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## **‘MUTUALLY ASSURED THREAT REDUCTION’ FOR RESOLVING IRAN’S NUCLEAR PROBLEM**

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The threats that Iran poses to the Middle East as well as to the international security environment are multifaceted. First and foremost, Iran’s development of nuclear weapon capabilities is the most imminent threat to the international community as a whole. Second, support by Iran’s Revolutionary Guards of terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas are also destabilizing the security environment in the Middle East and endangering the Middle East peace process. Third, in combination with Iran’s manifesto

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to become a regional power in the Middle East by 2025, Iran's declaratory policy to 'export' Islamic revolution abroad concerns neighboring countries, in particular those with substantial Shiite populations because such a movement might politically destabilize these countries. Fourth, it might trigger a 'nuclear cascade' of proliferation in the region.

Resolving Iran's nuclear problem implies that these security concerns must also be addressed at the same time. It would be of tremendous benefit to the peace and security of the international community. Furthermore, normalization with Iran would also positively affect secure and stable oil supply from the Middle East.

Iran's motivation for nuclear development is three-fold: security assurance against a US attack or pressure for regime change; a quest for supremacy in the regional security balance vis-à-vis rivals such as Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt; and the national pride that the Iranian religious and political leaderships exploit to legitimize themselves. The energy security needs that the Iranian government claims as a primary reason for fuel cycle development may in fact be secondary because the fuel fabrication capability that Iran has yet to develop is more critical than enrichment if self-sufficiency in nuclear fuel is to be achieved.

If we would like to totally eliminate Iran's nuclear threat, we need to address Iran's security concerns and the rationale behind the pursuit of nuclear development in order to decrease Iran's incentive.

In his speech in Prague on April 5, 2009, President Obama acknowledged Iran's right to develop peaceful nuclear energy with rigorous inspections. It is not clear whether President Obama implied that his administration might accept Iran possessing some sort of fuel cycle capabilities such as enrichment, if not a full industrial-scale factory, should Iran fully accept more intrusive safeguards based on the Additional Protocol to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Safeguards Agreement.

In the conventional legal interpretation of the 'inalienable right' to peaceful nuclear energy in Article IV of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), nuclear fuel cycle technologies such as enrichment and reprocessing are

included in 'peaceful use.' As long as countries are in compliance with NPT and IAEA safeguards agreements, they may pursue national nuclear energy programs with such technologies. Although Iran's compliance is in question, non-compliance cannot be a reason to force Iran to abandon its fuel cycle. In the sense that there is no compulsory enforcement, the rules are on Iran's side as long as the conventional interpretation prevails. We cannot get Iran out of the enrichment business by the enforcement of rules, but only by politics or force, so the question is how to make Iran voluntarily give up its enrichment activities.

In reality, an enrichment facility of a substantial scale is already in existence. Iran continues to develop that facility and, in two years or so, it could build it up large enough to produce enriched uranium for a few bombs every year. Therefore, if the negotiations on reducing the threat of Iran's nuclear program are prolonged, it will become even more difficult to dissuade Iran. Time is also on Iran's side.

President Obama also mentioned that his administration would seek engagement with Iran while acknowledging its rightful position in the international community. If the United States is ready to acknowledge Iran's rightful position (once again, the definition matters here), what we can take is a 'mutually assured threat reduction' approach. In this approach, both the United States and Iran agree to address each other's security concerns, entailing confidence-building, verification, and cooperation in certain matters of mutual interest.

To begin with, the United States and Iran could start their dialogue in areas where they can easily find common interests. Iran and the United States do indeed share some common interests. While President Obama identifies the stabilization of Afghanistan as the top priority in his security and foreign policy, Iran also faces serious threats on its border with Afghanistan from occasional border crossings by insurgents and drug and arms trafficking. Before President Bush's statement that included Iran in the 'Axis of Evil,' US and Iranian military officials had sat together to discuss the 'war on terrorism' in the western part of Afghanistan. Although the scope of dialogue would be narrow, and difficulties could be expected in expanding the scope of such dialogue, it could provide a

foundation for building confidence between the two countries.

The next step would be Iran's suspension of enrichment activities, followed by the placement of enrichment facilities under IAEA seal. In return, the United States could offer its assurances to not seek regime change and to bring an end to hostilities. Both sides would then agree on a roadmap toward normalization of relations to be implemented step-by-step according to commitments fulfilled. For Iran, a security guarantee from the United States should be the most attractive offer. The two countries could engage in a comprehensive dialogue on security issues, including Iran's sponsorship of Hezbollah and Hamas, and mutual security assurances between Iran and Israel (although this could be one of the most difficult issues).


Then, the United States and the international community could slowly lift sanctions as Iran shuts down the enrichment facility under IAEA supervision. Iran should accept rigorous inspections, including intrusive access to facilities, people, and documents - whatever the IAEA deems necessary - in exchange for an assured fuel supply. The international community can also offer Iranian scientists participation in international consortia for R&D in advanced civilian nuclear technology, including proliferation-resistant technology.

Finally would come the decommissioning of the facility. At this stage, the international community could offer energy cooperation to Iran, such as resumption of investment in both the oil and natural gas sector and the nuclear energy sector and normalize relations with Iran.

Of course, we should not forget to develop a 'back-up' system. Firstly, we need a stringent and effective enforcement mechanism involving all the United Nations Security Council's permanent members. Threats of sanctions must be realistic in the event that Iran cheats or does not comply with agreements. Secondly, export controls for sensitive materials should be strengthened. Iran still needs to import materials and equipment for upgrading and up-scaling its nuclear fuel cycle facilities. To prevent clandestine development activities by Iran, we need to strengthen control over the transfer of materials and equipments to Iran. For shipping such materials and equipment, Dubai is often used as a transshipment port. Therefore, we should request more

vigorous cooperation from Dubai's export control and custom authorities. Needless to say, export controls in shipping countries must be thoroughly implemented. Thirdly and most importantly, we need to address the concerns of neighboring states about rapprochement between Iran and the United States. Providing security assurances for them by checking Iran's ability to become a regional hegemon would be indispensable. To this end, security commitments by the United States are required. In particular, reassurance of the US' commitment to Israel's security would be important.

In the meantime, an important element in this process would be taking 'face-saving' measures for the national leadership of Iran. The Iranian people have been convinced by their leaders' repeated statements of the righteousness of Iran's pursuit of a nuclear program as well as of the malicious intent of the US. Given the rather pluralistic and 'democratic' nature of Iranian society, sudden changes of minds among the leaders might threaten their political and social legitimacy.

In a way, the key to 'mutually assured threat reduction' is to gain benefits of substance for us (freedom from Iran's nuclear threat and stability in the region) as well as to save face and domestic stability for Iran. 

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