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# Understanding the South African Nuclear Experience and its Applicability to Iran

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The nuclear non-proliferation regime is not as strong as it once was. The international community has had trouble reaching consensus on extending the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). North Korea has succeeded in building a nuclear weapon despite being party to the NPT, and now Iran appears to be on the verge of becoming the second NPT violator of the new millennium. But there is hope for nuclear rollback. The suspected Iranian program is reminiscent of South Africa's previous nuclear weapons program; a program which was disbanded nearly twenty years ago. By looking at the South African experience, the international community could formulate a comprehensive approach to ensure the Middle East does not become the next nuclear hotbed.

## Introduction

It is no secret that the global nuclear non-proliferation regime faces a precarious future. While the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty in 1995 ensured some level of continued cooperation within the establishment, the nature of the extension can also be viewed as a fracturing consensus on the direction of the non-proliferation regime. Iran's suspected nuclear weapons program exemplifies the problematic nature of the non-proliferation regime and its questioned ability to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons materiel and expertise. As such, it is

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important to not only continue international efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and technical expertise, but the international community must also recognize how to rollback programs that might progress despite international condemnation. South Africa's nuclear weapons program offers the best example of how such a feat can be accomplished. The case of the South African bomb is likely to resemble that of future proliferators; a pariah regime developing nuclear weapons despite international objection and considerable cooperation among the global powers to prevent acquisition. Understanding the reasoning for the bomb's creation and eventual dismantling within South Africa will shed light on how to approach Iran and its nascent nuclear program.

The future of the non-proliferation regime rests with the outcome of Iran's nuclear program. This is because Iran's nuclear activities fall within its Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) obligations and any resulting weapons program will speak directly to the non-proliferation regime's ability to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. There is hope that a favorable outcome for the regime can be reached. South Africa's now defunct nuclear weapons program offers an important precedent for nuclear rollback.

There are many similarities between the Iranian and South African experience with nuclear programs. Both countries were considered at the time to be pariah states because of their nuclear programs and political affairs. South Africa's status was due not only to its nuclear weapons program but was also a response to its adherence to the system of apartheid (Liberman 2001, p50). Iran's status as a pariah state is because of its nuclear program as well as its past attempts to violently export Islamic Revolution (Shuster 2007). Both countries' pursuits of nuclear energy programs lacked clear reasoning, and as a result, the international community was suspect of their claims that the programs were only used to generate energy. Although there are differences in the Iranian and South African circumstances, the lessons learned from rolling back South Africa's nuclear weapons program can help guide the international community in its response to a possible Iranian nuclear weapons program.

## Framework for the Analysis of Nuclear Weapons Acquisition

According to William Epstein (1977, 17), states have sought to add nuclear weapons to their arsenals because "[States] see nuclear weapons as promoting their security, enhancing their prestige, augmenting their influence, and improving their economic conditions" (Epstein 1977, 17). Expanding upon on these principles, this paper will utilize the three mod-

els of nuclear weapons acquisition, as outlined by Scott Sagan (1996), in order to understand the reasons behind South Africa's pursuit of nuclear weapons and why Iran may eventually pursue one. Although other models exist, Sagan's models best describe and analyze possible motives for nuclear weapons acquisition.

Sagan (1996) explains that weapons acquisition generally can be attributed to three sets of models: the security model, the domestic politics model, and the norms model (Epstein 1977, 17). The security model claims states may seek a nuclear weapon to ensure their national security against either conventional or nuclear threats (*ibid*). It is important to note that such an explanation allows for the individual state's *interpretation* of threats. As explained by Sharam Chubin (2001, 21), "Even in the absence of a specific or urgent security threat, a state that perceives itself embattled or friendless may seek nuclear weapons to take out a hedge against the possible deterioration of its security environment." Sagan's second model, the domestic politics model, argues that state actors "envision nuclear weapons as political tools used to advance parochial domestic bureaucratic interests" (Sagan 1996). Three actors are considered in regards to the domestic politics model: a state's nuclear energy establishment, the military, and politicians (*ibid*). Finally, states may choose to seek nuclear weapons as a sign of prestige according to the norms model. In this model, nuclear weapons exist as a symbol of modernity and are associated with advanced military capabilities (*ibid*). Utilizing these three models, the reasoning for nuclear weapons acquisition by South Africa and possible reasoning for an Iranian program will be explored.

## Discovery of Nuclear Programs

### *The South African Bomb*

There is much ambiguity surrounding the South African nuclear program, but certain facts are generally accepted. It is known that throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, South Africa succeeded in creating six viable nuclear weapons and ultimately dismantled the program between 1990 and 1991 (Liberman 2001, 45). It is generally accepted that South Africa's Atomic Energy Board (AEB) initially began its nuclear research with an eye toward civilian energy and peaceful nuclear explosions, from the late 1960s to early 1970s (Liberman 2001, 50). The AEB saw a need to pursue nuclear energy in order to protect South Africa's domestic coal supplies. As a country deprived of oil reserves and subject to international sanctions over apartheid, the South African government struggled to meet

domestic gasoline demands. The hope was that nuclear energy could be used to supply the power grid while the coal reserves could be converted into gasoline products (Betts 1979, 92).

The notion that Pretoria was pursuing a nuclear weapon, however, was solidified when, in 1977, Soviet satellites detected a nuclear test site in the Kalahari Desert. Although a nuclear weapons program had been rumored prior to the discovery, the Soviet evidence led to the widespread acceptance of South Africa's nuclear weapons program (Sublette, 2001). The satellite imagery resulted in a mandatory United Nations (UN) arms embargo and widespread economic sanctions against the Pretoria government. The use of sanctions, which began in 1963 on a voluntary basis, further isolated Pretoria from the international community and deprived South Africa of economic and security partnerships (Betts 1979, 99).

### *Discovery of Iran's Nuclear Program*

Unlike the South African case, the world has yet to find concrete evidence of a weapons program in Iran. Geoffrey Kemp (2001, 3) best summarizes the current situation in regards to the Iranian program: "There is some debate as to what the purpose of the Iranian program is and when it will actually come into service, but there is no debate about the fact that Iran is undertaking activities that contribute to the development of nuclear weapons." It is important to note that the Iranian program is not known to be a military program, but the circumstances of its existence and discovery are troubling. Some analysts believe the civilian energy program may be intended to have a latent weapons applicability, allowing for enough fissile material and weapons knowledge to be accumulated in order for short turnaround nuclear weapons creation in a time of need, as is the case in Japan (Fitzpatrick 2006, 527).

The Iranian program was made public in 2002 by an exile group, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, after it shared information with the Central Intelligence Agency (El-Kawas 2005, 22). Further inquiries would later reveal that the much of the current program began with unreported shipments of nuclear technology from the Chinese throughout the 1990s (Sultan 2005, 126). It was also determined that the Iranian program benefited from non-state actors, such as the A.Q. Kahn network, in addition to help from Indian and Russian businesses (Sultan 2005, 125). As a result of Iran's nuclear infrastructure, it is believed by some that Iran can produce nuclear weapons in a matter of years and may have the technology to launch nuclear warheads on ballistic missiles by 2015 (William, 2008). Despite all of these covert actions, Iran continues to claim the nuclear program is

for civilian energy purposes and reserves its right to the full nuclear fuel cycle as defined by the NPT (Crook 2006, 480).

## Dissecting the Rationale for Weapons Acquisition

### *South Africa's Security Reasoning*

During the creation of the nuclear weapons program throughout the 1970s, South Africa claimed to perceive several threats to its national security. Pretoria's concerns revolved around perceived conventional military threats to the South African government emanating at least in part from the international sanctions. As explained by Richard Betts (1979, 97), South Africa had few friends it could depend on within the international community: "The government in Pretoria [perceived] a major threat to its security and little prospect for external help in reducing it. As the last regime on earth based constitutionally on racial discrimination it has many local adversaries and few friends in the international community." Traditional security threats did exist, although the level of severity was questionable. Cuban forces had deployed to neighboring Angola in 1975 in an attempt to counter South African influence, and it was feared that the Soviet Union may also take an active role in the conflict (Betts 1979, 100).

However, the security rationale for the South African nuclear weapons program remains questionable. Although South Africa readily claimed it faced a variety of security threats, the reality of the situation did not lend itself to nuclear weapons acquisition. The security threats facing the South African government were a mixture of internal or nearby conflicts, which could not be responded to with nuclear weapons, or extremely far fetched scenarios involving nuclear powers. Much of the South African Defense Force was focused on preventing the movement of guerilla forces into South Africa rather than fighting conventional military forces (Liberman 2001, 59). The reality of South Africa's situation was that: "[Owing to] South Africa's geographic position and the weakness of black African states, there [was] realistically no conventional threat that Pretoria could not handle easily. African states [had] minimal airpower and airlift, lack[ed] bases within reach of important areas in South Africa, and face[d] language and political problems that [made] an integrated alliance command structure infeasible" (Betts 1979, 100). South Africa's conventional military forces could easily counter any regional threat.

In regards to nuclear threats, the Soviet Union could not realistically engage South Africa in nuclear war because of two important factors. A

Soviet attack was not feasible due in large part to limitations on its deployable forces. The Red Army could not realistically undertake a war at such a distance. Just as importantly, Soviet aggression was unlikely because the Western powers viewed South Africa as vital to their national interests--the shipping lanes off the South African coast are a major transit route--and would not permit Soviet dominance of the area (Liberman 2001, 59).

Aside from the unrealistic security threat, South Africa could ill afford to use a nuclear bomb because of the diplomatic repercussions that would follow such a move (Liberman 2001, 58). While there were legitimate security threats to Pretoria, the reality is that nuclear weapons did not provide a viable military solution. As such, the security model is not considered the best explanation of South Africa's nuclear weapons program.

### *Possible Iranian Security Reasoning*

Although there is questionable evidence of the existence of an active Iranian nuclear weapons program, possible reasoning for such a program could be explained in part by the security model. The realities of the Iranian security situation are similar to the perceived security threats faced by South Africa from the mid-1960s through the late-1980s. Iran claims it faces both traditional security threats from conventional military forces as well as energy security concerns arising from sanctions.

A covert nuclear weapons program would likely have been the result of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war (Kemp 2001, 2). Iran was already facing U.S. sanctions following the 1979 Islamic Revolution when it went to war with neighboring Iraq. The eight year war quickly became a war of attrition and featured the use of chemical weapons. Iranian leaders felt constrained in their efforts to fight Saddam Hussein due in large part to their inability to purchase advanced weaponry following their isolation by the Western world. Iran's diplomatic isolation was the result of U.S. efforts to thwart the Islamic Revolution (*ibid*). Attempts to isolate Iran were undertaken in response to Grand Ayatollah Khomeini's proclamations promoting the violent overthrow of regional monarchies which were supported by the Western powers, in favor of Islamic governments, all of which would answer to Khomeini as the newly crowned leader of the Muslim world (Shuster 2007).

Current security threats, as envisioned by Iran, focus largely on the United States. The United States has already forcibly overthrown the governments of Iran's largest neighbors in Afghanistan and Iraq. The United States is also reportedly drawing up invasion plans or investigating the possibility of strategically bombing the Iranian nuclear infrastructure; whether real

or imagined, such plans would necessitate contingency planning (CNN 2006). Official U.S. policy since the overthrow of the Iranian shah in 1979 has long been focused on regime change (Takeyh 2007). A perceived threat by the United States could lead to a nuclear weapons program, as the government in Tehran recognizes its inability to counter U.S. aggression with conventional forces. Although considerable in size, the Iranian army is in fact poorly structured and lacks the advanced technology that would be necessary to repel a U.S. attack (Kemp 2001, 12). While such a threat from the United States may be questionable (considering its military is already stretched thin), Iran may also develop a bomb because it sees itself as lacking a credible security guarantor. But aside from the United States, Iran faces few security threats as the current situation stands (Chubin 2001, 17).

In regards to a localized threat, the only way a regional threat would materialize would be a direct result of Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons. Sunni states such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia would be inclined to pursue their own nuclear weapons programs should Iran decide to acquire a nuclear weapon (GlobalSecurity.org 2007). Such a move would clearly worsen Iran's security, and would be the direct result of Iran's own actions. As it currently stands, the security model does not seem to sufficiently explain an Iranian nuclear weapons program.

### *South African Domestic Politics Reasoning*

The domestic politics model is perhaps the best explanation for the South African nuclear weapons program. The history of the program focuses largely on bureaucratic infighting and secrecy. The initial decision to pursue a peaceful nuclear energy program came from the Minister of Mines rather than South Africa's Prime Minister (Liberman 2001, 64). That the energy program did not come from the Prime Minister but rather the Minister of Mines speaks directly to Sagan's notion that programs spring from parochial domestic bureaucratic interests. As the nuclear energy program progressed, the South African AEB chose to selectively acknowledge its research. And the ministers who did know of the program decided not to share their knowledge of the nuclear research (Liberman 2001, 65). Again, such secrecy can be attributed to bureaucratic self-interest, as those individuals who knew of the nuclear energy program did not wish to lose such a valuable project.

As the nuclear energy research progressed, the program was overtaken by Defense Minister P.W. Botha and its military applicability was taken into consideration. It is important to note that Botha did this without

the support of the military, which thought its conventional forces could handle any security threat (Liberman 2001, 66). As was the case with the nuclear energy program, the nuclear weapons program was pursued by Botha to appease the Defense Ministry's constituents and maintain Botha's own bureaucratic interests. Proof of the domestic politics model as the best explanation for the weapons program can be seen in the fact that the South African State Security Council, meant to coordinate security policy between the different executive ministries, failed to be informed of the program until after the nuclear weapons had been dismantled in 1991 (*ibid*). If the weapons program had truly been of vital national interest to South Africa, the council tasked with coordinating national security priorities would have been made aware of the program's existence *prior* to the dismantlement of the nuclear weapons.

It is hard to determine precisely why South Africa acquired a nuclear weapon; however, what is known of the program's evolution lends itself to the domestic politics model. Applying Sagan's (1996) explanation of the domestic politics model, the nuclear energy complex, the military, and politicians played distinctive roles in the program. The nuclear energy complex, through the AEB and the Minister of Mines, created the nuclear energy research program without direction from the Prime Minister. Politicians such as the Defense Minister then used the energy program and subsequent nuclear research to suggest nuclear weapons acquisition, despite the objections of the military. The use of the program by the bureaucracies to promote their own interests is a direct testament to the use of the nuclear program to solidify bureaucratic strength. These key facts suggest endorsement of the domestic politics model, even if the actors involved chose to later attribute the program to security concerns.

### *Possible Iranian Domestic Politics Reasoning*

It will be hard to know if a nuclear weapons program in Iran will result from domestic politics because the exact structure of Iran's government and military is not clearly defined. The ambiguity of the Iranian political structure is due in large part to the uncertain role of the Iranian mullahs and the lack of understanding on the specific role of the current supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in the political sphere. While there is a 290- member national assembly, its candidates must be approved by the Guardian Council, which answers to the mullahs rather than the politicians (Economist Intelligence Unit 2007). Additionally, Iran features two distinct forces within its military: the regular armed forces and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRG). While the regular forces are tasked with tra-

ditional security responsibilities, the IRG serve to protect the mullahs and Islamic institutions and to ensure the success of the Islamic Revolution (BBC News 2007). This decentralized structure of the government and military does not bode well for non-proliferation efforts.

While South Africa also lacked a clearly defined political structure, the autonomy of the mullahs and the IRG present many more opportunities for actors to influence a nuclear weapons decision. The South African program was the result of a culmination of independent efforts by the AEB, the Minister of Mines, and the Minister of Defense, and it is just as likely any future Iranian program can come from a number of possible sources. Not only could the traditional actors move for nuclear weapons acquisition, but Iran could also see a push for weaponization at the behest of religious leaders. If the mullahs or the IRG feel the Islamic Revolution is threatened - using a liberal interpretation of threats - then either of these actors has the power and resources to undertake a nuclear weapons program. Given the difficulty in understanding the structure of politics in Iran, it is hard to make a clear decision. But the autonomy of the actors along with the added element of perceived religious duties certainly makes the domestic politics model a prime reason for future nuclear weapons programs.

### *South African Norms Reasoning*

It is no secret that those countries possessing nuclear weapons are held in higher regard than most other nations. As William Epstein (1977, 21) states, "It has become obvious to all countries that the acquisition of nuclear weapons and the technology for making them enhance a nation's prestige and status in the world, not just in military terms, but also in other ways. States possessing these arms are given greater weight in the entire range of foreign policy matters." For example, although both Japan and West Germany had far surpassed the economic standings of France and the United Kingdom in the late 1900s, France and the United Kingdom were believed to have been given leading roles in the international community because of their positions as nuclear weapons states (*ibid*).

It was thought by some individuals within South Africa that possession of a nuclear weapon would force the West to more seriously consider Pretoria's concerns (Betts 1979, 107). However, these accounts are given little credence as South Africa would have already seen how the international community reacted to nuclear weapons programs in Israel, India and Taiwan. By the mid 1970s, Israel and Taiwan were already internationally isolated for their own suspected nuclear weapons programs, and South

Africa also had the distinct disadvantage of international disdain for its apartheid regime (Betts 1979, 103). While some individuals involved in the weapons procurement would later claim the norms model played a role, historical facts do not support this notion.

### *Possible Iranian Norms Reasoning*

Given the difficulties in understanding the political structure of Iran, it is hard to make determinations as to the seriousness of normative reasoning in a possible Iranian nuclear weapons program. But several key facts can help determine if the norms model may fit. It is known that Iran wants to play a more important role in the Middle East and sees itself as the regional power (Farhi 2001, 47). As a result, Iran may view possession of nuclear weapons as a way to solidify its position and place it atop the Middle East power structure. South Africa's lengthy application of apartheid has already shown that pariah regimes do not necessarily adhere to the normative beliefs of the international community and it is not unreasonable to believe Iran holds international norms in similar disregard. Iran may see a nuclear weapons program as helping it to counter Israel's suspected arsenal and thereby position Tehran as the protector of the Islamic world. Iran may also view the relative success of North Korea in guaranteeing several concessions following a purported nuclear detonation in late 2006 as an example of what possession of a nuclear weapon can accomplish.

Iran is an economically deprived country following its international isolation and the Iran-Iraq war, and this may lead to desperation. Because of the need to assuage the economic demands of the population, it is conceivable to believe Tehran would be willing to create a nuclear weapons capability in order to again get the United States and other world powers to the bargaining table. Tehran has already claimed it needs nuclear energy so it can sell its oil on the international market with the current record prices. With oil exports currently accounting for upwards of 80 percent of Iran's total export earnings, such a claim carries weight (El-Khawas 2005, 24). But if Tehran gets desperate and feels the need to secure additional funds, it may view the $4 billion in energy aid and concessions received by North Korea as a tantalizing reward for a nuclear weapons capability (Farhi 2001, 49). However, it is not clear that the use of nuclear blackmail would fit within Sagan's norms model. Instead, the domestic politics model is the most likely answer to Iranian weapons acquisition, with the prestige factor exaggerated by politicians in order to win support from the Iranian populace.

## The Decision to Dismantle

There are a few general principles which are intended to prevent states from going nuclear. Arguably the greatest disincentive for weapons acquisition is the loss of security guarantees (Epstein 1977, 20). As it stands, almost all parties to the non-proliferation regime have various security guarantees with the major powers. Additionally, many of the nuclear powers have agreed not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states. Withdrawal from the non-proliferation regime in order to secure nuclear weapons, however, leaves a state particularly vulnerable to attack, be it conventional or nuclear. Other incentives for adhering to non-proliferation standards can include financial assistance, energy aid, or increased business cooperation. Unfortunately for states such as South Africa or Iran, their status as pariah states prior to weapons acquisition means such incentives are lost.

The domestic politics model best explains weapons development in South Africa. Although those responsible for the situation used normative and security excuses in explaining weapons development, these accounts were given after the weapons program had already been secretly created and dismantled. Instead, much of the evidence supports a push by a select few. The nuclear energy complex, through the AEB, clearly sought to initiate nuclear energy research and did so without the support of the Prime Minister but rather with the approval of the Minister of Mines. The reason for weaponization of the nuclear program is still contested, but it seems as though weapons acquisition came largely at the direction of the Minister of Defense.

It would appear as though Iran will likely follow a similar path, should it eventually pursue nuclear weapons. Iran does not realistically face a security threat at the moment, unless Tehran ops to pursue a nuclear weapon. The applicability of the norms model is a possibility, but it seems much more likely to be manipulated by bureaucratic actors to hide their own parochial self-interests. Because of the factionalized Iranian political structure, it is conceivable that a select number of actors could conduct a covert nuclear weapons program. Should the mullahs decided to use the IRG to produce such a weapon, little would be known within the Iranian populace because of the secrecy with which the religious leaders operate. But the importance in comparing Iran and South Africa is to understand how to rollback a possible Iranian nuclear weapons program. In order to determine how best to approach the Iranians, the circumstances leading to South African dismantlement must be fully understood.

## Dismantling the South African Nuclear Weapons Program

It is hard to pinpoint exactly what caused the dismantling of the South African nuclear weapons program; the same ambiguity which surrounded the implementation of the nuclear weapons program also characterized the dismantlement of the nuclear weapon inventory. A few points are important, however, in interpreting what may have caused South Africa's capitulation to international demands. One fact which is not disputed is that the dismantlement of the nuclear weapons program came at the behest of South African President F.W. de Klerk following his 1989 ascension to power. His clear anti-nuclear weapons stance dictated his appointment of key advisors into positions which oversaw the entire weapons program (Liberman 2001, 75). What is less clear is the reasoning for such a move.

As the 1980s progressed, South Africa's standing in the world continued to deteriorate. International sanctions remained in place and were inextricably linked not only to South Africa's nuclear weapons program but to its apartheid policies as well (Liberman 2001, 78). As South Africa's economy continued to stagnate, the government became more sensitive to international sanctions and began to search for a way out of its predicament (Liberman 2001, 48). An obvious choice was to give up the nuclear weapons which were at the heart of the sanctions, although de Klerk also recognized apartheid would have to be dealt with (Liberman 2001, 83).

By the time de Klerk entered office, there were few reasons for South Africa to hold on to its nuclear weapons inventory. South Africa's security situation--real or imagined--had improved prior to de Klerk's presidency. Many of the perceived security threats to Pretoria had significantly eroded by the late 1980s and those that remained were domestic in nature (Liberman 2001, 83). This forced the South African government to put further emphasis on its domestic constituencies and required addressing the country's economic shortfalls. The notion of South Africa gaining international prestige as a result of weapons possession had also been proven false by the end of the 1980s. South Africa's weapons program only further hardened the international opposition to the Pretoria government. As de Klerk came into power, he recognized that the nuclear program, along with apartheid, would have to be eliminated in order to reengage the international community and allow Pretoria to seek international investment. In the end, the nuclear program was not addressed until there was a drastic reconfiguring of the government.

## Addressing an Iranian Nuclear Weapons Program

Perhaps the most important facet of the South African rollback was the

united front with which the international community approached South Africa. The 1977 UN sanctions succeeded in truly isolating Pretoria and forced its eventual capitulation to international demands. While it is true that sanctions took nearly fifteen years to reach their desired effect, the strong commitment by the international community forced Pretoria to recognize the need to end its nuclear program in order to reengage the international community. Since the necessary cohesion has thus far been lacking in regards to Iran, this option does not present itself as being particularly feasible. It should be mentioned that there is some hope for a united front in the future. The European Union powers; England, France, and Germany (EU3), have moved closer to the U.S. stance in questioning the Iranian program's purpose (Crook 2006, 482). However, Russia has resumed its shipment of nuclear fuel for the Bushehr reactor following the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate, which claimed Iran had abandoned its nuclear weapons program (Reuters 2008). It seems increasingly unlikely the international community will be able to agree on an appropriate sanctions regime and will instead pass sanctions with minimal effect.

Another tactic could focus on security guarantees. The EU3 have sought Iranian explanations of past improprieties in exchange for agreeing not to refer Iran's case to the UN Security Council (Sultan 2005, 135). But such a move has been divisive in the past as it goes directly against the United States' position. The best scenario would be for the United States to offer its own security guarantee as Iran considers it the most viable threat. Washington could drop its longstanding policy of regime change in Iran and assert a commitment not to use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear state. There is some hope for such reengagement based on recent high level diplomatic meetings between Iran and the United States; however, this will have to significantly progress in order to improve upon nearly three decades of animosity.

Another form of a security guarantee could come through a push for a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East, a move supported by Iran in past statements (Farhi 2001, 41). Such a tactic would require the United States to apply pressure on Israel, which is not unthinkable but would certainly require a considerable amount of diplomacy. As the South African case proved, addressing security concerns eliminates an important excuse for weapons possession. If the United States can guarantee Iran's security, Tehran would have few incentives to pursue nuclear weapons. At the very least, the United States would then be better positioned to garner international support for a comprehensive sanctions regime, should Tehran pursue weaponization despite lacking a credible security threat.

A less proactive response to the Iranian program could be to simply wait and see how the coming Iranian elections play out. The current Iranian President and staunch U.S. foe, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is up for reelection in 2009 and if the 2006 elections are any indication, Ahmadinejad is losing considerable influence as he has failed to deliver on his previous campaign promises (Associated Press 2007). While this approach may be politically difficult for the United States, it is clear that South Africa's nuclear program was not bargained away until a willing executive came into power. If the United States were to continue its current policies, and more importantly, resist acting against Iran or further threaten Iran's national security, then it is conceivable that a new, more moderate president may be elected next. A more moderate regime, in conjunction with a dissolution of security threats, would place Iran in a similar position to South Africa's position the late 1980s, which ended with weapons dismantlement by Pretoria.

Whatever decision is made, it is important for the international community to approach Iran's suspected weapons program from a united position. This will require not only moderation of the U.S. stance but also a commitment by countries such as China and Russia to adhere to the principles that begot the non-proliferation regime. There also needs to be recognition that any efforts will have to be sustained for an extended period of time.

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