

# Balancing Ends, Ways, and Means: The Case for Reviving Support for “Regime Change from Within” in Iran

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With talks between six world powers and Iran over a nuclear deal at an impasse, Congress and the White House continue to spar over how many sanctions to lift to keep Iran’s negotiators at the table.<sup>173</sup> In the meantime, Iran’s Supreme Leader, the Ayatollah Khamenei, has repeatedly said that his nation will “not bow” to pressure from world powers on the nuclear issue.<sup>174</sup> The Obama administration argues that despite the missed deadline, progress in talks is occurring and that the U.S. should stay the course.<sup>175</sup> Negotiation, after all, takes time, and the conflict with Iran is not just over nuclear weapons and such a reduction is not in the interests of the U.S.

Beyond the problem of nuclear weapons, Iran’s continued export of terror, its actions to destabilize other countries in the Middle East, and its disregard for the civil and human rights of its own citizens presents a complex challenge. Understanding these issues is critical to understanding the nature of the conflict. Complicating the situation is due to the presence of an ideology rooted in opposition to the U.S. This ideology, promoted by the regime’s Supreme Leader and implemented by its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, has made it possible for the regime to rationalize a combination of conventional and unconventional warfare (including terrorism, sabotage, and surrogate war) beyond its borders and repression of its own citizens at home. The center of gravity, the focal point that holds the ideology and these activities together is the concept of *velayat-e-faqih* (absolute rule by the clerics) and its extension *sudur-i inqilab* (export of revolution).

## Nature of the Conflict

An axiom of Carl von Clausewitz, the Prussian military theorist, is that accurate determination of the nature of a conflict is critical to choosing the right strategy. The nature of the conflict in Clausewitz’s words “influences its purpose and its means.”<sup>176</sup> The first step is assessing its nature. The conflict with Iran has multiple layers. At one level, it resembles protracted social conflicts rooted in decades of mistrust and suspicion.<sup>177</sup> At another level, it is a struggle for power and influence in the Middle East. At a third level, it is a “contest of ideas” about how societies should be governed and how

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173 Zengerle, Patricia. 2014. “U.S. Congress seen backing extension of Iran nuclear pact.” *Reuters*, July 2014.

174 The Associated Press. 2014. “Khamenei: Iran won’t bow to pressure in nuclear talks.” *Haaretz*, May 13.

175 Hirschfeld Davis, Julie. 2014. “Obama Hints at Extensions for Iran Nuclear Tasks.” *New York Times*, July 16.

176 Clausewitz, Carl von. 1989. *On War*. Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 90.

177 On the Iranian side, grievances go back more than 60 years spanning the U.S. role in the overthrow of Iran’s democratically elected prime minister in 1953, its subsequent support for the 26-year dictatorship of the Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and its later backing of Saddam Hussein in his war against Iran. On the U.S. side grievances date to the 1979 takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran and the subsequent holding hostage of its staff for 444 days. They include Iran’s role in the terrorist attacks on U.S. forces in Beirut (1983), Saudi Arabia (1996), Iranian support for extremist anti-U.S. movements in Lebanon, Gaza, Iraq, Afghanistan and more recently Syria.

they should conduct their affairs globally.<sup>178</sup> Within these layers are multiple intertwined issues that cannot be easily separated and put back together. Each of these issues, in addition, has second or third order effects. While Iran's apparent pursuit of nuclear weapons, with its potential for a cascade of proliferation, has properly absorbed the administration's attention, the regime's continuing export of terror, its meddling in the affairs of other countries, and its brutal campaign of repression against its own citizens at home are equally troubling.

The nature of the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union is different from that between Iran and the U.S.; however, there are strategic lessons to be learned. In its contest with the Soviet Union, the U.S. used a combination of hard and soft power strategies to contain its adversary and support the aspirations of the Soviet peoples. This strategy was largely successful.<sup>179</sup> Today, Iran's supreme leader frequently complains that the Iranian regime is the target of a concerted "soft war" campaign (*jang-e-narm*), much like the one the U.S. used in the Soviet Union, to destroy its identity and bring about regime change.<sup>180</sup> In fact, the Clinton and Bush administrations did employ a number of soft war strategies to support the aspirations of the Iranian people, but the Obama administration has explicitly abandoned most of these efforts and it is Iran that has sought to master soft war strategies to pursue its own interests regionally and globally.<sup>181</sup> To this end, the regime has even opened a "soft war headquarters tasked with planning and executing Iran's own soft war strategy." This may be because, while the U.S. has become increasingly fixed on hard power initiatives (carrots and sticks), Iran's leaders see soft power as the biggest threat to the continuation of the regime<sup>182</sup> and fear most the prospect of regime change from within.

## The Center of Gravity

Clausewitz reminds us that the Center of Gravity (CoG), "the hub of all power and movement," should be the focal point in the construction of strategy.<sup>183</sup> While the concept of CoG is variously defined (the U.S. marines equates it with the adversary's weakness whereas the U.S. army sees it as the "source of the adversary's strength"), there is a general agreement that the CoG is the hub or "centripetal force" that tends to hold the system or structure together<sup>184</sup> and allows it to "act or accomplish a task or purpose."<sup>185</sup> As such, it provides "a framework within which competing demands for resources can be prioritized."<sup>186</sup>

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178 Kagan, Frederick W., and Pletka, Danielle. 2014. "America vs. Iran: The Competition for the Future of the Middle East." *A Report by the American Enterprise Institute*, January. p.5

179 Joseph Nye, "The Decline of America's Soft Power," *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2004), pp. 16-20.

180 Author's Note: In a recent speech for example, Khamenei clarified that for "the Arrogance confronting the Islamic regime...the priority today is what is called soft war; that is war using cultural tools, through infiltration [of our society], through lies, through spreading rumors" and "creating doubt in people's hearts and minds." Quoted in Farzan Sabet and Roozbeh Safshekan, "Soft War: A New Episode in the Old Conflict between Iran and the United States," *IranPolitick*, The Iran Political Analysis Project, Annenberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania (November 2013).

181 See Hiva Feizi and Babak Talebi, "Iran's Soft Power Borne of Necessity and Complexity of its Multi-Dimensional Audience," *Exchange: The Journal of Public Diplomacy*: Vol. 3, (1), Article 6, 2012. See also Sabet and Safshekan, "Soft War."

182 The Associated Press. 2012. "'Soft War' On Iran Is Biggest Threat to Country, Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari Claims." *Huffington Post*, September 03.

183 Clausewitz, p. 703

184 Antulio Echevarria II, "Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: It's Not What We Thought," *Naval War College Review* LVI, no. 1 (Winter 2003).

185 Dale C. Eikmeier, "Center of Gravity Analysis," *Military Review* (July-August 2004), p. 2.

186 Tim Bird, "UK Effects-Based Planning and Centre of Gravity Analysis: An Increasingly Dysfunctional Relationship," *RUSI Journal*, April 2008, p. 48.

The current U.S. administration has defined the CoG in terms of Iran's nuclear program. But the "real center of gravity", against which U.S. and allied efforts should be focused on the regime itself.<sup>187</sup> More specifically, it is the ideology that underpins the regime and encourages Iran's unique combination irregular warfare abroad and repression at home as a means for Iran to export its revolution and pursue influence.<sup>188</sup>

Since its inception, or at least since the Ayatollah Khomeini took over the reins of the revolution, the regime has been committed to the concept of *velayat-e-faqih* (absolute clerical rule) and its corollary *sudur-i inqilab* (export of revolution). In theory, the concept of *velayat-e-faqih* implied a "utopian Islamic society" in which "the state would be ruled over by a theocratic philosopher-king – a man so learned in Islamic law that all of his peers and all of his countrymen would recognize that only he could provide "right-minded" guidance."<sup>189</sup> In practice, the concept conferred absolute authority on a Supreme Leader, first the Ayatollah Khomeini, now the Ayatollah Khamenei, allowing each of these individuals in turn to trample on the democratic principles at the heart of the original revolution, establishing what the renowned religious scholar, Dr. Abdul Karim Soroush, has called a "religious tyranny."<sup>190</sup> Meanwhile the concept of "sudur-i inqilab" made it possible for the regime to rationalize terrorism and other forms of irregular war as a religious duty to "propagate Islam" (*tablig-e eslami*) and fulfill what the Ayatollah Khomeini envisioned as Iran's "manifest destiny" i.e. to become a superpower on a level with the United States.<sup>191</sup> The ensuing state went on to engage in a campaign of brutal repression including the massacre of as many as 20,000-30,000 political dissidents at home in the 1980s.<sup>192</sup> Unfortunately, the practice of executing dissidents has not ceased and if anything has worsened in the last year.<sup>193</sup>

## Ends, Ways and Means

Clausewitz was clear about the connection between ends, ways, and means describing them as a "paradoxical trinity."<sup>194</sup> The first task, he argued, in any contest (whether absolute war or a more limited contest), is to define the goal, the desired end-state at the conclusion of the conflict. The ends, as Col. Arthur Lykke points out, clarify the objectives: what is to be accomplished. The ways are the concepts and courses of action explaining how the ends are to be accomplished using available resources. The means are the resources needed to apply the concept or action.<sup>195</sup> Means may be tangible or

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187 See Robert Maginnis "Iran's Real Center of Gravity," *Human Events*, August 14, 2012.

188 This conception of the CoG is in line with the view that "ideas principles and moral aspects may be the centripetal force" that constitutes the CoG and fuels and drives an organization. See Joakim Karlquist, *The Center of Gravity Concept: Informed by the Information Environment* (NY: BiblioScholar, Oct. 2012), p. 41.

189 Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America* (NY: Random House, 2004), p. 144.

190 Soroush, Abdulkarim. 2010. "We must have a Referendum in Iran." Interview. February 1st.

191 Bar, Shmuel. "Iranian Terrorist Policy and Export of Revolution," Working Paper, The Ninth Annual Herzliya Conference on the Balance of Israel's National Security and Resistance, Feb 2-4, 2009.

192 Author's Note: The majority of those killed were supporters of the People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI), although supporters of other opponents including the Tudeh Party of Iran were executed as well. In 2012 the families of many of the victims initiated an international commission named Iran Tribunal to investigate the mass killing of Iran's political prisoners. See Bowcott, Owen. 2012. "Tribunal to investigate 1980s massacre of political prisoners in Iran." *The Guardian*, October 18. See also Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions*, (University of California Press, 1999), pp. 209-228.

193 Rafizadeh, Majid. 2014. "Surge in Executions and Human Rights Violations in Iran: Evidence of Rouhani's 'Moderate' Rule?" *Huffington Post*, April 04.

194 Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

195 See H. Richard Yarger, "Toward a Theory of Strategy: Art Lykke and the U.S. Army War College Strategy Model," in J. Boone Bartholomew, ed., *the U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues, Volume I: Theory of War and Strategy* (Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College, July 27, 2010), pp. 45-52.

intangible and can include forces, people, monetary resources, and information. The challenge is to achieve a balance between ends, ways, and means. Otherwise, there is what Col. Bruce Reider calls a “strategic disconnect.”<sup>196</sup>

How does the current administration conceptualize the end-state it wants to achieve in the situation with Iran? And how well do the ways and means the administration has chosen align with the end objectives?

## Ends

President Obama has repeatedly said that the desired end-state he hopes for is an Iran without nuclear weapons. The U.S. State Department has put out broader objectives. According to a May 2013 statement, the desired end-state in Iran is a country that no longer “threatens the peace and stability of the region and tramples the freedom of its citizens.”<sup>197</sup> The extent to which the ways and the means the U.S. has adopted align with this goal, however, is debatable.

## Means

To date almost all of the political discussion on Iran has focused on the means the administration can employ in the negotiating arena. Can Congress find the right number of carrots and sticks to keep Iran’s negotiators at the table? Particular focus has been on sanctions. Which ones should be eased? Which ones should be continued? What are the relative benefits of easing multilateral vs. bilateral sanctions and how will Iran’s Resistance Economy figure into the equation?<sup>198</sup> The means the U.S. and the P5+1 negotiators can employ are many. The problem, however, is not a matter of too few “means.” Rather, as Reider has argued in relation to another conflict, that in Iraq, it is a matter of finding the best “ways.”

## Ways

The term “nuclear threat” has become the focal point for almost all of the policy debate. Within this debate there is a considerable controversy over whether Iran is enriching uranium for peaceful purposes (as its leaders claim) or to develop a nuclear arsenal (as many believe). But the problem with Iran is not simply its potential nuclear arsenal. The larger and more strategically critical challenge is the regime’s effort to project its influence using a combination of conventional and unconventional weapons that include nuclear arms but also encompass terrorism and asymmetric war abroad as well as brutal repression at home.

Iran continues to be the world’s leading sponsor of terrorism and there is no evidence that this activity with its own destabilizing effects is decreasing. If anything, according to the U.S. State Department’s most recent *Annual Country Report on Terrorism*, released in April 2014, Iran has been working tirelessly (through its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), its Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) and its long-time ally Hezbollah) to extend its global terror network with a consequent “resurgence” in its state-sponsored terrorism worldwide.<sup>199</sup> These activities and their effects on international security are unlikely to be halted because of a nuclear deal.

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196 Reider, Bruce J. “Strategic Realignment: Ends, Ways and Means in Iraq,” *Parameters*, winter 2007-2008, pp. 46-57. Reider makes the case that failure to adequately ascertain the nature of the conflict and balance ends, ways and means has led to a flawed strategy in Iraq.

197 Sherman, Wendy (U.S. State Department), “U.S. Policy toward Iran: Written Statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee” (Washington DC, May 2013).

198 For a discussion of Iran’s Resistance Economy see Afshar Babak, “Threat of Sanctions and Management of Resistance Economy in Iran,” *Am J Sci Research*, March 2013, pp. 111-116.

199 U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Counterterrorism. *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013*. NCES 225886. Washington, D.C.: U.S. United States Department of State Publication, April 2014.

Indeed, Rouhani's choices for government and foreign relations appointments bode poorly for such a scenario. According to some reports, Iran's new defense minister, Brig Gen. Hossein Dehghan, appointed in 2013, was actively involved in plotting the U.S. Marine Barracks bombing in 1983 and his whole career was spent in the Revolutionary Guards, an arm of the government that has specialized in exporting terrorism.<sup>200</sup> More recently in April 2014, Rouhani appointed as Iran's UN ambassador, Hamid Aboutalebi, a known member of the student group that held 52 Americans hostage for 444 days in the 1979 seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Teheran.<sup>201</sup> (While Mr. Aboutalebi's role in the hostage crisis may have been minor, the underlying signal that, 35 years after the fact, the regime continues to promote such individuals, is troubling).

The regime's expanding use of proxies to destabilize its neighbors is another matter of urgent concern. Iran still provides small arms shipments and training to the Taliban in Afghanistan. In addition, and despite its pledge to support Iraq's stabilization, it gives regular guidance and training to Shia militants in Iraq. It has also deployed several hundred military specialists, including senior Quds Force commanders to Syria and is believed to have spent billions of dollars to support the Assad regime as it continues its brutal crackdown on the Syrian people, a crackdown that has resulted in the deaths of more than 70,000 civilians.<sup>202</sup> Additionally, Iran has been sending weapons to secessionist movements to foment dissent and destabilize Yemen.<sup>203</sup> These activities too are unlikely to stop in the presence of a nuclear deal, if one occurs. As Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, indicated as recently as November 2013, Iran is determined on "challenging the influence of America in the region and extending its own influence"<sup>204</sup> and it does not appear to be inclined to change how it pursues its influence "one iota."<sup>205</sup>

Further, to support these activities and defend against potential fallout, Iran has intensified a brutal crackdown on its own citizens. While the regime's record on human rights has always been poor, its repression of ordinary Iranians reached new heights in the wake of the disputed elections of 2009. Protestors were arrested en masse, tortured, raped and killed in prison. Today, as many as 500 Iranian dissidents, including minority rights and women's activists, are still behind bars. Leading opposition figures such as Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi, and Zahra Rahnavaard have now been held under house arrest for three years without charges or trial, and "despite President Rouhani's numerous promises to respect people's rights following his June 2013 electoral victory," serious rights abuses continue.<sup>206</sup> One of the most alarming trends is the surge in executions. Iran is now ranked number one, above China, in executions per capita. According to Ahmed Shaheed, Iran's UN special rapporteur for human rights, 176 people were put to death in January, February, and early March of 2014 alone. Several were executed in public and many sources believe the numbers are much higher. According to other reports, including the Human Rights Documentation Center, more than 500 people have been executed since Rouhani took office.<sup>207</sup> These trends, coupled with the regime's record of arbitrary detention and unfair trials, discrimination against minorities, mistreatment of political prisoners and restrictions on freedom of expression, led the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-

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200 Waterman, Shaun. 2013. "Iran's New Defense Minister: Hezbollah Chief who planned 1983 Marine Barracks Attack." *The Washington Times*, August 13.

201 Dehghan, Saeed Kamali. 2014. "Iran Nominates Man Accused of links to 1979 Hostage Crisis as UN Ambassador." *The Guardian*, April 03.

202 Sherlock, Ruth. 2014. "Iran Boosts Support to Syria." *The Telegraph*, February 21

203 Staff Writer. 2014. "Yemen's President Accuses Iran of Meddling." *Al Arabiya News*, March 31

204 Takeyh, Ray. 2014. "The U.S. Needs a Deal with Iran, not Détente." *The Washington Post*, January 12.

205 Paivar, Amir. 2013. "Iran Nuclear Talks: Tehran 'will not step back one iota.'" BBC NEWS, November 20.

206 Human Rights Watch. 2014. "Iran: Abuses Persist Under New Government." *HRW*, January 21.

207 Rafizadeh, Majid. 2014. "Surge in Executions and Human Rights Violations in Iran: Evidence of Rouhani's 'Moderate' Rule?"

moon, to deliver a sharp rebuke to Iran's president, Hassan Rouhani, as recently as March 2014.<sup>208</sup> The problem is that such abuses not only affect individuals and communities. In "a world of complex interdependencies and trans-border activities," they also have "spillover effects."<sup>209</sup> In particular they can increase the flow of refugees with destabilizing effects in neighboring countries. In addition, as Tim Dunne points out they "diminish the constraining capacity of key norms" and in the process give a "green light" to other states to engage in similar repression in blatant violation of international standards of behavior.<sup>210</sup> Logic dictates that multidimensional conflicts require multidimensional approaches. The "ways" need to fit the nature of the conflict, one that includes multiple layers and multiple issues and involves a spectrum of threats, not just the potential threat of Iran building nuclear weapons.

Limits of negotiation: Unfortunately the U.S. has become fixed on a course of action that is both singular in nature and limited in scope. As William Zartman of Johns Hopkins University reminds us, negotiation, a form of hard bargaining, is a useful tool for single-issue conflicts. It is not a panacea for multifaceted, multidimensional conflicts. Nor does it ensure reconciliation or remove the causes of the conflict.<sup>211</sup> Negotiation has other drawbacks. In equal power situations, it often produces a deadlock. In asymmetric ones, such as that between the U.S. and Iran, the bigger power (in this case the U.S.) may try to dominate and impose its will, but the weaker side can employ a range of tactics to level the playing field. In his experience, Zartman found that the bigger party often "set the framework" while the "little party gnawed away at details." The little party also frequently used delay tactics: they blustered, dawdled, cajoled, borrowed power, vetoed temporarily (by walking out) or longer (by threatening withdrawal) – thereby increasing their effective power.<sup>212</sup> Iran's past behavior in negotiations has followed this pattern and its current posture in P5+1 negotiations is with the same pattern. As Abe Sofaer observes, Iran has called for a "comprehensive, long term dialogue" and it expects to be rewarded for each gesture with the progressive lifting of sanctions. Unfortunately, a "long" process could well enable Iran to avoid or reduce the impact of current sanctions while allowing the regime to move closer to developing a nuclear arsenal.<sup>213</sup>

Nor is it likely that the current nuclear negotiations will lead, as some believe, to a more systematic meaningful dialogue to resolve the larger palette of problems. As Ray Takeh points out:

"The two parties are on different sides in the regional context. They're on different sides in Syria. They're on different sides in the Gulf. They're on different sides in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. They're on different sides on issues of terrorism. And they're on different sides on issues of Iraq."<sup>214</sup>

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208 Dehghan, Saeed Kamali. 2014. "Ban Ki-Moon Rebukes Iranian President for Human Rights Failings." *The Guardian*, March 12.

209 See Ihsan Dagi, "Human Rights and International Security: The Challenge for NATO in the Mediterranean," *Mediterranean Quarterly*, summer 2002, pp. 119-134. See also Eric Neumayer, "Bogus Refugees? The determinants of asylum migration to western Europe," *International Studies Quarterly*, September 2005, pp. 389-409 "Bogus Refugees? The determinants of asylum migration to western Europe," *International Studies Quarterly*, September 2005, pp. 389-409.

210 Dunne, Tim " "The Rules of the Game are Changing': Fundamental Human Rights in Crisis after 9/11," *International Politics*, March/May 2007, pp. 269-286.

211 William Zartman and Saadia Touval, "International Mediation in the Post-Cold War Era," in Chester Crocker, Fen Hampson and Pamela all, eds., *Managing Global Chaos* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), pp. 445-461.

212 William Zartman, "The Structuralist Dilemma in Negotiation," in Roy Lewicki, Robert J. Bies, Blair H. Sheppard, eds., *Research on Negotiation in Organizations* (Greenwich CT: JAI Press, 1997), vol. 6, pp. 227-246.

213 Abe Sofaer, *Taking on Iran: Strength, Diplomacy and the Iranian Threat* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2013), p. 3. See also Cordesman, "The Best Deal."

214 Takeyh, Ray. 2013. "Media Call with Ray Takeyh on Iran Nuclear Deal." *Council on Foreign Relations*,

In addition, it is not necessarily in Iran's interest to "make peace" since opposition to the U.S. is such a core component of its identity.

## Rethinking Strategy

To make progress in resolving the larger situation with Iran the U.S. needs to take several steps. First it needs to reassess the nature of the conflict, a conflict that has multiple layers and issues. Second the U.S. needs to better coordinate ends, ways and means. Is the U.S. only interested in a non-nuclear Iran or does it seek the broader objective outlined by the U.S. State Department (an Iran that no longer continues "on a path that threatens the peace and stability of the region and tramples the freedom of its citizens")? Iran's neighbors are watching closely. The Saudis and other Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) have an interest in a non-nuclear Iran, but fear that a final deal could be at their expense. As Ian Black, writing for *The Guardian*, points out, "Iran's backing for Assad, its intimate relationship with Hezbollah in Lebanon and support and inspiration for Shias in Iraq, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia's eastern province are all issues of profound concern."<sup>215</sup> The Saudis have voiced special concern about sanctions relief. Referring to the \$7 billion dollars in interim relief, Anwar Eshki, Chairman of the Middle East Centre for Strategic and Legal Studies in Jeddah, for example, has asked "whether these funds will be used by the Iranian regime for its own people, or to further finance crises in the region."<sup>216</sup>

Iran's people are also watching. Is the U.S. willing to sacrifice *their* aspirations for a nuclear deal? Human rights lawyer and 2003 Nobel Prize peace prize laureate, Shirin Ebadi, together with Payam Akhavan, a founder of Iran Human Rights Documentation, worry that this may be the case. Noting that even as Iran's foreign minister sat with his Western counterparts in Geneva in November, shaking hands and celebrating an interim nuclear agreement, "the lifeless body of a young man hung from a crane in a bleak public square in Tehran, spreading fear among Iranians who suffer the world's highest per capita rate of executions." Iranians ask: "will the world community disregard human rights in the coming months to conclude a comprehensive nuclear deal?"<sup>217</sup>

The Obama administration has so far signaled that its predominant objective is a nuclear deal. While the U.S. has plenty of resources to make a deal with Iran's negotiators, there is no guarantee that Iran's Supreme Leader will agree to a final deal or that Iran will follow through and comply with it.<sup>218</sup> Nor will a deal solve the larger problems posed by the Iranian regime. Third, there is a need to shift strategy. The strategy (ways) needs to fit the nature of the conflict, one that includes multiple layers and multiple issues and involves a spectrum of threats.

The U.S. needs to pressure Iran with strategic combinations. In addition to hard power in the form of negotiation, sanctions and military threats, the U.S. should use its soft power resources to address the real center of gravity in Iran by reviving support for the Iranian opposition and its efforts to bring about "regime change from within."

Contrary to what many expected from a leader promoting the "audacity of hope," the Obama administration has avoided asserting meaningful "soft power" particularly in

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November 25.

215 Black, Ian. 2013. "Iran Nuclear Deal: Saudi Arabia and Gulf React with Caution." *The Guardian*, November 24.

216 Staff Writer. 2013. "Nuclear Deal Sparks Iran Hegemony Fear." *ARAB NEWS*, November 25.

217 Akhavan, Payam, and Ebadi, Shirin. 2013. "In Iran, Human Rights and Nuclear Security go Hand in Hand." *The Washington Post*, November 29.

218 Cordesman, Anthony H. "The Best Deal with Iran That We Can Get," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Nov 24, 2013.

relation to Iran where, as Mark Lagon observes, it might have made a difference not only for Iran but for American interests as well.<sup>219</sup> At no time was this more apparent than in June of 2009 when millions of Iranians poured into the streets to protest the results of an Iranian presidential election that was widely viewed as rigged and fraudulent. As the number of protestors swelled, filling the streets of Teheran, Orumiye Rasht, Tabriz and Zahedan, the U.S. administration was faced with a strategic and moral dilemma. Two months earlier, the president had declared in Prague that he wanted to work on curbing Iran's nuclear arms efforts and would seek "engagement with Iran based on mutual interests and respect."<sup>220</sup> Should he now side with those protesting the theft of an election, even if that meant antagonizing Iran's leaders and possibly narrowing the channels for nuclear diplomacy? For several days the president was silent. When he did speak up, he equivocated. "It is up to Iranians to make decisions about who Iran's leaders will be," he said, adding, "We respect Iranian sovereignty and want to avoid the United States being the issue inside of Iran."<sup>221</sup> Within days protestors were arrested en masse. Many were tortured. Many are still incarcerated. The Green Movement with its potential to bring about some degree of regime change (or at a minimum some degree of regime modification in the direction of a more democratic state) was crushed, at least temporarily.

There were those who said that defending the protesters would only encourage Iranian authorities to scapegoat them as pawns of the West, but Iran's leaders would do so anyway. The president clearly lost an opportunity. As Council on Foreign Relations President Richard Haass wrote in *Newsweek* the following January:

"I am a card-carrying realist on the grounds that ousting regimes and replacing them with something better is easier said than done... Critics will say promoting regime change will encourage Iranian authorities to tar the opposition as pawns of the West. But the regime is already doing so. Outsiders should act to strengthen the opposition and to deepen rifts among the rulers. This process is underway... Even a realist should recognize that it's an opportunity not to be missed."<sup>222</sup>

Robert Kagan of the Brookings Institution has long made the point that regime change in Teheran is the "best nonproliferation policy" and that the "odds of regime change are higher than the odds that the regime will give up its nuclear program." Unfortunately, the president has gone out of his way in Martin Indyk's words "to demonstrate acceptance of the government of Iran." This was a key element, as Kagan observes in the president's "grand bargain." In return for Iran agreeing to participate in nuclear talks, the U.S. would guarantee that it would not support Iran's opposition or in any way seek regime change.<sup>223 224</sup> Regrettably, this decision put the American president and his administration on the side of a government that represses its own people and continues to pursue its interests by exporting terrorism and promoting instability in a growing number of regimes worldwide.

The U.S. needs to shift its strategy towards increasing the prospects for regime change. As a first step, the administration needs to revise the idea that regime change in

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219 Lagon, Mark P. 2011. "The Values of Values: Soft Power under Obama." *World Affairs Journal*, September/October 2011.

220 Obama, Barack. "Remarks by President Barack Obama." Hradcany Square, Prague, Czech Republic. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. April 5, 2009

221 Obama, Barack. "Remarks by President Barack Obama." Hradcany Square, Prague, Czech Republic. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. June 15, 2009.

222 Richard Haass, "Haas Regime Change is the Only Way to Stop Iran," *Newsweek*, Jan 21, 2010.

223 Kagan, Robert. 2010. "How Obama Can Reverse Iran's Dangerous Course." *The Washington Post*, January 27.

224 Kagan, Robert. 2009. "Obama's Iran Realism." *The Guardian*, June 17.

Michael Reisman's words is "almost always a bad idea."<sup>225</sup> It is true that the right of states, however small or weak, to govern themselves without interference from outside states or powers, is a fundamental principle of the modern international system and any "general legitimization" of regime change is not likely to be tolerated under international law, as Reisman points out.<sup>226</sup> It is also true that the forcible toppling of states in the form of "military adventurism" can bring about consequences that are more catastrophic than the regimes they are meant to replace.<sup>227</sup> In addition, it is a known fact that regime change, whether from within or without, does not necessarily ensure an orderly transition to democracy. At the same time, the concept of regime change cannot simply be relegated to the trash bin of failed policies. As Reisman himself observes, international law does not simply guarantee sovereignty. It also guarantees human rights.<sup>228</sup> Moreover, in U.N Secretary General Kofi Annan's words, "state sovereignty in its most basic sense is being redefined ... States are now being widely understood to be instruments at the service of people and not vice versa."<sup>229</sup> In Annan's words, "when an individual state should undertake to use force to change the regime of another state, because the regime is both hideous and dangerous, both pathological and pathogenic, and because the formal decision structures of the international legal system prove inoperable."<sup>230</sup> In such cases, other overriding principles such as the Right to Protect<sup>231</sup> and the concept of Responsible Sovereignty promoted by Stephen Krasner may apply.<sup>232</sup>

As a second step, the U.S. needs to abandon the idea that pressure on Iran in the form of support for "regime change from within" will only derail talks. As Kenneth Pollack has pointed out, Iran does not moderate when the pressure is off but when it is high.<sup>233</sup>

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225 Michael Reisman, "Why Regime Change is (Almost Always) a Bad Idea." Manley O. Hudson Lecture. *The American Journal of International Law* 98, July 2004, pp. 516-525.

226 Ibid, p. 516.

227 Falk, Richard, Stevens, Jacqueline, and Rajagopal, Balakrishnan. *International Law and the Third World: Reshaping Justice* (Routledge Cavendish, 2008), p. 205.

228 Reisman, 516

229 Annan, Kofi. 1999. "The Question of Intervention: Statements by the Secretary General." United Nations, New York: United Nations, 1999

230 Reisman, p. 524.

231 For more on Right and Responsibility to Protect, see Perez de Cuellar, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization," A/46/1, September 13, 1991; Francis Deng, Sadiikiel Kimaro, Terrence Lyons, Donald Rothchild and William Zartman, *Sovereignty as Responsibility: Conflict Management in Africa* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1996); ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (Ottawa: IDRC, 2001); and UN GA, 'World Summit Outcome', A/60/1, October 24, 2005, at paragraphs 138-9. According the latter document, the responsibility to protect lies first with the state. However, there is an additional assertion that bystander states or the "international community" not only have a right but a collective responsibility to assist states in protecting their populations in situations where the host state is failing to do so. For more on history of the emergence of this concept, see Alex J. Bellamy, *Responsibility to Protect: The Global Effort to End Mass Atrocities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), chapters 2-3; and Bellamy, *Global Politics and the Responsibility to Protect: From Words to Deeds* (New York: Routledge, 2011), chapters 2-4. While these emerging norms are still a matter of debate since they conflict with long held principles of state sovereignty and the right of states freedom from external interference, they are beginning to take on the form of "enforceable customary law" to protect vulnerable populations from mass atrocities. See Luke Glanville, "The Responsibility to Protect beyond Borders," *Human Rights Law Review* 12, no.1 (2012): 1-32; Luke Glanville, "In Defense of the Responsibility to Protect," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 41, no. 1 (2013): 169-182. These trends have provided a rationale for a range of pro-active efforts to prevent human rights emergencies including democracy promotion and non-violent regime change.

232 Drawing on the observation that conflict threats, in the form of transnational terrorism, irregular war, regional war and humanitarian problems such as disenfranchisement and human rights abuses, are rooted in corrupt and insensitive governance, the concept of Responsible Sovereignty is especially relevant to Iran. See Stephen D. Krasner, "An Orienting Principle for Foreign Policy," *Policy Review* (Oct/Nov 2010).

233 Pollack, Kenneth M. *The Unthinkable: Iran, the Bomb and American Strategy* (New York: Simon and

As a third step, U.S. leaders need to be more forthright in speaking out on behalf of the Iranian people and their rights to a government that serves the people, not the other way around. Rouhani's human rights record if anything has been worse than that of his predecessor. The U.S. also needs to do whatever it can to push back against the power of Iran's Revolutionary Guards. Not only is the Revolutionary Guard Corps the primary force inside Iran that wants to militarize its nuclear program, as Abe Sofaer argues, it is the primary executor of the regime's terrorist agenda; it has been "complicit in the genocide in Syria" and it is the main force in the repression of Iran's people.<sup>234</sup>

## Conclusions

If the U.S. is serious about meeting the ongoing challenge posed by Iran, it needs to rethink its strategy. First, we need to reassess the nature of the conflict. The problem is not just the potential for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran's irregular behavior in the international sphere and its brutal repression of its own people at home are also profound concerns.

Second, we need to reexamine whether ends, ways and means are consistent and connected in the context of a larger strategy and the center of gravity in Iran. The means the U.S. has to ensure some level of a nuclear deal are sufficient. The U.S. however needs to move beyond a singular focus on the nuclear issue and develop more comprehensive ways to reduce Iran's export of terror and its brutal repression of its own citizens.

Third, the U.S. needs to find a strategy that is appropriate to the complexities of a multidimensional conflict that includes a potential for nuclear war and proliferation but also encompasses terrorist activity surrogate war and human rights violations. The notion that hard bargaining is the only alternative to the stark choice between accepting a nuclear Iran and preemptively striking its nuclear facilities is a false dichotomy. There are multiple "ways" and the U.S. should make use of a multi-dimensional approach that blends hard and soft power. In particular, the U.S. needs to direct more of its energies to combatting the ideology at the heart of these activities and the best way to accomplish this is by reviving support for regime change from within.

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Schuster, 2013).

234 Sofaer, Abraham D. 2014. "Hurt Iran's Hawks, Not Its People." *New York Times*, February 26.