



## Iran's Nuclear Gamble, Canada and Obama's Second Term

**John Mundy**

The diplomacy of President Barack Obama and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei has been bedeviled by mistrust. There are many reasons why Khamenei is an extraordinarily difficult negotiating opponent, but one is unique to him: he is the only international leader today who does not travel. He has most probably not stepped outside his country since he came to power in 1988, and he rarely meets with international leaders who might challenge his worldview. In an earlier age this would not have been out of the ordinary, but in the postwar era it is. The modern international security system is managed against the backdrop of constant summit meetings between leaders. They talk to each other, get to know each other and gauge each other's intentions. Ayatollah Khamenei does not participate. How do leaders communicate effectively with him? How do they gauge his intentions? His self-imposed isolation is a key obstacle to successful diplomacy and one of the contributing factors to the failure of American and international diplomacy with Iran.

### Section I President Obama's First Term

President Barack Obama began his presidency with a dual-track strategy towards Iran,

### At a glance...

- *War with Iran is closer than we may think, but is not inevitable.*
- *If war with Iran does occur, the likely tactical victory of the U.S. (and other supporting countries) will come with a larger political and strategic defeat due to the size and nature of probable Iranian civilian casualties.*
- *The current crisis could be solved with an alternate approach, based on a political endgame acceptable to both sides, that includes a broader set of factors than the nuclear issue alone.*

pairing diplomacy and sanctions. The U.S. signaled that it was prepared to enter into negotiations without preconditions. The President's famous March 2009 Nowruz address set out to demonstrate American sincerity in seeking a diplomatic solution to the Iran-U.S. conflict, but the outreach to Iran didn't last very long. From the beginning, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei was deeply suspicious. He poured vitriol on Obama's Nowruz address the day after it was televised, in a major speech in Mashad, and only just left the door open to any further discussion. America's policy of

outreach to Iran could have ended then and there, but President Obama decided to persevere.

June 2009 was a significant month. The Iranian presidential election took place and wide-spread electoral fraud provoked huge demonstrations against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the Supreme Leader. The world was transfixed by brutal images of repression on the streets of Tehran. That same month, Iran contacted the IAEA and requested fuel pads for the Tehran Research Reactor, which produces medical isotopes and needed refueling. The Americans fashioned a proposal (with Russian, French and IAEA help) to swap most of Iran's stockpile of low-enriched uranium for fuel pads, and also offered Iran a safety upgrade.

This was a significant confidence-building initiative. For the first time in P5+1 negotiations<sup>1</sup>, the United States was not only participating fully but was in fact leading efforts to reach a political agreement with Iran. Hitherto, the failure of the P5+1 group to make progress with Iran had been attributed to American diplomatic aloofness. The proposed deal itself was well-balanced and offered benefits to both sides. The benefit to Iran was implicit recognition of its enrichment program; for the U.S., the benefit was a draw-down of Iran's stockpile of fuel to close to zero, well below the threshold for a weapon.

The initiative failed. The new Fordow fuel enrichment site was discovered near Qom. Despite Ahmadinejad's initial support for the swap, his domestic political opponents denounced it as a sell-out. Last-minute mediation by Japan and Turkey couldn't save it. It appeared that political paralysis in Tehran after the Iranian Presidential election made it impossible for the Supreme Leader to accept an offer that he had himself subtly invited. By the end of 2009, a proposal aiming to build confidence between the parties had done the opposite, and the diplomacy of outreach towards Iran came to a complete stop.

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1 The P5+1 group of countries are the five permanent members of the Security Council (China, Russia, Britain, France and the United States) plus Germany. It was led by Javier Solana, the European Union's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, until the end of 2009, when the EU's Baroness Catherine Ashton replaced him. The United States did not participate actively in the negotiations between the P5+1 group and Iran until President Obama became President.

In the words of Trita Parsi, the author of an excellent book<sup>2</sup> on this period, American diplomatic outreach to Iran was predicated on a single role of the dice. When it came up short, the United States switched to its other track of intensified economic sanctions. Outreach towards Iran was replaced by American diplomatic outreach to Russia and China, who had to be convinced to support new sanctions. On the eve of consensus emerging within the Security Council, two emerging middle powers, Brazil and Turkey, almost achieved a breakthrough.

In May 2010, President Luiz Lula da Silva and Prime Minister Recep Erdogan flew to Tehran and negotiated a deal to move a significant portion of Iran's enriched uranium offshore for reprocessing. They had a prior understanding with the United States on what might be acceptable, and came very close to delivering. However, during the few weeks that it took them to convince Tehran, the political room that President Obama had in Washington for deal-making shifted; now it was the Americans who turned away from a confidence-building agreement.

Turkey and Brazil were so disappointed by the collapse of their initiative that they voted against Resolution 1929 in the Security Council in June 2010. Still, it passed with Russian and Chinese support, imposing the latest and most far-reaching sanctions against Iran. Since that time, negotiations with Iran have yielded virtually nothing. Iran now has 9,000 centrifuges in Natanz and at least 2,000 (possibly 3,000) centrifuges in a fully hardened site under a mountain at Fordow.

In 2012 we saw three meetings of the P5+1 Group fail; the Prime Minister of Israel repeatedly threatened to attack Iran; economic sanctions inflicting visible damage on the Iranian economy and people without significantly changing Iranian policy; and some important and respected countries giving up on more political dialogue. Canada suspended diplomatic relations with Iran and closed Iran's embassy in Ottawa. It chose to announce that move in Russia (the country that has worked the hardest to find a political settlement with

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2 Trita Parsi, *A Single Roll of the Dice* (Yale U.P., 2012)

Iran), setting off a brief media war scare that Foreign Minister Baird had to explain away.

One of the most important events of 2012, however, was President Obama's speech to the AIPAC conference last March, in which he laid out American policy towards Iran.<sup>3</sup> He made a careful argument for establishing boundaries on what the U.S. could tolerate from Iran. First, he stated that the U.S. and Israel agreed that Iran did not yet have a nuclear weapon and was not yet in a position to obtain one without the U.S. being able to detect it with significant lead time. There was, therefore, time for a peaceful resolution of the issue, although the time available was not infinite. The President went on to frame Iran's nuclear challenge as a much broader problem than just a security issue for Israel alone: the entire international community had a stake in resolving it. He looked at Iran's leaders dispassionately, stating that they "care about the regime's survival. They're sensitive to the opinions of the people and they are troubled by the isolation that they are experiencing."<sup>4</sup> In the eyes of the United States, therefore, Iran leaders were rational actors with whom a successful political agreement was possible.

The most important part of President Obama's speech was his statement against containment: "Iran's leaders should understand that I do not have a policy of containment; I have a policy to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. And as I have made clear time and again during the course of my presidency, I will not hesitate to use force when it is necessary to defend the United States and its interests."<sup>5</sup> This was the core of his speech, and it remains the underlying objective of American policy towards Iran.

By specifically rejecting the idea of containing Iran if it became armed with nuclear weapons—something the U.S. has tolerated with North Korea—he defined his red line as the weaponization of Iran's nuclear program. This means there is a trigger for a military confrontation with Iran. If proof exists that Iran has decided to make a nuclear weapon, then we can expect a showdown. President Obama said at the time, "I don't bluff,"<sup>6</sup> and we can expect that he means what he says.

Since then, there has been no progress towards a political settlement. Meanwhile, the time Iran needs for a nuclear breakout is shortening. Recent estimates project that Iran would need about two to four months to have enough weapons-grade uranium for a small nuclear arsenal if it decided to go for it.<sup>7</sup> Iran keeps upping the ante by bringing on new facilities. Fordow is a fully hardened site, which tests the limits of the U.S. arsenal, and it has now received a full complement of centrifuges. Iran's new heavy water reactor at Arak is scheduled to become operational during third quarter of 2013, and will produce enough plutonium to create a second route to a nuclear weapon without relying on highly enriched uranium. Iran also continues to stall on a tentative deal to allow IAEA inspectors into its Parchin weapons testing facility.

War is coming closer because the U.S. too has upped the ante by recently taking the Mujahadeen-e-Khalq (MEK) off its terrorist list. Iran believes that Israel is using the MEK to car-bomb its nuclear scientists. Indeed, a shadowy war with Iran has already started. The war in cyberspace is well documented.<sup>8</sup> In the last couple of years, five Iranian nuclear scientists have been attacked and/or assassinated in Iran, most by car bombs, and Iran has allegedly been behind assassination attempts

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3 This speech should be read along with the transcript of President Obama's interview with Jeffery Goldberg, "Obama to Iran and Israel: 'As President of the United States, I Don't Bluff'", *The Atlantic*, March 2, 2012. Online: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/obama-to-iran-and-israel-as-president-of-the-united-states-i-dont-bluff/253875/>

4 Remarks by the President to the AIPAC Policy Conference, March 4, 2012. Online: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2012/03/04/president-obama-2012-aipac-policy-conference#transcript>.

5 Ibid.

6 President Obama, interview by Jeffery Goldberg, *The Atlantic*, "Obama to Iran and Israel", March 2, 2012. Online: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/obama-to-iran-and-israel-as-president-of-the-united-states-i-dont-bluff/253875/>

7 While Iran would still need significantly longer to develop and test a weapon and delivery system once enough weapons-grade uranium was produced, the rest of a potential weapons program would be much easier to conceal.

8 The cyberspace war includes alleged attacks by the U.S.-Israeli Stuxnet virus against Iran's centrifuges and Iran's alleged copycat cyber attacks against Saudi oil fields and American banks.

in Washington, Bulgaria, Kenya, India and Thailand.

War is also coming closer because we are moving toward a tipping point in the political cycle of the three key countries. In January 2013, a new government was elected in Israel alongside the re-elected Obama administration. This July, Iran will go through its own election cycle and replace Ahmadinejad with a new President. By the second half of 2013, therefore, all three states will have leaders operating on new mandates. If they cannot stop the momentum toward a showdown at that moment (the high point in their political fortunes), then it is possible that a sense of exhaustion with diplomacy will give way to active planning for a military confrontation in the second half of 2013 or early 2014.

## Section II The Human Cost of War with Iran

A potential war with Iran will not be Armageddon or World War III, but it will be more than a single surgical strike against isolated facilities. Israel's attacks on the Osirak reactor in Iraq in 1981 and Syria's al Kibar reactor in 2007 are not good templates for a future strike on Iran; those attacks were on single isolated sites, both of which were 'cold' (i.e. not in operation). Iran's program has many sites, and the key ones are 'hot', meaning they have nuclear fuel that could be dispersed over population centres. The literature on a strike suggests that a potential attack against Iran would target at a minimum four or five locations.<sup>9</sup> A thorough attack, however, could target as many as 400 sites if Iran's entire nuclear industry is targeted along with the nation's command and control, air defence, and naval and missile retaliatory forces.

Four hundred sites is a lot, but it's not so large a number when the strategic and tactical objectives of the operation are considered. The U.S.'s strategic objective will be to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, which means that Iran's entire program could be targeted. Iran's nuclear industry is big—much bigger than the Iraqi and Syrian programs that Israel attacked. It includes

uranium mining, fuel fabrication, weapons testing, buried enrichment facilities, research centres, a civilian nuclear power plant, research reactors and related manufacturing facilities—all spread over a territory the size of Alaska.

American tactical objectives could add more targets. The United States will design its campaign to minimize its own losses and contain Iran's military response. For instance, given the missile attacks by Hamas against Israel in Gaza last December, a strike against Iran could include pre-emptive attacks against its ballistic missiles, some of which can hit Israel and American bases in the region. Likewise, the U.S. Navy is unlikely to leave Iran's mine-laying, coastal cruise missile batteries and small boat navy untouched, given the tactical sophistication of the Revolutionary Guard's naval force within the Persian Gulf. (This is well documented in an open source report by the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence.)<sup>10</sup> The military campaign therefore cannot be described as a surgical strike. It would be an air war against both civilian and military targets. Not only that, the war could be open-ended if Iran decides to defend itself and fight back.

Even the strongest supporters of a military showdown admit that Iran's nuclear program could not be stopped by it but only delayed. Some critics of a strike, on the other hand, argue that it will make Iranian nuclear weapons inevitable. The literature virtually concedes, therefore, that the military option will not achieve the strategic objective of the United States, which is to prevent, not contain, Iranian nuclear weapons. This is the strongest point made by a report issued last September by The Wilson Center's Iran Project<sup>11</sup> and endorsed by a senior bipartisan group of retired American political, diplomatic and military leaders. It estimates that an Israeli strike would delay Iran's program by one to two years if Israel strikes alone, or by three to four years if the U.S. strikes with its bigger arsenal; after that, more military measures could be needed.

10 United States Office of Naval Intelligence, *Iran's Naval Forces: From Guerilla Warfare to a Modern Naval Strategy*, Fall 2009. Online: <https://www.fas.org/irp/agency/oni/iran-navy.pdf>

11 The Wilson Center, *Weighing the Benefits and Costs of Military Action Against Iran*.

9 The Wilson Center, *Weighing the Benefits and Costs of Military Action Against Iran*. Online: [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/IranReport\\_091112\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/IranReport_091112_FINAL.pdf)



Nevertheless, the damage to Iran would be severe. The primary nuclear sites to consider are the Arak heavy water reactor, two underground enrichment facilities at Natanz and Fordow, the Isfahan Uranium Conversion Facility and possibly the light water reactor at Bushehr. The University of Utah has just released a report titled *The Ayatollah's Nuclear Gamble*,<sup>12</sup> by Khosrow Semnani, which estimates that between 5,500 and 85,000 casualties would occur just at four sites it considered. And it's not just the number of civilian casualties but their nature that matters. There would be three types of casualties: caused by the bomb blasts themselves, the chemical consequences of attacks against facilities in Natanz and Isfahan, and the radiological effects of attacks on the reactors at Arak and Bushehr.

Obviously the numeric estimates are not exact because they depend upon labour shift schedules at the different sites, the timing and degree of surprise, and the weather (particularly which way the wind will be blowing over Isfahan). Not included in these estimates are knock-on economic, ecological and even psychological effects, which are hard to measure but can be compared to the disasters at Bhopal, Chernobyl, 9/11 and Fukushima-Daiichi.

The possible damage to Isfahan will resonate the most strongly with Iranians and the world community. Though most Westerners do not know Isfahan, it is Iran's Florence or Kyoto, with some of the world's most famous Islamic art and architecture. It is also a large city, with a population of about 1.8 million people. The Isfahan Uranium Conversion Facility, located only 16 kilometers from the city centre, manufactures uranium hexafluoride for the enrichment facilities in Natanz and Fordow.

Under prevailing winds, the toxic plume from an attack would reach the city's suburbs in less than an hour. According to the report, tens and possibly hundreds of thousands of people would be exposed to the chemical consequences of highly reactive fluorine compounds thrown up by the raid. At the highest concentrations, the effects on civilians will not be

dissimilar to chemical attacks during the First World War or the Iraqi chemical attacks during the Iran-Iraq war. According to the Utah study, Isfahan could suffer 1,000 casualties at the bomb site itself and 5,000-70,000 civilian casualties in the city. Local civil defence facilities are apparently very modest, and the city has only about 5,200 hospital beds.

When you absorb the information about the nature and scale of civilian casualties, your natural reaction is to recoil: surely Iran's leaders will not risk this type of devastation for a nuclear program that cannot possibly succeed in increasing Iran's national security. To answer this question, it is worth quoting the Utah study because its political assessment of Iran's Supreme Leader is so apt:

"Advocates of military strikes outside Iran fail to appreciate the deadly and deceptive nature of Atatollah Ali Khamenei's nuclear gamble or assess the unintended consequences of a military strike by the United States or Israel. At the heart of this misconception is a failure to recognize that Iran's leaders [are willing to use] the martyrdom of the Iranian citizenry in yet another 'holy war' [...] to tap into an ideology of victimhood and sacrifice that the Islamic Republic will cravenly seek to exploit to their advantage [...]. While most Iranians have long lost trust in this way of thinking, the revolutionary narrative allows Khamenei to deflect from the repression, corruption and mismanagement at home by blaming foreign powers for the calamities that have befallen Iran since the establishment of the Islamic Republic [...].

The conversion of Iran's nuclear program into a religious stage would allow the Ayatollah to use [...] a catastrophe unleashed by military strikes, particularly one that would guarantee the deaths of thousands of Iranians, [...] to win his gamble. The Iranian people would pay the price of the strikes provoked by his belligerent policies. He would reap the benefits."<sup>13</sup>

12 Khosrow Semnani, *The Ayatollah's Nuclear Gamble*. Online: [http://nucleargamble.org/?page\\_id=323](http://nucleargamble.org/?page_id=323)

13 Ibid., p.1

Memories of Iran's suffering during the Iran-Iraq war will resurface within the Iranian population if it absorbs this scale of losses. They will remember what we have forgotten: namely, the international community's inaction when Iraq used weapons of mass destruction against Iran's armies in the 1980's. Iran's current leaders learned a bitter lesson at that time, which they have not forgotten. When they complained about Iraq's use of chemical weapons at the United Nations, they found out that international conventions against chemical warfare would not be enforced for them.<sup>14</sup> This was a clear moral failure by the West, which could have opposed Iraq's use of chemical weapons but chose not to do so until very late in that war. More than anything else, this has undermined the moral authority of the international community in Iran, and it will be used by its leaders to rally the Iranian population against the United States and Israel in the event of a new war.

What might happen to Isfahan cannot be dismissed, therefore, as unfortunate collateral damage. It is likely to be a central aspect of the war because it is a potential humanitarian catastrophe. The scale and nature of the civilian casualties poses a moral challenge to the leaders of the United States, Israel and Iran, which may very well determine the ultimate success or failure of the operation for the belligerents.

There are, of course, many other political, diplomatic and economic consequences of a potential war against Iran but these are better known and well catalogued in the Wilson Centre's Iran Project. Here are some: the war might not be contained within Iran itself; Iran will likely leave the NPT and international inspection of Iran's facilities could cease; Russia and China will likely oppose the war, thereby breaking up the diplomatic unity of the sanctions regime; collective security under the UN Charter could be undermined again by a second American war carried out without the Security Council's authority; and oil prices could spike.

<sup>14</sup> During the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), the operative international convention was the 1925 *Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare*. The *Chemical Weapons Convention* post-dates the Iran-Iraq war by several years, only entering into force in 1997.

Thirty-four years after the Iranian Revolution, we are now well into the second generation of leaders and officials who have known nothing but dysfunction between Iran and the West. Even today, Iran's leaders do not realize how deeply the hostage crisis affected the United States. It's hard also to overestimate the impact on Israel of Iran's support for Hezbollah and Hamas. Iran's support for terrorist tactics against Israel has made it virtually impossible for the two countries to communicate, let alone understand each other. There is also the pernicious legacy of past wars in the region. The Iran-Iraq war, for instance, probably caused a million casualties on both sides and destroyed much of southwest Iran. The institutionalization of enmity between Iran and the U.S., Israel and other countries is a serious obstacle to peace that cannot easily be overcome.

Given Ayatollah Khamenei's longstanding hostility towards the United States and the importance to the Iranian Revolution of demonizing its American opponent, a full long-term settlement with Iran under its current leadership is highly unlikely. A true settlement, however, is not out of reach in the medium to long term, because it is clear that Iran's huge and long-suffering middle class longs for reform and is tired of Iran's isolation.

Reform almost came in 2009, when millions of Iranians protested the results of the last Presidential election. One day Iran's middle class will succeed, or a new generation of Iranian leaders will come to power who recognize the writing on the wall and begin the reform from within. There is not enough time, however, to let history take its course. What is needed in the next round of negotiations is an end-game sufficiently attractive to all sides to at least stop further escalation of the crisis and begin to reverse Iran's isolation. It must address the nuclear issue and should also be designed to reduce the ability of Iran's leaders to sell their brand of political pathology to their own people.



It could be made up of these elements:

*a) A verifiable deal on nuclear enrichment, which would at a minimum stop the current escalation to a military showdown*

The P5+1 group could offer a ‘freeze for a freeze’ (i.e. no additional enrichment in exchange for no additional sanctions) and move from there to the type of deal that was almost accepted in 2009 and 2010. The goal would be recognition of an Iranian civilian nuclear program that no longer poses a threat to security in the region.

*b) Reintegration of Iran into the world economy through the reduction and eventual reversal of sanctions*

International economic sanctions certainly inflict pain on the countries being sanctioned, but they do not have a good track record of altering the sanctioned country’s behaviour. At best they work very slowly, and are effective as a political tool only if the sanctioned country believes sanctions will be reversed in return for concessions. It is arguable whether President Obama has the power to reverse many of his country’s sanctions, given the role of Congress and its hostility towards Iran.

Sanctions against Iran also have a self-defeating aspect, since it is hard to design economic sanctions so that the pain falls hardest upon the country’s leadership rather than its general population. If the main effect of international sanctions is to undermine and impoverish Iran’s middle class, which is the main force for reform in the country, then sanctions will not contribute to a settlement if they become a long-term fixture of international policy. Sanctions also isolate Iranians from the international community, which serves the interests of Iran’s hardliners.

*c) Recognition of Iran’s legitimate national security concerns and its geopolitical interests in the region*

Iran’s generals are unlikely to agree to any deal with the P5+1 that leaves Iran open to attack. Likewise, Iran has demonstrated repeatedly that lasting solutions to geopolitical problems in the Middle East cannot

be constructed while also trying to isolate Iran. An example of geopolitical cooperation between Iran and the United States that worked to both countries’ advantage occurred in 2001: Iran cooperated with the United States when the U.S. invaded Afghanistan because the Taliban were their common enemy. Iran also played a constructive role in the subsequent peace conference that established the current Afghan government. This nascent cooperation went off the rails spectacularly after the ‘Axis of Evil’ speech. Iran made one last attempt at cooperation with the U.S. in 2003, but when that was rejected it returned to active hostility, working to undermine the U.S. occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

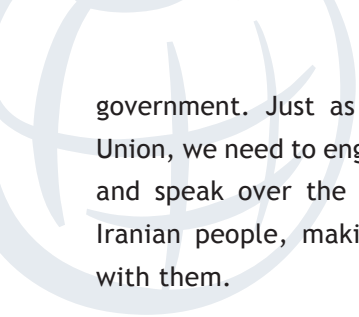
President Morsi of Egypt recognized Iran’s geopolitical importance when he created a contact group on Syria last year; it included Iran within a quartet of countries (Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran) to negotiate a political settlement to that conflict. He included Iran not because he supported its approach to Syria (as he made that clear when he visited Tehran last August for the Non-Aligned Summit); instead, he included Iran because he recognized it had the power to wreck a settlement in Syria if it was excluded.

*d) Re-establishment of more normal relations or at least regular dialogue between Iran and the United States*

This has become part of the current American negotiating strategy with Iran, inasmuch as the U.S. has signaled its readiness to undertake direct negotiations with Iran. To date Iran has refused, although there are rumours that unofficial talks between the two countries have taken place. Outside of the nuclear issue, geopolitical cooperation between the U.S. and Iran could be a topic for discussion (particularly with respect to Afghanistan, where neither country would like to see a hard-line Taliban government come to power).

*e) Sustained dialogue with Iran on human rights*

We should support the reform and human rights movement within Iran because it is the Iranians themselves who will ultimately reform their own



government. Just as we did with the former Soviet Union, we need to engage Iran in human rights dialogue and speak over the heads of Iranian leaders to the Iranian people, making sure they know that we are with them.

These five elements of a political approach to Iran are based on an endgame that envisages Iran reintegrating into the international community as a powerful but not predominant country in its region. We don't need simultaneous progress on all of these issues in order for diplomacy to be successful—but we do need measureable progress on the nuclear issue, backed up by patient, sustained and persistent effort on the other ones. And this will take diplomacy without false deadlines. Many years will be required, and it is unlikely that Iran will ever fully reintegrate into the international community until the Iranian people succeed in reforming their government from within.

#### **Section IV Canada's Role**

What can Canada do to help? We have to be realistic because our government has chosen to reduce our role. When Canada suspended diplomatic relations with Iran last September and closed both its embassy in Iran and the Iranian embassy in Ottawa, Canada was announcing to its friends and allies that as far as Canada was concerned, the time for further political dialogue with Iran was over.

Canada gave up three things when it closed its embassy and brought its diplomats home:

##### *1) Our ability to communicate directly with Iran's government in Iran*

This is very useful, especially in a crisis, and countries do not give it up lightly. It is hard enough to communicate your own country's intentions and gauge another country's reaction when you can communicate directly with it; when countries no longer have the ability to communicate directly, it is virtually assured

that there will be miscalculations about each other's intentions. In a crisis, this will hurt both countries.

##### *2) Our ability to develop a special insight into Iranian politics*

Because Canadian diplomats are no longer on the ground in Iran, Canada's ability to follow Iranian politics and assess the Iranian government's likely reaction to international initiatives has been reduced. This was part of Canada's value-added to the Iranian issue with Britain and the United States. Now other countries such as Australia and New Zealand will fill this role.

##### *3) Our ability to protect the rights of Canadian citizens in Iran*

There are three Canadian citizens in jail: Saeed Malekpour, Hamid Ghassem-Shall and Hossein Derakhshan. One is on death row, one has a death sentence that possibly has been commuted, and one is serving a 19 ½ -year sentence. Their loved ones all believe they have been tortured. Canada should not have abandoned them. Now their families will have to rely upon Italian diplomats to protect them.

The time is also long past when Canada was perceived as a potential mediator in this region of the world. We would not be taken seriously in the unlikely event that our government had a change of heart and aspired to the type of role that Turkey and Brazil played in 2010, when they almost got a deal with Tehran.

Nevertheless, there is something important that Canada can do. Canada has a privileged position with Israel, which it should use in two ways to help enlarge the chances for a political settlement with Iran. First, Canada should join our friends and allies (as well as many senior retired Israeli officials) in warning the Israeli government against initiating a military confrontation with Iran. Prime Minister David Cameron has done so; virtually every member of President Obama's first administration has done



so; even the retired heads of Mossad and Shin Bet in Israel have done so. As a respected and influential voice in Israel, Prime Minister Harper should join them.

Second, in the event that negotiations over the next several months reach some type of confidence-building agreement supported by the United States and the P5+1 group, Canada should use its influence in Jerusalem to convince Israel to support it, too. This would help President Obama, and his administration would likely be grateful to Canada for our aid.

### Conclusion

It is ironic that after two trillion-dollar wars in western Asia, Western thinking about a possible third war in the region remains so muddled. Supporters of war seem to justify it on the basis of exhaustion with diplomacy and impatience with sanctions. This isn't good enough.

After two wars that failed to achieve their own strategic objectives, proponents of a third war should show how a war with Iran would be different and successful. A military confrontation with Iran will likely be both a strategic and moral trap for the United States and all countries that decide to support it. Its tactical success is unlikely to prevent

Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon; and its horrific effects on Iran's civilian population will sink the U.S. and its allies in a moral quagmire that Iran's Supreme Leader will use to reinforce his hold over the Iranian population and delay the political evolution of Iran for a generation.

Canada should use its influence with Israel to help the international community reverse the drift towards a military confrontation and achieve a lasting settlement with Iran. 🌐

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