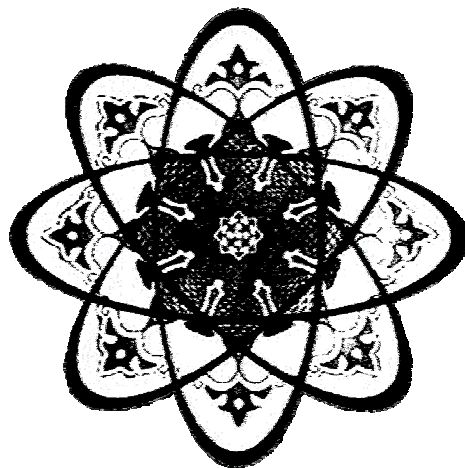


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**The U.S. Global Redeployment, Iran's Strategic
Encirclement and the Nuclear Issue. Some
Facts at the Beginning of 2005**

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**El Colegio de México, A. C.
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THE U.S. GLOBAL REDEPLOYMENT, IRAN'S STRATEGIC ENCIRCLEMENT AND THE NUCLEAR ISSUE. SOME FACTS AT THE BEGINNING OF 2005

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The U.S. Global Redeployment

In August 2004, President Bush officially announced the United States had decided to go forward with a global realignment of its military forces. This long discussed idea¹ pretends to substitute old deployment conceptions that prevailed during the decades of the Cold War, by a more efficient strategy, which considers the new global environment, with its concrete challenges and unpredictable risks in different areas.

This Global Posture Realignment (or the reanalysis of the Global Presence Overseas, Global Defense Posture, Global Force Posture, Overseas Force Posture, Overseas Large-Scale Redeployment, and so on) will deal with a total of 230 huge U.S. military bases all over the world (203 of them in American territory), with 5 458 military installations of second level scattered internationally, and with a total of almost 1.5 million troops (387 920 of which are present in many different countries).²

¹ These ideas were first discussed during the period of George Bush father, and they appeared in different documents and recommendations as: *Rebuilding American's Defenses. Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century*, A Report of the New Project for the New American Century, September 2000, <http://www.american-buddha.com/rebuild.america.htm>; *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Department of Defense, September 30, 2001, in <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/qdr2001.pdf>; and *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, September 2002, <http://usgovinfo.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>

² See: "Defense Department Background Briefing on Global Posture Review," United States Department of Defense, News Transcript, August 16th, 2004, <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2004/tr20040609-0843.html>

The realignment suggested will recall between 60 and 70 thousand troops to U.S installations and will evaluate the closing of different bases in the U.S.; in Europe it will re-deploy forces, mainly from Germany, the U.K. and France to new locations in eastern and southern enclaves (Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania); in Asia it will relocate forces in South Korea to southern areas of the peninsula, and U.S. troops in Japan will be transferred to other points in Australia and South-East Asia. The redeployment conceives opening new Forward Operating Bases (FOB) and Forward Operating Locations (FOL) in many different places around the world.

In short, some of the main ideas linked to the redeployment proposal are:

1- The 'Revolution in Military Affairs' or 'the transformation', considers not only the use of advanced technologies,³ but includes also many different ideas on training, organization, efficiency and global redeployment.

2- There is a need of abandoning the old Cold War 'reactive and stationary' conceptions, and, on the other hand, a need of thinking in terms of a 'greater operative perimeter', with new capabilities, greater mobility, quick deployment, more flexibility, and high combat level. During years, the enemy was perfectly well identified, but today the dangers are less predictable, "we are not talking about fighting in place, but moving to the fight. (...) We need to plan, but we must plan to be surprised."⁴

3- The quality of forces, firepower, precision, range and training, are now more important than the numbers of troops. "We are not focused narrowly on force levels, but are addressing force capabilities."⁵

³ For example, the ability to conduct network-centric warfare (NCW), intended to bring the improvements of the Information Age to military operations by providing universal interoperability, speed in information flows and enabling information sharing at all levels.

⁴ Douglas Feith, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Speech to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Transforming the U.S. Global Defense Posture," Washington, December 3rd, 2003, <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2003/sp20031203-0722.html>

⁵ *Ibid.*

4- There is a need of establishing forward operating bases and locations, pre-positioning weapons, getting the support of different hosting and allied nations, eliminating different kind of obstacles for future deployments, and of searching new alternatives in order to guarantee military training and action. “We need to improve our ability to project power from one region to another and to manage forces on a global basis.”⁶

The general idea is to face new unpredictable challenges that could arise in many areas of the so-called “Arc of Instability” (South America, parts of Africa, the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus, Central Asia and South-East Asia).⁷ Although, almost all analysts think that the region of prioritized attention will be the Persian Gulf-Caucasus-Central Asia (PG-C-CA), due to its energy resources and its geo-strategic importance.

We can recall that Truman and Eisenhower Doctrines suggested a deeper American participation in the Middle East, with economic and military assistance, as a means to gain access to the region’s energy resources and to avoid Soviet interference; that Nixon’s Guam Doctrine emphasized the need of relying on regional military allies; and that the Carter Doctrine was very clear when it explicitly considered the Persian Gulf as an area of key importance to U.S. national interest and security. “Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”⁸

President Ronald Reagan transformed Carter’s Rapid Deployment Joint Task Forces into a better-structured U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), giving it the status of a major

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Kurt M. Campbell and Celeste Johnson Ward, “New Battle Stations?,” *Foreign Affairs*, September-October 2003, <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20030901faessay82507/kurt-m-campbell-celeste-johnson-ward/new-battle-stations.html>

⁸ President James Carter, State of the Union Address, January 23rd, 1980, <http://www.thisnation.com/library/sotu/1980jc.html>

unified combat force. George Bush (Iraq War) and William Clinton (Dual Containment Policy) used it actively, as in George W. Bush Administration's military action for destroying Taliban's Afghanistan, and in its badly justified 'Preventive Strike' against Saddam Hussein's regime.

In fact, the redeployment is not great news for the PG-C-CA region, because almost all this area have experienced, during several years, the widening and strengthening of the main American military structure for this part of the world: the USCENTCOM (Map 1). The last years of the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War in 1991, the permanent strategic surveillance and frequent strikes on Iraqi territory, the inclusion of former Soviet Central Asian countries under the area of concern since 1999, the war in Afghanistan in 2002, and the last war against Iraq (from March 2003 up today) have being useful events for gaining new accesses, pre-positioning weapons, developing strategic relations with different countries of the region, selling armaments, and increasing its combat capabilities.

So we must consider,

a) That the Persian Gulf unquestionable value, containing 65% of global proven reserves of oil and 35% of natural gas, is now strongly reinforced with the huge energy resources of the geographical contiguous regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia, raising the figures even more (Graphics 1 and 2).

b) That the advancement and growing of U.S. military presence in this entire region, has motivated justified worries in countries of the region like Iran, and it is considered with high suspicions in Russian and Chinese military circles, for example.⁹

The global economy growing energy consuming tendencies will increase the importance of the region even more, it is obvious.

⁹ See: Stephen Blank, "U.S. Strategic Priorities Shifting in Central Asia," *Eurasia Insight*, March 25th, 2004, in <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav032504a.shtml> and Ian Berman, "The New Battleground: Central Asia and the Caucasus," *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2004-2005, http://www.twq.com/05winter/docs/05winter_berman.pdf

But what seems to be interesting, is that the U.S., one of the main promoters of free market, free flow of capitals and enterprise competition, is not acting consequently with its words, and prefers to develop strong military structures in places of high economic interest, in order to favor its own companies benefits in a direct manner. This remembers the style of its 19th century's policy of 'Gunboat Diplomacy and Military Bases'. Absolute hegemony is pursued through traditional conquering approaches instead of experimenting with other neo-imperialistic recipes.

Again, strategic considerations and oil interests seems to be at the center of the nowadays Republican administration's actions and plans for the near future, although we can consider that these are in fact general, permanent, bi-partisan or systemic interests. As Matthew Yeomans has said, "the most recent redeployment of military forces is just one more reaffirmation that in the post-Cold War global order, preserving access to energy resources is the prime strategic imperative."¹⁰

In a similar way, Michael T. Klare has evaluated,

George W. Bush's Iraq War, while duplicitous in many respects, is actually the culmination of twenty-five years of U.S. policy to ensure continued domination of the Persian Gulf and its prolific oil fields. In fact, it was a natural expression of the Carter Doctrine (...) Today, the Carter Doctrine stretches far beyond the Persian Gulf. It is the blueprint for the extension of U.S. military power to the world's other oil producing regions. Just as existing U.S. policy calls for the use of military force to protect the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, an extended Carter Doctrine now justifies similar action in the Caspian Sea region, Latin America, and the west coast

¹⁰ Matthew Yeomans, "Oil, Guns and Money," *Salon.com*, September 2nd, 2004, in Global Policy Forum, www.globalpolicy.org/empire/analysis/2004/0902yeomans.htm

of Africa. Slowly, but surely the U.S. military is being converted into a global oil-protection service.¹¹

Iran's perception of strategic encirclement

Paradoxically for the case of Iran, two of the main threats to the Islamic Republic: the Afghan Taliban regime (who created serious tensions that almost started a war in 1998) and the Iraq of Saddam (that caused eight years of war) were eliminated in 2002 and 2003 by American military operations. However, now the U.S. expanding presence and military actions promote a worrying threat perception, when Iran finds itself "bracketed by two war-torn and occupied countries."¹² This factor, along with the persistence of an American aggressive policy toward Tehran; the inclusion of the country as one of the members of an 'Axis of Evil'; the tensions related to the alleged Iranian weapons and non-conventional programs; the expansion, strengthening and actions developed by USCENTCOM; the permanent presence of U.S. forces in Persian Gulf waters and in military installations of countries of the Arabian Peninsula; the new bases in Central Asia, and Israel's attack potential, create a justified sense of 'strategic encirclement'.

Iranian forces dealt with Iraqi aggression and could have dealt with Taliban, but at a first glimpse, the strategic pressures from US could escalate into a more dangerous situation than those challenges.

Anyway, the deepening of the crisis in Iraq, due to wrongly preconceived scenarios, the absence of an 'strategic exit' in accordance with the so called 'Powell Doctrine', the growing Iraqi resistance of different nature, the renewedly demonstrated value of asymmetric warfare in front of a highly technological and supposedly undestroyable American army, and the high costs of the war (economy and casualties) are factors that make difficult for the U.S. to open a second combat front in the region. Good news for Iran.

An invasion of Iran by U.S. forces is an extremely difficult option if we consider the huge Iranian territory, the strong nationalistic feelings, and the high combat level of the Iranian defensive structures. Nevertheless, other dangerous scenarios could be more in line with the design of 'surgical or preemptive strikes', directed towards nuclear and strategic facilities that could be carried out by the U.S. or by Israel. In any case,

¹¹ Michael T. Klare, "The Carter Doctrine Goes Global," *The progressive magazine*, December 2004, http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Oil_watch/Carter_Doctrine_Global_Oil.html

¹² Morad Saghafi, "The New Landscape of Iranian Politics," *Middle East Report*, no. 233, Winter 2004, <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer233/saghafi.html>

Iran will perceive an attack as a coordinated American-Israeli effort,¹³ and could generate reactions in both directions.

In fact, the signals are not very clear and mixed in the U.S. projection towards Iran. The speeches about 'diplomacy as a first choice' appear jointly with a tough rhetoric that considers all options opened (including military), and together with different concrete strategic facts, that can be considered as a prelude for a future attack, or at least, as important elements of a 'psychological warfare', according to the prevailing perception of the Iranian leadership. Let us take some examples:

- 1- Last December, the neo-conservative Committee on the Present Danger, presented a Policy Paper (*Iran: A New Approach*) that, although being full of misconceptions and having the declared objective of destroying the Iranian political system, urges the United States to reengage Iran diplomatically, with a "peaceful but forceful strategy."¹⁴
- 2- In his State of the Union speech, President Bush said Iran remains primary state sponsor of terror and is pursuing nuclear weapons. He pledges to stand with Iranian people seeking liberty and to continue working with European allies to get Iran to give up its uranium enrichment program and any plutonium reprocessing.¹⁵
- 3- Just hours before Bush's second inaugural address focused on 'freedom and tyrannies', Vice President Richard Cheney considered Iran as a top threat to world peace and Middle East stability, a sponsor of terrorism against the U.S., and a builder of a "fairly robust new nuclear program." He said, "we don't want a war in the Middle East, if we can avoid it" (so, one good question would be who will decide if it is avoidable or not) and he warned that Israel might well decide to act first militarily to eliminate Iran's nuclear capabilities.¹⁶

¹³ Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani has considered that Israel will not be able to launch any military operation without an American green light. "Target Iran-Air Strikes," Global Security, in <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iran-strikes.htm>

¹⁴ This is a Cold War-era group that resurrected itself last June 2004. Whereas it once sought to defeat Soviet totalitarianism, its current purpose would be "dedicated to winning the war on terrorism." The committee is co-chaired by former U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz and former CIA director James Woolsey. Although the content is highly rejected, they at least are not talking about direct war. See "Iran: A New Approach," Policy Paper, December 20th, 2004, http://www.fightingterror.org/newsroom/CPD_Iran_policy_paper.pdf

¹⁵ "Bush Remarks on Foreign Issues," *The Associated Press*, February 3rd, 2005.

¹⁶ Vice President Richard Cheney quoted in Jim VandeHei, "Cheney Warns of Iran As a Nuclear Threat," *The Washington Post*, January 21st, 2005, p. A 02, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/world/mideast/nearest/Israel>

- 4- The possibility of an Israeli attack was reiterated by State Department's top international security official, John Bolton, "...we're very concerned that this might happen (...) Israel destroyed the Osirak reactor in Iraq. They have a history of this." Bolton insisted again that in the case of Iran "We never rule out any option, but we're trying to resolve this diplomatically."¹⁷
- 5- The new U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, declared at a news conference in London in February 2005 that a U.S. attack on Iran "was not on the agenda at this point" (that means, however, that it might enter the agenda at a later point).¹⁸
- 6- After meeting with NATO and European Union officials in February 2005, President Bush declared, "this notion that the United States is getting ready to attack Iran is simply ridiculous (...) And having said that, all options are on the table,"¹⁹ "...diplomacy is just beginning. Iran is not Iraq."²⁰

These positions appeared simultaneously with some leaked speculations and concrete actions that contributed to reinforce the worrying perception. For example, Seymour M. Hersh wrote in *The New Yorker* that,

The Administration has been conducting secret reconnaissance missions inside Iran at least since last summer. Much of the focus is on the accumulation of intelligence and targeting information on Iranian nuclear, chemical, and missile sites, both declared and suspected. The goal is to identify and isolate three-dozen, and perhaps more, such targets that could be destroyed by precision strikes and short-term commando raids. (...) The American task force, aided by the information from Pakistan, has been penetrating eastern Iran from Afghanistan in a hunt for underground installations (...) the Defense Department

¹⁷ "Bolton: US very concerned Israel might attack Iran," *Jerusalem Post*, February 1st, 2005, <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1107141483766>

¹⁸ Paul Reynolds, "America's tough rhetoric on Iran," *BBC News*, February 4th, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle_east/4236923.stm

¹⁹ Quoted in Michael A. Fletcher and Keith B. Richburg, "Bush Tries To Allay E.U. Worry Over Iran," *The Washington Post*, February 23rd, 2005, p. A 01, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A43199-2005Feb22.html>

²⁰ Quoted in Elisabeth Bumiller, "Bush May Weight the Use of Incentives to Dissuade Iran," *The New York Times*, February 24th, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/24/international/europe/24prexy.html>

civilians, under the leadership of Douglas Feith, have been working with Israeli planners and consultants to develop and refine potential nuclear, chemical-weapons, and missile targets inside Iran (...) The Pentagon's contingency plans for a broader invasion of Iran are also being updated. Strategists at the headquarters of the U.S. Central Command, in Tampa, Florida, have been asked to revise military's war plan, providing for a maximum ground and air invasion of Iran. Updating the plan make sense, whether or not the Administration intends to act, because the geopolitics of the region has changed dramatically in the last three years. Previously, an American invasion force would have had to enter Iran by sea, by way of the Persian Gulf or the Gulf of Oman; now troops could move in on the ground, from Afghanistan or Iraq. Commando units and other assets could be introduced through new bases in the Central Asian republics.

It is possible that some of the American officials who talk about the need to eliminate Iran's nuclear infrastructure are doing so as part of a propaganda campaign aimed at pressuring Iran to give up its weapons planning (...).²¹

Almost at the same time, the United Press International Intelligence Correspondent, Richard Sale, informed that American combat aircrafts have being flying into Iranian airspace for weeks, in an attempt to lure Tehran into turning on air radars, thus allowing U.S. pilots to grid the system for use in future targeting data, in case of actual conflict. The flights, launched from sites in Afghanistan and Iraq, are also considered as part of Bush Administration attempts to collect needed intelligence on Iran's strategic sites. And added,

The air reconnaissance is taking place in conjunction with other intelligence collection efforts (...). To collect badly needed intelligence on the ground about Iran's

²¹ Seymour M. Hersh, "The Coming Wars," *The New Yorker*, Issue of 2005-01-24 and 31, Posted 2005-01-17, <http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/> That information was officially denied by the Pentagon, but it deserves the attention and some kind of following up by interested people and analysts.

alleged nuclear program, the United States is depending heavily on Israeli-trained teams of Kurds in northern Iraq, and on U.S.-trained teams of former Iranian exiles in the south [Mujahedeen-e Khalq] to gather the intelligence needed for possible strikes against Iran's 13 or more suspected nuclear sites, according to serving and retired U.S. intelligence officials (...) Both groups are doing cross border incursions into Iran, some in conjunction with U.S. Special Forces (...) The MEK are said to be currently launching raids from Camp Habib in Basra, but recently Pakistan President Pervez Musharaff granted permission for the MEK to operate from Pakistan's Baluchi area.²²

Dafna Linzer, in the pages of *The Washington Post* also explained that Bush Administration has been flying surveillance drones over Iran for nearly a year to seek evidence of nuclear weapons programs and to detect weakness in air defenses. "The small, pilot-less planes, penetrating Iranian airspace from U.S. military facilities in Iraq, use radar, video, still photography and air filters designed to pick up traces of nuclear activities to gather information that is not accessible by satellites (...) The aerial espionage is standard in military preparations for an eventual air attack and is also employed as a tool for intimidation."²³ According to this same article, U.S. officials confirmed that the drones were deployed from bases in Iraq, shortly after taking Baghdad in early April 2003, but the missions became more frequent in 2004-2005.²⁴

Although Iranians have identified the drones (as by the Russian daily *Pravda* reported several UFO sighting, as some kind of 'UFO-mania'), it is said that Iran's National Security Council decided not to fully engage with these pilot-less aircrafts, to avoid turning on the radars and strategic communications web (in order to protect the vital information on its air defense system *vis-à-vis* the U.S. tactics), and started improving defenses

²² Richard Sale, UPI Intelligence Correspondent, "USAF playing cat and mouse game over Iran," January 26th, 2005, in World Peace Herald, <http://www.wpherald.com/storyview.php?StoryID=20050126-045615-4690r>

²³ Dafna Linzer, "U.S. Uses Drones to Probe Iran For Arms," *The Washington Post*, February 13th, 2005, p. A 01, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A19820-2005Feb12>

²⁴ The military operation in Iraq is using more than 700 remotely piloted aircrafts in counterinsurgency missions, so it is easy to carry on missions in Iranian skies with the Global Hawk, Predator, Hunter, Pioneer and others. Eric Schmitt "U.S. Drones Crowd Iraq's Skies to Fight Insurgents," *The New York Times*, April 5th, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/05/international/middleeast/05predator.html>

around nuclear facilities in Isfahan and Busheher.²⁵ But the Iranian daily *Ressalat* reported in December 2004 that Iran's air force had been ordered to shoot down any suspicious flying object near its nuclear facilities, and in February 2005, Information Minister Ali Yunessi threatened to shoot down the spy planes, if they came within range. "Most of the shining objects that our people see in Iran's airspace are American spying equipment used to spy on Iran's nuclear and military facilities (...) if any of the bright objects come close, they will definitely meet our fire and will be shot down (...) We possess the necessary equipment to confront them."²⁶

The surveillance has been intensified at the same time that the Republican Administration sharpens its verb and the American intelligence community reviews its intelligence on Iran, a pattern full of similarities with the U.S. policy before the attack against Iraq. A report on Iran's non-conventional programs released publicly in November 2004, said that Iran continued to vigorously pursue indigenous programs to produce nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. In reference to nuclear capabilities, some military sectors consider that if Iran is not stopped, it will reach self-sufficiency and a point of no return, and argue that as some of the facilities are still under construction and not yet active, "the U.S. may have a window of opportunity that would allow it to destroy those locations without causing the environmental problems associated with the destruction of an active nuclear reactor."²⁷

But now, it seems that the revision started in January 2005 by a presidential commission and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, will be more rigorous and careful, in order to avoid huge mistakes converting suspicions into undeniable facts.²⁸ Anyway, political pressures

²⁵ *Ibidem*, "One U.S. intelligence official said different types of drones with varying capabilities have been deployed over Iran. Some fly several hundred feet above the earth, getting a closer view of ground activities than satellites, and are equipped with air filter technology that captures particles and delivers them back to base for analysis. Any presence of plutonium, uranium or tritium could indicate nuclear work in the area where the samples are collected."

²⁶ Quoted in Nazila Fathi. "Iran Says Pilotless U.S. Jets Are Spying on Nuclear Sites," *The New York Times*, February 17th, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/17/international/middleeast/17iran.html>

²⁷ "Target Iran-Air Strikes," *op. cit.*

²⁸ The Republican-led Senate intelligence committee intends to conduct a "preemptive oversight" of intelligence on Iran. The panel would hold closed-door hearings with intelligence officials from the CIA, the Pentagon and other agencies to examine the quality of intelligence on potential "hard targets" inside Iran, especially those facilities U.S. officials believe could be used to build nuclear weapons. Lawmakers, who were mainly given the U.S. intelligence community's conclusions about Iraq, now intend to scrutinize the data and decision-making upon which intelligence judgments are based. A Senate intelligence committee investigation into prewar intelligence on Iraq concluded that most of the key judgments were exaggerated or unsupported by underlying information. See David Morgan, "Senate Scrutinizing U.S. Intelligence on Iran," *REUTERS*, February 6th, 2005, <http://www.yahoo.com>

and interests can always distort the quality of intelligence and its analysis. Considering this fact as real, the National Intelligence Council that is going to elaborate the next Intelligence Estimate on Iran (examining the strength of the Iranian political system, the nation's economic potential and nuclear issues), pretends to have no input from Bush Administration policymakers.²⁹

The U.S. intelligence community has not concluded that Iran has nuclear weapons, although it is convinced that Tehran pretends to build one in the future. In this sense, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was very cautious about the accuracy of the intelligence estimates when he declared that "It is fairly clear from the public statements of the Iranians that they are on a path of seeking a nuclear weapon and don't have it at the present time (...) I don't make estimates, that's the business for the intelligence community. But they're some years away according to the estimates, but I don't know if the estimates are correct or not (...) The President handles Iran policy, he's decided on a diplomatic route."³⁰

A very different view was expressed by the Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, when he said that Iran is going to have a nuclear weapon within two years, and by the Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, who affirmed that in the middle of 2005 the Iranians "will finish the tests to have the knowledge to produce weapons of mass destruction (WMD)." Repeating long-standing Israeli government warnings about Iran's nuclear capabilities, Shalom added, with a tone also similar to the Israeli propaganda campaign against Iraq that, "This is not only Israel's problem, but an international problem, as the long-range missiles can reach Europe."³¹

The annual intelligence assessment presented to Israel's Knesset on July 2004, noted that Iran's nuclear program is the biggest threat facing Israel today, and before it, some Israeli thinkers are proposing a 'preemptive strike' against Iranian nuclear facilities.

The continued Israeli efforts in showing Iran as a regional menace, the Mossad's plans for destroying Iranian reactors as they did in 1981 with the Osirak reactor in Iraq, the exercises that are carried out by Israeli Air Force pilots in the Negev Desert practicing an attack on a scale model of

²⁹ Dafna Linzer and Walter Pincus, "U.S. Reviewing Its Intelligence on Iran," *The Washington Post*, February 12th, 2005, p. A 12 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A17526-2005Feb11>

³⁰ Quoted in Tabassum Zakaria, "Rumsfeld: Iran Years Away from Nuclear Weapon," *REUTERS*, February 6th, 2005, <http://www.yahoo.com>

³¹ "Shalom: Iran to have knowledge to build nuclear weapons within six months," *The Jerusalem Post*, February 16th, 2005, <http://www.jpost.com>

Busheher reactor,³² and the declarations of the Israeli Defense Minister considering that “Iran is the main threat to Israel in the long run,”³³ add important ingredients for greater tensions in the area (Map 2).

At the same time that Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon said that the international community has not done enough to stop Iran from developing a nuclear weapon and warned that Israel will take its own measures to defend itself, Ehud Yatom, from the Likud party declared that “The Iranian nuclear facilities must be destroyed, just as we did with the Iraqi reactor. We must strive to attain the ability to damage and destroy any nuclear capability that might be directed against Israel.”³⁴

It is interesting to take into consideration, that Israeli strategic thinkers were successful in underlining the idea of Iraq as an obvious WMD warmonger inside the American debate.³⁵ Now that it is demonstrated that Baghdad had neither WMD, nor medium or long range missiles, the new campaign that is developed by Israeli military experts detailing the supposed ‘Iranian threat’, even bigger than Iraq’s Saddam, sounds familiar. At least one has to question the new assertions. But Washington, once again, insists in its strategic alliance with Israel and even president Bush declares, “the U.S. is going to back Israel against the Iranian threat.”³⁶

Israel could make the ‘dirty work’, as Cheney more or less said “Israel might do it without being asked (...) the Israelis might well decide to act first and let the rest of the world worry about cleaning up the diplomatic mess afterwards,”³⁷ but it seems difficult that such an intensive and extensive operation would be carried out by Israel alone. According to Ephraim Kam, the deputy head of the Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies, “It would be a complicated operation. In order to undermine or disrupt the Iranian nuclear program, you would have to strike at least three or four sites...Otherwise the damage would be too limited, and it would not postpone the program by more than a year or two, and this could in the end be worse than doing nothing.”³⁸

³² “Target Iran-Air Strikes,” *op. cit.*

³³ Quoted in Paul Reynolds “America’s tough rhetoric on Iran,” *BBC News*, February 4th, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle_east/4236923.stm The head of Israel’s secret services, Meir Dagan, also stated that nuclear weapons in Iran represent the greatest threat Israel had faced since the establishment of the State in 1948.

³⁴ *Ibidem.*

³⁵ See <http://www.whatreallyhappened.com/pathtowar>

³⁶ “Bush: U.S. to back Israel against the Iranian threat,” *AFP*, February 17th, 2005, <http://www.yahoo.com>

³⁷ “Cheney suggests Israel may attack Iran,” *The Washington Times*, January 21st, 2005, <http://washingtontimes.com/upi-breaking/20050121-073820-2712r.htm>

³⁸ “Target Iran- Air Strikes,” *op. cit.*, Israel has about 25 F-15 with combat radius of 2 100-2 225 kilometers, so they are able to strike in almost all the Iranian territory in case

Those sectors in U.S. and Israel that argue in favor of an attack against Iran to destroy its nuclear and weapons capabilities — and consequently toppling the religious leadership —, should take into consideration that an attack like this will only produce an even stronger Iranian nationalist answer, internal consolidation and possible ‘out of the borders actions’, inspired in martyrdom and jihadic principles as well.³⁹ An Iranian retaliation could consider different kinds of actions in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in the Persian Gulf region, in Israel, or even in more distant places. Iran can disrupt oil production and maritime traffic in the Persian Gulf if its vital interests are definitely threatened.

It must be considered that the Iraqi case has generated not only a high level of local resistance, but a growing Anti-American sentiment internationally, being especially strong in the Arab and Islamic worlds. So this pattern of reaction could be reinforced with an attack against Iran.

Some high-ranking Iranian officials have stressed the strategic options that the country has today, for example:

- **Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei**, “If the enemy has the audacity to harm and invade, our blows against it will not be limited to the borders of our country...if someone harms our people and invades our country, we will endanger his interests anywhere in the world.”⁴⁰

- **Iranian Revolutionary Guards Political Bureau head General Yadollah Javani**, “Today we have in our possession long-range smart missiles which can reach many of the interests and vital resources of the American and of the Zionist regime in our region. Thus, if the enemies show stupidity and make any mistake towards Iran, [Iran] will use all the means and capabilities at its disposal. Today we enjoy high deterrent ability...”⁴¹

they could flight directly from Israel. But over-flight permissions will be another complicated obstacle. Israel has bought hundreds of BLU-109 bunker-buster bombs from the U.S., which could be used against some Iranian installations. In October 2003, the German journal *Der Spiegel*, reported that a special unit of Mossad had completed “complex, yet manageable plans” for a preemptive and simultaneous attack against six nuclear sites in Iran.

³⁹ “Iran’s Political and Military Leadership Call for Martyrdom,” The Middle East Media Research Institute, Special Dispatch Series, no. 850, January 20th, 2005, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=countries&Area=iran&ID=SP85005>

⁴⁰ *Kayhan*, July 6, 2004, quoted in Ayelet Savyon, “Iran’s Nuclear Policy Crisis,” The Middle East Media Research Institute, *Inquiry and Analysis Series*, No. 189, September 21st, 2004, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=ia&ID=IA18904>

⁴¹ *Kayhan*, July 8th, 2004 quoted in *Op. cit.*, Savyon, “Iran’s Nuclear...”

- **Iranian Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani**, "It is obvious that we feel threatened, considering the line of thought of the superpowers. [But] we have prepared ourselves for the worst conditions (...) anyone attacking Iran will get a suitable response (...) Iran will not sit idly by awaiting a strike against it, and would resort to using the preemptive strike option against Israel and the U.S. ...The principle of preemption strike is not exclusive to the U.S."⁴²

- **President Mohammed Khatami**, "Will this nation allow the feet of an aggressor to touch this land? If, God forbid, it happens, Iran will turn into a scorching hell for the aggressors."⁴³ "But if the threat rhetoric remained, then also Iran would switch towards a different approach and that would be to no country's benefit."⁴⁴

- **Secretary General of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Hassan Rohani**, "If such an attack takes place then of course we will retaliate and we will definitely accelerate our activities to complete our fuel cycle and make nuclear fuel (...) But I do not think the United States itself will take such a risk. They know our capabilities for retaliating against such attacks."⁴⁵ "We are now capable of performing the nuclear operations required to produce yellow cake, enriched uranium, and fuel tablets. We can now claim that we have mastered the nuclear fuel cycle (...) But the threat of a military attack is not serious since the conditions in Iran, the region, the international community, and the United States are not prepared for this."⁴⁶ "We know each other very well. Of course, we are not going to confront the U.S., but Americans also are aware of the consequences of our retaliation and it will be in the interest of all the parties that such a confrontation would never occur."⁴⁷

Key Iranian politicians as President Mohammed Khatami, and the Head of the Expediency Council Hashemi Rafsanjani, consider that all these U.S. pressures are basically elements of a strong 'psychological warfare' against the Islamic Republic of Iran,⁴⁸ and although there are some threats to be

⁴² *Kayhan*, August 19th, 2004, quoted in *Op. cit.*, Savyon, "Iran's Nuclear..."

⁴³ "Iran: Attackers Would Face Hell," February 10th, 2005, *CBS News*, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/02/17/world/main674765.shtml>

⁴⁴ "Iran Insists Nuclear Program to Stay," *ALJAZEERA*, February 9th, 2005, <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/COFO6456-B42A-47AC-B989-8264C5707C6A.htm>

⁴⁵ "Iran to Retaliate if U.S. Attacks," *BBC News*, February 7th, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle_east/4241527.stm

⁴⁶ "Europe Not Serious, Iran Warns," *Tehran Times*, February 9th, 2005, <http://www.tehrantimes.com>

⁴⁷ Hassan Rohani, "Peaceful Nuclear Activity and Our Constructive Interaction with the World," *National Interest*, The Center for Strategic Research, Vol. 1 No. 1, Winter 2005, p. 17.

⁴⁸ "Iran Insists Nuclear Program to Stay," *op. cit.*

aware of, the common perception is that there won't be any attack.⁴⁹ An important element to be considered is the case of Iraq, because if in one sense it generates worries due to the U.S. military presence and actions there, in other direction the Iranian satisfaction about the elimination of Saddam's regime and the particular re-composition of power that favors the Shia population is very obvious.

In fact, one can think that the political reconstruction in Iraq, based on a U.S. design, not only pretended to neutralize the Shia issue as the most difficult factor to face according with its pre-war assumptions, but also that there are interests that transcend the Iraqi borders towards a better understanding with Iran, (specially with reformist Shiites tendencies present there), and towards a different balance of regional power in the Persian Gulf, emphasizing shiite-sunni differences, for example.

These ideas have been present in some key U.S. institutions, for instance, Graham E. Fuller (RAND Corporation) has argued in his book of 1999 *The Arab Shia: The Forgotten Muslims*,⁵⁰ that traditional American conflicts with Shiites could be solved through a dialogue with Iran, and giving a central political role to Shia community in a post-Saddam Iraq.

In this same line, professor Yitzhak Nakash, wrote in the influential pages of *Foreign Affairs* (Council of Foreign Relations)⁵¹

Over time, a relationship between the United States and Iraqi Shi'ites built on trust could facilitate a *modus vivendi*, perhaps even a dialogue, between America and Iran. In the wake of the September 11 attacks, the threat to U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf does not emanate from an Iranian Shi'ite revolution that has lost its fervor, but rather from the growth of Sunni Islamic radicalism influenced by the Wahhabi-Hanbali school dominant in Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism hatred for America is rivaled only by its hostility to Shi'ism. To contain its spread, the United States will need to build bridges to Shi'ites in the Arab world as well as to the reformers in Iran. How the Bush administration handles

⁴⁹ This perception was permanently repeated during my visit to Tehran in March 2005 for participating in two international seminars on the Persian Gulf and Iran's Nuclear Program.

⁵⁰ Graham E. Fuller and Rend Rahim Francke, *The Arab Shia: The Forgotten Muslims*, Saint Martin Press, 1999, 190 pages.

⁵¹ Yitzhak Nakash, "The Shi'ites and the Future of Iraq", *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2003, Vol.82, No. 4, p.26

the Iraqi Shi'ites, therefore, will be crucial not only for the future of Iraq but also for the future of the entire region.

Anyway, in front of these challenges and ambiguities, Iran continues to develop its defense structures, military training, and its national military industry which is capable of producing weapons of different grades, from tanks, helicopters and armored vehicles to small and highly mobile weapons ideal for the asymmetric warfare. At the same time, many Iranian officials recognize the need of keeping a strong national unity in the middle of the developing debate between different political factions inside the country.

The nuclear dossier

As part of its defensive capabilities, Iran continues to develop medium-range ballistic missiles likely to carry non-conventional heads.⁵² The steady progress made by Iran was confirmed by former president Hashemi Rafsanjani when he said "Today we have the power to send our missiles up to 2 000 kilometers [Map 3], and experts know that once a country has made such a step, all further steps are accessible."⁵³ Tehran is also testing a solid-fuel missile engine for its medium-range ballistic missiles, in order to increase the accuracy and allow for long-term storage of fueled missiles.⁵⁴

With this improvement, Iran strengthens its position and tries to reach a better strategic equilibrium in front of Israeli power, but these new facts generate new challenges to other regional actors as well in a classical example of a "security dilemma". The Defense Minister, Ali Shamkhani tried to calm down those worrying perceptions, insisting on the deterrent

⁵² Andrew Koch, "Tehran Altering Ballistic Missile," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, December 6th, 2004,

http://www.janes.com/security/international_security/news/jdw/jdw041206_1_n.shtml
"The version that was recently tested [in August 2004] and presented in public already deserves the title of Shahab 4, as it is completely different from the previous Shahab 3. Everything but the propulsion system was changed; the range was increased [1450 km], as well as the re-entry vehicle. The missile has a modified nose section [similar to the Russian SS-9 intercontinental ballistic missile] allowing it to hold a larger warhead and thus providing additional room for a nuclear device."

⁵³ "Iran says it now has missile with 2,000 km range", AFP, October 25th, 2004, <http://www.spacewar.com/2004/041005102320.7bb4q68t.html> It is unclear whether this 2 000 kilometer range missile is an improved Shahab-3 or a new missile.

⁵⁴ Most liquid fuels must be placed in a missile shortly before it is to be launched. Solid-fuel missiles are also more mobile and can be deployed more quickly. Paul Kerr "IAEA: More Questions on Iran Nuclear Program", *Arms Control Today*, July-August 2005, http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2005_07-08/IAEA_Iran.asp?print

character of the upgraded missiles, and that they do not threaten any country.⁵⁵

The declarations of the Ukrainian President, Victor Yushchenko, indicating that his country illegally sold X-55 missiles (or AS-15) to Iran and China in 2001, added new ingredients to the debate on the magnitude of Iranian ballistic project. The missiles were not delivered with the nuclear warheads they were capable of carrying, and Iran doesn't have large strategic bombers to launch them, but with a range of 3 200 kilometers, these cruise missiles could be a very important weapon in Iranian stocks.⁵⁶

In spite of the appealing of developing a nuclear strategic option due to the current regional tensions, the Iranian government has always reiterated that nuclear weapons have no place in their defense policies and national security doctrine, and that it only defends its full right of peaceful use of nuclear technology. For example, President Khatami has declared that, "We give our guarantee that we will not produce nuclear weapons because we're against them and do not believe they are a source of power (...) But we will not give up peaceful nuclear technology."⁵⁷

In some cases, the religious argument has been incorporated, explaining that nuclear weapons are incompatible with the essences of Islam. For example, during a meeting with the participants at the 15th International Conference on the Persian Gulf, Hashemi Rafsanjani, President of the Expediency Council insisted that ethically and religiously the use of weapons of mass destruction is rejected, and that this factor is more important than any other consideration.⁵⁸

In other cases, there are many Iranian thinkers that consider very problematic to have a nuclear device, because it will generate a lot of immediate strategic pressures against the Islamic Republic. "The existence of nuclear weapons will turn us into a threat to others that could be exploited in a dangerous way to harm our relations with the countries of the region."⁵⁹ But many observers do not forget the declaration of the same Rafsanjani on December 14th, 2001, that has been interpreted as a signal that Iran wants nuclear weapons, when he said, "In due time the Islamic

⁵⁵ "Iran can mass-produce missiles", *BBC News*, World Edition, 9 November 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3997151.stm

⁵⁶ "Iran denies buying cruise missiles from Ukraine", *Aljazeera.com*, 4/11/2005, http://www.aljazeera.com/me.asp?service_ID=7944

⁵⁷ Quoted in: "Iran Will Stick to Nuclear Plan," *BBC News*, February 9th, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/4252019.stm

⁵⁸ Personal notes.

⁵⁹ Iran's Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani, quoted in *The Guardian*, February 6th, 2002.

world will have a military nuclear device, and then the strategy of the West would reach a dead end, since one bomb is enough to destroy all Israel.”⁶⁰

In the strategic discussion there are also a couple of important arguments:

- a) Today, Iran doesn't have the missile capability for reaching U.S. territory, so its hypothetical nuclear retaliation potential, should find other different more complex alternatives and covert methods of delivery to be considered as such.
- b) It will be very difficult to take the decision to retaliate in nuclear terms against an attack from Israel, because the geographic characteristics of that country make it impossible not to affect the Palestinian population, and other neighboring countries. An Iranian nuclear retaliation against Israel would be an option of last resort to be played only *in extremis*. An Iranian strategic capability will obviously challenge Israeli nuclear exclusiveness, but could also give reason for a nuclear “dominos” in the region.

It is important to remember that one thing is to have a nuclear device, and other thing is to have the fuel cycle capability. Both have strategic impacts, one bigger than the other does. One thing is entering into a kind of mutual assured destruction logic, and other option is to negotiate security guarantees.

The simple mastering of uranium enrichment capacities implies a certain degree of strategic ‘nuclear deterrent’, because the possibility of ‘weaponizing’ nuclear material will be always there. In fact, taking into consideration the dual-use nature of the nuclear technology, any pacific energy program could be diverted for weapons development, and in itself, the enrichment capacity generates at least a kind of ‘pacific nuclear deterrent’. The technology used to enrich uranium to a standard needed for nuclear power can also be used to enrich it further to a standard needed for a nuclear explosion.

If it is true that the old debate about ‘security with nuclear weapons’ has been largely substituted by the desired ‘security without nuclear weapons’, it is also true that still nowadays there is a selected ‘nuclear club’, and that nuclear capacity is a very important factor in some critical scenarios like the Indian-Pakistani conflict, or a very useful negotiating card as in the North-Korean agenda. Even the traditional nuclear powers did not

⁶⁰ Quoted in Nasser Saghafi-Ameri, “Iran’s Nuclear Program: The Question of Non-Proliferation,” *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.5, no.2 (Fall 2003), p. 72.

fulfill with their commitment for nuclear disarmament under the article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and during the post-Cold War years they continue developing and modernizing their nuclear arsenals, reevaluating their nuclear strategic doctrines.

Iran can see that there is a great difference between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. Once you have the capability you are considered for negotiating (Korean option); if you don't have it, you can be erased (The Iraqi scenario); so it seems that Iran could reach a middle position: avoid the nuclear weapon while developing the enrichment capability for negotiating. The nuclear program has a high level of support inside Iran, and it is full with symbolism and national pride as well. It is part of the efforts in searching for recognition, in eliminating isolationism, countering the Iranian sense of siege and victimization, and a key-step toward the idea that Iran must be a developed country. In words of Hassan Rohani, "...having enrichment capabilities means a new position for every country that possess it, not only in terms of technological considerations but also in terms of political ones."⁶¹

Although the Iranian nuclear program has recently attracted much international attention, we must recall that this project dates back to the period of Shah's regime, when the construction of several nuclear power plants was planned. But with the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 those projects were abandoned up to the end of the war with Iraq, when they were recovered.

Iran approached Germany for the resumption of their building of Busheher reactor, but it failed due to U.S. pressures. Other attempts with Argentina, India and China, among several countries also failed because of Washington policy, and finally, in 1995, it was Russia that agreed to the completion of Busheher reactor, that was supposed to be finished to the year 2000. In fact, it will be ready by the end of 2005.

Although for some international observers Iran does not need nuclear energy due to its immense reserves of oil and natural gas, it is also true that nuclear energy seems to have a role to play in many developed and growing economies, and it is considered as a clean and cheap option. At the same time, it is obvious that facing growing global consumptions of oil and gas, the debate about alternative sources of energy, including nuclear, is entirely opened.

The U.S. Administration has been opposed to Iran's nuclear program since its revival in the mid-1990's, but U.S. challenges have substantially grown since the disclosure, in late 2002, of Iran's achievement in acquiring new

⁶¹ *Op. cit.*, Rohani, "Peaceful Nuclear Activity...", p. 19.

technologies in the field of nuclear fuel cycle. In a two-year investigation the International Atomic Energy Agency stated that the Iranians hid enrichment facilities during years, and criticized the country because it did not fully reported the acquisition of advanced centrifuges, the purchases and development of nuclear materials, the uranium enrichment activities, and it did not declare the existence of several nuclear sites. Then the Iranian government admitted that it had been developing the ability to enrich uranium, but only to produce fuel for its nuclear power plant still under construction (Graphic 3).⁶²

As a member of the NPT, Iran is not allowed to make a nuclear bomb, but it has ‘the inalienable right’ to develop, research and produce nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, as it is stipulated in NPT’s article IV. It is generally considered that, although formally the NPT does not recognize a ‘right to enrichment’ per se, the activities related to the nuclear fuel cycle are included in this article.

Its secret work has generated tensions, strong doubts in some Western countries, and the total refusal of Israel and the U.S. that are convinced Iran is moving purposefully and rapidly toward the bomb. For many western observers, the issue for Iran is to regain international community’s trust — affected by “the revelation of close to 20 years of clandestine activities dealing with highly sensitive nuclear matters, and of secret cooperation with an international proliferation network”⁶³ linked to Pakistan, Libya and North Korea.

Iranian officials recognized they acted in secret, because otherwise it would have been impossible for them to develop the fuel cycle capability, but now they want to clear up the doubts and take corrective actions. They defend their right of enriching uranium for peaceful purposes in accordance to the NPT, and insist in being autarkic in nuclear fuel production, in order to avoid dependency on any country or circumstance.⁶⁴

⁶² During a visit to the Nuclear Technology Center in Isfahan, on March 7th, 2005, Iranian officials explained us that currently they possess the complete process for enriching uranium (exploration, mining, yellow cake, uranium conversion in UF₄ and UF₆, enrichment, fuel manufacturing plant, and waste management), and that plutonium recycling is the only thing they are not able to do.

⁶³ Philippe Errera, “The E3/E.U.-Iran negotiations and prospects for resolving the Iranian nuclear issue: a European perspective,” paper presented at the International Conference on Nuclear Technology and Sustainable Development, Center for Strategic Research, Tehran, March 5th-6th, 2005.

⁶⁴ Iranian engineers recognized that the enrichment process is an expensive one, and that it could only be economically profitable once the nuclear electrical generation capabilities reach the 10 thousand megawatts. Up to that moment, it is more efficient to buy the fuel. Iran wants to have six or eight nuclear plants by the year 2020.

To face this, Europe and other international actors are proposing Iran to develop its nuclear plants for generating electricity, but using imported fuel, eliminating the possibility of militarizing a fuel cycle capability. The North Korean file demonstrated that a member of the NPT can develop a peaceful nuclear fuel cycle and, once it decides to make the bomb, it can step out of the Treaty. Russia, as Iran's main nuclear partner; Europe, as the main negotiator with Iran; or the IAEA, as the main structure dealing internationally with nuclear affairs, could give guarantees of future nuclear supplies for Iran's growing nuclear program. Iranian officials insist that the model to follow is Japan, not Korea.

As a result of the negotiating process with the representatives of the European Union (Great Britain, Germany and France) — started in Tehran (June 2003) and continued in Paris (October 2003) —, Iran did not only sign the Additional Protocol to the Non-Proliferation Treaty in December 2003⁶⁵ — which gives extra guarantees for a peaceful program and allow surprise international inspections of its nuclear sites —,⁶⁶ but also agreed to suspend temporarily its enrichment activities in 2004.

Through this process of dialogue with the E.U.-3, Iran might have been interested in developing the European alternative to resist Washington's more aggressive approach, emphasizing the differences and contradictions between both shores of the Atlantic, and achieving some kind of negotiating atmosphere that could contemplate Iranian guarantees of peaceful nuclear development in exchange of European approval of its fuel cycle. However, during President Bush's tour to European countries, in March 2005, some new factors could be detected:

- a) Europe insisted on negotiating with Iran. Washington seems to accept this alternative a little more than in previous moments and, although it refuses to participate directly in the dialogue, now agrees to give some incentives to Iran if Tehran agrees to halt permanently uranium enrichment — strategy that had been previously rejected by Bush Administration. Therefore, we must conclude that U.S. position moved nearer to the European approach.

⁶⁵ Up to March 2005, Iran has not ratified the Protocol.

⁶⁶ The Additional Protocol to the NPT was created in 1997 and is considered as a powerful tool to curb the proliferation of nuclear arms. The Protocol obliges countries to provide the IAEA with much more precise information about their nuclear activities than is required under the NPT, which took effect in 1970. It authorizes the IAEA to carry out inspections of nuclear facilities more intrusively. States are committed to give IAEA's inspectors, information about and access to all parts of their nuclear fuel cycle, including uranium mines, fuel production, enrichment plants and nuclear waste sites. They must also offer access to any other location where nuclear material is or may be present, and the IAEA may give as little as two hours' notice before it visits a site. The monitoring is intended to assure that a country is only producing low-enriched uranium capable of fueling commercial nuclear reactors, rather than high-enriched uranium for nuclear weapons.

- b) But at the same time, Europe adopted a tougher position in its negotiation with Tehran threatening with bringing the case to the UN Security Council, where political and economic sanctions would be considered if Iran does not provide 'objective guarantees' and stops enrichment activities permanently. It seems to be different to the initial European position that accepted peaceful enrichment in exchange of 'objective guarantees', and refused to discuss penalties. Thus, Europe also moved closer to American demands on Iran.

Face to this more coordinated approach, Tehran will not be able to exploit properly the differences between the U.S. and the E.U., and it should promote alternatives for direct and un-direct negotiations. The speech of President Khatami during his visit to Venezuela in March 2005, indicating the possibility of new Iranian gestures towards the international community through the suspension (not cancellation) of its enrichment activities, seems a step in that direction. The agreement signed with a Halliburton subsidiary for exploiting gas resources in the huge South Pars field⁶⁷ is another good example of the complexities presented in the negotiating web. Such a deal is full of symbolism in favor of dialogue, and cannot be explained strictly on technical matters.

The best scenario for Iran would be one in which its peaceful nuclear development with an international oversight of its nuclear fuel cycle production capability could be guaranteed. This is the one defended with a maximalist approach in the official Iranian discourse. However, if we consider the current reality of the global correlation of forces the future scenario could be different.

The U.S. will not permit a rival country like Iran to turn nuclear with an active fuel cycle, so they will work with European countries in order to exert great pressures on Iran to stop it.⁶⁸ Iran has the right of enriching

⁶⁷ The deal to develop two sections of Iran South Pars' gas field promises significant economic benefits. The project includes onshore and offshore sections and its initial phase is to become operational by the first quarter of 2007. The total output of the phases will reportedly produce 50 million cubic meters per day of treated natural gas for domestic use and 80 000 barrels of gas liquids per day for export. All the work would be done by a subsidiary company registered in the Cayman Islands. Halliburton announced the South Pars gas field project would be its last in Iran, but the company has opened an unmarked office on a Tehran building, according to *Fortune Magazine*. Jefferson Morley, "Halliburton Doing Business With the Axis of Evil," *The Washington Post*, February 3rd, 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A58298-2005Feb2.html>

⁶⁸ President Bush has repeatedly said that he is consulting with the Europeans on the talks, but has never said why the U.S. is not directly involved in the negotiations. Some European diplomats say one reason is Bush's opposition to reward what they consider

uranium under international surveillance for peaceful purposes, there is no doubt about it, but it may have to postpone the complete fulfillment of his rights in order to search middle grounds in favor of its national strategy. One characteristic of U.S. unilateral approach, as an imperial and hegemonic hyper-power, is its reinterpretation of international law according to its points of view and its interests, would it be in the case of “preemptive strikes”, “battlefield detainees”⁶⁹ or non-proliferation. The Bush Administration argues now that there is a new class of nations that simply cannot be trusted with the technology to produce nuclear material, even if the NPT itself makes no such distinction, because “there is nothing to prevent a country, once it has learned how to enrich uranium or reprocess spent nuclear fuel rods, from withdrawing from the treaty and moving full-bore toward a bomb.”⁷⁰

A possible negotiated option could adjudicate a longer character to the voluntary ‘suspension’ without forcing Iran to abandon its rights, in exchange of important economic and strategic incentives that cannot be ignored. Although official speech has insisted that Iran will never agree to a permanent cessation of its fuel cycle, nor accept some “carrots” in exchange,⁷¹ and underlined that the suspension, agreed as a good will gesture, will never be transformed into a cancellation. Other option could be to conceive a nuclear fuel cycle under multilateral management. The renewed debate on the fuel cycle has many different positions, with some arguing for avoiding new countries to access the cycle in exchange of guaranteeing the selling of nuclear fuel to them; and others proposing an interesting multilateral fuel cycle approach, that considers the establishment of multinational facilities with international supervision.

Iran should explore ‘middle way solutions’ to its nuclear needs and aspirations, and through a process of negotiation try to benefit from some of the offers it is receiving, such as: More investments in general economy and in gas/oil sector in particular, nuclear scientific and technical cooperation including the possible selling to Iran of light water reactors,⁷² increased access to international markets, acceptance in the World Trade

bad behavior: having the world’s superpower sitting at the same negotiation table with a nation considered a rogue state.

⁶⁹ “Battlefield detainees” or “unlawful combatants” are new definitions used by the U.S. instead of the “war prisoner” concept established in the International Law.

⁷⁰ David E. Sanger, “Bush Seeks to Ban Some Nations From All Nuclear Technology,” *The New York Times*, March 12th, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/15/politics/15treaty.html>

⁷¹ Hamidreza Assefi, Foreign Ministry spokesman has said that: “The Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, and no pressure, bribe or threat can make Iran give up its legitimate right,” in Nazila Fathi, “Iran Dismisses Economic Offer From the U.S.,” *The New York Times*, March 13th, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/13/international/13iran.html>

⁷² The Europeans negotiators have offered to sell Iran a light water reactor because it is easier to obtain weapon-grade plutonium from heavy water reactors.

Organization, unfreezing of Iranian assets, relieve of sanctions, sale of critical spare parts for the country's aging commercial airlines, and even discuss key-topics of the Iranian security agenda, with a wide regional dimension. In this last point, Iran will insist in creating a free zone from weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East in order to concentrate more attention over Israel as a nuclear strategic reality and a challenge to deal with, regionally and internationally. Any future discussion or partial agreement about this will be considered as an important political victory of Iran's foreign policy.

However, this concerted scenario needs a lot of political will and efforts from different sides, "Iranians do not seem to have given up their ambitions to have a fuel cycle. If Iran's leaders are to change definitively their policies, and abandon their efforts to have a fuel cycle, they must be convinced that their own security, and the future of the Islamic Republic, will be better protected as a result. But the Bush Administration, which loathes the Islamic Republic and wants it to fall, has not absorbed this unpalatable truth."⁷³

The good will of European diplomacy and some kind of U.S. reduced aggressiveness are key-factors for a negotiation. On the other hand, Iran should not withdraw from negotiations, because it will only increase tensions and contribute to an isolationist approach towards Tehran. Iran should continue working in the framework achieved in November 15th, 2004, when three working groups (comprising the E.U.-3, the E.U. Council Secretariat and Iran) were formed in order to deal with nuclear issues; technological and economic cooperation; and political and security issues.

At the same time, it is very important to develop alternative sources of legitimacy, as could be the Russian support of Iran's pacific nuclear program. In starkly contradiction with the U.S., Russian President Vladimir Putin said he is convinced that Iran is not seeking to develop nuclear weapons.⁷⁴ Russia can give guarantees of Iranian activities, operational security, fuel controls and recycling of nuclear waste. Iran could also increase its levels of exchange with regional countries and other important international actors as India, China, and Japan in order to support its nuclear transparency.

And obviously, a very fluent and detailed exchange with the IAEA is essential. In February 2005, Mohammed Al Baradei, head of the IAEA, declared that there had been no discoveries in the past six months to

⁷³ Christopher de Bellaigue, "Bush, Iran and the Bomb," *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 52, number 3, February 24th, 2005, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/17762>

⁷⁴ Steve Gutterman, "Russia to Cooperate on Iran Nuke Program," *Associated Press*, February 18th, 2005, <http://news.yahoo.com>

substantiate U.S. claims that Iran is secretly working toward building a nuclear bomb. Al Baradei considered that Iran's cooperation had improved steadily and most relevant issues had been resolved, and he suggested that the U.S. must get involved in the talks between Europe and Iran.⁷⁵ IAEA inspectors are continuing their research in order to obtain greater insight into the international black market that supplied Iran and to get a more definitive account of the country's past programs.⁷⁶ The Agency has confirmed that Iran has a full enrichment program and it has produced UF₆, but without any diversion to non-peaceful activities.

As I said before, the military options against Iran are not easy to decide due to a number of factors. But even any possible preemptive strike against nuclear related facilities, must consider not only the Iranian defensive capabilities, but that Iran's nuclear sites are spread out widely (Arak, Bonab, Busheher, Esfahan, Karaj, Natanz, Tehran), some of them are considered to be deeply buried, and could be even more protected in the near future (Map 4). In fact, Iran is now building sites of defensive nature to protect nuclear materials in case of an attack. The Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Hassan Rohani, said on state television, "Our nuclear centers cannot be destroyed. Our nuclear technology comes from our scientists and we can transfer our nuclear workshops under mountains and carry out enrichment where no bomb or missile can be effective."⁷⁷

In this sense, the request of the Department of Defense in January 2005, for the restoration of a research program designed to create a new type of nuclear weapons capable of destroying hardened underground targets, is also a worrying element (for a future attack, or as another dissuasive instrument).

The program for a Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP)⁷⁸ was shelved by Congress in 2004 under growing international and domestic criticism, but

⁷⁵ Dafna Linzer and Glenn Kessler, "IAEA Head Disputes Claims on Iran Arms," *The Washington Post*, February 16th, 2005, p. A 12, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A27319-2005Feb15>

⁷⁶ Dafna Linzer, "IAEA Digs Into Past of Iranian Program," *The Washington Post*, February 17th, 2005, p. A 18, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A30726-2005Feb16>

⁷⁷ "Iran Tells U.S. Nuclear Sites Cannot Be Destroyed," *AFP*, February 8th, 2005, <http://www.yahoo.com>

⁷⁸ The RNEP program, involving leading U.S. nuclear weapons laboratories such as Los Alamos and Livermore, has spent 10,3 million dollars since 2002. It sought to find the possibility of converting into "bunker busters" two existing warheads, the B61 and B83. The B61 is a tactical thermonuclear gravity bomb that can be delivered by strategic as well as tactical aircraft (B-52, B-2, F-16 fighter jets), and the B83 is designed for precision delivery from very low altitudes, most likely by B-2 stealth bombers. Scientists were working on finding ways to harden the bombs' shells so they can survive penetration through layers of rock, steel and concrete before detonating. According to the Defense Intelligence Agency, at least 10 thousand bunkers currently exist in over seventy

the Defense Department is very interested in developing this “because no weapon in the current stockpile could threaten the growing number of targets being buried in tunnels and beneath mountains.”⁷⁹

Besides, with little public debate, the Pentagon has already spent billions of dollars developing space weapons and preparing plans to deploy them, in order to seek American space superiority and reaching the point of strafing and bombing from space. As president Bush withdrew in 2002 from the 30-year-old Antiballistic Missile Treaty, which banned space-based weapons, now the Department of Defense is developing different projects as “Global Strike,” “Rods From God” and “Eagle,” that will enable the U.S. Air Force to strike any location on the face of the earth at any moment, including deeply buried targets.⁸⁰

Opponents of the proposed weapon have argued that underground facilities can be seal off with smart, precision-guided conventional weapons, directed to entrance tunnels, air and electric systems, and so on, and that it is also impossible to penetrate deeply enough to prevent the nuclear warhead’s explosion from sending tons of radioactive debris into the atmosphere. Many people think Washington is sending the ‘wrong signals’ to the world and hinders international non-proliferation efforts when they talk about improving their nuclear war heads stock, developing tactical nuclear weapons, making plans to base destructive weaponry of

countries around the world. More than 1 400 of them are used as strategic storage sites for weapons of mass destruction, concealed launch pads for ballistic missiles as well as leadership or top-echelon command and control posts. See: “Rumsfeld Asks for Restoration of Nuclear Bunker Buster Program,” *AFP*, February 2nd, 2005, <http://www.yahoo.com>

⁷⁹ Walter Pincus, “Rumsfeld Seeks to Revive Burrowing Nuclear Bomb,” *The Washington Post*, February 1st, 2005, p. A 02, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A52564-2005Jan31> The US already has conventional earth-penetrating bombs, which destroy underground targets by burrowing 10 meters or more into soil before detonating. But they can’t get through rock to reach deeper, toughened bunkers. The RNEP could cut through 30 meters of rock. See “Bunker-busting bombs back on US agenda,” *New Scientist*, February 12th, 2005, <http://www.newscientist.com>

⁸⁰ “Global Strike” or Common Aero Vehicle would be able to deliver up to 1 000 pounds of munitions to a target 3 000 nautical miles away. From space it could hit deeply buried bunkers, command centers, missile bases, as well as mobile targets. “Rods From God” or Hipervelocity Rod Bundles, aims to hurl long metal cylinders of tungsten, titanium or uranium, weighing about 100 kilograms from the edge of space to destroy targets on the ground, striking at speeds of about 7 200 miles an hour with the force of a small nuclear weapon. “Eagle” or The Evolutionary Air and Space Global Laser Engagement, involves airborne, terrestrial, or space-based lasers in conjunction with space-based relay mirrors to project different laser powers and frequencies to achieve a broad range of effects from illumination to destruction”. Tim Weiner, “Air Force Seeks Bush’s Approval for Space Weapons Programs”, *The New York Times*, May 18th, 2005, section A, page 1, column 6.

mass destruction in the space, and insisting with all these measures in a strategy of “terrifying nuclear deterrence.”⁸¹

Last remark

It is extremely important to work for a better security environment in all the Middle East and Western Asia with a long term view that must include, among other things a de-escalation of American military presence, an Iraqi political reconstruction without foreign interferences, a self-conceived process of political transformation in many countries of the area, new strategic compromises between regional key-actors, a general weapon race de-escalation, a denuclearization of the whole Middle East, and an advancement of U.S.-Iranian understanding. Unfortunately, the proposed new global realignment seems to be contradictory with these purposes, heating up military options in order to control energy supplies, and rising the fight against terrorism as a main argument for action.

The real threats that terrorism of different inspirations can represent to various international actors cannot be fought with redeployed armies and preventive attacks with hidden agendas, but through a systematic cooperation between intelligence and counterintelligence structures all over the world, and through the focusing on the different motivational factors and its deep causes. In the words of the very well known expert Anthony Cordesman, “so far, governments have reacted largely by treating the symptoms and not the disease. Counterterrorism is essential to deal with the most obvious and damaging symptoms, but it cannot deal with the underlying causes. Military force is sometimes necessary. However, it is now all too clear in Iraq that it can create as many — or more — problems than it solves.”⁸²

Future violent alternatives in the Persian Gulf region and threatening military redeployments will only create more tensions and problems, deeply affecting peoples’ most legitimate interests in development, justice and political participation.

So, any genuine concern that could exist about the Iranian nuclear program or its ambiguities could be better discussed through negotiating channels and through diplomatic means — as the European initiative has shown —, and through a process of trust-building measures. Instead of reinforcing the Iranian sense of vulnerability with openly aggressive

⁸¹ Western States Legal Foundation, “U.S. Nuclear Weapons Policies, Ballistic Missile Defense and the Quest for Weapons in Space: Military Research and Development and the New Arms Race,” <http://www.wslfweb.org/space.htm>

⁸² Anthony Cordesman, “Beyond Anger and Counterterrorism: A New Grand Strategy for U.S. and Arab Relations,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 13th, 2004, http://www.csis.org/features/040913_US-ArabStratSpeech.pdf

policies that promote only ‘a balance of fear’ and a perception of ‘strategic encirclement’, it is extremely important to develop a dialogue with Tehran in order to exchange perceptions on benefits and risks calculations. As Christopher de Bellaigue has said, “it may be helpful to think of Iranian tactics, of which Iran’s pursuit of nuclear ambiguity is an example — no matter how aggressive they are in themselves — as the underpinning of an essentially defensive strategy.”⁸³

The achievement of the nuclear fuel cycle is an undeniable success of Iran’s scientific and strategic thinking, but in today’s conditions, it seems to be rather a very important bargaining card for the Islamic Republic, than a fixed obsession. Tehran has the full right to develop a peaceful nuclear project, but the real danger of a selective military strike against its installations — with serious consequences for the world security — cannot be over-optimistically discarded, so it could be useful to negotiate some limits encouraging a middle ground national strategy.

⁸³ *Op. cit.*, de Bellaigue, “Bush, Iran and the Bomb.”



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