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Dear Friends,

A year ago, when terribly worried about the possibility of an attack on Iran, with disastrous consequences for Iran, of course,¹ but also for nearly all the rest of the world² and certainly including America, I was bombarding you and others with analyses and warnings.

For a while, it appeared that I was like the little boy who cried wolf. As in the story, the “wolf” – the prospect of war -- was actually there: about half of the American navy was positioned along Iran’s frontier; hundreds of cruise missiles were aimed at its nuclear sites, factories, military camps and cities; hundreds of aircraft were on alert at bases surrounding Iran in Qatar, Iraq, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and the Indian Ocean; other USAF aircraft were primed to deliver bombs directly from the continental United States;³ amphibious assault ships, equipped with helicopters and fast hovercraft, had been sent to the Gulf in 2007 to be ready to “insert” troops within hours of a decision to attack; covert agents and special forces were

¹ *The Guardian*, February 13, 2006, Ewen MacAskill. “Consequences of a War,” Up until April 2006, the White House was planning to use nuclear weapons in the attack but was dissuaded by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Peter Pace, USMC, according to Seymour Hersh in *The New Yorker*, July 10 and 17, 2009. Consider the result of what the Bush administration decision: As former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara pointed out (“Apocalypse Soon,” *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2005), a “small” (one megaton) nuclear weapon today is roughly 70 times as powerful as the weapon that killed 280,000 people in Hiroshima. He commented that to drop a nuclear weapon on a “nonnuclear enemy would be militarily unnecessary, morally repugnant, and politically indefensible.” It would thus have severely damaged America’s world leadership and probably convinced a number of other countries that they would need nuclear weapons to protect themselves from the United States; so it would have ratcheted up the world nuclear arms race to a new level of danger.

² I have laid out the economic consequences in a number of papers. In summary, they would remove at least temporarily upwards of 25% of the world’s energy, certainly causing severe dislocations (since the oil produced in various other areas would require extensive modification by refineries that do not have the capacity to do so), and would almost certainly cause a panic in which energy costs would soar. It would obviously make working out of the current depression even more difficult.

³ A detailed description of the USAF “shock and awe” is laid out by US Air Force General (Rtd.) Thomas McNerney in “Target Iran” in the Neoconservative journal *The Weekly Standard*, April 26, 2006. It makes sobering reading and should be read by Americans as it certainly has been by Iranians: “A military option against Iran’s nuclear facilities is feasible... What would an effective military response look like? It would consist of a powerful air campaign led by 60 stealth aircraft (B-2s, F117s, F-22s) and more than 400 nonstealth strike aircraft, including B-52s, B-1s, F-15s, F-16s, Tornados, and F-18s. Roughly 150 refueling tankers and other support aircraft would be deployed, along with 100 unmanned aerial vehicles for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, and 500 cruise missiles. In other words, overwhelming force would be used... [to] hit more than 1,500 aim points. Among the weapons would be the new 28,000-pound bunker busters, 5,000-pound bunker penetrators, 2000-pound bunker busters, 1000-pound general purpose [GP] bombs, and 500-pound GP bombs. A B-2 bomber, to give one example, can drop 80 of these 500-pound bombs independently targeted at 80 different aim points. This force would give the coalition an enormous destructive capability... [and would] allow the initial attacks to be completed in 36 to 48 hours. The destruction of Iran’s military force structure would create the opportunity for regime change as well...”

meanwhile deployed in Iran,⁴ drone aircraft, gathering intelligence and “also employed as a tool for intimidation” had been overflying Iran since 2004;⁵ and the Bush administration was issuing a stream of warnings that “all options were on the table.”⁶

(Please forgive me for extensive allusion to sources; I do so because many of the items I will discuss are either controversial or little known.)

Of course, having troops and equipment “at the ready” does not necessarily mean that they will be used. But history shows us that it does make their use more likely. The choice gives rise to the common military expression, “use it or lose it.” Moreover, the official US military objective in the Middle East, established by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, certified by Vice President Dick Cheney and approved, indeed amplified, by the President, was the overthrow of the Iranian government. This has been a persistent theme since the 1990s of American Neoconservative advisers to the White House, the Defense Department and the CIA as well as more visible and often clamorous commentators in the media and pontificating and often vociferous strategists in a number of policy institutes and foundations.

It was not just Americans who were talking about and preparing to attack Iran: year after year an attack on Iran was perhaps the most common subject in Israeli political discussion, in the Israeli media and in Israeli diplomatic and lobbying encounters with American officials and legislators. Moreover, America had supplied Israel with fighter-bombers (the F-16i and the F-15i) with sufficient range to reach at least some Iranian sites and with the munitions (the GBU-28 and the more powerful GBU-39 “bunker-buster” bombs) designed for just the sort of attack planned against Iran.⁷

In June 2002, the Israelis tested the performance of 100 of their F-16i and F-15i aircraft in a well-publicized mock attack carried out over the Mediterranean Sea.⁸ What this war game made clear was that while the American-supplied aircraft had the range to reach at least one site, other necessary aircraft (including rescue helicopters) did not and would have to be refueled in the air or at stopovers.⁹

Meanwhile, since Israeli and American intelligence had identified more than 1,200 suspected nuclear and other military sites,¹⁰ it was clear that a single Israeli strike even with 100 aircraft would not suffice. Either multiple raids, more aircraft or nuclear weapons would be required to accomplish the mission the Israelis had set for themselves. They nevertheless have

⁴ The US Navy had sunk about half of the Iranian fleet in the Persian Gulf during the Iraq-Iran war of the 1980s; the Clinton administration imposed oil and trade sanctions on Iran from 1995-March 2000; in 2007, President Bush requested \$400 million to “destabilize” Iran’s government; and as Seymour Hersh reported in *The New Yorker* of July 7 & 14, 2009, “a secret military task force [is] now operating in Iran, that is under the control of JSOC [Joint Special Operations Command]. Then just before the end of his term, ⁵ *International Herald Tribune*, February 13, 2005 Dafna Linzer, “U.S. Uses Drones to Probe Iran for Arms.”

⁶ Most notably, of course, President George W. Bush’s “State of the Nation” address of January 2003.

⁷ The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, September 11 and 14, 2008.

⁸ *International Herald Tribune*, June 21-22, 2008, Michael Gordon and Eric Schmitt, “An Israeli dry run for raid against Iran?” More than 100 F-16 and F-15 participated over the eastern Mediterranean and Greece, flying the exact range of flight to Natanz, 1,400 km.

⁹ The F-16i and F-15i may have the range, but most Israeli aircraft would have to be refueled. Andrew Brookes, in the March 2007 *World Today* (Royal Institute of International Affairs).

¹⁰ *The Sunday Times*, September 2, 2007: Sarah Baxter, “Pentagon “Three-Day Blitz” plan for Iran.”

continued to assert their determination and ability to carry out an assault if the United States does not bring the presumed Iranian nuclear-weapon program to a halt.

These events, massing of forces and repeated statements convinced me that the danger of war during 2008 constituted an unacceptable risk to America. Along with a number – but not a very great number – of others, I hammered away at consequences of this drift into war in every forum I could reach.

Subsequently, in November 2008, the US National Intelligence Council dropped its own bombshell. In a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), the 16 federal intelligence agencies declared “with high confidence” – that is, as the publication explains, “the judgments are based on high-quality information [making] it possible to render a solid judgment” -- that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program four years before: “We judge with high confidence,” the NIE continued, “that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program...and We judge with high confidence that Iran will not be technically capable of producing and reprocessing enough plutonium for a weapon before about 2015.”¹¹

Fortunately, perhaps because the NIE showed that the Bush administration’s frequently asserted justification for an attack on Iran was unsubstantiated, President Bush apparently came to agree in the final weeks of his administration that the danger posed by an attack was unacceptable. He decided not to authorize an American military action. He also turned down an Israeli request for a “green light” to raid Iran.¹² His decision was approved by NATO leaders including French President Sarkozy who said “an attack would be ‘a catastrophe’ [and] must be prevented.”¹³

President Bush could order the USAF and the US Navy not to attack Iran, but, of course, he could not absolutely prevent the Israelis from carrying out an air raid. His administration, as I have pointed out, had given them the required equipment, and they repeatedly asserted their determination to use it in precisely the situation President Bush had created, refusal by America to do what the Israeli government demanded, to destroy Iran’s capability to move toward nuclear weapons. What the Israeli Air Force lacked was a route, a flight path.

At this point, as Victorian novelists liked to say, “the plot thickened.” Or it may have since there is so far (and may never be) concrete evidence. But based on snippets of information and reasoning, it seems to be at least possible that an undisclosed aspect of the August 2008 crisis over Georgia *may* have involved an Israeli attempt to solve the dilemma of a flight path. Unlike Israel which has no common boarder with Iran and is at the extreme limit of Israeli aircraft range, Georgia is right next door. If Israeli aircraft could be based there, they could relatively easily hit any site in Iran. Farfetched? As the Israeli blog, *ynet news.com*, reported on August 10, 2008, “The fighting which broke over the weekend between Russia and Georgia has brought Israel’s intense involvement in the region into the limelight. This involvement includes the sale of advanced weapons to Georgia.” (At the same time, Israel has also been selling its aircraft

¹¹ Issued by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. The report contradicted some aspects of a May 2005 NIE on Iran’s nuclear program. The fact that the NIE was published, an unusual action, seemed to indicate a growing worry by the intelligence agencies that America was sliding toward war with Iran and an attempt to make such a move impossible by showing that it was unjustified.

¹² As Jonathan Steel reported on September 27, 2008 in *The Guardian*, “Israel asked US for green light to bomb nuclear sites in Iran.” “Israel gave serious thought this spring to launching a military strike on Iran’s nuclear sites but was told by President George W. Bush that he would not support it...”

¹³ Daniel Levy, Talking Point Memo (Salon), September 11, 2008.

technology to Russia to enhance the performance of Russian fighter bombers.) How, if at all, this complex set of moves fits into the Iran story is, as I say, obscure. If it was part of a plan, the plan was not *then* effected. Unless or until we learn more, all one can say is that it is certainly intriguing.

Another intriguing episode was the September 6, 2008 Israeli attack on an alleged nuclear site in Syria.¹⁴ The most logical explanation I can find for the attack, based on my own observations of RAF and USAF probes during the Cold war, some of which I watched on radar on the Black Sea in 1963, was to get the Syrians to “light up” their radar air defenses. That is what we were doing in the Crimea and elsewhere to establish a usable flight plan into the Soviet Union. This ploy would have been useful to the Israelis only if they wanted to develop the option of overflying Syria.

Overflying Syria, however, would not get Israeli aircraft to Iran. They would still have to overfly American-controlled Iraqi airspace. Would they be allowed to do so? It is inconceivable that if planes of the Israeli Air Force appeared over Iraq on a mission against Iran the USAF would attempt to shoot them down.¹⁵ Consequently, both the Bush and Obama administrations have made only ambiguous statements advising caution and expressing sympathy, not flat prohibitions or threats to cut military supply or other largess if Israel attacked. In short, as one commentator put it, “sending mixed signals.”¹⁶

In their attack on the Iraqi nuclear installation Oisraq in 1981, the Israelis overflew Jordan and Saudi Arabia. They could presumably use the same route today if the Syrian route proved too dangerous. But, to avoid Iraqi airspace, they would have to swing far to the south, overflying Kuwait, and this might require the use of tanker aircraft in which they are thought to be deficient. The other route, over Turkey, would, similarly, be technically difficult and would probably be opposed by the Turks who maintain strategically important relationships with Iran.

In short, it would be difficult but not impossible for Israel to attack Iran.

II

The presumed danger, to which the Bush administration was reacting and to which the Israelis are today stridently proclaiming is that Iran is on the brink of acquiring a nuclear weapon. Is this true? The November 2008 NIE said no, but it also admitted “we do not know whether it (Iran) currently intends to develop nuclear weapons.” The Israelis believe they do. If they do, how great a danger does their action pose? Since World War II, no state has used nuclear weapons aggressively; all nuclear powers have regarded them solely as deterrents. Nor has any state shared its weapons with non-governmental groups such as terrorists. Iran would be unlikely to do so even if it had weapons. And even if it actually acquired the materials to make a weapon, testing would be extremely difficult and impossible to hide. But, if the potential acquisition by Iran of a nuclear weapon capability is a great danger, what can be done about it? These are surely

¹⁴ Norman Dombey, “At Al Kibar,” *London Review of Books*, June 19, 2008, pointed out that the reactor, if it existed, had “no fuel, and no prospect of getting any...”

¹⁵ I think this is self-evident given the power of the Israeli lobby throughout America, but it is also exemplified by one historical episode. The U.S. Navy did not intervene even to protect a US Navy ship, the USS *Liberty*, from Israeli aircraft and ships that were endeavoring to sink it. This was during the 1967 war. For a graphic account see James Bamford, *Body of Secrets* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 200 ff.

¹⁶ *The Nation*, April 13, 2009, Roane Carey, “US must Stop Mixed Signals on Iran.”

among the most important questions that the Obama administration must address.

I will address these questions in this paper, but first I will discuss *why* the Iranians might wish to acquire a nuclear weapon. Answering that question requires some insight into Iranian interpretation of American-Iranian relations and some discussion of the country's cultural and political orientation.

Beginning with the way "the other fellow" sees an issue is not how we Americans usually address a problem. We usually start at the other end: in this case, what the Iranians have done against America, what they are believed or are alleged to be doing and what they might do.

Foremost among American grievances is that the Iranian regime, in violation of international law and diplomatic custom, sanctioned the seizure in 1979 of the United States embassy in Tehran and the taking as hostages of most of its staff. The "hostage crisis" was probably the most important and certainly was the most emotional issue in that year's presidential election.¹⁷ The charge has been made and at least partly documented that on behalf of Ronald Reagan, William J. Casey, later head of the CIA, arranged that the hostages not be released before the election, thus denying Carter the political boost their release would have given his candidacy. If this is true, it would have put the Iranian regime in position to blackmail the Reagan administration. It is certain that after winning the election, the Reagan administration, seconded by Israel, secretly began dealing with Iran on more favorable terms in the so-called Iran-Contra affair.¹⁸ So to some extent Iran faded from the American hate list. There were subsequent ugly events, including the terrorist car bomb attack on the American embassy annex in Beirut on October 23, 1983 that killed 241 American servicemen, which was partly blamed on Iranian influence, but there were no direct government-to-government clashes.

Americans by and large have forgotten or, if they remember, wish to put aside their own actions against Iran. The Iranians have not forgotten and have repeatedly brought them forward. In brief summary, the actions they mention are, first, the American overthrow of the first democratically elected government of Iran. That happened in 1953 in a coup that was suggested by the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI-6) to then Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and was carried out by the CIA under Kermit Roosevelt.¹⁹ The coup resulted in the reimposition of Muhammad Reza Shah whose repressive policies led ultimately to the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

¹⁷ Captain Gary Sick USN (Rtd.), who was the (NSC) officer most closely involved, has written a chronology of the events in *All Fall Down: America's Fateful Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House and London: I.B. Tauris, 1985). Mark Bowden later interviewed a number of the militants and describes their activities and motivations in "Among the Hostage Takers," *The Atlantic Monthly* (December 2004). I also deal with this episode in my forthcoming *Understanding Iran* (New York and London: Macmillan, 2009).

¹⁸ Gary Sick, *October Surprise: America's Hostages in Iran and the Election of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1991).

¹⁹ The official, still classified, history written by Donald M. Wilber, *The Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran, November 1952-August 1953*. Mr. Wilbur's account, which was intended as a text book on how to overthrow governments to train CIA officers, was turned over to *The New York Times* in 2000 and was made available at <http://www.nytimes.com/library/world/mideast/041600iran-cia=index.html>.

The second action was American military assistance to Iraq in its war against Iran. The US directly or indirectly supplied weapons, including cluster bombs, anthrax and equipment to manufacture poison gas, as well as battlefield intelligence to the Iraqis under Saddam Husain. These donations assisted the Iraqis in killing hundreds of thousands of Iranians.²⁰ In addition, America actually fought Iranian armed forces, sinking most of the Iranian navy. Economically, America also took the leadership in imposing a quasi-blockade that caused great suffering in Iran. Then, shortly after a visit by Donald Rumsfeld to Baghdad, the United States removed Iraq from the “terrorist list” and added Iran.

The third action to which the Iranian regime has pointed was the shooting down, in Iranian air space, on July 3, 1988 of an Iran Air civilian Airbus, thus killing 290 passengers, including 66 children, and crew. The US government agreed to pay \$61.8 million in damages but refused to apologize and awarded the captain of the Cruiser USS *Vincennes* that fired the missile a medal.

Despite these episodes, the Iranians both as individuals and as a government showed notable friendship for America and support for its policies. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, 60,000 Iranians observed a minute of silence in bustling Tehran and many thousands of others held candlelight vigils.²¹ The Iranian government assisted the United States in its campaign against the Taliban and in the establishment of American-designated Afghan government²² and has employed about 20,000 troops and police, sustaining almost as many casualties as America suffered in Iraq, trying to interdict the drug trade.²³ The Iranians also deported large numbers of suspected al-Qaida operatives and forced or won-over Afghan regional strong men to the American side.²⁴ In these actions, Iran made major contributions to the achievement of America’s major objectives in its Afghan campaign.

Despite the opposition of their own “hawks,” successive Iranian government have made conciliatory gestures.²⁵ For example in May 2003 then-President Muhammad Khatimi offered to open negotiations for a “grand bargain,”²⁶ Prime Minister Ahmadinejad, although wary and at least verbally hostile, made a comparable offer in May 2006 and has just repeated it to President Obama. On April 7, 2009, he said he welcomed “honest” talks which he explained meant concrete actions rather than just words.²⁷

²⁰ William R. Polk, *Understanding Iraq* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005 & 2006), 131-132.

²¹ The BBC, Gordon Corea, “Uncovering Iran.”

²² See Max Rodenbeck, “The Iran Mystery Case,” *The New York Review of Books*, January 15, 2009.

²³ Antonio Maria Costa, “The New Golden Triangle,” *International Herald Tribune*, December 1, 2006, “Iran has deployed almost 20,000 antinarcotic police and border guards along its 1,845 kilometer border with Afghanistan and Pakistan – the world’s most active opium smuggling route. Twenty-eight mountain passes have been blocked by huge concrete structures. Hundreds of kilometers of trenches – four meters wide and four meters deep – have been dug to stop drug caravans eluding patrols. Towers and barbed wire stretch as far as the eyes can see.”

²⁴ Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett, “Opportunity Knocked,” *National Interest Online*, July 23, 2008.

²⁵ *International Herald Tribune*, December 7, 2007, Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett, “Bush’s real lie about Iran: despite recent claims otherwise, the White House has rebuffed negotiations with Iran at every turn...”

²⁶ *Financial Times*, March 17, 2004, Guy Dinmore, “US stalls over Iran talks offer.” The Bush administration was furious and complained to the Swiss Foreign Ministry that its ambassador in Tehran had exceeded his authority by even transmitting the offer.

²⁷ Associated Press, April 8, 2009, printed in *The New York Times*.

Contrariwise, the Bush administration repeatedly rebuffed Iranian gestures, ignored Iranian offers to negotiate differences²⁸ and damned the Iranian leadership.²⁹ President Bush categorized Iran in his January 2002 State of the Union address as a part of the “Axis of Evil.” That terminology set the style of American-Iranian relations during the Bush administration as I have set out above. What it also did was to force upon Iran’s leadership two “lessons.”

The first lesson derived from the contrast between the American treatment of Iraq, which *did not* have a nuclear weapon, and North Korea which *did*: Iraq was effectively destroyed as an independent state and its government overturned while North Korea was offered an aid program. Iranian officials could hardly miss the point: not having a bomb put them in mortal danger. Iranians thought they were next on the list.³⁰

The second moral was almost as important: it was *that once a country actually gets a bomb, it is safe*. No country will attack a country that, in retaliation, can inflict “unacceptable” damage. North Korea was the proof of that.

Moreover, the history of the nuclear age shows that once a country gets the bomb, it is quickly accepted by the other nuclear powers as a “member of the club.”³¹ India is a recent proof of this: although it secretly acquired the weapon and did not join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (as Iran did), the Bush administration said, in effect, “we will make an exception – as we have done for Israel, which also has not joined Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – and share with you our nuclear technology.”³²

So what is it likely that Iran will do about these “lessons.” Put another way, what do we know or what can we infer from what we know?

III

While serving as a Member of the Policy Planning Council, during which I spent a great deal of time trying to figure out what dozens of other governments were trying to do, I learned that our ability to accomplish that task is severely limited. Despite spending many billions of dollars on diplomatic encounters, intelligence gathering from friends and agents, interception and

²⁸ *International Herald Tribune*, August 18, 2006, “from news reports” “Twenty-two former high-ranking military officers and retired diplomats urged President George W. Bush on Thursday to open discussions immediately...” *The New York Times* correspondent Nicholas D. Kristof headed his column on January 22, 2007, “Hang up! Tehran is calling.”

²⁹ *International Herald Tribune*, August 18, 2006, “from news reports” “Twenty-two former high-ranking military officers and retired diplomats urged President George W. Bush on Thursday to open discussions immediately...” *The New York Times* correspondent Nicholas D. Kristof headed his column on January 22, 2007, “Hang up! Tehran is calling.”

³⁰ *The Guardian*, January 29, 2009, Julian Borger, “Soft-spoken line from Washington may terrify Tehran.” “While mixed messages emanated from the Bush administration, only one was clearly received in Tehran – that Iran was next on the Axis of Evil list after Iraq... The lesson of the Iraq invasion for the Iranian leadership was that Saddam lost his job and then his life not because he might have had weapons of mass destruction but because he had none. North Korea, the third member of the axis, which had nuclear bombs, was treated with much greater respect.”

³¹ *The London Review of Books*, June 22, 2006, Brian Jones “Nuclear Blindness.”

³² *International Herald Tribune*, September 12, 2008, Former President Jimmy Carter, “India deal puts world at risk” and October 3, 2008, Peter Baker, “Congress approves U.S. nuclear trade with India.”

decoding of radio traffic, satellite imagery and even more recondite means, it was difficult to get the raw data. But information collection was only the beginning of the problem. The data had to be interpreted so that “appreciations” could be made of the current events and projections could be made into the future.

In recent years, Americans have evolved two methods of accomplishing these tasks. Both are flawed; indeed, both have occasionally misled us into danger. The first of these is the adaptation mathematicians have made of the German Army General Staff *kriegspiel*, the “war-game.” Essentially the war-game sets out to show how the opponent will respond to an escalating series of “moves.” It assumes that he will be guided by a balance sheet of potential profit and loss. If he does not *add them up accurately* (as the mathematicians taught us to say) he has “miscalculated.” Gaming thus views the foreigner as a sort of accountant -- culturally disembodied, mathematically precise and governed by logic. In short, we posit in him precisely those qualities that do *not* shape our actions. So when we apply the lessons to “grand strategy” in our culturally diverse world, the results of the war-game are nearly always misleading.

In the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis (during which I was a member of the “Crisis Management Committee”) I was ordered to participate in a sort of replay of that crisis; it was a war-game designed to press the events into nuclear *conflict* but not quite to nuclear *war*. My colleagues on “Red Team” were some of America’s most senior military, intelligence and foreign affairs officers and we drew upon the most sensitive information available in the American government about the Soviet government. We focused on an escalating crisis at the end of which we were informed that “Blue Team” had obliterated a Russian city. How should we respond? Do nothing, retaliate by “taking out” an American city or go to general war?

After careful consideration, we opted for general war, firing all our missiles to attempt to wipe out all American retaliatory capability and even the country.

The “umpire,” Thomas Schelling, an MIT mathematician and author of *The Strategy of Conflict*, called a halt to the game, saying that we had “misplayed,” and called a general meeting in the War Room of the Pentagon the next morning for what would have been in real life literally a postmortem. Schelling opened by saying that if we were right, which of course we were not, America would have to give up the theory of deterrence. Why had we acted in this irresponsible way?

In response, we showed that Red Team went to general war because it had to. If the leader of Red Team had done nothing, he almost certainly would have been regarded as a traitor and overthrown by his own military commanders; had he played tit-for-tat, obliterating, say, Dallas, what could an American president have done? He also could not “turn the other cheek.” He would have had to reply. In turn, Russia would have had to react. And so on. Thus, despite the catastrophe it meant for both *nations*, neither *government* could have found a place or time to halt the fateful process. In short, whatever the “interest of state” (which clearly called for avoiding war even if in humiliation), the “interest of government” compelled actions that were not shaped by the same category of “logic.” No previous war-game had predicted this outcome. Indeed, the dozens or hundreds “played” over the past decade, had all predicted, as did Schelling, exactly the opposite: the Russians would back off in the face of threat. The game we played was designed to show that they would also back off even after an attack.

We did not then know how very close we had come to total world annihilation in the real-life Cuban Missile Crisis and how much had depended on sheer luck³³ -- and on the bravery or foolhardiness of Nikita Khrushchev.³⁴

To supplement or correct the war-game, America has evolved a second means of evaluating the present and predicting the future. This is the “National Intelligence Estimate” (NIE) like the one on Iranian nuclear capacities and intent of November 2008. An NIE represents the considered opinion of the most knowledgeable (or at least best informed) senior officials of the US government who are presumed to speak without fear or favor. I have myself requested several NIEs and have been allowed to sit through the preparation of a number of others. NIEs are the common way that major problems are examined and predictions are made on how they will evolve.

The flaw in the NIE is perhaps lesser than that in the war-game, but it is nonetheless serious. It depends upon assembling “facts.” That is, the staff that prepares the draft takes the vast input of statements, acts and capabilities of the adversary and from them makes an “appreciation” describing what the adversary is doing and drawing from it the inference of what he is likely to do. What is often deficient in this approach is that no assemblage of facts can ever be complete. Even more important is that it cannot account for all the “non-facts,” the emotions, religious beliefs, fears, memories and even ignorance of the opponent.

The draft thus prepared is then put before a designated group of senior officials, drawn from all over the Executive Branch, to be discussed and brought to a consensus. The consensus may or may not be right: what seemed to the National Intelligence Council in 2005 was the opposite of what seemed right in 2008.

So let me suggest an alternative. It relies in part on what the war-game and the NIE require, as much information as can be assembled, but it then goes in a slightly different direction: it involves putting oneself on “the other side of the table.” That is, it requires that one try to look at the issues the way the opponent does. Let me take the issue before us and pretend to play the role in the Iranian government that I actually performed in the Kennedy administration. As an Iranian policy planner, how would “I” see events and trends and what would I advise?

I am here attempting to accomplish two purposes: first, in my diplomatic and business experience, I have found that it is always enlightening to put oneself “on the other side of the table,” to try to understand what the other person sees, what he is thinking and what he wants. Then, second, with as much of a sense of how the other person one sees the issue, one can evaluate whether or not there is a basis for a “deal” and if so what it costs, how likely it is to be successful and what the alternatives are.

I begin with what my hypothetical Iranian policy planner – “I” -- thinks America (under the Bush administration) has been aiming to do:

³³ As former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara found (“Apocalypse Soon,” *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2005) years later the commanders of the four Soviet nuclear submarines then trailing the American fleet had authorization to fire their nuclear armed torpedoes without recourse to Moscow. Being out of touch with their headquarters, they continued to patrol for four days *after* Khrushchev announced the withdrawal and the crisis had ended.

³⁴ He was not overthrown, but after his death he was “down-graded” and not buried at the Kremlin Wall as were other Soviet leaders.

IV

Reading in the press what President Bush, Vice President Cheney and other administration officials were saying, “I” (the Iranian Policy Planner) would begin by assuming that they are planning to attack Iran, abort its nuclear program and “regime change” it.³⁵ The policy of the Bush administration is more extreme but continues elements of the Clinton administration policy;³⁶ so I believe it is likely to continue into the Obama administration.

My job as the regime’s policy planner is to figure out how to make invading Iran less attractive, and so less likely, and to offer an alternative that America will accept and that Iran’s rulers can afford to approve. My first step is to ask Iran’s intelligence analysts what the risks are. In American terms, this is equivalent to asking for a NIE. I believe that the Iranian equivalent to the National Intelligence Council would probably respond with this:

“The first danger is espionage. That is, the United States could attempt through covert action to bring about a coup d’état.³⁷ It did this in 1953 when the CIA and the British MI6 overthrew the government of Prime Minister Mosaddegh. Could it do so now? The odds are against it because the Iranian regime has both purged the regular army of the kind of officers who in 1953 supported the monarchy and has stationed among all army and air force units *mullahs* who monitor officers and men; it also has offset the regular army with the Revolutionary Guard. Moreover, with members of the *ulama* living in every community throughout the country, it would be very difficult for any significant group of Iranians to assist foreigners, as the senior army leaders and some political dissidents did in the 1953 coup.

“Even without *mullahs* watching them, the Security Services believe that the bulk of the Iranian people are with the regime at least on the issue of national defense.³⁸ True, there are dissident groups among the minorities – the Kurds in the northwest, the Arabs in the southwest

³⁵ *Asia Times*, May 6, 2008, Gareth Porter, “Yes, the Pentagon did want to hit Iran.” “Three weeks after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, former US defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld established an official military objective of not only removing the Saddam Hussein regime by force but overturning the regime in Iran, as well as in Syria and four other countries in the Middle East...”

³⁶ Iran’s President Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani told *Time* on May 24, 1993 that there had been no real change from the Bush to the Clinton administration. The US Navy continued to maintain a massive presence in the Persian Gulf, where the previous Bush administration had sunk about half of the Iranian navy. President Muhammad Khatami called for a “dialogue with the American people” on a US TV interview in 1998 and Iranian Foreign Minister Kharrazi met with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright at the UN in September, but these encounters did not notably change our relationships.

³⁷ *The New Yorker*, July 7 & 14, 2008, Seymour Hersh “Preparing the Battlefield”: “Late last year, Congress agreed to a request from President Bush to fund a major escalation of covert operations against Iran, according to current and former military, intelligence, and congressional sources.” For them he sought up to \$400 million which he described in a Presidential Finding “designed to destabilize the country’s religious leadership.” US “Special Operations Forces have been conducting cross-border operations from southern Iraq, with Presidential authorization, since last year. These have included seizing members of Al Quds, the commando arm of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, and taking them to Iraq for interrogation, and the pursuit of ‘high-value targets’ in President Bush’s war on terror, who may be captured or killed.” Funding was approved. “...a secret military task force, [is] now operating in Iran, that is under the control of JSOC [Joint Special Operations Command].” Then just before the end of his term, the *International Herald Tribune* of January 12, 2009, President Bush “embraced more intensive covert operations aimed at Iran...to undermine under systems, computer system and other networks on which Iran relies.”

³⁸ Nass and Precht: “All Iranians resent President Bush’s denigration of their country.”

and the Baluchis in the southeast -- but these dissident groups are small, uncoordinated, distant from strategic centers and unpopular with the bulk of the Iranian population. They can commit occasional terrorist acts, as each has done -- for example, murdering a Revolutionary Guard officer and blowing up a cultural center in Shiraz³⁹ -- but those acts will only increase popular antipathy to them.

“The only truly Iranian dissident group was the Mojahedin-e Khalk and they were effectively destroyed or chased out of Iran from 1982. They have no significant following in the country and blackened their name by their association with Saddam Husain during his attack on Iran. The Americans initially aided and abetted their terrorist attacks on Iran,⁴⁰ but subsequently the Americans bombed their bases in Iraq in 2003.⁴¹ Our friend and ally in Iraq, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, has ruled that they cannot use Iraq as a staging ground for attacks on Iran.

“Even with the support of some people in minority communities, American “Special Operations Forces” constitute no serious threat to our regime. They can be provocative, occasionally kidnap or kill a few of our officers or commit sabotage, but these are only pin-pricks.

“The U.S. Air Force has consistently violated Iranian airspace with unmanned drones in recent years. What our radar and ground observers told us has been confirmed even in the western press.⁴² Their intrusions are insulting but not a serious problem. In any event, even if we shoot down the drones, we cannot prevent satellite photography; however, we can hide whatever we wish to prevent being photographed by simply roofing our facilities as we did at our IR-40 Nuclear Research Reactor.⁴³

“More serious is the risk of air attacks. The American Air Force appears eager to stage such attacks. They have publicly stated that they can destroy our armed forces, our industry and indeed our whole country. Perhaps the closest they came to acting was in April 2007 when we had a minor confrontation with the British in the waters off the Shatt al-Arab. The Americans

³⁹ *The New Yorker*, July 7 & 14, 2008, Seymour Hersh, “Preparing the Battlefield,” “Earlier this year, a militant Ahwazi group claimed to have assassinated a Revolutionary Guard colonel, and the Iranian government acknowledged that an explosion in a cultural center in Shiraz, in the southern part of the country, which killed at least twelve people and injured more than two hundred, had been a terrorist act and not, as it earlier insisted, an accident. It could not be learned whether there had been American involvement in any specific incident in Iran, but, according to [Colonel Sam] Gardiner, the Iranians have begun publicly blaming the U.S., Great Britain, and, more recently, the C.I.A. for some incidents.”

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* They have “received arms and intelligence, directly or indirectly from the United States.”

⁴¹ *The New York Times*, April 17, 2003, Douglas Jehl, “U.S. bombed bases of Iranian rebels in Iraq.” The Mojahedin-e Khalq maintained bases with several thousand fighters with tanks and artillery on Iranian border from which they have made cross-border attacks and have killed “scores of soldiers.” They have been supported by the House of Representatives International Relations Committee’s subcommittee on the Middle East. The attack “almost certainly represented an end to the group as a fighting force, after the years in which it operated freely from Iraq with support from Saddam Hussein.”

⁴² *International Herald Tribune*, February 13, 2005, Dafna Lilnzer “U.S. Uses Drones to Probe Iran for Arms,” “The Bush administration has been flying surveillance drones over Iran for nearly a year to seek evidence of nuclear weapons programs and detect weaknesses in air defense, according to three U.S. officials with detailed knowledge of the secret effort. . . The aerial espionage is standard in military preparations for an eventual air attack and is also employed as a tool for intimidation.”

⁴³ *Report of the Director General to the Board of the IAEA*, February 19, 2009.

offered to act, but British refused the offer.⁴⁴ At about the same time, judging that the Americans were on the edge of military action, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency warned against “new crazies who say ‘let’s go and bomb Iran.’”⁴⁵ He did not name American Vice President Dick Cheney, but just a few days before Mr. Cheney had issued threats to Iran on the deck of an American aircraft carrier just off our coast.⁴⁶ At the present time, we do not have the capacity to stop a massive or sneak air attack, but we are getting advanced anti-aircraft rockets (SA-20 and later models) from the Russians. We probably could not stop the USAF but we might be able to stop the Israelis.

“We have had a curious relationship with the Israelis. They were close allies of the Shah, as we learned when the students who had seized the American embassy pieced together shredded secret documents, but we have traded with them and, during the Reagan administration, have even purchased military equipment from them. More recently, they have repeatedly threatened to do to us what they did in their attack on the Iraq on June 7, 1981. They demonstrated recently over the eastern Mediterranean that they could attack us. We could not now stop them. Perhaps we could after we get more anti-aircraft missiles. But, unless they used nuclear weapons, they could not defeat us. To attack us, they would have to refuel in the air or at American bases in Iraq. Before he left office, President Bush told them they could not do this; the cost to America of allowing Israel to attack us would be high.

“Moreover, since Israel and Iran do not share a frontier, Israeli aircraft would have to overfly Turkey – and we don’t think the Turks would allow this – or Syria⁴⁷ and Iraq. The Syrians would not be able to stop them and we doubt that any American administration would or even could prevent them from overflying Iraq. No American president could afford to order the USAF to shoot down Israeli aircraft flying against Iran.

“So we have taken such precautions as we can, by burying many of our installations at least 70 feet (21 meters) underground (much as America and Russia did their nuclear facilities and missiles); so we think an attacker would have to use nuclear weapons.⁴⁸

“The use of nuclear weapons against us would be catastrophic for us and also for the Israelis, but Israel has the means and has been training for a nuclear attack on Iran at least since 2007.⁴⁹ It is the world’s fifth largest nuclear weapons power with what the US Defense Intelligence Agency publically estimates to be 60 to 80 bombs.⁵⁰ Two of its “Dolphin-class” submarines, each armed with 24 US-made Harpoon missiles, perhaps nuclear tipped, patrol off our southern and western coasts, well within range of every town in Iran.⁵¹ Other Israeli missiles

⁴⁴ *The Guardian*, April 7, 2007, Ewen MacAskill, Julian Border, Michael Howard and John Hooper, “Americans offered ‘aggressive patrols’ in Iranian airspace. The British “said the US could calm the situation by staying out of it...[and] At the request of the British, the two US carrier groups, totally 40 ships plus aircraft, modified their exercises to make them less confrontational.”

⁴⁵ Reuters, June 1, 2007.

⁴⁶ *The New York Times*, May 12, 2007, David E. Sanger, “Cheney, con Carrier, Sends Warning to Iran.”

⁴⁷ *U.S. News and World Report*, March 12, 2008.

⁴⁸ *The Sunday Times*, January 7, 2007.

⁴⁹ *The Sunday Times*, January 7, 2007: “...if things go according to plan, a pilot will first launch a conventional laser-guided bomb to blow a shaft down through layers of hardened concrete. Other pilots will then be ready to drop low-yield one kiloton nuclear weapons into the hole.”

⁵⁰ *The Guardian*, July 29, 2008, George Monbiot, “We lie and bluster about our nukes – and then wag our fingers at Iran,”

⁵¹ *The Independent*, May 1, 2004, James C. Moore, Why Shouldn’t Iran Have Nuclear Weapons?”

could be fired from Israel itself; they would be disturbing but not decisive unless they were nuclear armed.

“Israel is thus Iran’s greatest danger, but it is only the tip of our security problem: Iran is surrounded by nuclear powers – India, Pakistan, China and Russia in addition to Israel. We now have relatively favorable relations with these powers, but conditions could change. The Russians, particularly, might be prepared to drop their (somewhat tepid) support of us in exchange for the Americans pulling NATO back and/or dropping their plan to install missiles in Central Europe. Of more immediate concern, the United States maintains nuclear weapons and delivery systems in bases in Qatar, Iraq, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan; America has the capacity to deliver bombs directly from the continental United States; and its huge fleet in the Persian Gulf varies between 2 and 6 carrier battle groups with hundreds of aircraft and cruise missiles, each of which can be tipped with nuclear weapons already present on the ships.⁵² The Americans have threatened time after time to use them⁵³ and have even developed a special bomb, which they have apparently also given Israel, that US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld called a “robust nuclear earth penetrator.”

“If nuclear weapons were used, probably tens or hundreds of thousands of our citizens would be killed immediately;⁵⁴ the bombs would also throw up perhaps one million cubic meters of radioactive soil with unimaginable consequences for us but also for people all around the world. Consequently, we think this would be such a catastrophe that sane governments would not do it. Now that the Bush administration is gone, we think the danger has somewhat lessened. But, the danger remains. Particularly from Israel.”

This is what I imagine an Iranian intelligence analyst would tell his government.

V

Based on this analysis, Iran’s policy planner would be expected to recommend what his government should do. Imagining myself in that role, I believe he would say something like this:

“Looking at the Axis of Evil sequence and hearing the cacophony of American threats, I urge that Iran get a nuclear device as quickly as possible. That, after all, was the successful policy of Russia, China, India, Pakistan and Israel. Indeed, as a leading student of strategy at the Hebrew University recently said, ‘Had the Iranians not tried to build nuclear weapons, they would be crazy.’

“But, the acquisition process – that is, when other governments believe a country is working on getting a bomb but does not yet have one -- is a time of great danger. How to get through this period of danger is the major challenge. There are several components in the answer:

⁵² *The Guardian*, May 4, 2006, Tariq Ali, “Why has the US Manufactured a Crisis Over Iran?”

⁵³ *The New Yorker*, July 10 and 17, Seymour Hersh, “Last Stand.” “In late April [2006 the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Marine General Peter] Pace achieved a major victory when the White House dropped its insistence that the plan for a bombing campaign include the possible use of a nuclear device...’ Bush and Cheney were dead serious about the nuclear planning,’ the former senior intelligence official told me. ‘And Pace stood up to them.’”

⁵⁴ *The Guardian*, February 13, 2006, Ewen MacAskill. “Consequences of a War,” by Professor Paul Rogers and published by the Oxford Research Group.

“Clearly we must make a military strike on Iran unattractive. Iran’s first defense is its people. Although the government may be unpopular with many Iranians, they are as unlikely to aid a foreign invader as the anti-Castro Cubans were during the American attacks on Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 and the anti-Saddam Iraqis were during the 2003 American invasion. Iran is better prepared and in a position to inflict more damage on an invader than either the Cubans or the Iraqis. The Cubans were few in number and the Iraqis had no organized fallback force after its army cracked. The Iranian regime must assume that a campaign of “shock and awe” would destroy its regular armed forces, but Iran has a potent fallback force. The 150,000 Revolutionary Guards and even more numerous *Sazman-e Basijis* (who showed their fanatical bravery during the Iraq-Iran War) are trained and equipped for guerrilla warfare. We should make it clear that they would inflict large and continuing casualties on any invader. Iran is large and has several times the population of Iraq so the cost of invading or trying to occupy it would be many times that of Iraq. We must be sure that the United States realizes this.

“In addition to this land-based guerrilla potential, Iran learned from the Iraq-Iran war, when America sank its larger ships, to go for small boats. Iran has nearly a thousand high-speed boats scattered among more than 700 little ports along the Persian Gulf. They could be used in *Kamikaze* type attacks with missiles and bombs and would certainly do great damage to attacking forces.⁵⁵ Again, we need to be sure that all outsiders realize the consequences of an attack.

“Iran has developed and built missiles of which at least the Shihab-3 has a range of about a thousand miles (1,600 kilometers) and so could reach Israel. We must make it clear that if attacked we will use them against Israel. Iran also has large numbers of smaller missiles that could be used to destroy oil facilities and sink ships along the Gulf. In response to an attack, Iran like any other state would naturally use all its means of defense or counter-attack. The states in the Gulf should be made to realize the cost to them of any attack on us.

“Additionally, unlike remote and isolated North Korea, Iran has trading partners, friends and allies abroad. Both China and India rely heavily on Iranian energy exports. An attack on us, they should be reminded, would derail their own development programs. Other countries – indeed the whole Islamic world -- would view an American and even more an Israeli -- attack on Iran, as an attack on Islam. Iran’s national religion, Shia Islam, has millions of adherents in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Our enemies will try to accentuate the Shia-Sunni split, but we must portray the attack as one on the religion as a whole. An attack by America and/or Israel would also conjure memories, even more widely shared, of imperialist “gunboat diplomacy.” Africans and Asians are already sensitive to this issue and we can draw on their anger. Finally, America’s European allies would not support the attack. We need to keep the issue before them. Americans are well aware of these facts. Iranians must doubt that the American people would support a ruinously expensive war particularly in the midst of their enormous financial difficulties; America would have to be mad to add Iran to its problems. The logic of our position should be self-evident.

“From these short-range considerations, Iran needs a longer-range policy that has two features: first, it should aim at a result that would give it safety, prosperity and, above all, dignity. The simplest answer to this objective would be acquisition of a nuclear weapon. Once that was achieved, Iran would automatically be made a member of “the club” of nuclear powers.

⁵⁵ *The New Yorker*, July 10 & 17, Seymour Hersh, “Last Stand.” American Naval Intelligence found that “Iran has more than seven hundred undeclared dock and port facilities along its Persian Gulf coast.” The Japanese Kamikazes killed about 5,000 Americans.

However, we must not lose sight of the fact that acquisition of a nuclear weapon is only a means, and not necessarily the best means, to accomplishing our objectives. It is expensive in terms of money, industrial capacity and talent. Once acquired, a nuclear arsenal is expensive to maintain and control. Moreover, having a weapon does not get us further toward the development of our country. Look at Pakistan. And we learned from the regime of the Shah that excessive expenditure on the military weakens a country. But, it is fool-proof: if we have a weapon we will not be attacked.

“If our leaders decide to weaponize, we must protect ourselves during the dangerous acquisition phase. Doing so will require shrewd tactics and subtle action. It will also require -- and must aim to acquire -- time to bring the various elements together.

“There are well-tested models for handling this dangerous process. The United States, Russia, Israel, China, India, Pakistan and North Korea each rushed through the acquisition phase as rapidly and as secretly as possible. Iran cannot hope to achieve the same degree of secrecy, but it has a means to overcome excessive surveillance or interference. The model for that action was provided by China and Vietnam, and if done with care, it can be effective. In essence, it simply alternates offers to negotiate with moves to build the still-legal nuclear manufacturing capacity.⁵⁶ We Iranians add an element to the Chinese and Vietnamese model. It is the traditional Shia protective mode of dissimulation (*taqiyyah*). Such a tactic would give Iran the option at any time of agreeing to nuclear restraint or, if our conditions are not met or we find that danger increased to an intolerable level, of moving ahead to acquire a weapon. Alternating the two activities, what Mao called “talk talk fight fight” thus for Iran would become ‘offer to talk, offer to talk, spin centrifuges, spin centrifuges.’ “Such a policy requires subtlety and close attention to the temper of the United States and Israel. Pushing too hard or fast could precipitate an attack.

“We may not have a free choice in these matters. Israel may attack us whatever we do and even whatever the cost to Israel itself. After all, governments do not always act on rational intelligence assessments and are often driven by anger, fear or ideology. Consequently, I must affirm that the most certain way to deter attack is to acquire at least one nuclear weapon and the means to deliver it. That is what Russia, China, India, Pakistan and Israel have done. The means to deliver a weapon, the Shihab-3 missile, has been in hand for five or six years.⁵⁷ The bomb itself is not in hand. And getting it will be both dangerous, as I have said, and costly in intellectual resources and money.

“Therefore, if security can be achieved in ways that also contribute to the wealth of the country, they would be obviously preferable. So, we should explore the alternatives.”

VI

Now reverting to my own position as an American and drawing on considerable experience in planning policy, negotiating difficult problems (including helping to end the Algerian war as head of the US government Algerian Task Force and negotiating a ceasefire in

⁵⁶ *International Herald Tribune*, December 2, 2005, Richard Bernstein: “Mao’s fight talk’ strategy is a winning one for Iran.” Mao Zedong’s fight fight talk talk strategy. Offer to talk, then resume work on nuclear process. “There is no very good military option on Iran...there is no feasible alternative to negotiations [but that] is the reason Iran in the end will probably become a nuclear weapons power.”

⁵⁷ *The New York Times*, July 8, 2003, Nazila Fathi, “Iran Confirms Test of Missile That is Able to Hit Israel.”

the “Suez War” at the request of Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir), I suggest that the answer to the question I posed above is that there *is* the possibility of a “deal” that would prevent war and thus work to American and world interests.

As I see the major elements of such a deal, they include, in order of precedence, the following:

1. The United States must renounce its assertion in the “National Security Paper of the United States” of its right and intention to preëemptively attack any country “at the time, place, and in the manner of our choosing.”⁵⁸ As long as this remains a valid statement of American policy, the Iranian government would be foolish not to seek a nuclear weapon. As the former head of the U.S. National Security Agency, Lt. General William Odon, wrote, “...President George W. Bush’s threat of regime change has only driven Iran and North Korea to accelerate their efforts”⁵⁹ to acquire nuclear weapons and as Charles Ferguson added, “a U.S. attack would undoubtedly convince Iran’s leaders to take that momentous step.”⁶⁰ An attack would not only guarantee that Iran would acquire a weapon, but would set off a race among other powers to acquire them.

2. The second step is to help to organize and become a signatory to an internationally guaranteed statement recognizing Iran’s sovereign independence and certifying that no other state will attack it. As even senior American generals and other officials have pointed out, “Iran cannot accept long term restraints on its fuel-cycle activity as part of a settlement without a security guarantee.”⁶¹

3. Such guarantees have often been made among states, but in and of themselves they have rarely prevented war. So the third step would be to create a nuclear-free Middle East. This and other steps could be taken in a phased manner. It could begin with a decision by the US to stand down its own enormous naval and air forces on Iran’s frontier.

4. More complex, of course, is what to do about the neighboring already nuclear-armed states. The means to accomplish this part of the objective will require international negotiation of a high order. But the essential element is clear: “imbalance” is what has successively motivated other powers to acquire nuclear weapons. Russia had to have the bomb because America had it; China, because of Russia, India and Pakistan, because of one another. So Iran will not definitively give up its ambition unless other states do too. We must recognize that this is virtually a universal truth: it was clearly stated by the then head of the Indian nuclear program to justify his nation’s acquisition of the bomb. He said, essentially, that there can’t be one standard for the Europeans who were the original members of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and another for the Asians who were late comers. But cutting back and then abolishing nuclear weapons inventories is in everyone’s interest. This now appears to be the policy of the

⁵⁸ “Department of Defense, “The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America,” March 2005. Another version came out the following year. It was savaged by William Pfaff who wrote (*International Herald Tribune*, March 20, 2006) that “Intellectual poverty is the most striking quality of the Bush administration’s new National Security statement, issued on Thursday. Its overall incoherence, its clichés and stereotyped phraseology...reveals the administration’s foreign policy as a lumpy stew of discredited neoconservative ideas with some neo-Kissingerian geopolitics now mixed in.” The June 2008 version, signed by then and now Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, was cosmetically improved, but the assertion of the right to act preëemptively remained. New emphasis was added to “non-state” and “rogue-state” warfare.

⁵⁹ “The Nuclear Option,” *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2007

⁶⁰ “Been there, botched that,” *International Herald Tribune*, February 15, 2006.

⁶¹ Seymour Hersh, *The New Yorker*, “Last Stand,” July 10 & 17, 2006 quoting Major Generals Paul Eaton and Charles Swannack, Jr.

Obama administration. It is the correct policy since nuclear weapons anywhere are a danger to people everywhere.

5. Would Israel join in such an effort? Now, it will certainly say “no,” but Israel has logical reasons to reconsider this decision because soon, whether or not Iran decides to get a nuclear weapon, other countries in the area eventually – and probably soon -- will. So while, arguably, nuclear weapons *were* a source of security for Israel in the past its nuclear arsenal *is now becoming* a source of insecurity. It will be extremely difficult to convince Israel of this point, but the logic will become clearer as time passes, and there are incentives that can be offered to encourage this move.

Within a nuclear-weapon-free Middle East, Iran and other countries could, of course, benefit from the intellectual, industrial and energy-saving aspects of nuclear technology and, within a balanced approach to getting rid of these horrible weapons, Iran would not find it humiliating to take up the various proposals⁶² to have other powers monitor its activities and safeguard its fuel.

The Iranian government, like the Israeli government, will be reluctant to join such an effort. Its “hawks” like the Israeli “hawks” will argue that having a bomb is a surer means to deter enemies. The issue will be hard fought domestically in both countries. Both must be persuaded that “giving up the gun” is virtually necessary for survival.

Here consider Iran: I assert that all indications are that Iranians are tired of living under the gun and want peace and security; they want their government to meet their desires for a richer, fuller life. If security guarantees are supplemented with more open international trade, for example enabling Iran to join the WTO (which the United States has blocked), to have better access to capital for investment, and to get the advanced technology required to improve oil extraction and to liquefy natural gas, the Iranian government will have achieved a true “victory.” If the Iranian government fails to move in this direction, it almost certainly will become increasingly unpopular particularly among the rising generation. It is for this reason, I believe that, despite the opposition of Iran’s own “hawks,”⁶³ President Ahmadinejad wrote to President Obama on January 29, 2009.

Perhaps even more to the point, the Iranian government is now cooperating with the United States and other nations in the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. While not so dramatic as nuclear weapons, chemical weapons have been used frequently and have killed about as many people as died in the American nuclear attacks on Japan. Moves to get rid of them offer at least a pattern that could be adapted to the nuclear threat.

Suspicious remain deep, memories on both sides remain painful, but with care trust can be built and wounds healed.

⁶² For example, the proposal of William Luers, Thomas Pickering and Jim Walsh, “A solution for the US-Iran Nuclear Standoff,” in the March 20, 2008 *New York Review of Books*. “We propose that Iran’s efforts to produce enriched uranium and other related nuclear activities be conducted on a multilateral basis, that is to say jointly managed and operated on Iranian soil by a consortium including Iran and other governments.” And their subsequent article in the February 12, 2009 issue of the same journal.

⁶³ *The Guardian*, January 29, 2009: The chairman of “the Guardian Council,” Ayatollah Ahmad Janati, denounced attempts to rapprochement with the US.

VII

Now I turn to the Israeli role in these events. Here the end of the “never cry wolf” story seems apt. You will remember that everyone tired of the little boy's warnings so when the wolf really did come, no one reacted with sufficient speed and vigor. The “little boy,” the bystander, was eaten by the “wolf,” the war. What is the danger before us? Some of us, and certainly I, believe what the Israelis say, that it is immediate and real.⁶⁴

In its pronouncements, the incoming new Israeli government has said that it intends to short-circuit any moves toward resolution of the crisis that do not definitively destroy the potential for Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. It has repeatedly said that it has the means and the determination to take action. “In an interview with Jeffrey Goldberg of the *Atlantic*, incoming Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed to have told President Barack Obama that either America stops Iran or Israel will...So once again, in spite of President Obama’s best efforts, the military option was put back on the table and the atmosphere for dealing with Iran was turned into ‘Do as we say—or else’..’The message of Israeli hawks has been that it can only afford to give diplomacy ‘a few months...otherwise Israel will take military action.’”⁶⁵

Several events in the last few weeks and even days appear to translated these words into visible preparation for military action. “‘The message to Iran is that the threat is not just words,’ one senior defence official told *The Times*...’We would not make the threat [against Iran] without the force to back it. There has been a recent move, a number of on-the-ground preparations, that indicate Israel’s willing to act,’ said another official from Israel’s intelligence community.”⁶⁶

To evaluate how clear and present this danger is, we must now look at it in the Israeli context as we have Iran’s statements and likely actions in the Iranian context.

The Israeli attack on a convoy in the Sudan which was believed to be carrying arms to Gaza gives, I suggest, an example of the mindset of each of the Israeli governments in recent years. Asked about the Israeli operation, “Outgoing Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert would not confirm the attack but stressed that Israel would act ‘whenever it can’ against its enemies, and said: ‘Who dares wins – and we dared.’”⁶⁷ Dozens of other examples could be brought forward. As Roane Carey points out in a recent article,⁶⁸ the fundamental Israeli strategic principle has always been that “no neighboring state or combination of states can ever be allowed to achieve anything faintly approaching military parity, because if they do, they will try to destroy the Jewish state...” Thus, Israel must maintain what Vladimir Jabotinsky, the patron saint of Likud and a succession of Israeli prime ministers, called “the iron wall.”

⁶⁴ *The Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 2009, Paul Richter, “Gates warns against Israeli strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities.” Israeli President Shimon Peres told Israel’s Kol Hai Radio on April 12 that Israel would attack Iran if it did not stop work on its nuclear program; “‘We’ll strike him’, Peres said in the interview.” The new prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu called the Iranian program an “existential threat.”

⁶⁵ *Alternet*, April 13, 2009, Trita Parsi, *Huffington Post*, “Israel is Bluffing: Constant War Threats Against Iran Are Empty, But Still Dangerous.” “Netanyahu’s tough talk undermines the Obama administration’s prospects for diplomacy...it fuels Iranian insecurity and closes the window for diplomacy.”

⁶⁶ *The Times*, April 18, 2009, Sheera Frenkel, “Israel stands ready to bomb Iran’s nuclear sites.”

⁶⁷ *Energy Compass*, XX, #16, April 17, 2009, Paul Sampson, “Will Israel Hit Iran?”

⁶⁸ *The Nation*, April 13, 2009, Roane Carey, “US Must Stop Mixed Signals on Iran.” Carey further says that “The new Israeli prime minister, Likud Party hawk Benjamin Netanyahu, has warned President Barack Obama that if Washington does not quickly find a way to shut down Iran's nuclear program, Israel will.”

The policy of overwhelming force that permeates Israeli strategy today arose in the Palestine Mandate vis-à-vis the Palestinians. Jabotinsky was a “realist.” He never expected the Palestinians would just lie down in the face of Zionist ambition or welcome the immigrants with open arms. He did not analyze so much as proclaim, but to him it was inconceivable that “tillers of the soil” would peacefully acquiesce in losing their lands nor would the Palestinians, no matter how divided and backward, give up their country. The only way to effect the Zionist program was force. And, Jabotinsky realized, the application of force could not stop at the borders of the Mandate. As he told the British Royal Commission of 1936, “even the whole of Palestine may prove too small for that humanitarian purpose we need. A corner of Palestine, a ‘canton,’ how can we promise to be satisfied with it. We cannot. We never can. Should we swear to you we should be satisfied, it would be a lie.”

Those Zionists in the 1920s and 1930s who disagreed⁶⁹ thought, or said they thought, that the Palestinians would simply sell their lands to the Jewish National Fund and move to other lands. The Palestinians, they maintained, were merely squatters without legal rights. To justify their contention, the Israelis referred to the 1858 Ottoman land code. In that code, the Turks had superimposed upon traditional and customary rights to land a legal system designed to increase tax revenues. Under it, anyone, usually an absentee or even someone from another country, who could guarantee tax payments and could reach an agreement with the sometimes corrupt Ottoman authorities, could acquire a form of legal “ownership.” It was this system which the British rulers of the Palestine Mandate inherited and enforced. So in the early days of the Mandate, the Zionist organization was able to buy blocs of land from people who in many cases had never set foot upon it. (One of the first large sales was by a Lebanese merchant family.)

The peasant cultivators were then forced to leave, or were hired as day laborers on, what had been for time out of mind of man “their” lands. Naturally, this created great bitterness on the part of the Palestinians but was regarded as morally and legally right by the Zionists. As this system spread, Zionist holdings reached 180,000 hectares (444,600 acres) on the eve of the 1948 war. This was a tiny portion of what Israel would have needed to survive so driving out the Arab population⁷⁰ became a major objective of the war effort. Nearly a million people including whole villages of farmers thus became refugees. Jabotinsky’s acolytes played a significant part in this activity but they were joined by those who had professed the belief that Israel could be created by peaceful amalgamation.

After their victory in 1949, the new Israeli government made some concessions to those Palestinians who remained – for example the granting of limited Israeli citizenship and some civil rights – but both internally and vis-à-vis neighbors, it followed, as Jabotinsky had realized, that the Israeli state could exist only if it maintained an overwhelming military power. This reliance

⁶⁹ Jabotinsky resigned from the Zionist executive in 1923 in opposition to the relatively moderate methods and policies of Chaim Weizmann. In 1935, he founded the Irgun Z’vai Le’umi which became the basis for the Herut after 1948.

⁷⁰ This was denied for many years, but has been fully documented by various Israeli scholars including Benny Morris in *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), his *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and his “Revisiting the Palestinian exodus of 1948” in Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim (eds.), *The War for Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Also see Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006). A much earlier account, before the Israeli records were available is in the book I wrote with David Stamler and Edmund Asfour, *Backdrop to Tragedy* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1957) when to say what Messrs. Morris, Shlaim and Pappé now say was regarded as proof of anti-Semitism.

on “the Iron Wall” explained Israeli policy and performance in the series of wars that followed 1948.⁷¹

Thus, today, rather than being an aberration, the Israeli policy on Iran grows out of this fundamental system first applied to the Palestinians and then to other Arab states. The integral nature of the Israeli approach to Israel, to the occupied areas of Palestine, to the neighboring states was stated, perhaps in its most extreme form, by the new Israeli Foreign Minister, Avigdor Libermann, who favors denationalization of Arab citizens of Israel and probably their expulsion from Israel, but it is not different in content from the beliefs and statements of the early Zionists even to the British government at the time of the formulation of the Balfour Doctrine. The apex of this policy has been Israel’s refusal to allow the formation of a Palestinian state, its continued acquisition of Palestinian land and its reliance on military force and ultimately on nuclear weapons.

So interwoven are these policies that it will prove nearly impossible to deal successfully with any one without dealing with them all. So far, at least, the Obama administration has shown an understandable reluctance to grab this thorny nettle. But it is true, if not entirely obvious, that there is no conceivable solution to the problem of the “Middle East” whether defined in terms of Arab-Israel affairs or of a broader area now including Iran that fails to address the totality of the issue.

So where does this leave us? To speculate, it seems to me that the Israelis are on the edge of a cliff: if they move ahead in their plan to attack Iran, as they say they will, regardless of whatever restraints are applied or cautionary words voiced by the Obama administration⁷² or others, I believe they will create a catastrophe not only for Iran but also others. Their action will precipitate at minimum a guerrilla war of more serious dimensions in Lebanon, in Jordan and Gaza, possibly revolution in some of the surrounding states, particularly in Egypt and perhaps in Saudi Arabia. Growing hatred of Israel throughout much of Asia, Africa and even Europe. Severe worldwide economic dislocations. Indeed, I believe that it will later be seen to have marked the beginning of the end for Israel itself.

⁷¹ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (London: Penguin, 2000).

⁷² Such as those of Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to Marines at the Marine University at Quantico Naval Base. *Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 2009.

Since this was written:

In America, the newly appointed Special Assistant to the President for the Middle East, Dennis Ross, published a book that one reviewer commented (*PULSE*, June 13, 2009) “reads like a how-to manual for launching a war on Iran, marketing the war successfully, and making sure the Iranians cop all the blame for it.” *Haaretz* correspondent Barak Ravid on 15 quoted Ross and his coauthor David Makovsky of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy saying that “tougher policies – either militarily or meaningful containment – will be easier to sell internationally and domestically if we have diplomatically tried to resolve our differences with Iran in a serious and credible fashion.”

On July 5, 2009, *The Sunday Times* printed a map of “Israel-Iran War Scenarios” and quoted the head of the Israeli intelligence service, Mossad, as assuring Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that Saudi Arabia “would turn a blind eye to Israeli jets flying over the kingdom during any future raid on Iran’s nuclear sites.”

On July 6, 2009, Brian Knowlton reported in *The Global Edition of the New York Times*, that Vice President Joe Biden said “that the United States would not stand in the way of Israeli military action aimed at Iran’s nuclear program...[we] cannot dictate to another sovereign nation what they can and cannot do...Israel can determine for itself – it’s a sovereign nation – what’s in their interest and what they decide to do relative to Iran and anyone else.”

On July 16, 2009, *The [London] Times* Jerusalem correspondent, Sheera Frenkel, reported that “Two Israeli missile [Saar] class warships have sailed through the Suez Canal ten days after a [Dolphin class] submarine capable of launching a nuclear missile strike, in preparation for a possible attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities.” Israel, simultaneously, carried out tests of long-range aircraft and missiles in American facilities, proclaiming “It is not by chance that Israel is drilling long-range manoeuvres in a public way. This is not a secret operation. This something that has been published and which will showcase Israel’s abilities,” said an Israeli defense official.”