

Ahmadinejad's Second Term and Iran's Nuclear Policy

Nader Entessar*
University of South Alabama
Mobile, Alabama

The results of the disputed June 2009 Iranian presidential election and the subsequent clashes between anti-Ahmadinejad demonstrators and the country's security and paramilitary forces have added a new unpredictable dimension to Iran's foreign policy posture. Even before the post-election disturbances, Tehran's nuclear program had become the most significant sources of friction between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the West, especially the United States, in the twenty-first century. President Barack Obama, who had challenged his predecessor's policy of non-negotiation with Iran unless it gave up its nuclear enrichment program, offered to negotiate with Iran without preconditions over its nuclear program. However, after the post-election violence in Iran against the supporters of the anti-Ahmadinejad "Green Movement," President Obama came under pressure to reverse course and withdraw his earlier offer to the government of Iran. Many in the Iranian diaspora argued that any negotiations with the Ahmadinejad-led administration would bestow legitimacy to an otherwise discredited administration in Tehran and would undermine the democratic movement in the country. Iran's Nobel Peace Prize winner, Shirin Ebadi, accused Britain of "ignoring the regime's savage suppression of opposition in order to safeguard talks on its nuclear programme."¹ Ebadi, went on to accuse the West for caring more about "its own security than human rights" and ignoring the fact that undemocratic regimes pose a greater risk to international peace than do nuclear weapons by themselves.² Instead of negotiating with the Ahmadinejad government over its nuclear program, Ebadi urged the Western countries to downgrade their embassies, withdraw their ambassador from Iran, and freeze the assets of *Iran's leaders*[emphasis added]. The British government, for its part, dismissed Ebadi's appeal by stating: "The only other people who act like they want to close our embassy are the Iranian Government."³

Moreover, the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC), one of several Bush-era American-based groups run by Iranian exiles which had received \$3 million from the U.S. State Department, was recently notified that it would receive no further funding from the U.S. government. Ted Galen Carpenter of the libertarian Cato Institute sees the defunding of the IHRDC as a minor goodwill gesture by the United States in its nuclear talks with Iran. According to Carpenter, funding of the IHRDC and other similar programs by the U.S. government are "more designed to make Americans feel noble and honorable than they are actually designed to achieve results. And what the Obama administration has done, I think, is return to the more mainstream approach in U.S. foreign policy, which is to focus on the external behavior of troublesome regimes, not on the internal behavior."⁴

The neoconservatives and their neoliberal kindred spirits in the West contended that the Iranian government's suppression of dissent and its violent tactics in post-election developments validated their confrontational stance against the Islamic Republic of Iran. These groups, using rhetoric reminiscent of the George W. Bush era, have produced a dizzying number of reports, op-

* Email address: "Nader Entessar" <nentessar@usouthal.edu>

eds, and newspaper and magazine articles, arguing essentially for a more robust economic and military approach to Iran.⁵ Some right-wing U.S. senators continue to back “all out” military action against Iran as a viable option. For example, Senators Lindsey Graham (R-DC) and Saxby Chambliss (R-GA), told correspondent Chris Wallace on the Fox News Sunday broadcast on October 4, 2009 that the United States should not limit its possible military action against Iran to that country's nuclear facilities. Instead, Washington should launch an all-out and sustained war against Iran. In Graham's words: “If we use military action against Iran, we should not only go after their nuclear facilities. We should destroy their ability to make conventional war. They should have no planes that can fly and no ships that can float.”⁶

The neocons' drumbeat of war in the post-George W. Bush era may be part of their strategy of pushing the Obama administration to pursue a zero-sum game in its dealings with Tehran as well as creating further schisms in the Iranian hierarchy by dangling the specter of an all-out war against their very existence. However, as Kayhan Barzegar has noted, the post-election events in Iran have indeed created fissures among the Iranian ruling elite, but such splinters most likely will not have lasting effects on the consensus that had existed on this issue prior to the June 2009 presidential election.⁷ In other words, Iranian tactics and their approach to the nuclear issue and negotiating tactics with the West may change as Ahmadinejad comes to the realization that his “outspokenness and proactive stance on regional and international issues can sustain support both at home and abroad for only so long.”⁸ On the other hand, outside threats to destroy the fabric of Iranian society will most likely serve as a lifeline to a government whose legitimacy has been shaken in the aftermath of the June 2009 presidential election.

Nuclear Goals

Is the Islamic Republic of Iran seeking to counter its weakness in conventional weapons by developing a nuclear deterrent capability? Are nuclear weapons useful for enhancing Iran's military posture to deter a potential threat from a regional adversary like Israel? We cannot answer these and similar questions with any degree of certainty. However, we can get a better picture of why Iran seeks to maintain its current nuclear posture in the face of enormous pressure from the West by examining the country's national perspective on its threat perception and factional decision-making and its impact on the nuclear debate.

Although the United States and Israel have long accused Iran of seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, ambiguities abound in terms of both Iran's intentions and capabilities as a potential nuclear-armed state. In its numerous reports on Iran, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has yet to conclude that Iran's nuclear program has violated the country's obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).⁹ Nonetheless, in early October 2009, the *New York Times* reported that the IAEA had indeed concluded in a confidential analysis that Iran had acquired “sufficient information to be able to design and produce a workable” nuclear bomb.¹⁰ This internal report was reportedly leaked to the Western governments by Olli Heinonen, the head of the IAEA's Safeguards Department.¹¹ When the question of the IAEA's confidential memo, as reported by the Associated Press and the *New York Times* was brought up in a press conference, a frustrated Mohammed ElBaradei, the IAEA's Director General, replied: “As I have said many times, and I continue to say today, the Agency [IAEA] has no concrete proof there is an ongoing weapons programme in Iran. There are allegations that Iran has conducted weaponization studies; however, these are issues which we are still looking into. . . . On the question that the Agency has information that has been withheld, and that there is information which has not been shared with Board [of Governors]:

this is maybe for the hundredth time that I have been saying and the Agency has been saying that this is totally baseless, totally groundless.”¹² In short, although it is true that the IAEA has reported that it cannot categorically state that Iran does not intend to develop nuclear weapons; such assertions are not unique to Iran. In fact, the IAEA has inserted similar statements in its reports on 46 other NPT signatory states.

Israel has become a particularly major concern for Iran's top-level decision-makers. Notwithstanding President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's provocative rhetoric against Israel, which is primarily designed for garnering support among the Arab masses and for bolstering his dwindling radical base, Israel presents a singularly unique challenge to Iran's security. Given the fact that Israel is a nuclear weapons state and is not a signatory to treaties dealing with the proliferation and use of nuclear weapons, and given Israel's continuing threat to strike militarily against targets inside Iran¹³, the Islamic Republic theoretically has good reason to develop a nuclear deterrent capability against the threat of a nuclear-armed Israel. Any discussion of Iran's nuclear ambitions/intentions without taking into account the Israeli factor is futile at best and counterproductive at worst. This remains true irrespective of who occupies the office of presidency in Iran.

Iran's current nuclear posture was developed to achieve a number of immediate goals and many long-term objectives. These goals and objectives were formulated by the Center for Strategic Research of the Expediency Council, before Ahmadinejad had been the president, and were used as a guideline to steer Iran's negotiations with the so-called EU-3 during 2003-2005. Although the Iran-EU-3 negotiations collapsed in 2005, most of the country's nuclear objectives have remained generally unchanged over the past few years. These goals have been:

- Keeping Iran's nuclear file within the confines of the IAEA and preventing it from going to the UN Security Council [Iran failed to achieve this goal but has endeavored to return its nuclear file to the IAEA]
- Controlling the international and domestic repercussions of escalating nuclear tensions with the West
- Explaining to the world why Iran needs to develop a peaceful but independent nuclear capability
- Demonstrating to the world that the United States is not so much worried about Iran developing nuclear weapons but preventing Iran from technological progress
- Demonstrating that the Iraqi, North Korean, and Libyan models are not the only ones that can be pursued to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons while maintaining Iran's treaty rights
- Demonstrating Iran's political maturity and diplomatic skills in dealing with the West
- Weakening America's unilateralism and demonstrating the benefit of multilateral negotiations to Europeans and the rest of the world
- Demonstrating that only negotiations within the framework of equality and respect for the views of both sides can result in meaningful and enduring agreements
- Laying the groundwork for the gradual removal of economic sanctions and obstacles that have prevented Iran from developing a more robust economy
- Demonstrating the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program to the regional states
- Demonstrating that the suspension of the full nuclear cycle can only be discussed within a political framework and not with threats and intimidation

- Demonstrating Iran's good intentions by agreeing to sign the Additional Protocol and undertaking additional voluntary confidence-building measures
- Complete adherence to all agreements Iran has signed irrespective of the nature of outside threats
- Increasing European investments in Iran, thus weakening American sanctions against the Islamic Republic
- Laying the groundwork for the creation of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East
- Integrating European security with that of Iran in the Middle East¹⁴

The outline of Iran's objectives in negotiating with EU-3 can be used as a model for the 5+1 (five permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany) negotiations with the Islamic Republic. Although there are certainly some fixed positions on Iran's demands, there is also a gray zone (zone of negotiation) that allows Iranian negotiators to be flexible, and compromises can be made within this zone.

Nuclear Decision-Making Structure: The Impact of the 2009 Presidential Election

It has often been said that all strategic decisions in Iran are either made by Ayatollah Khameni or are approved by him. In a broad sense, this may be a correct statement. But it sheds little light on the pattern of decision-making in Iran and does not tell us about the countervailing forces that have an impact upon the final outcome of such decisions. (As I have described elsewhere) prior to the June 2009 presidential election, there were three overlapping circles that affected the final outcome of Iran's nuclear decisions.¹⁵ The first circle of decision-makers was composed of Ayatollah Ali Khameni (in his capacity as the Supreme Leader), who remained *primus inter pares* among the country's decision-makers. This circle also includes Hojatoleslam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (head of the Expediency Council); Defense Minister Mohammad Najjar; and Ali Shamkhani, former Defense Minister and the head of the Center for Strategic Research; Mohammad Ali Jafari, the head of the IRGC; and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Hassan Rohani, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator during 2003-2005, was occasionally invited to join this top decision-making circle because of his long-term service as the head of the Supreme National Security Council and his intimate knowledge of the country's nuclear issues.

The second circle of decision-makers consisted of the Minister of Intelligence, Director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), the Supreme Leader's chief foreign policy advisor, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (who also served as the chief nuclear negotiator). The third circle of decision-makers consisted of the appropriate representatives from the *majlis* (Parliament) and various technical experts, such as the country's representative to the IAEA. The Speaker of the Iranian Parliament (Ali Larijani) and the chair of the Parliament's Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee (Alaeddin Borujerdi) also played a crucial role as members of the third circle because they have ultimately been responsible for harmonizing the decisions of the executive and legislative branches on the nuclear issue. It is important to note that Ali Larijani's influence on nuclear issues was greater than the previous parliamentary speakers because he had served as Iran's chief nuclear negotiator. In a bid to increase the influence of the *majlis* over the direction of the country's nuclear negotiation, Speaker Larijani stated that Iran's Parliament would henceforth increase its supervisory role over the country's nuclear negotiations and would "only authorize talks which will be within the legislative bodies framework."¹⁶

The views held by these individuals were certainly varied, and sometimes they criticized each other in public. For example, when President Ahmadinejad engaged in a game of nuclear chicken by stating that Iran's nuclear program was like a train without brakes, he was rebuked by "an expert" (most probably Rafsanjani) for jeopardizing Iran's negotiating leverage.¹⁷ Similarly, Rafsanjani had, on numerous occasions, warned about extremist statements, a veiled reference to Ahmadinejad's utterances that had undermined the country's security.¹⁸ In an interview with the Mehr News Agency, former Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani criticized Ahmadinejad's "diversionary" tactics as detrimental to Iran's global standing and security. Specifically, Shamkhani took issue with holding the Holocaust conference because it would weaken "our grand strategy."¹⁹

Although almost all factions inside Iran supported the country's right to peaceful nuclear energy, they differed on their assessment of the policy approach taken by the Iranian government. On the ultra-conservative side, the *Kayhan* newspaper and its influential editor Hossein Shariatmadari advocated a more confrontational stance with the West than had been followed by the government negotiators so far because they considered the U.S. as being trapped in a quagmire in Iraq and elsewhere. In other words, the hardliners viewed the crisis as being a US problem not Iran's.²⁰ Similarly, Hossein Allahkaram, the Ansar-e Hizbollah's theoretician, opined that the best strategy for Iran to follow was to ignore the "[illegal] UN Security Council Resolution 1737, and the other resolutions that may be adopted against Iran" because it would take more than a year before the United States can entertain serious military attacks against Iran. However, Allahkaram argued, if Iran continued on its current path, it would have passed the nuclear threshold, and the United States could attack a country that had nuclear deterrent capabilities without suffering unacceptable consequences.²¹

On the reformist side, voices of dissent rose against the nuclear posture taken by the government of Iran. One of the strongest criticisms came from the Mojahedin of Islamic Revolution. The organization's statement read in part: "Our world is not a just one, and not everybody gets its rightful share. What is important for our country is to make a cost benefit analysis of our decisions and decide the best course of action that is doable and does not expose us to harm and destruction.... President Khatami's approach to the nuclear issue reflected both his realism and his skilled defense of our rights...."²² Similar sentiments were also expressed by Mohammad Atrianfar, a Rafsanjani ally and a theoretician of the "reformist" camp, in a spirited public debate with Amir Mohebian, an influential "pragmatic conservative" commentator.²³ In general, a critical mass of those in the "reformist" camp believed that, given the current international atmosphere, it would be in Iran's national interest to temporarily suspend its nuclear program. As expressed by Fatemeh Haghigatjoo, a former outspoken female reformist parliamentarian, Iran's "insistence on the [nuclear enrichment] program will create international reactions that in the long-run will result in distrust by the international community, and endanger the foundations of the regime and undermine its legitimacy.... Rather, the government should base its legitimacy on the people's vote, and make every effort to gain the trust of the international community. [The reformists] further believe that the best deterrent strategy serving Iranian national interest is the increased trust between the state and the people, and the strengthening of civil and democratic institutions."²⁴

Although the outcome of Iran's June 2009 presidential election and the subsequent unfolding events may indeed have an unsettling and as yet unpredictable impact on the country's nuclear policy, the structure (and not necessarily the personalities) of the country's nuclear decision-making will most likely remain stable. As Iran analyst Farideh Farhi has aptly noted,

Ahmadinejad's manipulation of the presidential election was designed partly to boost Iran's leverage in its future negotiations with the United States. In other words, the "intent of the manipulation was to show that hardliners have a popular mandate."²⁵ The post-election violence and the fracturing of the Iranian elite and society may yet have the opposite effect on Ahmadinejad's government's negotiating strategy.

The Geneva Negotiations: Iran, 5+1 and Prospects for the Future

The October 1, 2009 Geneva meeting between Iran and 5+1 was indeed a significant development. This meeting was preceded with the publicity surrounding the news of the discovery of a "secret" nuclear facility in Fordo, which is located near the city of Qom. President Obama, accompanied by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy and the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, announced that the Iranian nuclear program "represents a direct challenge to the basic foundation of the nonproliferation regime" and warned Iran to adhere to its obligations under the UN Security Council and the IAEA.²⁶ In some respects, President Obama and his French and British counterparts were posturing to get an upper-hand in the upcoming talks with Iran. The construction of the so-called "secret" facility had been known to the United States since the Bush era, and Iran was aware of this fact, as well. The Fordo facility is still in the early stages of its construction and no nuclear material has been introduced into this facility. On September 21, 2009, Iran notified the IAEA that it was constructing a new pilot enrichment plant in Fordo. Under the terms of Iran's safeguard agreement with the IAEA, Iran is required to notify the IAEA of the existence of a nuclear facility 180 days before it introduces nuclear material to that facility. Therefore, Iran viewed the West's "outrage" at the public announcement of the Fordo facility as a diversionary negotiating strategy and a cynical attempt to box-in Tehran at the Geneva talks by exploiting the weakness of the Iranian government.

The Geneva talks, which lasted more than seven hours, included a 45-minute private talk between Saeed Jalili, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, and William Burns, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, the principal U.S. negotiator at the talks. At the conclusion of the day-long talks, it was announced that one concrete agreement in principle had been reached: Iran tentatively agreed to ship the supply of its low enriched uranium from its small research reactor in Tehran to other countries, most likely Russia and France, to be enriched to a higher grade uranium (19.5 percent) for use in medical and other related fields. This agreement allowed both sides to claim victory. Mehdi Safari, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Europe and a member of the country's negotiating team, called the Geneva talks "win-win" for both sides, while President Obama assessed the talks as a positive first step while issuing warnings to Iran to follow through with its promises. As Obama stated: "This is a constructive beginning, but hard work lies ahead. We've entered a phase of intensive international negotiations. And talk is no substitute for action. Pledges of Cooperation must be fulfilled... our patience is not unlimited."²⁷

In Iran, the supporters and opponents of the Ahmadinejad government offered contrasting interpretations of the outcome of the Geneva negotiations. The opposition "Green Movement" viewed the outcome of the talks as a retreat by the Ahmadinejad government because, contrary to its previous pronouncements, it agreed in principle to enrichment of Iranian uranium outside the country. The "Green Movement" further argued that the West still remained suspicious of Iran's nuclear intentions and promises.²⁸ The *Kayhan* editor, Hossein Shariatmadari, offered a vastly different and more thorough analysis of the Geneva talks than that of the "Green Movement." According to Shariatmadari, the West did not bring up the issue of Iran's enrichment suspension. Furthermore, per Iran's previous agreements with the IAEA, Iran had already agreed to send the

low-enriched uranium from the Tehran research facility to other countries for further processing and adaptation for use in nuclear medicine research and application. It was the West, Shariatmadari opined, that conceded to Iran's demands and not the other way around.²⁹ However, the initial round of the Geneva talks was not structured to accomplish major breakthroughs in the long-standing nuclear stalemate between Iran and the West. Nonetheless, they were the first steps in a long journey, whose outcome is yet to be determined. More appropriately, as Gary Sick of Columbia University has observed, "instead of being a food fight leading to a total breakdown, the Geneva talks were serious, businesslike, and even cordial."³⁰ The fact that the two sides agreed to meet again is a clear indication that progress in breaking the impasse in the Iranian nuclear issue is possible, but the road ahead is perilous.

Iran's strategic loneliness and the history of US-Iran relations since 1979 teaches us that the path to normalization of relations between the two countries is fraught with danger, and obstacles on both sides will continue to damage the prospects of rapprochement between Washington and Tehran. Some Western analysts have argued that the Iranian government does not want normal relations with the United States. Political analyst Fareed Zakaria in a *Newsweek* article argued that isolation from the West and "hostility toward the United States are fundamental pillars that prop up the current [Iranian] regime—the reason that this system of government came into being and what sustains it every day. This is not simply a matter of ideology—though that is important—but economics. Those who rule in Tehran have created a closed, oligarchic economy that channels the country's oil revenues into the coffers of its religious foundations (for compliant clerics) and the increasingly powerful Revolutionary Guards."³¹ Other American analysts of contemporary Iran have argued that Iran has made serious offers of strategic significance to the United States, but it was Washington that rebuffed Iran's offers of engagement in the past. They argue that instead of the counterproductive sanctions policy, the Obama administration should seek a "strategic realignment with Iran as thoroughgoing as that effected by Nixon with China. This would require Washington to take steps, up front," to assure Tehran that rapprochement would serve Iran's strategic needs."³²

Finally, the Iranian negotiators will have to eschew sermonizing if they intend to hold meaningful and potentially fruitful talks with their Western counterparts. Saeed Jalili, Iran's chief negotiator acted professionally in the October 2009 Geneva talks. Although, Jalili may have a tendency to engage in long monologues, he is a calm person and is not a polarizing figure (like President Ahmadinejad). However, he may not have the requisite background to lead Iran in the tough rounds of negotiations. Jalili, who was born in 1965 in Mashad and fought in the Iran-Iraq War, was appointed to his current position because of his close friendship with Ahmadinejad. Also, Jalili's worldview may have been shaped by his experience in the Iran-Iraq War and by injuries he suffered in the War (he still walks with a limp). Moreover, Saeed Jalili views current political developments exclusively from a *Quranic* paradigm. His book on foreign policy, titled *Foreign Policy of the Prophet of Islam*, and his doctoral dissertation in political science (from Imam Sadeq University) on "Paradigm of Political Thought of Islam in the Holy *Quran*" demonstrate the ideological impediments that may hinder Jalili's understanding of complex foreign policy and security issues facing today's Iran. Of course, while he does not have to compromise his religious beliefs, he must recognize that his counterparts are not looking at the world from his religious prism. Iran needs to make sure that their team includes capable negotiators who are familiar with the mores of their 5+1 counterparts.

Notes

-
- ¹ Martin Fletcher, "Britain Is Appeasing Iran, Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi Says," *Times* (London), September 24, 2009, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article6846763.ece.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Andrew F. Tully, "Necessar Decision or Bad Decision? U.S. Cuts Funds to Iran Rights Group," *Payvand News of Iran*, October 9, 2009, <http://www.payvand.com/news/09/oct/1088.html>.
- ⁵ See, for example, Daniel Coats, Charles Robb and Charles Wald, "Meeting the Challenge: Time is Running Out," Bipartisan Policy Center, September 2009, pp. 1-19.
- ⁶ Fox News Channel, Fox News Sunday, October 4, 2009.
- ⁷ Kayhan Barzegar, "The Paradox of Iran's Nuclear Consensus," *World Policy Journal*, vol. 26, no. 3, Fall 2009, pp. 21-22.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 22.
- ⁹ See the Iran section in the IAEA's website, <http://www.iaea.org>, for all of the agency's reports on Iran.
- ¹⁰ William J. Broad and David E. Sanger, "Report Says Iran Has Data to Make a Nuclear Bomb," *New York Times*, October 4, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/04/world/middleeast/04nuke.html>. For a analysis of this report, see Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), "Excerpts from Internal IAEA Document on Alleged Iranian Nuclear Weaponization," *ISIS Report*, October 2, 2009, pp. 1-5.
- ¹¹ Gareth Porter, "Leaked Iran Paper Based on the Intel that Split IAEA," Inter Press Service (IPS) News Agency, October 6, 2009, <http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=48740>.
- ¹² The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), "Transcript of IAEA Director General Remarks at Joint Press Conference with Atomic Energy Organization of Iran," Tehran, Iran, October 4, 2009, <http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Transcripts/2009/transcr041009.html>.
- ¹³ See, for example, Lally Weymouth's interview with Michael Oren, Israel's ambassador to the United States, *Newsweek*, October 12, 2009, p. 37.
- ¹⁴ Center for Strategic Research, *Diplomasiye Hasteii: 678 Rooz Modiriyat-e Bohran*, Tehran: Center for Strategic Research, 2006, pp. 12-18. Also, see Mohammad Ali Basri and Mostafa

Ghasemi, "Barresiye Mavaze-e Etehadiyeh Oroopa va Amrika dar Qebal-e Parvandehe Hasteii Iran, *Journal of Defense Policy* (Tehran), vol. 14, no. 2, Spring 2006, pp. 25-64, and Seyyed Hamid Mowlana and Manouchehr Mohammadi, *Siyast-e Khareji Jomhoori-e Eslami Iran dar Dolat-e Ahmadinejad*, Tehran: Dadgostar Publisher, 2008, pp. 194-200.

¹⁵ Nader Entessar, "Iran's Nuclear Decision-Making Calculus," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 16, no. 2, Summer 2009, pp. 31-33.

¹⁶ Press TV, April 12, 2009, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=91207>.

¹⁷ Baztab, February 25, 2007 [<http://www.baztab.ir/news/61576.php>].

¹⁸ See, for example, *Iran Times*, February 2, 2007, pp. 1 and 10.

¹⁹ Mehr News Agency, March 3, 2007 [<http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=455662>].

²⁰ See, for example, Hossein Shariatmadari, "There Is Crisis, but on Which Side?," *Kayhan*, February 19, 2007 [<http://www.kayhannews.ir/851130/2.htm>].

²¹ See Allahkaram's article posted on <http://www.ansarnews.com/?usr=news/detail&nid=602> [nd].

²² For the full text of the statement, see <http://mojahedin-enghelab.org/ShowItem.aspx?ID=353&p=1>.

²³ *Kargozaran*, February 25, 2007.

²⁴ Fatemeh Haghghatjoo, "Factional Positions on the Nuclear Issue in the Context of Iranian Domestic Politics," *Iran Analysis Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 1, January-March 2006, pp. 1-2.

²⁵ Farideh Farhi, "Ahmadinejad's Nuclear Folly," *Middle East Report*, vol. 39, no. 3, Fall 2009, p. 2.

²⁶ For a transcript of Obama's remark, see the *New York Times*, September 26, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/26/world/middleeast/26nuke.text.html>.

²⁷ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President on the Meeting of the P5+1 Regarding Iran," October 1, 2009.

²⁸ See Jonbesh-e Rah-e Sabz, October 2, 2009, <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/2212>.

²⁹ *Kayhan*, October 6, 2009, <http://www.kayhannews.ir/880714/2.htm>.

³⁰ Gary Sick, "Real Progress with Iran," *The Daily Beast*, October 2, 2009, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2009-10-02/real-progress-with-iran/p/>

³¹ Fareed Zakaria, "Containing a Nuclear Iran: Forget Force and Sanctions. It's Time to Get Real," *Newsweek*, October 12, 2009, p. 34.

³² Flynt Leveret and Hillary Mann Leverett, "How to Press the Advantage with Iran," *New York Times*, September 29, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/29/opinion/29leverett.html>

Comments on "Ahmadinejad's Second Term and Iran's Nuclear Policy"

Behrad Nakhaei

Over the past thirty years, Iran's nuclear program has been used as a political tool by the West. In a sense, Iran's nuclear program has been transformed into a political conflict with a forced atomic veil. West's stand on Iran's nuclear program has consistently been at least one step behind the reality. Many of the analyses and discussions on this subject have been along the personal agenda lacking objectivity.

In his analysis, Nader Entessar presents a fair and objective detail of Iran's nuclear enigma which has been intertwined with both internal and external politics, each consisting of several factions and various views. He aptly points to some of those stands which use the nuclear issue as a façade for ulterior motives, ranging from minor political manipulations all the way to total obliteration of Iran, the motives of which have been intensified—either because of or as a potent excuse-- after the June 2009 election and the ensuing bloody violence which are still continuing and growing.

Entessar argues that Iran's nuclear goals and objectives have remained unchanged, since these goals and objectives have been formulated by the Strategic Research of the Expediency Council long before Ahmadinejad became President. He enforces his argument by briefly discussing the three layers of decision making bodies in Iran. Therefore, in his capacity as the President, Ahmadinejad can only influence the tactic and not the strategy, and all within the confinement of Iran's nuclear goals and objectives which are bound by Iran's obligation under NNPT. However, Ahmadinejad failed to safeguard one of these goals which was preventing Iran's nuclear file from going to UNSC, which led to the first ever UN sanction against Iran. Although pursuing the same strategies, yet Ahmadinejad's tactics have been confrontational and abrasive, as Khatami's tactics were congenial and confidence building.

In this paper, one statement that I disagree with is a quote in this paper by Farideh Farhi that: "Ahmadinejad's manipulation of the presidential election was designed partly to boost Iran's leverage in its future negotiations with the United States." I believe that at best, this was an excuse and not a reason. As is widely known and accepted, any negotiation with US is at the behest of the leader, no matter who occupies the presidency. As noted in this paper, the election and its aftermath unfortunately has considerably weakened Iran's negotiating position. As noted

by Entessar, to some observers, the Geneva meeting in October, the first Iran-US contact in thirty years, and Iran's initial agreement to exchange of enriched U with 20% enriched U for Iran's research reactor are evidences of Iran's weakened position, despite Mehdi Safari's win-win claim.

The September 21 announcement of Fordo plant—a facility the building of which had started in 1998-1999 and most probably as a safe sanctuary for the military, then later decided to be converted to a makeshift enrichment plant following repeated threat of invasion of Iran by US and Israel—took the West off-guard. This announcement was a calculated move by Ahmadinejad to mask the disputed election and the post-election violence. Although the existence of this facility has been known by the West, yet unfortunately, the West took the bait, forcing unsubstantiated and unreasonable claims and remarks by the Western leaders.

Entessar provides the essential and expectable requirements for a nuclear agreement. The critical step is to assemble a capable and knowledgeable team of negotiators who are familiar not only with the realities of the nuclear issues, but also with the Western views and psyches. Iran's negotiators must substitute sermons with practical discussions of the nuclear issues. The realities of the past—the most important one being the unjust West's support of Saddam Hossein in his invasion of Iran and continued support for his use of WMD against Iran—are too bitter to overlook. It is unreasonable to expect that Iran and US can resolve their differences with only a few contacts. The process is a long and arduous one requiring a dose of reality with extended patience on both sides. The nuclear issue can potently serve as the medium for peace in such attempt and as a trust building step for both sides, in realization of President Eisenhower's "Atom for Peace" address to UN in December 1956.