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GETTING TO ZERO

Prospects for progress on Iran's nuclear file

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*Iran's Central Bank was sanctioned in the latest round.
This is an image of the 50,000 Rial banknote celebrating Iran's nuclear program*

Executive Summary

Assuming it to be pursuing a nuclear weapon programme and determined to prevent proliferation, the international community is on a course to isolate Iran through a series of sanctions. This is a high-stakes approach that has already entrenched positions. Tensions have been heightened by a series of diplomatic incidents involving Iran and Israel, over-interpretation of the recent International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report on Iran's nuclear activity, international attempts to restrict Iran's access to financial markets, and Iran's continued drive to acquire dual-use nuclear technology and nuclear material while confident of domestic support. The region now faces the prospect of a proliferation cascade, or unilateral military action by Israel.

The period ahead of the 2012 Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone (WMDfZ) in the Middle East conference presents a window of opportunity to improve diplomatic relations. The current sanctions

regime and covert action approach has a number of unintended consequences, not least in bolstering the resolve of the Iranian leadership in resisting external pressure. Contrary to much of the existing commentary on this issue, Iran could be seen as a rational actor seeking regional influence. The WMDfZ process is an opportunity to engage Iran and its neighbours in dialogue.

States will need to agree on organising principles ahead of the WMDfZ conference, with a view to building a concept of security better suited to all the key regional actors, such as:

- The pursuit of trust-building measures by Middle Eastern states, but also by the P5 + 1;
- Greater involvement of states in the region determining the diplomatic agenda; and,
- The re-integration of Iran into the international community through a robust nuclear verification and inspection regime.

Military action poses an inherent risk to the global non-proliferation regime, in particular if it were in

the form of unilateral action by Israel, a non-NPT state acting to punish a member-state for apparently transgressing it. It would result in a renewal of Iran's trajectory towards the nuclear threshold with greater unity of support within the country. Even today, the combination of covert action and sanctions has undermined dialogue, and has achieved little more than delay for Iran's nuclear programme.

The WMDFZ conference, valuable in itself, is the beginning of a wider political and diplomatic regional process, with implications beyond WMD. It offers the hope of reintegrating Iran, and of greater transparency and engagement on the part of all the actors involved.

Introduction

The road towards a 2012 Conference for a WMDFZ in the Middle East is proving a tumultuous one. A series of diplomatic incidents, including assassination plots linked to Iran, covert action against Iranian personnel and facilities, as well as the November 2011 report by the IAEA on Iran, and tightening international sanctions, have contributed to the deterioration of diplomatic relations between Iran and the international community. As diplomatic relations between Iran and the P5 + 1 have ground to a halt, the United States and Europe have increasingly come to rely upon sanctions and the implied threat of military action to deal with Iran; the Iranian nuclear programme has therefore become, in its own right, the key area of focus ahead of the conference.

The shortfalls of contemporary behaviour by states integral to the negotiation process, including Israeli military posturing, the international sanctions regime and Iran's failure of transparency over its nuclear programme, have all hampered the diplomatic process. Yet, the WMDFZ conference presents a number of opportunities for a more constructive

political environment, and a framework that could overcome these obstacles.

Iran's Strategy

Addressing Iran's nuclear programme is central to the success of the WMDFZ conference. The Islamic Republic believes the restrictions to its right to enrich uranium are illegal, and its sentiment is historically rooted. Buttressed by popular support for its civil nuclear programme, uranium enrichment is regarded as a 'sovereign right and a great source of national pride'.¹ It is also regarded as integral to the country's modernisation, particularly as a source of energy independence, set against the memory of the 1953 coup d'état, in which British control of Iran's petroleum resulted in regime change. Additionally, the Iran-Iraq War also rendered the revival of its nuclear programme in the late 1980s as a defensive measure against Iraqi aggression, due in part to Iraq's use of chemical weapons against Iran. (The programme had previously been halted by the Ayatollah Khomeini on Islamic grounds.) The West's unseating of Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi in the past decade has simply added to Iran's strategic calculation that any state without a nuclear deterrent is vulnerable to concerted U.S. action.

Despite the prevailing view in the media, there is a widespread consensus amongst analysts that Iran has not yet decided to produce a nuclear weapon, but may have decided to develop the capability to produce and deliver one.² The Iranian regime is highly aware of the consequences of acquiring a nuclear weapon – be that a pre-emptive attack against it by the United States and Israel, or regional proliferation – and it is also wary of losing the

¹ Stefan Simanowitz, 'Iran: The Green Movement and the Nuclear Issue', *Toward Freedom*, 21st June, 2011. Last accessed 16th October, 2011, <http://towardfreedom.com/middle-east/2438-iran-the-green-movement-and-the-nuclear-issue>.

² Barbara Slavin, *How Reliable is Intelligence on Iran's Nuclear Programme?*, Atlantic Council's Iran Task Force, (Washington, 2011), p. 11.

support it receives from members of the Non-Aligned Movement. The resulting strategy is therefore what the EU's Institute of Security Studies labels a particular form of 'nuclear ambiguity'. Different than Israel's 'nuclear ambiguity' policy, which refers to a lack of transparency over its considerable nuclear arsenal and a pre-emptive strike policy against regional states, Iran's 'nuclear ambiguity' allows it to 'hover on the legalistic threshold between being inside and outside the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)'.³ This strategy allows for the continuation of uranium enrichment for civilian purposes, but leaves obscure whether any political decision has been made to resume a nuclear weaponisation programme. Technically (though not politically), this might put Iran on a similar path to Japan's model, for example.

Military Threats against Iran

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Ehud Barak have been warning that by the end of 2012, Iran could have hidden underground all the necessary components to produce a warhead.⁴ According to reports, Netanyahu – who fervently believes Iran poses an existential threat to Israel – in concert with Barak, has been attempting to mobilise the Israeli cabinet in favour of military action against Iran's nuclear facilities. The Israeli argument rests on the premise that a pre-emptive strike against Iran bears fewer risks than allowing a nuclear-armed Iran to emerge

³ Rouzbeh Parsi, 'A Never-Ending Spectacle: The IAEA Report and Iran's Nuclear Programme', *Institute for Security Studies*, 10th November, 2011. Last accessed 23rd November, 2011, <http://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/detail/article/a-never-ending-spectacle-the-iaea-report-and-irans-nuclear-programme/>.

⁴ Nick Hopkins, Julian Borger and Ian Black, 'Iran Warns U.S. to Avoid Clash over Nuclear Programme', *The Guardian*, 3rd November 2011. Last accessed 5th November, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/03/iran-warns-us-clash-nuclear>.

in the region, for fear of a nuclear weapon being used against Israel by Iran or its proxy forces.

Yet, as has been written extensively elsewhere, an Israeli strike poses significant risks to international security. Above all, military action risks forcing an Iranian exit from the NPT, radical reaction from Iran's proxies, Hamas and Hezbollah, and a concerted push by Iran towards a formal resumption of a weaponisation programme.⁵ The Secretary-General of the IAEA, Yukiya Amano, has voiced his concern that military action would cut off the Agency's access to Iran's nuclear facilities, further obscuring Iran's enrichment activity.⁶ It would provide a rallying point for Iranian citizens in support of their nuclear programme and the government's standing, and would also strengthen the government's resistance to what is perceived as 'punishment' for challenging the dominance of the West.⁷

In view of the consequences, however, are Israeli military threats credible? Or are they simply efforts to draw attention and coerce support from the United States and Europe? Israel has been unrelenting in its campaign to pressure the international community to take urgent military action against Iran, repeatedly stating that an attack would have to take place within the next year in order to be effective. But, Israeli sabre-rattling may be seen as political cover for possible covert action

⁵ 'Le rapport de l'AIEA, ou 'la dernière fenêtre de tir pour mettre la pression sur l'Iran', *Le Monde*, 9th November, 2011. Last accessed 10th November, 2011, http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2011/11/09/le-rapport-de-l-aeia-ou-la-derniere-fenetre-de-tir-pour-mettre-la-pression-sur-l-iran_1600879_3218.html.

⁶ David E. Sanger and Mark Landler, 'To Isolate Iran, U.S. Presses Inspectors on Nuclear Data', *The New York Times*, 15th October, 2011. Last accessed 16th October, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/16/world/middleeast/white-house-says-data-shows-iran-push-on-nuclear-arms.html>.

⁷ Simanowitz, 'Iran: The Green Movement and the Nuclear Issue'.

against Iranian nuclear infrastructure (the Stuxnet virus, believed to be of Israeli and American origin damaged Iranian centrifuge technology, several Iranian scientists with links to Iran's nuclear programme have been assassinated, and an explosion took place at a Quds Force missile base in Iran).⁸ Israel's advocacy of military action could be a façade for a longer-term strategy – continuing to covertly disrupt Iran's nuclear technology, whilst maintaining pressure upon the international community to take action. It is in this way that Israeli sabre-rattling has become a key facet of Israel's nuclear strategy.

There has also been considerable internal debate within the United States on military action, particularly within the context of the upcoming Presidential elections. Having failed to establish dialogue with Iran in 2009, the Obama administration has since relied upon sanctions and covert action as the bedrock of its policy towards Iran. Its policy has been shaped by a general consensus that a lack of evidence concerning a weaponisation programme cannot justify military action. The U.S. intelligence community, for example, gave its assessment that although Iran may be preserving its options for a nuclear capability, it has not made a decision to formally resume its nuclear programme for military purposes.⁹ Similarly,

⁸ David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, 'Explosion Seen as Big Setback to Iran's Missile Programme', *The New York Times*, 4th December 2011. Last accessed 5th December 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/05/world/middleeast/blast-leveling-base-seen-as-big-setback-to-iran-missiles.html?scp=36&sq=Iran&st=nyt>. Thomas Erdbrink and Joby Warrick, 'Iranian Scientist Involved in Nuclear Programme Killed in Tehran Bomb Attack', *Washington Post*, 11th January, 2012. Last accessed 28th March, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/iranian-scientist-killed-in-tehran-bomb-attack/2012/01/11/gIQAT1V7pP_story.html.

⁹ James Risen and Mark Mazzetti, 'U.S. Agencies See No Move by Iran to Build a Bomb', *New York Times*, 24th February, 2012. Last accessed 28th March, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/25/world/middleeast/>

in a recent assessment, the Obama administration played down the implications of the November IAEA report on Iran, which linked Iran's uranium enrichment activity with potential nuclear weapons development in the past decade.¹⁰ Furthermore, top U.S. officials, including Defence Secretary Leon Panetta and serving military, have expressed strong views on the 'strategic futility' of bombing Iran's nuclear facilities.¹¹ Wary of highlighting U.S. impotence in the case of an Iranian nuclear 'breakout', President Obama has consistently stated that military action remains a tool for the United States against Iran, but as a last resort. His resoluteness to prevent proliferation is bolstered by a personal commitment to the global non-proliferation regime.

By contrast, some officials from the previous Bush administration and Republican Presidential candidates have criticised the 'lack of seriousness' in Obama's sanctions approach and view the recent alleged Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States as a pretext for

[us-agencies-see-no-move-by-iran-to-build-a-bomb.html?scp=1&sq=intelligence%20agencies%20Iran&t=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/25/world/middleeast/us-agencies-see-no-move-by-iran-to-build-a-bomb.html?scp=1&sq=intelligence%20agencies%20Iran&t=cse).

¹⁰ International Atomic Energy Agency, *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of United Nations Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Report by the Director General*, GOV/2011/65, Board of Governors, 8th November, 2011. Last accessed 28th December, 2011, <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2011/gov2011-65.pdf>. Marc Ambinder, 'Will Nuclear Watchdog Report Change U.S. Policy Towards Iran?', *The Atlantic*, 9th November, 2011. Last accessed 10th November, 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/11/will-nuclear-watchdog-report-change-us-policy-toward-iran/248159/>.

¹¹ Tony Karon, 'Nuke Report Unlikely to Break the Stalemate, Could Iran be the Next Cuba?', 11th November, 2011. Last accessed 15th November, 2011, <http://globalspin.blogs.time.com/2011/11/11/nuke-report-unlikely-to-break-the-stalemate-could-iran-be-the-new-cuba/>.

military action.¹² Their proximity to Israeli lobbies in Washington has limited the ability for Obama to pursue a diplomatic approach,¹³ and has deepened the hard-line bipartisan approach towards Iran in Congress. This is reflected in the unanimous Senate vote on sanctioning Iran's Central Bank against the advice of the Administration,¹⁴ and the Iran Threat

¹² John Bolton, 'Iran's Assassination Plot Compels a Tough Response', *The Guardian*, 21st October, 2011. Last accessed 3rd November, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/oct/21/iran-assassination-plot>. Eli Clifton, 'Right-Wing Think Tankers Use Alleged Assassination Plot to Push for War with Iran', 12th October, 2011, <http://thinkprogress.org/security/2011/10/12/341994/right-wing-think-tankers-use-alleged-assassination-plot-to-push-for-war-with-iran/>. See also – James Jay Carafano, 'Forty-Second Plot Highlights State-Sponsored Terrorism Threat', *The Heritage Foundation*, 12th October, 2011, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/10/forty-second-plot-highlights-state-sponsored-terrorism-threat>; Michael Rubin, 'Iranian Plot to Assassinate Saudi Arabian Ambassador on US Soil Must Force Obama to Change Policy', *New York Daily News*, 12th October, 2011, <http://www.aei.org/article/foreign-and-defense-policy/regional/middle-east-and-north-africa/iranian-plot-to-assassinate-saudi-arabian-ambassador-on-us-soil-must-force-obama-to-change-policy/>; Mark Dubowitz, 'Iran Terror Plot: Will America Finally Respond?', *Huffington Post*, 11th October, 2011, <http://www.defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/iran-terror-plot-will-america-finally-respond/>.

¹³ Tony Karon, 'Is Israel Again Weighing an Attack on Iran's Nuclear Facilities?', *TIME*, 4th October, 2011. Last accessed 16th October, 2011, <http://globalspin.blogs.time.com/2011/10/04/is-israel-again-weighing-an-attack-on-irans-nuclear-facilities/>. Tony Karon, 'Will Dennis Ross' Resignation Raise Pressure on Obama for a Tougher Iran Stance?', *TIME*, 14th November, 2011. Last accessed 28th November, 2011, <http://globalspin.blogs.time.com/2011/11/14/will-dennis-ross-resignation-raise-pressure-on-obama-for-a-tougher-iran-stance/>

¹⁴ Jennifer Rubin, 'Senate Passes Iran Sanctions 100-0, Obama Objects', *Washington Post*, 2nd December, 2011. Last accessed 13th December, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/post/senate-passes-iran-sanctions-100-0-obama-objects-really/2011/12/02/gIQA7yELKO_blog.html, and Jay Solomon, 'Senators Press Obama on Iran's Central Bank', *Wall Street Journal*, 8th August, 2011. Last accessed

Reduction Act, which seeks to outlaw contact with Iranian officials (though it has been interpreted itself as beyond the mandate of Congress in limited Presidential freedom).¹⁵ Pressure from these groups and from Prime Minister Netanyahu reached a peak in February/March of 2012, when their 'now quotidian Israeli sabre-rattling' became increasingly aggressive, prompting a concerted effort from Western leaders back to the diplomatic path.¹⁶

Despite its initial rhetoric and the complexity of its balancing acts, the Obama administration has largely followed a continuation of the containment policy of its predecessor. In avoidance of a military strike, it has been using surveillance drones and information warfare to sabotage Iran's nuclear infrastructure (in addition to Stuxnet, the Duqu virus is believed to originate from the United States).¹⁷ It has also reinforced its military presence in the Gulf.¹⁸

20th November, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB1000142405311904480904576494463569720404.html>.

¹⁵ Roger Cohen, 'Contain and Constrain Iran', *The New York Times*, 14th November, 2011. Last accessed 15th November, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/15/opinion/cohen-contain-and-constrain-iran.html>. See also - United States Congress, *Iran Threat Reduction Act Bill*, H.R. 1905, available at <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c112:H.R.1905>.

¹⁶ Karon, 'Is Israel Again Weighing an Attack on Iran's Nuclear Facilities?'.

¹⁷ Julian Borger, 'Iran's Nuclear Ambitions Have Already Started a War with West – A Covert One', *The Guardian*, 3rd November, 2011. Last accessed 4th November, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/03/iran-nuclear-ambitions-secret-war>. David E. Sanger, 'America's Deadly Dynamics with Iran', *The New York Times*, 5th November, 2011. Last accessed, 6th November, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/06/sunday-review/the-secret-war-with-iran.html?pagewanted=all>. 'Iran Says It Has 'Controlled' Duqu Malware Attack', *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 14th November, 2011. Last accessed 15th November, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-15721839>.

¹⁸ Sanger, 'America's Deadly Dynamics with Iran'. Stefan Simanowitz, 'A 'Game Changer' in Iran?', *Huffington Post*, 9th November 2011. Last accessed 10th November, 2011,

Although the Administration has rejected the policy of containing a nuclear-armed Iran, it has also expressed a strong reluctance to involve itself in an Israeli strike. However, were Israel to take unilateral action, the United States may find itself compelled to support it. High-level talks between U.S. and Israeli officials, as well as public statements made by Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron reinforcing the sanctions/diplomacy dual-track have attempted to contain this moral hazard, and appear to have quelled immediate pushes for military action. For now the prospect of military action remains a distant possibility.¹⁹

Sanctions

European states generally see sanctions as an alternative, not a prelude, to military action, though their attitudes towards Iran have hardened in recent years. The failure of previous negotiations, pressure from the United States, and the November IAEA report have all galvanised European governments into adopting tougher measures. The IAEA report in particular had a significant impact on the European states, whose over-interpretation of findings on *possible* military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme shaped their tenacity to pressure Iran. The report detailed research by Iranian scientists into trigger devices, warhead design and conventional explosives for missiles, but failed to present new findings indicating any sort of formal weaponisation process in place under the current regime.²⁰ It was criticised directly by Russia and other states as beyond the mandate and

http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/stefan-simanowitz/a-game-changer-in-iran_b_1083612.html.

¹⁹ Haaretz, 'U.K.'s Cameron: 'No Justification for Israeli Attack on Iran', 16th March, 2012. Last accessed 28th March, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/u-k-s-cameron-no-justification-for-israeli-attack-on-iran-1.419068>.

²⁰ International Atomic Energy Agency, *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of United Nations Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran*.

competence of the Agency, pointing to the politicisation of the IAEA under Amano's term.²¹ Similarly, a follow-up report released by the Agency in February 2012 did little other than consolidate concerns expressed in the November report.²²

These aspects of the report, along with the ambiguity of recent diplomatic incidents, have further rooted a negative image of the Iranian regime. Tehran's refusal to permit the IAEA access to Parchin fuelled suspicions linking the site to nuclear activity, despite the site being a military facility and therefore outside of the Agency's remit. Furthermore, a series of attempted assassinations of diplomatic personnel in India, Georgia and Thailand were denounced as being authorised by elements of the Iranian government, despite tenuous evidence.²³ Such instances have been leapt upon as grounds to increase punitive measures against Iran. The resulting shift in European policy is intended not only to punish the regime and coerce it into changing policy, but also to inhibit Iran's ability to develop a nuclear weapons capability.²⁴ Demonstrated in the

²¹ David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, 'U.S. Hangs Back as Inspectors Prepare Report on Iran's Nuclear Programme', *The New York Times*, 6th November, 2011. Last accessed 7th November, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/07/world/middleeast/united-states-hangs-back-as-inspectors-prepare-report-on-irans-nuclear-program.html>. 'Le rapport de l'AIEA, ou 'la dernière fenêtre de tir pour mettre la pression sur l'Iran', *Le Monde*.

²² International Atomic Energy Agency, *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Report by the Director General*, GOV/2012/9, Board of Governors, 24th February, 2012. Last accessed 28th March, 2012, http://www.isisnucleariran.org/assets/pdf/IAEA_Iran_Report_24February2012.pdf.

²³ Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, 'Iran Seems an Unlikely Culprit for the Attacks on Israeli Diplomats', *The Guardian*, 15th February, 2012. Last accessed 28th March, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/feb/15/iran-israeli-diplomats-attacks>.

²⁴ Slavin, *How Reliable is Intelligence on Iran's Nuclear Programme?*, p. 1. Dina Esfandiari and Mark Fitzpatrick,

European oil embargo on Iran, it is expected that depriving the Iranian regime of a key source of revenue will undermine technological progress and force Iran to return to the negotiating table.

France and Germany have shifted away from an incentive-based approach to negotiations towards increased pressure against Iran, both countries now recognising Iran as a 'threat to regional and international security'.²⁵ France has been particularly aggressive towards Iran under President Sarkozy's leadership; it recently called for sanctions on an 'unprecedented scale', and in the aftermath of the IAEA report, pushed for an embargo against Iran's oil exports.²⁶ Germany too has shifted towards seeing further sanctions as 'unavoidable',²⁷ despite its previous reluctance as a result of its economic relationships.²⁸ This change of heart may have been influenced by a series of defence agreements with Israel.²⁹

'Sanctions on Iran: Defining and Enabling "Success"', *Survival*, 53:5 (2011), pp. 145-146.

²⁵ Brendan Taylor, *Sanctions as Grand Strategy*, Adelphi Paper No. 411, Winter 2010, p. 74.

'La France souhaite 'des sanctions' pour faire plier l'Iran sur le nucléaire', *Le Monde*, 8th November, 2011. Last accessed 9th November, 2011, http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2011/11/08/le-rapport-de-l-iaea-eloigne-le-scenario-d-une-attaque-contre-l-iran_1600828_3218.html.

²⁶ Julian Borger, 'European States Call for Stiffer Sanctions Against Iran Following IAEA Report', *The Guardian*, 9th November, 2011. Last accessed 10th November, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/09/calls-tougher-sanctions-iran-iaea>. Kethevane Gorjestani, 'France Urges Europe to Impose Oil Embargo on Iran', *France 24*, 3rd January, 2012. Last accessed 4th January, 2012, <http://www.france24.com/en/20120103-france-urges-europe-impose-oil-embargo-iran-sanctions-alain-juppe-sarkozy>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Taylor, *Sanctions as Grand Strategy*, pp. 79-80.

²⁹ Juergen Baetz, 'Germany OKs Subsidised Submarine Sale to Israel', *Business Week*, 30th November, 2011. Last accessed 3rd December, 2011,

Devising the U.S. sanctions policy towards Iran has had to be carefully balanced with the interests of key international allies. Sanctioning the Iranian Central Bank, for example, has been a key area of contention given that Japan and South Korea, both of whom rely on significant oil imports from Iran, make their purchases through the bank. China, a permanent member of the Security Council, and known to be Iran's largest purchaser of oil, is even more sensitive.³⁰ Not all Arab neighbouring states are comfortable with pressuring Iran either (in particular: Bahrain, Oman and Qatar).³¹

Sanctions are clearly being coordinated in order to close international loopholes.³² The EU, for example, has gradually tightened its sanctions on Iran through measures such as adding 180 Iranian officials and companies to a blacklist, matching the structure of U.S. sanctions.³³ Nevertheless, their limitations are becoming increasingly evident; economic pressure has rarely been known to fundamentally alter a policy deemed central to the 'continued survival of each regime' or state security.³⁴ Though sanctions clearly undermine key industries, they are failing to

<http://www.businessweek.com/ap/financialnews/D9RB66280.htm>.

³⁰ Steven Lee Myers and Mark Landler, 'Report on Nuclear Effort Draws a Muted Response from the White House', *The New York Times*, 8th November, 2011. Last accessed 9th November, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/09/us/white-house-quiet-on-report-about-irans-nuclear-efforts.html?pagewanted=all>.

³¹ Dina Esfandiary and Emile Hokayem, 'Rising Tensions in Iran and Saudi Arabia's Cold War', *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, 27th October, 2011. Last accessed 20th November, 2011, <http://www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-voices/?blogpost=297>.

³² Esfandiary and Fitzpatrick, 'Sanctions on Iran', p. 145.

³³ Rick Gladstone and Nicholas Kulish, 'West Tightens Iran Sanctions after Embassy Attack', *The New York Times*, 1st December, 2011. Last accessed, 2nd December, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/02/world/middleeast/britain-closure-embassy-iran-expel-diplomats.html?_r=1&emc=tnt&tntemail1=y. The vote was 100 to 0 in favour.

³⁴ Taylor, *Sanctions as Grand Strategy*, p. 90, 106.

alter the regime's behaviour.³⁵ Iran continues to produce more enriched uranium each month, evades sanctions, and manufactures its own materials such as carbon fibre to circumvent U.N. blacklists.³⁶ The broader strategic use of sanctions by the great powers to influence one another is gradually undermining the value of sanctions, both the Chinese and the Russians seeing an opportunity to undercut American influence in the Middle East.³⁷ Furthermore, although part of the 'dual-track' approach employed by the Western states, the steadfast pursuit of sanctions has contributed to the recent diplomatic stalemate. Britain, having led the recent charge in sanctioning the Iranian Central Bank - the main conduit for Iran's oil sales - saw its ambassador expelled from Tehran in retaliation, and the subsequent ransacking of its embassy by protestors.³⁸ The United Kingdom responded by removing its diplomats and ordering the expulsion of all Iranian diplomats from London.³⁹ With several

³⁵ Mark Landler, 'Obama Aide Says Iran's Leaders Are Feeling the Strain of Sanctions', *The New York Times*, 22nd November, 2011. Last accessed 23rd November, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/23/world/middleeast/thomas-e-donilon-obama-aide-says-iran-feels-strain-of-sanctions.html>. Pam Benson, 'Sanctions Fail to Change Iran's Behaviour, White House Concedes', CNN, 22nd November, 2011. Last accessed 23rd November, 2011, <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/11/22/politics/us-iran-sanctions/index.html>. Taylor, *Sanctions as Grand Strategy*, p. 105.

³⁶ Slavin, *How Reliable is Intelligence on Iran's Nuclear Programme?*, pp. 8-9. International Atomic Energy Agency, *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, pp. 2-6. Esfandiary and Fitzpatrick, 'Sanctions on Iran', p. 147.

³⁷ Taylor, *Sanctions as Grand Strategy*, p. 100.

³⁸ Rick Gladstone, 'Iran Moves to Downgrade its Relations with Britain', *The New York Times*, 28th November, 2011. Last accessed 29th November, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/29/world/middleeast/iran-moves-quickly-to-downgrade-ties-with-britain.html?emc=tnt&tntemail1=y>.

³⁹ John F. Burns, 'As Britain Closes Embassies, Iran's Isolation Could Complicate Nuclear Issue', *The New York Times*, 30th November, 2011. Last accessed 1st December,

European countries also having taken punitive diplomatic measures, notably France, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway, the repercussions for Iran have been highly significant in having the diplomatic passages to other countries involuntarily constricted.

East versus West

Sanctions tend to frame the issue as one of control by the West, rather than allowing regional initiatives to take root.⁴⁰ Reflecting a wider divide between East and West, a recent Russian initiative offering phased lifting of sanctions in return for greater Iranian transparency on its nuclear activities was rejected by the West, the latter conditioning talks on Iran's prior suspension of all enrichment activity.⁴¹ Much of Russia's recent opposition to expand sanctions stems from frustration at this rejection, and a fear of the IAEA report being abused as 'an instrument of regime change'.⁴² Vladimir Putin's

2011,

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/19/world/middleeast/nuclear-watchdog-seeks-consensus-on-iran.html?_r=1&emc=tnt&tntemail1=y.

⁴⁰ Paul Ingram, 'Key Findings from the BASIC Malta Workshop on the 2012 Weapons of Mass Destruction Free-Zone in the Middle East Conference', *British American Security Information Council*, 22nd September, 2011. Last accessed 23rd October, 2011, <http://www.basicint.org/sites/default/files/keyfindingsfrommalta.pdf>.

⁴¹ Mark Fitzpatrick Interview on the IAEA's Iran Report', *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, 8th November, 2011. Last accessed 12th December, 2011, <http://www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-experts-commentary/mark-fitzpatrick-interview-on-the-iaeas-iran-report/>. Fredrik Dahl, 'Russia, China May Blunt Western Pressure on Iran', Reuters, 2nd November, 2011. Last accessed 3rd November, 2011, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/11/02/idINIndia-60273420111102>.

⁴² 'Looming Iran Assessment Worries Russia', *Global Security Newswire*, 20th October, 2011. Last accessed 21st October, <http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/looming-iran-assessment-worries-russia/>. La France souhaite 'des sanctions' pour faire plier l'Iran sur le nucléaire', *Le Monde*. Ellen Barry, 'Russia Dismisses Calls for New U.N. Sanctions on Iran', *The New York Times*, 9th November, 2011. Last accessed 10th November, 2011,

return to the Russian Presidency is likely to harden this difference, as is Russian use of the nuclear programme as a bargaining chip against NATO's proposed ballistic missile defence shield, ahead of the NATO (and NATO-Russia) summit in Chicago in May 2012.⁴³

China has been less assertive.⁴⁴ On the one hand, China has found a 'natural strategic partner' in Iran, with some dependence upon Iranian petroleum imports, whilst also being Iran's biggest arms supplier, and a significant industrial partner.⁴⁵ On the other hand, China values its position in the global non-proliferation regime, and does not want to aggravate the United States, so has reluctantly supported the U.N. sanctions thus far. Although

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/10/world/europe/russia-dismisses-calls-for-new-un-sanctions-on-iran.html>.

⁴³ 'Le rapport de l'AIEA, ou 'la dernière fenêtre de tir pour mettre la pression sur l'Iran', *Le Monde*. Isabelle Lasserre, 'l'Iran prépare une bombe nucléaire', *Le Figaro*, 13th October, 2011. Last accessed 14th October, 2011, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2011/10/13/01003-20111013ARTFIG00709-l-iran-prepare-une-bombe-nucleaire.php>.

⁴⁴ 'Nétanyahu tenterait de mobiliser pour attaquer l'Iran, Téhéran réagit', *Le Monde*, 2nd November 2011, last accessed 3rd November, 2011, http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2011/11/02/netanyahou-tenterait-de-mobiliser-ses-ministres-en-vue-d-attaquer-l-iran_1597165_3218.html.

⁴⁵ Ilan I. Berman, 'To Stop Iran, Lean on China', *New York Times*, 8th November, 2011. Last accessed 9th November, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/09/opinion/irans-nuclear-program-and-china.html>. David Lerman and Tony Carpaccio, 'Some Chinese Missiles to Iran May Escape U.S. Sanctions Law', *Bloomberg*, 1st November, 2011. Last accessed 2nd November, 2011, <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2011-11-01/some-chinese-missile-sales-to-iran-may-escape-u-s-sanctions-law.html>. 'Le rapport sur le nucléaire iranien attendu dans un climat tendu', *Le Monde*, 7th November, 2011. Last accessed 8th November, 2011, http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2011/11/07/l-iran-se-dit-pret-a-repondre-a-une-attaque-contre-ses-installations-nucleaires_1599732_3218.html.

Russia and China have kept diplomatic channels open with Iran, their policies ultimately benefit the U.S. strategy in providing Iran with an incentive to constrain its behaviour in order to retain Russian and Chinese support.⁴⁶

Towards Reconciliation

The period leading up to the WMDFZ conference is an opportunity to restore diplomatic relations and to move away from the politics of isolation practiced by several sides in this multidimensional dispute. Trust-building will require greater political inclusion of two states in particular – Israel and Iran. Israel is currently excluded from various bodies in the Middle East and North Africa (such as the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO) and the IAEA Board of Governors) because other states refuse to recognise it as a state.⁴⁷

Arab states and Israel have minimal influence in the negotiations process around Iran's nuclear programme. The WMDFZ conference could draw these states into an important process that strengthens the capacity of regional states to handle Iran's nuclear programme, Israel's nuclear arsenal, and future nuclear challenges. Central to this effort is the need to arrive at a clear expression of what 'security' means for each state involved, including freedom from existential threats, the protection of identity, and preventing regional domination. Wider political issues such as the Israel-Palestine conflict or the stationing of NATO nuclear weapons in Turkey would also likely arise.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the weight of

⁴⁶ Jeffrey Goldberg, 'How a War with Iran Could Start Accidentally', *The Atlantic*, 21st October, 2011. Last accessed 29th October, 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/10/how-a-war-with-iran-could-start-accidentally/247127/>.

⁴⁷ Ingram, 'Key Findings from the BASIC Malta Workshop'.

⁴⁸ Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy, 6th London Conference on a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone, School of African and Oriental Studies, 24th October, 2011.

upcoming presidential elections and the perception of U.S. partiality in the region renders the period ahead of the 2012 conference a timely opening in which regional states could take a lead in the negotiations process.⁴⁹

Whilst the WMDFZ process cannot ignore the broader political and peace processes, the technicalities of nuclear negotiation will help frame the discussion. A pertinent starting point would be discussing a *regional* Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT), with verification measures. Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt have articulated their desire to 'include Israel's nuclear arsenal in the equation' for 2012, warning that the balance between Israel's arsenal and Iran's nuclear programme will also need delicate management.⁵⁰ Arab states look for a process that promises to end with Israeli ratification of the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state and IAEA inspection visits to its nuclear facilities. Ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) and the closure of the Dimona facility are also desired. Israel too will be looking for stronger ratification and entry into force of an Additional Protocol by Iran, transparency over past weapons-related research, and crucially, recognition of Israel.⁵¹

Members of the P5 + 1 group have a vital role to play beyond laying down conditions for non-nuclear weapon states. They will need to give clear negative security assurances, and are likely to be asked to go beyond a promise not to use nuclear weapons, and conditionally foreswear military intervention outside of the U.N. framework. The significance of such a measure would be threefold. First, it would mitigate the pressures on middle powers to acquire nuclear

weapons in order to balance superior conventional attack capabilities of the nuclear weapons states, as opposed to fearing the use of nuclear weapons against them. Second, it would enhance the effectiveness of the non-proliferation regime if controls over the transfer of nuclear technology were not determined by particular bilateral relationships, but rather by international principle and the proliferation record of recipient states. Third, it would strengthen the international nuclear security system if export controls were more tightly monitored and states held accountable to universal principles. Germany, for example, has sold Israel six dolphin-class military submarines since 2005, capable of carrying nuclear warheads.⁵² Similarly, the United States has been heavily criticised for its 2008 agreement with India, under which India could receive nuclear reactors and associated technology from the United States, despite its nuclear weapons programme.⁵³

Conclusion

Nuclear security in the Middle East needs to progress towards a more inclusive, non-discriminatory concept, conducive to regional stability. The WMDFZ process, tied into the NPT regime, offers an important forum in which this can occur, provided that states avoid using the conference to isolate Iran or Israel.

Despite the bluster, it seems unlikely that Israel or the United States will deliberately strike Iran in the short-term. The consequences are too dire and are compounded by strong domestic, economic and political constraints. Nevertheless, signs have emerged of a severe rift within the international community between East and West on the appropriate path to take. Several states are arriving at the conclusion that sanctions can do little more

⁴⁹ Ingram, 'Key Findings from the BASIC Malta Workshop'.

⁵⁰ Karon, 'Is Israel Again Weighing an Attack on Iran's Nuclear Facilities?'.

⁵¹ Ingram, 'Key Findings from the BASIC Malta Workshop'.

⁵² Baetz, 'Germany OKs Subsidised Submarine Sale to Israel'.

⁵³ Slavin, *How Reliable is Intelligence on Iran's Nuclear Programme?*, p. 13.

delay the regime's pursuit of a nuclear capability. But slowing Iran's nuclear development must sit *alongside* other strategies that are effective in turning the momentum.

Iranian re-integration into the international community would come in exchange for increased transparency, full compliance with international norms and Iran's assimilation into a regional structure that strengthens the security and assurance of its neighbours. Resolving regional political issues in parallel with nuclear security would lead towards the development of a regional mechanism for managing future Middle Eastern nuclear diplomacy. Moreover, recognising the limitations of economic pressure on the Iranian economy would constitute a step towards restoring dialogue as the principal political tool. The WDMFZ conference in 2012 offers a distinctive opportunity from which an improved framework can emerge.

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