



"CENTRAL CHALLENGES OF AMERICAN NATIONAL SECURITY, STRATEGY AND THE PRESS"
(2013)

To: U.S. President Barack Obama

From: J. Comins

Re: Iran's Nuclear Program: Addressing the Challenge and Reassessing the U.S. Current Strategy
(October 15, 2013)

Issue: Reassessing the strategic choices given the continuing disparity between Iranian official discourse and facts, and the latest developments concerning the changes in Iran leadership.

National Interests: *Vital:* Prevent, deter, and reduce the threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons attacks on the United States or its military forces abroad; Ensure U.S. allies' survival. *Extremely Important:* Prevent, deter, and reduce the threat of the use of nuclear weapons anywhere; Promote the acceptance of international rules of law and mechanisms for resolving or managing disputes peacefully; Prevent the emergence of a regional hegemon in important regions, especially the Persian Gulf.

Analysis: The continuing development of Iran's nuclear program represents a challenge to peace and international security. On the one hand, Iran has built up enough capabilities for enriching uranium at 20% and they are able to convert it at 90% in a short period of time—which is the final step to generate nuclear weapons. On the other hand, according to U.S. national intelligence community, it remains unclear if Iran will eventually decide to go beyond the "red lines" stated by Obama's Administration: Iran crossing the threshold to get a nuclear bomb. Publicly, Iranian authorities have consistently denied their intentions to seek it. They have always defended the use of nuclear power for civil and medical applications. On the ground, the situation is fairly distinct. As the IAEA points out: "Iran does not provide enough cooperation to prove the absence of undeclared nuclear facilities and activities, and it apparently worked on aspects related to nuclear weapons design".

Operational Objectives: 1) Avoid uranium enrichment at 90% and limit stockpiles of nuclear material and other transparency measures. 2) Prevent the risk of a sudden a break out to the bomb. 3) Enhance cooperation between Iran and IAEA inspectors.

Strategic Options:

1) Current U.S. Strategy. So far, U.S. strategy has been based on three main pillars: demands, economic sanctions and covert actions—including outstanding cyber war/cyber sabotage. *Pro:* Iranian economy today is seriously damaged; the financial restrictions have a negative impact on the nature of commercial relations between Iran and China, one of its key allies and supporters in the international forums; it has fostered Iranian willingness to negotiate a settlement. *Con:* empowers anti-reform voices and hard liners influence; encourages further enrichment; set conditions for a "sneak out" scenario; potential humanitarian effects.

2) International Community-Sponsored approach. Implementing P5+1 proposal: relieving sanctions in return for suspending enrichment at 5% followed by transparency measures. Bottom line: Iran continues obstructing the works of IAEA inspectors. *Pro:* prevention is preferable to contention; Iranian Supreme Leader supports President Rouhani to make a deal; facilitates overlap between the two parties' minimum conditions. *Con:* Iran gains time to reach a "critical capability" in secret; pressures from within Obama's Administration to further demanding agreement.

3) Containment and Airstrikes. Developing surgical operations to bomb Iranian nuclear facilities. *Pro:* Demonstrating U.S. seriousness and credibility; destroying main Iranian nuclear facilities and setting back the nuclear program. *Con:* requires more than conventional military capabilities; risks to destabilize the region; possible closure of the Strait of Hormuz; ineffective if Iran possesses secret facilities; retaliation on the U.S. allies or in the U.S soil through terrorism attacks.

Recommendation and Implementation: #2 International Community-Sponsored Approach, as the best long-term solution which emphasizes the compromise with multilateralism, encourages burden sharing with the U.S. and avoid the possibility of regional destabilization and retaliation against U.S. facilities and citizens.