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WITH ELECTIONS APPROACHING, NEW PRESSURES ON IRAN, WHICH “WANTS THE BOMB”—*REVOLUTIONARY GUARD* A NEW FOCUS

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Don’t Be Fooled: Iran Wants The Bomb: [Ahmad Hashemi, *Times of Israel*, Jan. 17, 2013](#)—While at the Iranian foreign ministry, I served as interpreter for visiting dignitaries, diplomats and officials. I paid close attention to public proclamations and official statements. And I was present at inner-circle conversations in which a number of high-profile Iranian officials made no secret of their intention to go atomic.

Iran Faces a Rough 2013: [Alireza Nader, *Real Clear World*, Jan. 3, 2013](#)—For Iran, 2013 could be one of the most challenging years-both at home and in relations with the outside world-since the 1979 revolution. The Islamic Republic faces the potential of stronger economic sanctions and even an Israeli and/or U.S. military strike because of its intransigence in complying with U.N. resolutions on its nuclear program.

On Topic Links

Iranian Policy Toward Direct Nuclear Talks with the U.S.: [Lt. Col. \(ret.\) Michael Segall, *Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs*, January 17, 2013](#)—The question of engagement with the United States has, to varying degrees, been a domestic issue in Iran since the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution. It has emerged in recent years in connection to important events and junctures, particularly with regard to the Iranian nuclear program. In Iran, just as in the United States, this issue serves as a tool in political struggles between the different camps and is raised when it furthers some political purpose or other. Download as [PDF](#).

The Next Chernobyl?: [Khosrow B. Semnani & Gary M. Sandquist, *New York Times*, Jan. 2, 2013](#)

Iranian Support for Palestinian Terrorist Organizations: [Meir Amit Terrorism Information Centre, Jan. 7, 2013](#)

The Tehran Terror Trail: [Editorial, *New York Daily News*, Jan. 13, 2013](#)

EFFECTIVELY CONFRONTING TEHRAN

Daniel Pipes

[*National Review*, January 8, 2013](#)

As Americans seek to find an alternative to the stark and unappetizing choice of either accepting a rabid Iranian leadership that wields nuclear weapons or preemptively bombing Iran’s nuclear facilities,

one analyst offers a credible third path. Interestingly, it's inspired by a long-ago policy toward a different foe — the Reagan administration's ways of handling the Soviet Union — yet this unlikely model offers a useful prototype.

Abraham D. Sofaer, a former U.S. district judge and legal adviser to the State Department, now a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, argues in the forthcoming *Taking On Iran: Strength, Diplomacy and the Iranian Threat* that since the fall of the shah during the Carter administration, Washington “has responded to Iranian aggression with ineffective sanctions and empty warnings and condemnations.”

Not since 1988, he notes, has the U.S. government focused on the Iranian military force that specifically protects the country's Islamic order and most often attacks abroad, variously called the “Pasdaran” or “Sepah” in Persian, the “Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps” (IRGC) in English. This roughly 125,000-strong elite force, created in 1980, has an outsized role in Iran's political and economic life. It possesses its own army, navy, and air-force units, it controls ballistic missile programs, and it shares control over the country's nuclear program. It runs the Basij, which enforces strict Islamic mores on the Iranian public. Its military forces are more important than the regular armed forces. Its Quds Force of about 15,000 agents spreads the Khomeini revolution abroad via infiltration and assassination. Its graduates staff key positions in the Iranian government.

The IRGC has played a lead role attacking Americans, their allies, and their interests, especially when one includes the IRGC's many documented surrogates and partners, such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the Muqtada al-Sadr movement, even the Taliban and al-Qaeda. IRGC accomplishments include the 1983 Marine barracks and U.S. embassy bombings in Lebanon, the 1992 and 1994 bombings of Jewish targets in Argentina, the 1996 Khobar barracks bombing in Saudi Arabia, the 2011 attempt to kill the Saudi ambassador in Washington, and the provisioning of Hamas with missiles for its 2012 war with Israel (weapons that are already being re-provisioned).

In all, IRGC attacks have caused the deaths of more than 1,000 American soldiers and of many more members of other armed forces and non-combatants. The U.S. government has condemned the IRGC as a state sponsor of terrorism and designated it as a proliferator of weapons of mass destruction. Sofaer advocates a supple two-pronged approach to Tehran: “Confront IRGC aggression directly and negotiate with Iran.”

Confrontation means Washington exploits “the full range of options available to curb the IRGC short of preventive attacks on nuclear sites.” He argues that U.S. forces have the right to and should target factories and storage facilities for arms, facilities associated with the IRGC (bases, ports, trucks, planes, ships), arms shipments about to be exported, and IRGC units. Sofaer's goal is not only to curb IRGC violence but also to “undermine IRGC credibility and influence, and help convince Iran to negotiate in earnest” over its nuclear-weapons program.

Negotiation means talking to Tehran about outstanding issues rather than trying to punish it with aloofness. Sofaer quotes James Dobbins, a former special U.S. envoy to Afghanistan, as expressing this view: “It is time to apply to Iran the policies which won the Cold War, liberated the Warsaw Pact, and reunited Europe: détente and containment, communication whenever possible, and confrontation whenever necessary. We spoke to Stalin's Russia. We spoke to Mao's China. In both cases, greater mutual exposure changed their system, not ours. It's time to speak to Iran, unconditionally, and comprehensively.” More broadly, along with Chester A. Crocker, another former American diplomat, Sofaer sees diplomacy as “the engine that converts raw energy and tangible power into meaningful political results.”

Confronting and negotiating in tandem, Sofaer expects, will put great pressure on Tehran to improve its behaviour generally (*e.g.*, regarding terrorism) and possibly lead it to shut down the nuclear program, while leaving available a pre-emptive strike on the table “if all else fails.” Former secretary of state George P. Shultz, in his foreword to *Taking on Iran*, calls Sofaer’s idea “an alternative that should have been implemented long ago.” Indeed, the time is well overdue to respond to IRGC atrocities with the language of force, the only language that Iranian leaders understand — and this might have the additional benefit of avoiding greater hostilities.

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DON'T BE FOOLED: IRAN WANTS THE BOMB

Ahmad Hashemi

[Times of Israel](#), Jan. 17, 2013

Iran’s top nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili recently said his country has agreed to resume talks on its nuclear program later this month. At the same time, the IAEA and the international community, particularly the European countries, have stepped up efforts to revitalize the futile negotiating process. During my four and a half years as an employee of the Iranian foreign ministry, I learned beyond doubt, that my country’s participation in talks is purely a stalling tactic....

It was almost a decade ago that the People’s Mujahedin, Iran’s leftist opposition in exile, first revealed the clandestine nuclear activities carried out by the regime, providing the exact addresses of some of the facilities, and letting the world know about the Islamic theocracy’s true ambitions for acquiring nuclear bombs. Since then, Iran has attended dozens of negotiating rounds merely to convince naïve politicians and dewy-eyed peaceniks that it is telling the truth. Within this context, Tehran maintains that it is trying to use diplomatic means to prove that Iran is merely working to harness nuclear energy for peaceful purposes in order to meet increasing domestic energy demand as it runs out of fuel. Iran likewise exploits the matter at home, whipping up populist nationalism with leftist-style demagoguery that depicts its nuclear program as a cardinal matter of national pride.

But a lie remains a lie, whether it is repeated ceaselessly in international forums or broadcast all day to the Iranian masses. While at the Iranian foreign ministry, I served as interpreter for visiting dignitaries, diplomats and officials. I paid close attention to public proclamations and official statements. And I was present at inner-circle conversations in which a number of high-profile Iranian officials made no secret of their intention to go atomic. I personally witnessed the following examples:

In April 2005, after organizing several meetings in his office at the Discernment Council headquarters, I was invited to a meeting at the home of Mohsen Rezai, the Secretary of the Expediency Discernment Council and a former commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) during the Iran-Iraq war. I was invited in my capacity as a founding member of of the short-lived Islamic Association for Students and Academicians (IASA, which was dissolved the next year), together with Ruhollah Solgi, the IASA secretary general. (Today, Solgi is the governor of Aran va Bidgol County in the Isfahan region.) We were asked to come and exchange views on the overall situation on the upcoming presidential election campaign in which Mr. Rezai was preparing to run as a presidential nominee.

Rezai’s home was located in the Shahrak Shahid Daghayeghi Complex at the outskirts of the Lavizan forests in northeast Tehran. We went to a spacious, concrete villa on the last block of the fenced in and tightly patrolled neighbourhood, which provides housing primarily for IRGC officers and other high-profile officials. When we arrived, Rezai was busy meeting various military and political figures, including generals from the IRGC. At this private meeting in his house, while castigating former reformist president Khatami for his compromising approach towards the West, Mohsen Rezai strongly

advocated the idea of acquiring nuclear bombs for “deterrent purposes.” He referred to such a weapon as a “holy Islamic bomb” needed to defy the bullying approach of global arrogance. Mentioning that even Khomeini approved of acquiring an atomic bomb to safeguard the interests of Islam during Iran-Iraq war, he argued that everything is allowed for the sake of Islam, including using WMDs and the mass killing of civilians.

In early 2012, Ali Bagheri, the deputy secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, was meeting his Indian counterpart at a dinner reception at India’s embassy in Tehran. While we waited for the Indian official, who had been delayed in traffic, to arrive, I heard the Iranian foreign ministry’s director for Europe and America, Ahmad Sobhani, ask Mr. Bagheri about the Supreme Leader’s latest views on the 5+1 negotiations. Bagheri replied that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei remained adamant and increasingly convinced that “we should expedite our efforts and diversify our secret facilities to achieve our goal before it is too late.”

In early February 2012, I was present at a confidential meeting at which Iran’s deputy head of the Islamic Revolution Mostazafan Foundation was negotiating with the North Korean ambassador in order to obtain nuclear technology for Iran in exchange for financial support. In my foreign ministry position, I interpreted at meetings between my country and international chemical weapons inspectors. The Iranian side, known as the Escort Team, included officials from the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Intelligence, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Industry. They met with representatives from the Hague-based chemical weapons watchdog, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, known as Inspection Team.

I was present throughout these encounters, which included a Pre-Inspection Briefing prepared for the visitors by Iran, on-site visits at chemical production plants, and summation deliberations and conclusions...I interpreted as the Iranian defense officials misinformed and deceived the inspectors. With such a history of producing weapons of mass destruction in the form of chemical weapons, why should anyone believe that Iran is not intent on producing an atomic bomb?

All previous meetings between Iran and the 5+1 failed because Iran was never serious about curbing its nuclear programs. After seven years, the West and particularly the Obama administration are still hopeful that they can achieve progress through negotiations. Tehran may have slowed down tactically, but undoubtedly, as the former commander of Iran’s revolutionary guards Mohsen Rezai once said, “Iran’s long-term policy and strategic vision is to acquire a holy Islamic atomic bomb.”

Using a well-known concept in Shiite jurisprudence known as the expedient or altruistic lie, Iranian officials are perfectly willing to lie when it comes to their intentions and programs. The enlightened nations would do well to understand the religious underpinnings of Iranian diplomats’ big lies in contrast with European negotiators. Once the extent of the deception is understood, the question should be not whether Iran’s nuclear program is peaceful but rather when and how the program can be safely terminated.

Ahmad Hashemi, was born in Qom, Iran. He has a Master’s Degree in American Studies from the Iranian Foreign Ministry’s School of International Relations. In January 2008, he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an English, Turkish, Arabic interpreter. Active in the 2009 pro-democracy Green Movement protests he was forced to flee Iran and currently is seeking political asylum in Turkey.

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Alireza Nader

[Real Clear World](#), Jan. 3, 201

For Iran, 2013 could be one of the most challenging years-both at home and in relations with the outside world-since the 1979 revolution. The Islamic Republic faces the potential of stronger economic sanctions and even an Israeli and/or U.S. military strike because of its intransigence in complying with U.N. resolutions on its nuclear program.

But the world's only modern theocracy also must deal with twin domestic challenges-- deepening malaise among the young and increasing tensions among the political elite. Both could be important factors in the presidential election scheduled for June 14, which will feature a new slate of candidates since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will have served the two-term limit. Home-grown problems could outweigh the regime's foreign policy woes.

Iran and the world's major powers have all indicated an interest in a new round of diplomatic talks in 2013 to end the long standoff over Tehran's controversial nuclear program. The gap is still enormous, however, after three rounds in Istanbul, Baghdad and Moscow in 2012. The big question is whether Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is truly interested in making a deal-and on terms that will also satisfy the United States, Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia.

Khamenei is not easily swayed by pressure. He has survived imprisonment and lived through the revolution, assassination attempts, the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, popular uprisings, and decades of sanctions. He views Iran's uranium enrichment program not only as a natural and legal right, but also a measure of Tehran's success against the United States. In 2012, he often publicly talked about the U.S. "decline" in the Middle East, reflected in part by the fall of three pro-American rulers with other U.S. allies wobbling. Tehran also spins the so-called Arab Spring as an "Islamic awakening" modeled on its own Islamic revolution.

Despite what he says publicly, however, Khamenei is also savvy enough to know that the same political changes represent new challenges for his regime as well. Syrian President Bashar Assad, Tehran's most important Arab ally, is under siege from a protest movement that turned into a surprisingly powerful military campaign. The spillover impacts Lebanon's Hezbollah, which also faces its own unique problems. And other regional powers, most notably Turkey, are increasingly questioning Iran's geopolitical aspirations.

Iran begins 2013 with growing economic woes that may be an important calculation in Khamenei's decision. He needs tens of billions of dollars in oil revenues to maintain a vast and often loyal network that has maintained his rule as Iran's ultimate leader for the past 23 years. But the world's toughest sanctions, soaring inflation, and the plummeting value of Iran's currency produced the perfect economic storm in 2012. And Tehran's economic crisis will not end any time soon.

Iran's oil exports declined by as much as one-half in 2012, a factor that could produce additional pressure from key Khamenei constituents, including the Bazaar merchant class and the powerful Revolutionary Guards. But chronic mismanagement is the chief cause of Iran's economic problems. After his 2005 election, President Ahmadinejad eliminated economic planning agencies such as the Management and Planning Organization. He also sidelined skilled technocrats who were not politically loyal to him. He fuelled inflation by injecting massive cash into the economy and reducing subsidies. During his presidency, imports of goods from Asia and Europe skyrocketed, contributing to the closure or bankruptcy of hundreds of Iranian factories. The list goes on and on.

Corruption across the regime has contributed to the economic crisis. In 2012, the Islamic Republic was perceived as one of the most corrupt in the world, according to Transparency International. It ranked

133rd-tied with Russia, Kazakhstan, Honduras and Guyana-out of the 176 countries and territories that were ranked.

The Revolutionary Guards, which control large parts of the economy, are also reportedly corrupt. The most powerful military organization in Iran has charitable foundations that are tax-exempt and largely free of government scrutiny. The Guards have also been linked to illicit smuggling and narcotics trafficking. Some veteran officers have reportedly amassed significant wealth.

The economy is now the Islamic Republic's Achilles Heel. Iran has been successful in educating millions of Iranians and rebuilding its infrastructure after the Iran-Iraq War. But it has not reached the potential of a country with one of the world's largest reserves of oil and natural gas and a well-educated and resourceful population.

The Islamic Republic begins 2013 with anxiety among both the public and the government over the impending presidential election. The 2009 election produced the deepest political schism since the revolution, with millions turning out in massive popular protests across the country to challenge the official outcome. It gave birth to the opposition Green Movement and created an enduring crisis of legitimacy for the Supreme Leader.

The 2013 election may be more tightly scripted than any earlier presidential race to prevent serious debates or competition....In December 2012, the Iranian parliament passed legislation requiring all candidates to have the endorsement of more than 100 of the regime's "experts" and to be between the ages of 40 and 75. Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, a former president who has long been Khamenei's main political rival and a focus of hardline ire, is now 78 years old and ran again in 2005 against Ahmadinejad, but lost. He is now excluded from running again....

The spectrum of rivals reflects the unprecedented divisions. All were among the early revolutionaries who ousted the shah and hung together for more than a decade. Ahmadinejad, a hardliner who had Khamenei's full endorsement just four years ago, is now perceived as a threat to the Supreme Leader's hold on power. But the most important challenge to the regime may still come from the Green Movement. Its symbolic leaders, Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, are under house arrest but they remain a potent threat to Khamenei's rule, perhaps even more than an Israeli military strike or U.S. sanctions.

Alireza Nader is a senior policy analyst at the nonprofit, nonpartisan RAND Corporation and a lecturer on Iranian politics at the George Washington University.

ON TOPIC

The Next Chernobyl?: Khosrow B. Semnani & Gary M. Sandquist, *New York Times*, Jan. 2, 2013—A Chernobyl-type nuclear meltdown in Bushehr [Iran] would not only inflict severe damage in southern Iran, but also in the six oil and gas-rich Gulf Cooperation Council countries of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Indeed, the capitals of those states are closer to Bushehr than Tehran. Nuclear radiation in the air and water would disrupt the Strait of Hormuz shipping, the world's most important oil choke point. Oil prices would skyrocket. The world economy would face a hurricane.

Iranian Support for Palestinian Terrorist Organizations: *Meir Amit Terrorism Information Centre*, Jan. 7, 2013—The military capabilities of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) were revealed in Operation Pillar of Defense. Those capabilities were the product of massive Iranian support constructed around an arsenal of many thousands of rockets, both standard and manufactured by the terrorist organizations themselves (using Iranian technical knowhow).

Iranian Policy Toward Direct Nuclear Talks with the U.S.: Lt. Col. (ret.) Michael Segall, *JCPA*, January 17, 2013—The question of engagement with the United States has, to varying degrees, been a domestic issue in Iran since the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution. It has emerged in recent years in connection to important events and junctures, particularly with regard to the Iranian nuclear program. In Iran, just as in the United States, this issue serves as a tool in political struggles between the different camps and is raised when it furthers some political purpose or other. Download as [PDF](#).

The Tehran Terror Trail: Editorial, *New York Daily News*, Jan. 13, 2013—The temperature is spiking in the warm war between the U.S. and Iran. President Obama's national security team, which has a history of trying to engage the mullahtocracy, must recognize the limits of talk.

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