed by Iran and North Korea. I also want to thank two of the bright young intellectual forces of the Institute, Raffaello Pantucci and John Wooding, for their assistance in enabling the completion of this report. I am grateful to Robert Silano for making this volume possible. Last, but by no means least, I thank Caitlin Brannan for making the Global Strategic Review conference possible at all. All mistakes in this volume, however, are solely my own responsibility.

NOTES

1. Also see Wyn Q. Bowen, *Libya and Nuclear Proliferation: Stepping Back from the Brink*, Adelphi Paper No. 380 (2006); Robin M. Frost, *Nuclear Terrorism After 9/11*, Adelphi Paper No. 278 (2005); William Walker, *Weapons of Mass Destruction and International Order*, Adelphi Paper No. 370 (2004); and David Reese, *The Prospects for North Korea's Survival*, Adelphi Paper No. 323 (1998).

2. See *Iran's Strategic Weapons Programmes—A Net Assessment* (IISS, September 2005) and *North Korea's Weapons Programmes: A Net Assessment* (January 2004). Published in London by the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Introduction: The Dual Challenge of Iran and North Korea

Patrick M. Cronin

How do Iran and North Korea pose trouble to regional stability and world order? Why have attempts to curb their nuclear programs and broader political ambitions failed? How have Iran and North Korea, each in their own way, managed to defy the world's preponderant power, the United States, as well as other major powers and the United Nations? Where are the fractured and oscillating relations with these two nettlesome actors heading? What are the long-term implications of their current trajectories for nuclear proliferation, deterrence, alliance management, regional security, and world order? These timely and pressing questions about two of the world's most dangerous powers are the focus of this volume.

DOUBLE TROUBLE TIMES FIVE

Iran and North Korea pose serious challenges to international order. For all the differences between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the contentedly isolated Democratic People's Republic of Korea (the DPRK or North Korea), these two states create similar strategic challenges to the United States, the Middle East and the Northeast Asian regions, respectively, and to relations among major states. It is not simply that this duo represents the remaining charter members of what President George W. Bush famously dubbed: "the axis of evil." The trouble posed by this pair of powers runs far and wide, as potential catalysts for future war, as proliferators threatening the tenuous

global nuclear nonproliferation regime, as agents frustrating America's alliance management and regional diplomacy, as potential spoilers of regional peace, and even short of war exerting influence on future regional security architectures, and ultimately, as maverick wild cards in the global order.

First, Iran and North Korea remain amongst the most likely potential triggers for interstate war in an era when most wars are intrastate or civil wars or, as in the case of terrorism, perhaps transnational conflicts. When security planners in Washington—and in other capitals around the globe—contemplate the myriad ways in which future interstate wars could break out, the precarious relations between the United States and Iran and North Korea are at the apex. Indeed, some commentators contend that conflict with Iran and North Korea has been held off this long in part because of America's exhaustion after launching a global offensive, a "war on terrorism" that left it broadly committed in terms of potential foes and deeply mired in specific insurgencies, especially in Iraq. As the epigraph of this volume admonishes, preempting trouble before one even knows for sure that it is trouble, is a swift way for a major power to experience overstretch. Toppling Saddam Hussein, who held together his Sunni-minority government through brute force, pervasive intelligence, and corruption, was a modest security objective aside the more ambitious but poorly planned strategy of establishing a model democracy in the Middle East. The high cost of intervening in Iraq—whether counted by a metric of human lives, state treasure, regional instability, or political capital—has tempered Washington's enthusiasm about any other headlong rush into Tehran or Pyongyang. But a weakened, hesitant United States is also a hindrance to keeping the peace, as an emboldened Iran and North Korea each march forward with their nuclear programs and political aims. In fact, the perception that the United States is timorous or a "paper tiger" may well create the perception and misperception that may trigger future war. When Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps troops took fifteen British sailors and marines hostage in March 2007, the world witnessed precisely the kind of local incident that could have been the spark to ignite a larger war. Hence, by the criterion of being a potential trigger of conflict, Iran and North Korea are clearly troublesome.

Iran and North Korea are also clearly trouble in the sense that their nuclear programs pose challenges to security in general and to the nonproliferation regime in particular. The spectre of war with Iran or North Korea is sufficiently grim even before one recalls that, unlike Iraq, these countries either have, or are clearly erecting the capabilities to have, nuclear weapons. Furthermore, even if those prospective weapons are never to be fired in anger or by accident, the sheer scope of their nuclear programs are, everyday, posing a challenge to the viability of the regime of treaties and agreements—especially the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)—that have helped in past decades to contain the threat posed by the rampant spread of nuclear weapons and their supporting technologies. Even while the last five-year review of the NPT in 2005 concluded in such a manner as to cast doubt on

its future relevance, Iran has accelerated its full nuclear fuel cycle program and North Korea has conducted a nuclear test. Moreover, North Korea has been granted a diplomatic process, despite the fact that it has left the NPT, while Iran remains a constant threat to also walk away from the international agreement. The expanding nuclear and missile capabilities of Iran and North Korea are changing facts on the ground. Iran abandoned a go-slow approach to uranium enrichment and North Korea also accelerated its own program before acceding—again—to multilateral diplomacy in February 2007. Both countries have cooperated with the nuclear black market, and Pakistani scientist A.Q. Khan has admitted to providing each of these countries with gas centrifuge technology needed to help create a nuclear bomb. If these two countries are allowed to succeed, some analysts predict that further nuclear proliferation—even a second nuclear era—will be nearly inevitable in the Middle East and East Asia. As Henry Kissinger wrote, “The world is faced with the nightmarish prospect that nuclear weapons will become a standard part of national armament and wind up in terrorist hands. The negotiations on Korean and Iranian nuclear proliferation mark a watershed.”¹

War may well be prevented, and the international agreements aimed at curbing wider nuclear proliferation may continue to stagger forward like a drunken sailor (i.e., teetering but still standing). But Iran and North Korea will also threaten double trouble to existing regional security mechanisms, which in the absence of agreed upon and effective multilateral forums in the Persian Gulf and Northeast Asia, are based on a rough balance of power underpinned by America’s bilateral alliances and security partnerships. These alliances are increasingly strained by the continuing challenges of managing a rising Iran and a potentially failing North Korea. In the Gulf and Middle East, long-standing U.S. partners (and predominantly Sunni Arab states), like oil giant Saudi Arabia and peace supporter Egypt, have become increasingly assertive in their foreign policies and vigilant in their domestic policies because of Iranian power. Not only has the United States failed to reverse the Iranian threat, its intervention in Iraq has now limited the potential financial, human, and political capital that the United States could dedicate toward stifling Iranian regional hegemonic ambitions. The largely Sunni Arab world in particular feels the tug of power moving in Iran’s direction, especially with Iran freed from its two most proximate past foes in Afghanistan and Iraq. At the same time, an American tendency to equate good governance with democracy, particularly in the Middle East, has done little to challenge the autocratic theocracy of those running Iran, but it has certainly accentuated concerns about future stability in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The concern that Saudi Arabia may intervene in Iraq to defend the Sunni minorities left behind after the fall of Saddam Hussein, or that Israel could take it upon itself to strike Iran’s nuclear facilities rather than wait for the seemingly inevitable arrival of a nuclear weapon, are demonstrative of the new tensions Iran is creating in America’s alliance management. Meanwhile, America’s regional ally Israel is isolated and feeling more threatened

by the potential emergence of an Iranian nuclear weapons program and support for surrogate insurgents in the region.

North Korean diplomacy and strategy has seriously troubled the U.S.-South Korean alliance since the late 1990s and especially since 2001. Since then the divergence in perception between the American and the South Korean sense of the North Korean threat has become starker. At the same time, the North Korean issue is strengthening the U.S. alliance with Japan—which is now eager to behave like a normal power and is on the verge of rewriting its constitution to allow it to assume the same military posture as other powers—though this is having a corrosive effect on the U.S.-South Korean alliance. Meanwhile, China's influence is growing with South Korea, while Chinese-Japanese relations remain locked in a historic time warp of distrust. Consequently, it is no surprise that China and South Korea have forged incredibly thick and deep ties in the past several years. Whether the diplomatic process designed to channel diplomatic efforts for dealing with North Korea—namely, the Six-Party Talks comprising North and South Korea, the United States, China, Japan, and Russia—can succeed in keeping the nuclear issue in check and transform it into a useful multilateral security mechanism in Northeast Asia, remains an open question. What is not in question is that North Korea, as well as Iran, produce a sober challenge for America's alliance system—a collection of security obligations and arrangements that undergird security in the absence of effective multilateral institutions.

Iran and North Korea pose a fourth kind of trouble as regional spoilers. In the greater Middle East, Iran has the capability to spoil stability in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as with countries surrounding Israel; at the same time, Iran's nuclear power and flexing of political muscle might well confound future attempts at erecting a more peaceful regional order. In Northeast Asia, the largest strategic challenge may well be reconciling the three-sided balance of power among a reemerging China, a more normal Japan, and a relatively declining United States. The power discrepancies in both regions make it difficult for major powers to agree to constraints on their powers; those powers, believing that time is on their side, hope to accrete more power, and those fearing a loss of at least relative power are reluctant to agree to a further diminution of their clout. As suggested above with the complication to America's alliances, Iran and North Korea each have the ability to significantly alter the future course of regional peace and security and the sets of relations that emerge in the event of a watershed event, such as war or a significant arms agreement.

Iran and North Korea generate a fifth type of trouble, namely to world or international order, by which we mean especially relations among the major powers. World order came to mean something specific after the Second World War, and the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council have since held considerable sway in global security affairs. In

America, many have seen world order—like globalization—as one and the same phenomenon as American order. But the distribution of global power is today much more diffuse than it was more than three score years ago. How the United States will reconcile its role in the world in the coming decade is a crucial question for international security. To answer that question, one will have to consider America's relations with its traditional allies, including those in Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia. Also, one must understand the potential for harmony and conflict between the United States and a rising China. Finally, there is the issue of newly formed relations among regional powers in the Middle East and East Asia. Taken together, Iran and North Korea suddenly can be seen as posing much larger challenges than they should do, given their limited contributions to that same order. This fifth type of trouble, times two, rounds out a full complement of ten challenges to security.

IRAN AND NORTH KOREA

The first four chapters of this volume delve into the trouble with Iran.

Chapter 1 describes some of the specific military and political challenges posed by Iran. The failure to find a diplomatic means of taming Iran's nuclear ambitions suggests that Iran and the United States may well be on a collision course in the coming decade. Limited trust and a difficulty in fashioning a framework for political resolution means that future regional peace and security could well be at the mercy of individual events, whether intentional or accidental. At the same time, the various challenges of the region—including instability, terrorism, and political violence in Iraq—seem unlikely to be advanced by a continuing standoff on the nuclear issue. Whether the nuclear issue can be resolved peacefully or not may determine the future of regional security in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East.

In Chapter 2, nonproliferation expert and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Mark Fitzpatrick describes the technical progress and impediments facing Iran's recent developments. However likely it may seem, Fitzpatrick does not judge an Iranian nuclear weapon as an inevitability. At the same time, Iran's pursuit of uranium enrichment, despite international pressure to desist, and the country's other nuclear facilities, including its plutonium reactor at Arak, suggests that Iran is seeking more than a peaceful nuclear program as it claims. He makes clear the complex issues of Iran's nuclear developments and the policies arrayed against those developments. He crystallizes the technical issues and outlines how diplomatic overtures have been designed to slow down or stop progress toward Iran's capacity to build nuclear weapons. Although the record is punctuated with a less than spectacular success rate, he notes that diplomacy has slowed Iran's nuclear program and he remains hopeful that diplomacy may yet find a resolution to the fundamental problem of dealing with Iran.

In Chapter 3, Shahram Chubin explains how Iran's ever-shifting motivations behind its proliferation program relate to security, prestige, and domestic politics. The security aims center on the suspicion that Iran's nuclear program only makes sense if it has a military goal of building a nuclear weapon; otherwise, a full fuel cycle makes little sense for a uranium-poor Iran. Exploiting every opportunity within the existing NPT is seen as a less confrontational way of achieving progress toward that capability. With respect to prestige, Chubin notes that the program is in a real sense an end in itself rather than a means to some larger security objective. Internally, the nuclear issue is first and foremost a political tussle for power and legitimacy, and only secondarily about ideology. Despite the regime's insistence on its benign intentions, it has also studiously prevented any public debate over the nuclear program. For instance, a true debate in Iran might raise the risks that the regime is exposing its people to by its headlong pursuit of nuclear energy. Even so, Chubin believes a final decision about converting Iran's nuclear capabilities into a nuclear weapon has not been fashioned.

In Chapter 4 leading Russian strategic thinker Alexei Arbatov describes the profound dangers posed by the continuing tensions between Iran and the United States. He is starkly dire in his predictions of what could happen in the coming decade when Iran is faced with making a final decision as to whether to proceed with forging nuclear weapons. He also explains why Russian officials put their policy of practical cooperation with Iran over a single-minded pursuit of nonproliferation. After all, Arbatov notes, Iran's transgressions in not complying with international demands from the International Atomic Energy Agency and the United Nations Security Council must be compared with North Korea's quitting the NPT altogether and yet still being rewarded with concessions and negotiation. Arbatov is constructive in portraying the steps that Iran, the United States, and other international actors might take to convert the challenge of dealing with Iran into an enduring milestone in regional security.

The next five chapters deal with North Korea.

In Chapter 5, I have sketched out some of the ways in which North Korea poses trouble to security. Nuclear proliferation is only the most obvious concern created by North Korea's nuclear program. The fact that North Korea has twice resisted coercive diplomacy, and American and international demands, suggests that the regime has more determination and resiliency than it is credited with possessing. At the same time, the potential for sudden regime collapse and possible Korean unification remain real concerns for all neighbouring countries in the region. The changes in the U.S.-South Korean alliance in recent years have, for the most part, weakened this partnership even in the absence of multilateral security mechanisms. North Korea magnifies these other troubles as well.

In Chapter 6, former South Korean Foreign Minister Sung-Joo Han focuses on the tenuous peace on the Korean Peninsula, which is buffeted

by both North Korea's nuclear and missile proliferation but equally by a shifting American-South Korean alliance. He also portrays some of the futility of American attempts to rely more on pressure on North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons than on diplomacy, and the indirect strain this placed on a changing U.S.-South Korean alliance. Ambassador Han describes the dangers of a shifting balance of power on the Korean Peninsula as North Korea builds and retains nuclear weapons and long-range missiles, the lingering potential for an outbreak of regional war, and the growing arms buildup if not arms race in Northeast Asia. In detailing some of the potential calculus behind North Korea and China's endgame, he further shows the complexity of resolving the dilemmas posed by North Korea. Meanwhile, the South Korean-U.S. security alliance and deterrent system has been weakened in recent years, despite the absence of a clear mechanism for replacing it. The chief implication for South Korea, however, is that it will increasingly have to take responsibility for deterrence on the Peninsula.

In Chapter 7, former U.S. State Department Policy Planning Director Mitchell Reiss analyzes why attempts to use coercive diplomacy against North Korea backfired and North Korean escalation of tensions in 2006 through missile and nuclear tests ended up producing a return to diplomacy. At the same time, Dr. Reiss describes many of the reasons for pessimism about securing from North Korea any quick and lasting agreement over nuclear disarmament. Looking at the crisis-like tensions of the latter half of 2006 as a low point in U.S. diplomacy, Reiss writes that, "The real failure has been Washington's inability, after several years of on-again, off-again negotiations in Beijing, to learn whether North Korea is actually willing to surrender its nuclear weapons program, and if so, at what price." He adds that, after years of negotiations with North Korea, we still know very little about the scale, dimensions, and scope of its nuclear program. Even while finding much fault in the procedure and substantive of negotiations with North Korea, particularly surrounding the Six-Party Talks, Reiss notes that critics of the Bush administration would have been hard pressed to show that North Korea would have seized bilateral negotiations with the United States in good faith. Alas, Reiss observes that North Korean recalcitrance has not brought significant, if any, penalty. Only with a basic reappraisal of the priorities and approaches to curbing North Korea's nuclear program by China and South Korea can we expect real progress in disabling the North Korean problem.

In Chapter 8, Dr. Liru Cui, who heads a prestigious think tank in Beijing—the China Institute for Contemporary International Relations which provides classified reports to Chinese Communist Party officials—explains how a combination of China's domestic priorities and politics and its foreign policy interests have combined to push China to the forefront of diplomacy with North Korea. China's emphasis on stability over nonproliferation and the importance attached to improving relations with South Korea have been notable features of recent Chinese diplomacy. Chinese diplomacy

is driven by the view that the problem is cold war between North Korea and the United States and requires Chinese mediation as an honest broker to prevent open conflict. Dr. Cui also accentuates the critical role played by the United States in whether peace or insecurity prevails in the region. He portrays a benign version of China's interests in the region. He also observes how China is encroaching on America's role as a regional provider of the public good of peace and security.

In Chapter 9, one of the best of Japan's next generation of strategic analysts, Narushige Michishita, portrays why the combination of missile and nuclear programs threatens Japan above all others. *Scud* and *No-dong* missiles can reach Japan, which remains a primary target of North Korea. Even so, Michishita recognizes that North Korea's primary goal in escalating tensions in 2006 was to coerce the United States and Japan back to the bargaining table from a more advantageous position to North Korea. Ultimately, he believes North Korea wants to win acceptance of the status quo, receiving benefits for cooperation but never fully disarming its unconventional programs. From this perspective, a further defensive military buildup by Japan, with the United States, is an inevitable consequence of living with a nuclear North Korea. The impact that China's enlarged regional role has had on Japan should not be underestimated; for Japan, China, and not the United States, has shown that it can play a decisive role in shaping the course of regional relations. China's rise continues to be an assumption on which the surrounding powers, including Japan, determine their strategy and defense posture. Meanwhile, North Korea has two choices: it can make a real strategic decision to forsake its nuclear weapons and begin doing so; or it can bandwagon further with a growing China. That choice will be a bellwether of future regional security and it highlights why the careful management of the North Korean problem is so important for international security.

Finally, in the conclusion to this volume, I return to troubles posed by Iran and North Korea, especially related to their nuclear programs. I have highlighted how Iran and North Korea have succeeded in preserving and countering American-led coercive diplomacy to disable their nuclear facilities and verifiably abandon a nuclear weapons program. Alliance management and regional institution building remain vital long-term endeavours to be tackled by future leaders. Hopefully the creative juxtaposition will help augment the sizable corpus of literature on these countries and issues, and ease the way for prudent but strategic approaches to grappling with Iran and North Korea.

NOTE

1. Henry A. Kissinger, "A Nuclear Test for Diplomacy," *The Washington Post*, May 16, 2006, p. 17.

PART I

Iran

The Trouble with Iran

Patrick M. Cronin

Iran invites violently opposing viewpoints. Optimists see Iran's historic civilization, potent trading power, mounting oil wealth, teeming collection of youth, a country more pluralistic than any other in the Middle East but Turkey, a victimized state richly deserving of more equality with other states, and a middle power desiring an expansive set of regional responsibilities. Pessimists tend to see Iran through the glass darkly: a government dead set on a full nuclear fuel cycle with a weapon in mind; an emboldened, risk-taking nation waging indirect and proxy warfare against the United States and Britain, for instance, by providing Iraqi insurgents with explosively formed projectiles and apprehending British sailors in Iraqi waters; an Iran that uses the discourse of rights and justice but fails to support any internal debate on its nuclear program; a country whose officials seem to have a deeply warped view of the West; and a nation that has rebuffed liberal political reforms in favor of the zealotry of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose scorching rhetoric frequently raises regional tensions. The reality is that both of these clashing perspectives on Iran inform the intricate mosaic that is the whole picture of modern Iran.¹

The trouble with Iran is that, in the midst of starkly different realities and trends, it is unambiguously augmenting its power and challenging the status quo in the Persian Gulf and greater Middle East. Whether right or wrong, Iran is shifting the regional balance of power and the resulting tensions with local and outside powers may well fuel a more intense and larger conflagration. In the past several years, Iran's prominence has been

boosted by the profoundly weak states of neighboring Afghanistan and Iraq, a United States that is overencumbered fighting to stand up fledgling governments in those two countries, and Tehran's relentless pursuit of a nuclear option. Iran's self-assurance has swollen concomitant with the rising costs imposed on the United States since it led an intervention into Iraq, deposed Saddam Hussein, and then found itself in the midst of a counterinsurgency from which both success and exit appeared to be distant options at best. Indeed, the misconceived "war on terrorism" of which Iraq was part of only by conflating the heinous but separate behavior of Saddam Hussein and the egregious acts of terrorism on the United States on September 11, 2001, highlighted the heavy yoke of providing global security, regardless of whether that role was a self-appointed American one, or more collegially shared.

Unfortunately, Iran appears to have decided that a nuclear program, backed by other military means, is the best means of demonstrating its rising prominence, despite the risks attendant to such an exhibition. Tehran's nuclear program, which had been dialled back during seesawing negotiations with the European states of Britain, France, and the Germany, accelerated in 2006 and 2007, hastening the time when Iran would have to make a final decision—assuming it had not already done so—about whether to acquire a nuclear weapon. Thus, at a time when the United Nations Security Council had demanded that Iran halt its limited uranium enrichment work, Iran signalled defiance by opting to announce that it had started industrial production of nuclear fuel.² Although the veracity of the announcement was met with skepticism, Iran undoubtedly remained headed in a dangerous direction. President Ahmadinejad cast the issue as one of rights, glossing over legitimate violations documented by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and obvious security concerns about Iran's nuclear posture. "The great Iranian nation," Ahmadinejad said in a speech at its Natanz nuclear facility in April 2007, "... will not allow some bullying powers to put obstacles in its path of progress. ... We will go on to reach the summits." The president admonished others against applying pressure on Iran lest Iran "reconsider its behavior," a reference to unspecified Iranian countermeasures.³ Does Iran want to fabricate and amass an inventory of nuclear weapons, or does it merely want the wherewithal to build one, should it feel the need to do so in the future? No one appears to know the answer to that question. Meanwhile, Iran's missile ranges continue to grow; the limited accuracy of its longest-range missile, the extended range *Shahab-3*, makes it a more logical candidate for a nuclear rather than a conventional warhead. But even the short-range missiles of Iran, such as the *Zeal*, is dangerous, as the reported use of it by Hezbollah during its five-week war with Israel in the summer of 2006 made clear. Far less visible is Iran's network of forces and nonstate actors which can sow trouble throughout the region.

Iran is no small power. It has 65 million people, which makes it more populous than the United Kingdom with some 60 million people. Demographically, Iran is less a homogenous Persian empire than a collection of many frontier minorities. Iran is only half Persian, with the other half divided among Azeris, the most numerous minority having migrated from the Caucasus; Kurds near northern Iraq and Turkey; Gilani and Mazandarani of northwest Iran; Lurs in western Iran; Arabs from across the Shatt al-Arab waterway, the Persian Gulf, and Gulf of Oman; the Baloch adjacent to Pakistan and Afghanistan; and Turkmen astride the border with Turkmenistan. Four-fifths of the population are under thirty years of age, and thus 80 percent of the population have only ever known Iran as the Islamic Republic of Iran, and only one in five may remember that Iran and the United States were once close allies. Indeed, along with Turkey and Pakistan, Iran formed a critical front line of states to thwart Soviet power. With the Soviet Union a relic of history, however, youthful Iranians see the United States as the leading country trying to deny it a larger regional role, even while a majority appear to want a modern, not a medieval Iran to emerge. Thus, Iran's youth will ultimately determine whether Iran continues to harbor an ethos of a revolutionary Islamic state or transforms into a modern regional power.

Neither is Iran a trivial military power. Iranian forces include some 350,000 soldiers in the army, 125,000 members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a small navy with about 18,000 forces, and about 52,000 air forces. The IRGC, although seen as having primarily an internal security role, also controls some 40,000 paramilitary forces. It was IRGC forces that apprehended fifteen British sailors and marines in March 2007, and it was IRGC commanders who were detained by U.S.-led coalition forces in Irbil, Iraq, two months prior to that. The IRGC Air Force controls Iran's strategic missile force, including one brigade of *Shahab-1/2* intermediate-range ballistic missiles with twelve to eighteen launchers; and one battalion with six single launchers each with four *Shahab-3* intermediate-range ballistic missiles. Iran also supports a number of nonstate groups associated with insurgency and terrorism, including most notably Hezbollah in Lebanon.⁴

THE EVOLUTION OF THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROBLEM

The Iranian nuclear problem has been long in evolution. During the course of four decades, Iran's nuclear ambitions and the readiness of foreign suppliers to assist, have followed a circuitous route with four distinct phases. In the first phase, during Iran's embryonic nuclear program in the late 1960s and early 1970s, peaceful nuclear cooperation was but one aspect of a burgeoning allied relationship. The United States provided Iran with basic nuclear research facilities, and in 1968 Iran signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The United States deemed it necessary to promote Iranian power to help police the Persian Gulf region at a time when

the United States was fully committed in Vietnam and the British withdrew from East of Suez in 1971. Iran was eager to fill the vacuum of power, not least because of competition with its main neighbor and rival, Iraq. However, in the mid-1970s the United States successfully persuaded its European allies not to sell Iran dual-use nuclear technology, which in this case meant fuel cycle facilities with both civilian and potential military applications. For the Shah (Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi), as for Iran's leaders today, the prestige associated with being a nuclear power was at least as important as objective security concerns.⁵

Cooperation, nuclear and otherwise with Iran, took a very different turn with the Iranian Revolution in 1979. In this second phase, Washington led the global opposition to nuclear assistance for the Islamic Republic of Iran. The development of nuclear power was a low priority for Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. However, even during this time of turmoil, Iran undertook at least a small-scale clandestine program with the help of centrifuge technology acquired from Pakistan.

After the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 and the end of the Cold War shortly thereafter, Iran embarked on a concerted effort to expand its nuclear activities. From Russia and China rather than Europe, Iran gained help with uranium conversion and heavy-water production. Once again, however, the United States prevailed upon foreign suppliers to limit exports to Iran to something less than full fuel cycle facilities. What was not well understood at the time, was Iran's growing covert nuclear program, which included research into nuclear conversion, enrichment, and plutonium separation. With the help of the now-exposed network of A.Q. Khan, Iran was able to begin the construction of pilot-scale and industrial-scale enrichment facilities at Natanz around 2000.⁶

The fourth and current phase of relations over Iran's nuclear program can be dated to 2002, when President George W. Bush included Iran, along with Iraq and North Korea, as part of an "axis of evil" during his 2002 State of the Union address. Public explanation of this escalating rhetoric shortly followed, with the revelation in August 2002 of the previously secret Natanz research and enrichment facilities by an Iranian opposition group. The United States tried to ratchet up the pressure on Iran, indirectly by justifying the overthrow of Saddam Hussein largely on the basis of proliferation concerns, and directly by threatening to refer the matter to the UN Security Council. Meanwhile, European countries took the lead in brokering a deal. In October 2003, Iran reached an agreement with the United Kingdom, France, and Germany (the so-called European Union-3 or EU-3) to acknowledge its previously undeclared nuclear activities, allow more intrusive IAEA inspections under the Additional Protocol and "temporarily" suspend all uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities as defined by the IAEA. The accord soon faltered over the scope of suspension, as Iran resumed production of centrifuge components and began trial operations at

its conversion facility in Esfahan. A new confrontational round of diplomacy ensued that once again produced a deal with the EU-3 in November 2004 and thereby averted referral of the matter from the IAEA to the UN Security Council. The accord restored full suspension of Iran's enrichment activities, including uranium conversion, manufacture of centrifuge components, and the installation, testing, and operation of centrifuges at the Natanz facility. This cyclical crisis diplomacy repeated itself in late 2005. As Iran resumed limited pre-enrichment steps, the EU-3 sought to strike a new bargain, and the IAEA agreed in principle but not in practice to refer the matter to New York and the UN Security Council.⁷

THE COLLISION COURSE OVER NUCLEAR ENERGY

Especially since 2006, Iran has appeared on a collision course with the international community in general and the United States in particular. In the spring of 2006, the IAEA reported to the United Nations Security Council that Iran has not heeded calls to suspend a uranium enrichment program that could be diverted for making nuclear weapons. UN Security Council members have since deliberated over a series of sanctions, each one fraught with peril.

Despite international overtures to Iran, it has failed to grasp the olive branch of diplomacy. Although the George W. Bush administration began to adopt a more pragmatic approach to nonproliferation issues during the final two years of its tenure, it simultaneously held onto all of its options, including the use of force; meanwhile, other members of the Security Council supported either mandatory or voluntary sanctions but not the threat of force to coerce Iran to comply with its demands. Tehran's policy approach was to eschew offering proposals of its own, while lambasting the major powers, and seeking to shift the debate to issues other than sanctions.

It is worth considering the author's first-hand experience while participating in the first two conferences on security and nuclear power allowed after Ahmadinejad's ascent to power. In fact, President Ahmadinejad reportedly tried to thwart the meetings; when he failed to prevent them from taking place, he then sought to upstage them by holding a press conference of his own and impeding an international inspection of Iran's nuclear facility at Esfahan. The conferences were hosted by the Centre for Strategic Research, which is under the jurisdiction of Iran's Expediency Council, whose Chairman—the Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani—Ahmadinejad had defeated in the presidential contest.

The conference boasted far more passionate rhetoric than is typical of a conference in Washington or at an American or European university campus. The fiery rhetoric emanating from Iran appeared to be fuelled by a perception that Iran was negotiating from a position of strength vis-à-vis the permanent members of the UN Security Council. The conference's

histrionics also appeared to disclose a fierce jockeying for power among Iran's political elite. Speaking at the conference he helped to arrange, Chairman Rafsanjani was most content with garnering praise for having laid the cornerstones of Iran's longstanding nuclear program. Although Rafsanjani is considered the moderate beside a president who uses the spectre of an external threat to solidify his domestic power base, his words were more caustic than measured. He noted that Iran's nuclear enrichment program was peaceful "for the moment," and that it was "irreversible, like a bullet fired from a gun, and it can't be taken back." Rafsanjani glossed over Iran's violations as a voluntary signatory to the NPT, dismissing them as "minor transgressions" by forgetful bureaucrats who were doing nothing that the IAEA wasn't aware of; however, he then contradicted that reasoning by arguing that in some cases Iran could not report purchasing critical materials from "immoral sources" (such as the A.Q. Khan network) because "if we had told you, you wouldn't have let us do it."⁸

Although the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Dr. Ali Larijani, has distinguished himself as an able interlocutor with the outside world, his words at this largely domestic-oriented conference were far from temperate. Indeed, Larijani delivered an equally blustery diatribe, denouncing the United States for its "lies" and for serving as "the center for the demolition of international law." Iran speaks "with one voice on this national issue," Larijani said in regard to its civilian nuclear program, a nuclear program that was started under the Shah with the backing of the United States. But even while Larijani repeated the chorus of Iranian rights, he also left the door ajar for a diplomatic resolution—the only question being whether Iran would be willing to meet the world partway to defuse the escalating crisis. On that front, most evidence pointed in the opposite direction. For instance, Larijani declared a tit-for-tat policy of suspending cooperation with the IAEA should the UN adopt sanctions and he said military strikes would force Iran's nuclear program underground.

Meanwhile, President Ahmadinejad and Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei declared on consecutive days Iran's unswerving commitment to a full nuclear fuel cycle. The Iranians would, said Khamenei, "respond to any strike with double the force." These statements seemed part of a comprehensive, well-calibrated campaign of public diplomacy. I and other international visitors participating under the auspices of the Nobel Prize-winning Pugwash organization were party to the charade. For the second year in a row, a trip was planned for the visitors to fly to Esfahan, 400 kilometres away, to underscore the transparency of Iran's nuclear program—after all, Iran unlike North Korea remained a signatory to the NPT and still allowed restricted IAEA inspections. Unfortunately, the April 2006 excursion took place in a less hospitable climate and forced the group to travel day and night by slow bus, leaving barely enough time for Iranians to snap pictures of foreign experts garbed from head to toe in protective gear freely viewing a