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A Nuclear Iran is America's Worst Nightmare
By Lawrence J. Haas

When it comes to national security, prudence demands that we confront the biggest threats before they develop – not after. And no bigger threat to the United States and its allies looms than an Iran with nuclear weapons.

Preventing Tehran from getting nuclear weapons does not necessarily mean war with the Islamic Republic. We have a host of other tools at our disposal, from pressuring Iran's leaders to engaging with its pro-Western populace. But make no mistake: we must do whatever it takes, even if that means military action.

An Iran with nuclear weapons is America's worst nightmare. It would give a virulently anti-Western state that's already the world's most active state sponsor of terrorism the means to carry out – itself or through its terrorist network – its threats to eliminate not just Israel but the United States as well.

We must take leaders at their word, for history provides sobering lessons of what happens when we do not. So, when Iran's fanatical President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, vows to “wipe Israel off the face of the map” and promises a “world without America” that is “attainable, and surely can be achieved,” we should react accordingly.

Ahmadinejad and the mullah-crazy that sanctions his Presidency surely act like they mean it. Iran not only continues to pursue its aggressive globe agenda, it is also building its capacity for more mischief.

“Iran remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism,” the State Department wrote in its most recent annual report. Specifically, Tehran helps plan and support terrorist acts; provides funding, training, and weapons for Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other key Middle East terrorist groups; is working to destabilize Iraq; and refuses to bring to justice the senior al-Qaeda leaders it detained in 2003.

While pursuing its nuclear program, Iran is also building its conventional weapons. It recently bought North Korean missiles with the range to hit Europe, and U.S. intelligence says it's far along in developing a missile that can carry a nuclear warhead, according to Haaretz, the Israeli newspaper.

Iran is planning for war with the United States. In a recent interview on Iranian television, the Iranian Army's Chief of Joint Staff, General Abdorrahim Musavi, said the Islamic Republic is preparing “the equipment, structures, and tactics necessary” to confront what he calls America's “strengths and weaknesses.”

While posing a direct threat to the United States, Israel, and our European allies, a nuclear Iran would destabilize the entire Middle East. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and other nearby states would feel compelled to launch their own nuclear programs, spreading those weapons across a volatile region on which much of the world depends for its energy needs.

But, for the United States, refusing to accept a nuclear Iran does not necessarily mean war with Tehran. If our long-term goal is “regime change,” as it should be, we have numerous tools at our disposal.

Working with our allies, we should ratchet up the pressure on Iran’s leaders by imposing sanctions targeted specifically at them. These sanctions could include a freezing of assets, restrictions on travel, and an overall refusal to engage with them as colleagues on the world stage.

Simultaneously, we should strengthen our ties to the Iranian people, who strongly oppose the regime and strongly support the United States. While providing covert support to dissidents, we should invest much more in television, radio, the internet and other means of communication to talk directly to Iranians. A popular insurrection that replaces the current regime with a moderate one may be achievable.

Either way, an Iran with nuclear weapons is simply too dangerous for the United States to accept. We must do whatever it takes to prevent it from coming to pass. Anything less would be irresponsible.

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