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Laying the Foundations for Preemptive Nuclear War Against Iran

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As prospects for a preemptive strike on Iran remain ever present, the recent round of talks between the P5+1 and Iran in Baghdad on May 23rd, 2012 have resulted in a familiar stalemate. As a precondition for any deal to stop higher-grade uranium enrichment, Tehran requested immediate relief from economic sanctions as a show of reciprocity [1].

Iranian chief negotiator Saeed Jalili emphasized Tehran's right to develop peaceful nuclear energy as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, while the P5+1 refused to scale back economic sanctions, insisting Iran suspend its 20% uranium enrichment program [2].

As leaders in Tel Aviv assert that Israel may conduct military strikes against Iran before the US Presidential elections in November [2], Major General Hassan Firouzabadi of the Iranian Armed Forces reiterated Iran's commitment to the full annihilation of the Zionist regime and the continual support of Palestinian autonomy [3]. Even if Tehran reaches an agreement with the IAEA, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak refused to rule out a military strike against Iranian facilities, demanding that Iran dismantle its uranium enrichment sites and use only imported fuel [4].

Although the recent conference in Baghdad failed to meet the expectations of its participants, Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany have agreed to hold another round of talks in Moscow on June 18th [5]. As a further indication of division between P5+1 participants, Germany has pledged to work toward a political and diplomatic solution to Iran's nuclear energy issues by providing Tehran with technical assistance in developing a peaceful nuclear program [6], while the US Senate recently approved a new round of sanctions against Iran aimed at any country or company that provides technology or resources to develop Tehran's oil and uranium resources [7]. The new legislation targets Iran's national oil and tanker firms and widens sanctions on Iran's energy sector to any international joint venture where Tehran is a substantial partner or investor. As the US continually pressures Beijing to join its oil embargo, the Chinese Foreign Ministry remains vocally opposed to the new package of economic sanctions against Iran [8].

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich blasted the US for imposing new unilateral sanctions against Iran, describing the move as an irrational measure intended to the harm pace of negotiations [9]. India has remained adamant against expanding sanctions on Iran [10], as New Delhi and Tehran agree to increase annual bilateral trade two thirds to \$25 billion by 2015, confirming their intent to bypass US sanctions by making payments for a significant portion of its oil purchases from Iran in rupees [11]. As further cooperation between the US and the Persian Gulf monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) remains evident through their unanimous support of Syria's armed opposition, Saudi Arabia remains a major beneficiary under the continued imposition of sanctions on Tehran from Washington. Japan and South Korea once accounted for 26% of Iran's oil exports [12], now both Seoul [13] and Tokyo [14] have sought stable supplies of crude oil from Saudi Arabia. As South Africa turns to Saudi Arabia after halting business with Iran [15], the kingdom's crude output is at a thirty-year high [16], as shipments to the United States quietly rise to 25% [17].

As a result of sanctions on Iran, Christine Lagarde of the International Monetary Fund predicts that oil prices could spike as much as 30% and hover around \$160 per barrel if Iran's crude oil exports fell sharply [18]. As Iranian production hits a ten-year low as of March 2012, industry-wide fears of a recession-fueled fall in demand have prompted the reduction of total world oil production through the imposition of embargoes on Iranian oil; higher prices triggered by a supply squeeze from the sanctions work to further benefit international oil companies and producers like Saudi Arabia [19]. In March 2012, the US granted Japan and 10 EU nations a six-month reprieve to gradually cut their imports of Iranian oil, lest they be subjected to their own financial sanctions and cut off from the US financial system [20]. Under the 2012 US National Defense Authorization Act, Barack Obama can impose financial sanctions on foreign banks that carry out financial transactions with Iran's central bank "for the purchase of petroleum or petroleum products from Iran" [21].

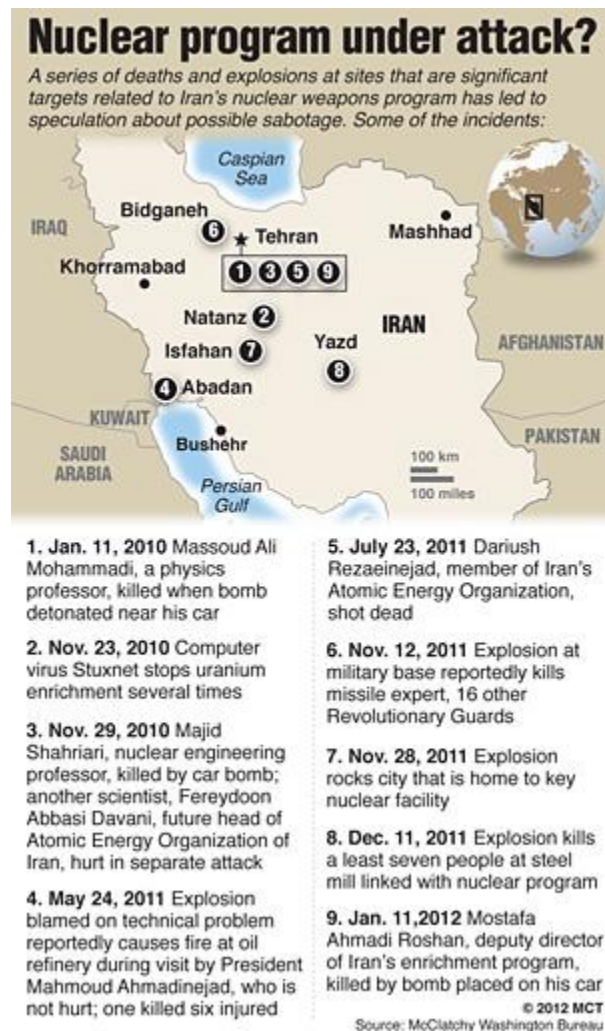


Given the fragile state of the European economy, the further implementation of financial sanctions on nations who fail to comply with the oil embargo on Iran is thoroughly unreasonable, with entirely negative implications for the European Union. Any further escalation of tensions with Iran would likely trigger inflated oil prices, which could further cripple the unstable economies of Greece and Portugal and potentially lead to those nations leaving the European Union. Despite Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Qassemi downplaying the negative effects of sanctions [22], inflation is soaring within Iran as the cost of food increases between 25% to 125%, with 60% of the population relying on cash subsidies handed out by Tehran [23]. Iran's budget deficit for the 2011/2012 fiscal year is expected to be between \$30 to \$50 billion, as the Iranian rial continues to plunge after the imposition of the oil embargo, causing widespread panic buying of gold among the Iranian public [24].

As commodity prices in Iran continue to skyrocket, former Mossad director Efraim Halevy remarked, "The rial is going down, it's gone down by over 50 percent. It's almost impossible to describe the damage done," while former Israeli foreign minister Shlomo Ben-Ami forewarns, "When a national currency loses 50% of its value in a matter of weeks, economic collapse is at hand." [25][26]. As Iran struggled to replace its client base following the imposition of US-led economic sanctions, Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz spoke before the Israeli cabinet predicting the collapse of the Iranian economy [27]. Haaretz reports the remarks of an unnamed senior official in the Israeli Foreign Ministry, "These aren't sanctions against Iran. Instead, they are sanctions imposed by the West to curb Israel's attack plans, had Israel not spoken out about its intention to attack, none of this would be happening. The Iranians are frightened. You have to understand what's going on there in stores; citizens grab food off the shelves because they are worried about an impending attack. Inflation is soaring and the currency has lost half its value. All this attests to fear." [28]

As the black market in Iran expands amid an increasing lack of public confidence in the rial, the role of the state is indirectly strengthened because smuggling imports requires strong connections within the regime, leaving the poor and lower middle class susceptible to poverty while the officials being targeted by sanctions themselves benefit from the embargo [29]. The fact that Obama administration chose to preemptively impose sanctions on Iran before the P5+1 meeting in Baghdad even took place indicates that the objective of US-Israeli policy toward Iran seeks

not mutual agreement and reconciliation, but the further perpetuation of conflict to ensure that the question of Iran's nuclear energy issue remains unsolved. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the scope for sanctions over Iran's nuclear program had been exhausted and any additional measures were intended to provoke discontent in the Iranian population [30].



As the United States and its allies offer unflinching support to armed opposition groups under cover of “democratic activism” in non-acquiescent countries in the region, any popular revolution in Iran would unquestionably be supported and used to pressure the government from within, even using the opportunity to launch an armed opposition insurrection. An article published in *The New Yorker* by Seymour M. Hersh entitled, “Our Men in Iran?,” documents how members of Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK), an Iranian dissident group and US State Department-listed terrorist organization, were trained in communications, cryptography, small-unit tactics and weaponry by the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) at a base in Nevada starting in 2005 [31]. JSOC instructed MEK operatives on how to penetrate major Iranian communications systems, allowing the group to intercept telephone calls and text messages inside Iran for the purpose of sharing them with American intelligence. The group has been implicated in the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists [32] and the planting of the Stuxnet malware that sabotaged Iran's nuclear facility in Natanz [33].

MEK was founded in 1965 as a Marxist Islamic mass political movement aimed at agitating the monarchy of the US-backed Iranian Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The group initially sided with revolutionary clerics led by Ayatollah Khomeini following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, but eventually turned away from the regime during a power struggle that resulted in the group waging urban guerilla warfare against Iran's Revolutionary Guards in 1981. The organization was later given refuge by Saddam Hussein and mounted attacks on Iran from within Iraqi territory, killing an estimated 17,000 Iranian nationals in the process [34]. MEK exists as the main component of the Paris-based National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), a "coalition of democratic Iranian organizations, groups and personalities," calling itself a "parliament-in-exile" seeking to "establish a democratic, secular and coalition government" in Iran [35]. Following the toppling of Saddam Hussein, UN special representative in Iraq Martin Kobler organized efforts to relocate MEK insurgents to a former US military base near the Baghdad airport, with the full support of the US Embassy in Iraq and the State Department to avoid violent clashes between the MEK and the Shiite-led Iraqi government [36].

MEK has long received material assistance from Israel, who assisted the organization with broadcasting into Iran from their political base in Paris, while the MEK and NCRI have reportedly provided the United States with intelligence on Iran's nuclear program. Despite the documented cases of atrocities committed by MEK forces, elder statesmen such as former NATO Supreme Allied Commander General Wesley K. Clark, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, former 9/11 Commission Chairman Lee Hamilton were paid \$20,000 to \$30,000 per engagement to endorse the removal of the Mujahideen-e Khalq from the US State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations [37]. NBC News reports that Israel provided financing, training and arms to Mujahideen-e Khalq, who are responsible for killing five Iranian nuclear scientists since 2007 using motorcycle-borne assailants often attaching small magnetic bombs to the exterior of the victims' cars [38]. A recent investigation by the US Treasury Department has indicated that Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization is financially sponsored by the Israeli regime and Saudi Arabia [39].

Upon launching a war against Iran, aggressor nations would likely utilize MEK forces as opposition insurgents and could even recognize the touted "parliament-in-exile", the National Council of Resistance of Iran, as Iran's legitimate representative, much like how the Friends of Syria group has recognized the opposition Syrian National Council [40]. From her political base in Paris, exiled NCRI leader Maryam Rajavi is a strong candidate for Western support in contrast to internal opposition figures such as Mir-Hossein Mousavi, former Iranian Prime Minister turned political reformist and figurehead of the Green Movement demonstrations in 2009 following the victory of incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in elections widely perceived as a fraudulent [41]. Although Mousavi has advocated greater personal freedoms in Iran and the disbanding of religious police enforcers, he is a strong advocate of Iran's nuclear energy program and would likely never yield the kind of acquiescence to Western policy that exiled figures such as Maryam Rajavi would uphold in exchange for political support and material assistance [42]. It is widely believed that Mousavi is currently held under house arrest without an arrest warrant, charge or trial [43].

While figures such as Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi publically renounce nuclear

weapons [44], Iranian scientists claim to be enriching uranium to 20% to develop radiopharmaceuticals and industrial isotopes under the supervision of the IAEA inspectors [45]. On October 1, 2010, the IAEA proposed a deal according to which Iran would send 3.5% enriched uranium abroad and receive 20% enriched uranium from potential suppliers in return, namely France and the United States, who Tehran accused of stalling negotiations from the start [46]. Tehran was offered a deal at a time when its supplies of 20% enriched uranium were nearly depleted, however Iranian lawmakers rejected the deal after technical studies showed that it would only take two to three months for any country to further enrich the nuclear stockpile and turn it into metal nuclear plates for the Tehran Research Reactor, while suppliers had announced that they would not return fuel to Iran in any time less than seven months [47].

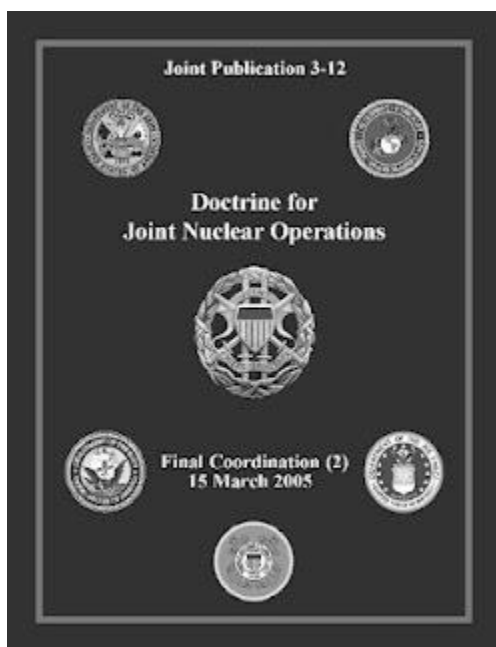
Iran has made efforts to ensure the transparency of its nuclear program by allowing IAEA probes to inspect Iranian sites such as the Parchin military complex where the agency has reported suspicious activities in the past [48]. The IAEA's recent discovery of traces of uranium enriched up to 27% at Iran's Fordo enrichment plant sparked controversy, although the enrichment figure is still substantially below the 90% level needed to make the fissile core required in nuclear arms; officials conceded that the likely explanation for the increased level of enrichment was attributed to centrifuges initially over-enriching at the start as technicians adjusted their output [49]. It should be noted that former chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Hans Blix has challenged the IAEA's own reports on Iran's nuclear activities, accusing the agency of relying on unverified intelligence from the US and Israel [50]; the IAEA's most recent report cited Tehran's progress toward enrichment technology with complete cooperation with the agency and confirms the non-weaponized status of Iranian nuclear activities [51].

Clinton Bastin, former director of US nuclear weapons production programs, has sent an open letter to President Obama regarding the status of Iran's capacity to produce nuclear weapons [52]. Bastin reiterates, "The ultimate product of Iran's gas centrifuge facilities would be highly enriched uranium hexafluoride, a gas that cannot be used to make a weapon. Converting the gas to metal, fabricating components and assembling them with high explosives using dangerous and difficult technology that has never been used in Iran would take many years after a diversion of three tons of low enriched uranium gas from fully safeguarded inventories. The resulting weapon, if intended for delivery by missile, would have a yield equivalent to that of a kiloton of conventional high explosives" [53]. The US-based Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) has recently released claims that Iran's total production of enriched uranium over the past five years would be enough for at least five nuclear weapons stating, "This total amount of 3.5 percent low enriched uranium hexafluoride, if further enriched to weapon grade, is enough to make over five nuclear weapons." [54]

Bastin's assessment of Iran's nuclear program further emphasizes the impracticality of weaponizing the hexafluoride product of Tehran's gas-centrifuges, as the resulting deterrent would yield the equivalent explosive capacity equal to a kiloton of conventional explosives, producing a highly inefficient nuclear weapon. If Iran chose to produce nuclear weapons in this way, it would take several years to reach the 90% enrichment levels needed for a nuclear deterrent; Iran has complied with the IAEA and the United Nations on this issue and there is no substantial evidence indicating that Tehran has any intention of enriching uranium to 90% for the purpose of creating nuclear weapons. On March 23rd, 2012, Reuters released a special report

entitled, “Intel shows Iran nuclear threat not imminent”, concluding that the United States, its European allies and even Israel agree that Tehran does not have a bomb, it has not decided to build one, and it is years away from having a deliverable nuclear warhead [55]. As the West continually implements an unyielding regime of sanctions against Iran when they themselves acknowledge the civilian nature of the Iranian nuclear program, the overwhelming motive behind their actions to pressure Iran into full-scale war on an unprecedented scale is self-evident.

The United States has produced more than 70,000 nuclear weapons between 1951 and 1998 [56], while Israel possess a nuclear weapons stockpile ranging from 75 to 400 warheads [57]. While the hazardous ramifications of Iran’s nuclear development pervade public consciousness, the fact that US legal doctrine has worked to further blur the line between conventional and nuclear warfare remains rarely acknowledged. The March 2005 Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations released by the Joint Chiefs of Staff envisages “contingency plans” for an offensive first strike use of nuclear weapons against both Iran and North Korea, providing the legal mandate to carry out pre-emptive nuclear war, both in terms of military planning as well as defense procurement and production [58] The 2002 adoption of the Pentagon’s 2001 Nuclear Posture Review by the US Congress marked the cease of prohibition on low yield nuclear weapons and provided funding allocations to pursue the development of tactical nuclear weapons, such as bunker buster (earth penetrator) mini-nukes [59].



The revised Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations (March 2005) envisaged five scenarios where “the use of nuclear weapons might be requested,” namely, “to attack adversary installations including weapons of mass destruction, deep, hardened bunkers containing chemical or biological weapons, or the command and control infrastructure required for the adversary to execute a WMD attack against the United States or its friends and allies” and “to counter potentially overwhelming adversary conventional forces”. The doctrine further cites, “Responsible security planning requires preparation for threats that are possible, though perhaps unlikely today. The lessons of military history remain clear: unpredictable, irrational conflicts occur. Military forces must prepare to counter weapons and capabilities that exist in the near

term even if no immediate likely scenarios for war are at hand. *To maximize deterrence of WMD use, it is essential US forces prepare to use nuclear weapons effectively and that US forces are determined to employ nuclear weapons if necessary to prevent or retaliate against WMD use*" [60].

The possibility of nuclear strikes against Iran pose staggeringly frightening implications for the human family, as the very nations crying foul about the danger of nuclear weapons have prepared the legal infrastructure to use them against others, preemptively. While trust towards the Iranian regime remains questionable among segments of the Iranian population and the international community, Tehran has complied with the IAEA and no evidence exists to implicate Iran with constructing a nuclear weapon. While the fiery rhetoric of Iranian and Israeli officials remains entirely counterproductive, Tel Aviv has shown the least initiative to constructively partake in diplomacy with Iran, as top Israeli officials refuse to even meet with US envoy to the P5+1, Wendy Sherman, who reportedly was sent to Tel Aviv to "reaffirm our unshakable commitment to Israel's security" [61]. As Israel aggressively employs an apartheid policy domestically, nuclear-armed Tel Aviv boasts its right to strike Iran without consent from any other nation [62]. As our species approaches the increasingly dangerous crossroads of the 21st Century, nations such as Germany, Russia, India and China must utilize their collective influence and technology to mediate this impending security crisis in the Middle East.

Although Iran has asserted its right to develop peaceful nuclear technology as a signatory to the nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty, its uranium-based fuel has wrought negative and inaccurate accusations regarding Tehran's intentions to weaponize. To ensure the further deflection of erroneous accusations, Iran can truly make an example of itself by phasing out uranium-based nuclear technology and shifting to a liquid fuel based on molten-fluoride salts used in Liquid Fluoride Thorium Reactor (LFTR) nuclear technology powered by thorium, an obscure, mildly radioactive metal produced as a waste product from the mining of rare earth minerals. Thorium is plentiful, easily accessible and energy dense, a metric ton produces as much energy as 200 tons of uranium, or 3,500,000 ton of coal [63]. Thorium-based reactors consume their own hazardous waste and would serve Iran's internal needs far more effectively than its current technology. As a nuclear fuel, thorium is both cleaner and safer than uranium and produces benign alpha radiation, unable to even penetrate skin [64].

The governments of China [65] and India [66] have expressed great interest in further developing thorium molten-salt reactor technology. Iran holds 9% of the world's oil reserves and 17% of its natural gas reserves; the abundant supply of fossil fuel resources has indirectly discouraged the pursuit of alternative renewable energy sources [67]. Iran has enormous potential as a producer of geothermal energy, particularly in the provinces of Azerbaijan and Tehran [68]. There is no shortage of solutions to the current problems faced by the international community in its efforts to oversee peaceful energy technology in Iran. China, Germany and India could share their growing technical expertise with Iran to develop energy solutions that can never be used as a pretext for external military strikes. No credible basis exists to warrant the implementation of economic sanctions against Iran, which are ostensibly in place to coax social unrest and collapse the Iranian economy.

For all the belligerence exuded by the current Iranian regime, the unwavering aggressive it

receives from outside forces does nothing to offer the people of Iran any tangible solutions to better themselves and their standard of living. Although the further application of sanctions will inevitably have damaging effects on Tehran, inflated oil price fluctuations have the potential to fracture the fledgling austerity-states of the European Union. The failure of emerging markets to adhere to full embargoes on Iran once they come into effect would send a strong message to the architects of such disastrous policy. As nations such as China and Russia acknowledge the imbalanced nature of power in the Security Council and the aggressive stance of the United States and Israel, these nations can best utilize their power by offering technological and diplomatic solutions to avert the detrimental social, economic and spiritual consequences of war.

Notes

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