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Commentary: *Tim Collins*

# The American Nuclear Empire and Iran

At a midmorning White House press conference on Wednesday 17 October 2007, President Bush raised the stakes in the rhetorical conflict between the United States and Iran. Responding to a question about Iran's nuclear intentions, the President intoned, 'We got a leader in Iran who has announced that he wants to destroy Israel. So I've told people that if you're interested in avoiding World War III, it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing them from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon. I take the threat of Iran with a nuclear weapon very seriously'.<sup>1</sup> Yet according to a December 2007 report in *The Washington Post*, the President's dire warning was issued 'at least a month or two after he had first been told about fresh indications that Iran had actually halted its nuclear weapons program'.<sup>2</sup>

The information the president was allegedly familiar with on that October morning was later made public in the November 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), *Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities*.<sup>3</sup> But despite the estimate's key judgements that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in the autumn of 2003, that it had not imported enough enriched uranium for a weapon, and that it 'will not be technically capable of producing and reprocessing enough plutonium for a weapon before about 2015', the Bush

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1. Press conference by President Bush, 17 October 2007, available at <[www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/10/20071017.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/10/20071017.html)>.
  2. P. Barker and R. Wright, 'A Blow to Bush's Tehran Policy', *The Washington Post*, 4 December 2007, available at <[www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007)>.
  3. National Intelligence Estimate, 'Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities', available at <[www.dni.gov/press\\_releases/20071203\\_release.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20071203_release.pdf)>.

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administration showed no signs of changing tack. In an interview broadcast on Israeli television just days before his January 2008 trip to the Middle East, President Bush referred again to his Iranian counterpart's threat by saying, 'If I were an Israeli, I would take the words of the Iranian president seriously, and as president of the United States I take them seriously'.<sup>4</sup>

So while the punditry entertained theories of political payback, and meditated on the politicisation of the bureaucracy following the estimate's release, the White House, by and large, played it cool. The President's National Security Adviser, Stephen Hadley, acknowledged that the estimate offered some positive news, but cautioned that the potentiality of a nuclear-armed Iran remained a very serious problem. He also stressed 'that the President has the right strategy: intensified international pressure along with a willingness to negotiate a solution that serves Iranian interests while ensuring that the world will never have to face a nuclear armed Iran'.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the NIE endorsed one key aspect of the administration's strategy. It judged with 'high confidence' that

Tehran's announcement of its decision to suspend its declared uranium enrichment program and sign an Additional Protocol to its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Safeguards Agreement, was directed primarily in response to increasing international scrutiny and pressure resulting from exposure of Iran's previously undeclared nuclear work.<sup>6</sup>

The Iranian response to the NIE was mixed. While President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad claimed it a victory for Iran, Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottak went on the offensive, asserting that the allegations about the existence of a nuclear weapons program were wrong, and that the estimate contained both 'facts and lies'.<sup>7</sup> The Foreign Minister responded by sending a formal letter of protest to the United States in which he accused it of spying and espionage.

And so it goes. Almost six years after Iran's clandestine nuclear

4. 'Bush: We'd defend Israel in event of Iranian strike', Reuters, Haaretz.com, 6 January 2008, available at <[www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/941778.html](http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/941778.html)>.

5. White House Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley, 3 December 2007, available at <[www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/12/20071203-10.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/12/20071203-10.html)>.

6. NIE, 'Iran', available at <[www.dni.gov/press\\_releases/20071203\\_release.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20071203_release.pdf)>.

7. 'Iran protests over US "espionage"', BBC News, 8 December 2007, available at <[news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/7134854.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7134854.stm)>.

program was outed by a domestic opposition group, Iran continues to defy the international community, and the rhetorical hostilities between the United States and Iran continue. The question is: why is the Iran issue so intractable?

You do not need to be an international security expert to have noticed the profound differences between the manner in which the case of nuclear proliferation in Iran is being handled by the United States and the way the Iraqi, North Korean, Libyan and Central Asian cases were handled; or, for that matter, the way the altogether more immediate nuclear threat was managed during the Cold War. Two principal factors have led to the current stalemate. One is the perceptible shift in US policy over the last fifteen years in terms of the nuclear 'order'. The second is the legacy of the US–Iranian imperial entanglement, which was never really severed, despite the mutual ostracizing of the post-revolution years.

### Nuclear 'Order' and Iran

The US nuclear empire today lies in tatters, less able and inclined to influence the global nuclear environment than it ever was during the Cold War, primarily because it reneged on its part of the nuclear bargain, ceasing to provide the one public good it did during the Cold War: order. The net effect has been the bankrupting of the former nuclear order, making the prospect of 'containing' Iran significantly more problematic than it otherwise might have been.

The United States' retreat from the order it helped fashion amplified the injustices that were inherent in it. The order symbolized by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was never really just, seeing as it formalized the existence of five nuclear weapons states (NWS): the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France and China. But the NPT was the linchpin of a carefully constructed order, which as William Walker noted, was based on '*a managed system of deterrence, and a managed system of abstinence*'.<sup>8</sup> Yet the prevalence of the systems of deterrence and abstinence, in addition to the consensus that nukes were too dangerous to ever use, did not render the former order immune to the forces of what Richard Butler, former Executive Chair of the United Nations Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM), has referred to as the axiom of proliferation.

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8. W. Walker, 'Nuclear Order and Disorder', *International Affairs*, vol. 76, no. 4, 2000, p. 703.

Butler discussed this idea in his 2002 Templeton lecture, 'Science, Weapons, Politics: The Ethics, The Hard Choices', at the University of Sydney.<sup>9</sup> The former diplomat argued that the axiom of proliferation — which says that as long as a state possesses a nuclear weapons capability, another will seek to acquire one — is inseparable from the concept of justice. Attempts by the nuclear 'haves' to justify the necessity of nuclear weapons for their national security to the nuclear 'have-nots', whilst simultaneously denying the have-nots the same level of security, were as transparently hypocritical in the halcyon days of the former nuclear order as they are today.

However, by moving away from constitutional ordering — whereby the United States shaped the order by actively supporting treaties, international agreements and inspections regimes — to hegemonic ordering in the mid-1990s, the United States significantly altered the nuclear playing field. The new mood in US security thinking corresponded with the failure of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) II, signed in 1993 by Presidents George H. W. Bush and Boris Yeltsin, to come into force. Six years later, the Republican-controlled Senate's rejection on 13 October 1999 of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) foreshadowed the emergent US position. Then in 1999, the passage into law of the National Missile Defense Act, which mandated the deployment of the once controversial missile defence system, confirmed the United States' abandonment of the former order. Commenting on developments up to the year 2000, William Walker assessed their significance in the following terms:

Taken together, these developments threatened injury to the system of deterrence, by implying that the US had lost confidence in it; injury to the system of abstinence by implying that the US had diminishing regard for the institutions of multilateral arms control; and injury to the project of marginalization, by implying that the US was not interested in its own technological and strategic restraint. As a consequence, US actions called into question the entire order that the US itself had so painstakingly constructed.<sup>10</sup>

A survey of more recent US behaviour leads one to conclude that Walker's systems of deterrence and abstinence have not so much

9. R. Butler, 'Science, Weapons, Politics: The Ethics, The Hard Choices', The Templeton Lecture, The University of Sydney, 2002, available at <[www.chast.org/templeton.htm](http://www.chast.org/templeton.htm)>.

10. Walker, 'Nuclear Order and Disorder', p. 713.

been injured by the Bush administration over the intervening years as they have been left for dead. In 2001, President Bush allowed the CTBT that had earlier been rejected by the Senate to languish there once more without ratification. That December, the president unilaterally withdrew the United States from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Having left for dead the nuclear order that kept us alive during the tense moments of the Cold War, the United States then set about creating a new order for itself, and a state of *disorder* for everyone else.

On new year's eve 2001, the Nuclear Posture Review was submitted to Congress. It elevated the status of nukes by calling for a 'New Triad' of nuclear, non-nuclear and defensive capabilities.<sup>11</sup> Then, in 2002, the president unveiled the *pièce de résistance* of the new order — the National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction.<sup>12</sup> Under the pretext of protecting Americans from 'rogue states' and terrorists, the administration significantly altered US policy, granting nuclear weapons a utility they had not possessed since prior to the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Consequently, the nuclear taboo that prevailed during the Cold War was summarily abolished. As Kurt Campbell wrote at the time, the devaluation of the nuclear taboo 'may serve to remove one of the most important factors deterring a country's entry into the nuclear club'.<sup>13</sup> A dangerous precedent had been set.

Given the advent of the new order, it was not at all surprising to learn of Iran's clandestine nuclear research and uranium enrichment facilities. That the Iranian facilities were developed surreptitiously over a period of two decades, and concealed from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), illustrates the dangerous consequences of the United States' desire for nuclear hegemony.

The subsequent discovery by the IAEA of weapons-grade uranium at the Kalay-e Electric Company plant in west Tehran in September 2003, and at the Natanz plant in central Iran, led to the international demand, articulated in United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1737: that Iran 'suspend all uranium

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11. Nuclear Posture Review Report, United States Department of Defense, 2001, available at <[www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2002/d20020109npr.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2002/d20020109npr.pdf)>.

12. National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction, 2002, available at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/12/WMDStrategy.pdf>>.

13. K. M. Campbell, 'Nuclear Proliferation beyond Rogues', *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 26, no.1, Winter 2002–2003, p. 10.

enrichment-related and reprocessing activities'.<sup>14</sup> Resolution 1737 was augmented on 24 March 2007 with the passing of resolution 1747, which focused on limiting Iranian arms exports and strengthening the existing economic sanctions.<sup>15</sup>

Predictably enough, the Iranians rebuked the UN sanctions. On the day Resolution 1737 was adopted, Iran's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Dr M. Javad Zarif, used his address to the Security Council to lament the state of nuclear disorder.

Today is a sad day for the non-proliferation regime ... The same Governments, which have pushed this Council to take groundless punitive measures against Iran's peaceful nuclear program, have systematically prevented it from taking any action to nudge the Israeli regime towards submitting itself to the rules governing the nuclear non-proliferation regime. By so doing, they have provided it with wide latitude and even encouragement to indulge freely in the clandestine development and unlawful possession of nuclear weapons ...<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, irrespective of Iran's proven guilt on the counts of developing nuclear weapons-grade uranium, and their subsequent refusals to halt enrichment-related activities, Dr Zarif's charges of Security Council hypocrisy were irrefutable.

For his part, President Ahmadinejad was not content pointing out the absurd injustice of the situation. In February 2007, two months after the passing of Resolution 1737, the Iranian president protested that Iran would work to achieve its right to nuclear technology in the shortest possible time, and claimed that foregoing other policies would be worth it.<sup>17</sup> Indicating his grasp of the prestige still associated with nuclear weapons, President Ahmadinejad reasoned, 'the enemies want us to surrender so that Iran won't have anything to say in the world'.<sup>18</sup> Echoing

14. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1737 (2006), available at <daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/681/42/PDF/N0668142.pdf?OpenElement>.

15. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1747 (2007), available at <daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/281/40/PDF/N0728140.pdf?OpenElement>.

16. Statement by H. E. Dr M. Javad Zarif, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran before the Security Council, 23 December 2006, available at <www.un.int/iran/statements/securitycouncil/articles/>.

17. 'Iran "swiftly seeks nuclear goal"', BBC News, 21 February 2007, available at <news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle\_east/6381477.stm>.

18. 'UN Warns Iran on Nuclear Schedule', BBC News, 25 May 2007, available at <news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle\_east/6687137.stm>

Ahmadinejad's defiant tone, Vice President of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, Reza Aqazadeh, declared in May 2007 that Iran's enrichment program was proceeding appropriately and that the installation and operation of 50,000 centrifuges was Iran's goal.<sup>19</sup> If the Americans were counting on bludgeoning Iran into obedience, they had clearly forgotten what a formidable opponent Iran could be.

### The United States' Persian Prerogative

The United States first became involved in Iran's internal affairs in the late nineteenth century, and over the course of the ensuing entanglement repeatedly transgressed Iran's sovereignty. The climax of US imperialism in Iran came in 1953 when the US-led Operation Ajax ousted the democratically elected nationalist prime minister Dr Mohamed Mosaddeq. That disastrous example of Mid-East meddling led eventually to the tumultuous revolution of 1979 and the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini, the subsequent US hostage crisis, and the period of hostile estrangement that persists today.

However, the absence of relations between the Islamic Republic and the United States did not lead to the resignation of the United States' Persian prerogative. On the contrary, a number of US measures have been adopted in recent years with the express purpose of controlling Iranian behaviour. The Iran–Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) of 1996 — amended in 2006 to the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) — was and remains the linchpin of the United States' containment strategy. Even before ILSA, President Clinton issued Executive Orders 12957 and 12959 in 1995 banning US investment in Iran's energy sector and US trade with and investment in Iran generally. The current Bush administration went even further, implementing a potentially more debilitating strategy known as 'international outreach'. The outreach policy is being led by the Treasury Department's Stuart Levey, who is charged with making it difficult for Iran to use the international financial system to fund potentially illicit activities.<sup>20</sup> By dissuading investors and potential investors from trading with Iran, the hope was that Iran would reconsider its need for nukes.

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19. 'Iranian Official: We're making good progress on nuclear program', Associated Press, Haaretz.com, 20 May 2007, available at <haaretz.com/hasen/spages/861513.html>.

20. M. Gregory, 'America's Financial War on Iran,' BBC News, 13 June 2007, available at <news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/6730681.stm>.

This does not appear to have happened, nor does it seem that it is the only goal of US policy. Undeniably, the United States has well-founded concerns about Iran's nuclear program. They include the demonstrated 'administrative interconnectedness' between Iran's weaponization and nuclear experts.<sup>21</sup> Yet the US response to Iran's intransigence suggests that there is more to this dispute than the prospect of a rogue state going nuclear. Conveniently, however, for the United States, it has been able to rely on both opportune circumstances and well-established myths to justify the maintenance of its foundering Persian prerogative.

Consider the way that, in the absence of real intelligence on Iran's nuclear program, the Bush administration took to sounding off about the Iranian-manufactured Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) that were turning up in Iraq. Last August, *Time's* Robert Baer reported a White House official as saying 'IRGC IED's are a *casus belli* for this Administration. There will be an attack on Iran'.<sup>22</sup> The consensus that Iran is a dangerous threat to stability allowed the administration to shift the emphasis from Iranian nukes to Iranian IEDs as it built its case for war and regime change in Iran.

Likewise, in-built prejudices in the US political culture have aided the Bush administration's concerted effort to vilify Iran. Of course, The United States has long considered Iran a terrorist state. President Clinton favoured the term 'state of concern', while 'rogue' became the preferred adjective under President Bush.<sup>23</sup> But what we have seen, at least since the time of the revolution and the subsequent hostage crisis, is the purported irrationality of Iranians become conventional wisdom in US political culture. At the time of the hostage crisis, adhering to the irrationality myth, Secretary of State Edmund Muskie described the Iranians with whom President Carter and the State Department were negotiating as not only 'very stubborn' but, crucially, 'irrational'.<sup>24</sup> But the process by which this myth became ingrained in the political culture has been somewhat less conspicuous. The late Edward Said illustrated how it was able to enter the blood stream of US politics without so much as an

21. A. Cordesman, 'Iran's Developing Nuclear and Missile Programs', Centre for Strategic and International Studies, revised 15 February 2007, p. 17, available at <[www.csis.org/index.php?option=com\\_csis\\_pubs&task=view&id=3727](http://www.csis.org/index.php?option=com_csis_pubs&task=view&id=3727)>.

22. R. Baer, 'Prelude to an Attack on Iran', *Time*, 18 August 2007, available at <[www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1654188,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1654188,00.html)>.

23. M. Gurtov, *Superpower On Crusade: The Bush Doctrine in US Foreign Policy*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2006, p. 137.

24. See E. Magnusson, 'She Wore a Yellow Ribbon', *Time*, 5 January 1981, available at <[www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,922317,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,922317,00.html)>.



utterance of the word 'irrational'. Referring to a confidential cable sent from Charge d'Affaires Bruce Laingden to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, in which Laingden endeavours to penetrate 'the Persian psyche', Said wrote:

Laingden's message is not a scientific account of 'the Persian psyche' he discusses, despite the author's pretense to claim objectivity and to expert knowledge of the culture. The text is rather an ideological statement designed, I think, to turn 'Persia' into a timeless acutely disturbing essence, thereby enhancing the superior morality and national sanity of the American half of the negotiations. Thus each assertion about 'Persia' adds damaging evidence to the profile while shielding 'America' from scrutiny and analysis.<sup>25</sup>

Today, the myth of the irrational Iranian — or the witty, alliterated variant, the 'mad mullah' — is so commonplace that people scarcely notice its Orientalist and racist foundations. Evidence for its popularity as a journalistic conceit may routinely be found in reporting that demands that Iranian foreign policy and behaviour be interpreted through the prism of 'rationality'. Then there is the altogether more sinister approach described by Said, whereby each assertion about the Iranian regime, Tehran, Ahmadinejad, or the ubiquitous mullahs, is used to disparage Iran.

A March 2007 column in *The Australian* by Greg Sheridan provides a particularly unapologetic example of this kind of smear. Beneath the tabloid-worthy title 'Terrorist State has a History of Insanity',<sup>26</sup> Sheridan expressed his dismay that the kidnapping of fifteen British sailors 'has not yet become a huge global issue'. For all the author's talk of the Iranians' 'madness' he does entertain the possibility that the kidnapping was a 'tactical move'. Moreover, the author cites previous Iranian successes in extracting concessions from the West. Thus it appears that the uncontested nature of the myth frees its adherents from the constraints of logic. Instead, the myth allows them to plug the latest Iranian high crime, misdemeanour, or indiscretion into a ready-made template and arrive at the desired conclusion: Iranians are insane, irrational, mad and by no means civilized.

25. E. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, London, Vintage, 1997, p. lxvi.

26. G. Sheridan, 'Terrorist State has a History of Insanity', *The Australian*, 29 March 2007, available at <[www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,21464413-25377,00.html](http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,21464413-25377,00.html)>.

The exploitation of the conventional wisdom has been a crucial ingredient in the United States' Iran policy over the past nearly thirty years, and today it plays an important role in the ongoing nuclear dispute. The prospect of irrational Iranians with a nuclear arsenal fitted in nicely with the abandonment of the systems of deterrence and abstinence, and the contemporaneous reconsideration of the virtue of US nuclear weapons. The irrationality myth also meshed well with that other ready-made template: the conflation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and terrorist threats.

Supposing for a moment that nuclear deterrence had not fallen out of vogue in the United States, it is very hard to conceive of a political landscape where deterrence theory could be applied to present-day Iran. A 2006 Cato Institute report detailing four policy options for dealing with Iran's nuclear program listed option four, ergo the least attractive, as 'Acceptance and Deterrence'. The report concedes

the presence of Ahmadinejad makes the deterrence option more nerve-racking than it would be otherwise. Having such an emotionally volatile and hate-filled individual as Iran's head of state understandably makes people wonder whether deterrence would work in this case.<sup>27</sup>

Likewise, the three panelists who spoke on nuclear deterrence at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy's 2007 Soref Symposium reiterated the belief that, under the current nuclear order, deterrence may not apply at all, and certainly not to Iran, which might be inclined to use nuclear weapon without provocation.<sup>28</sup>

In terms of the WMD-terror threat conflation, a Pentagon adviser on the War on Terror articulated the administration's logic when he told the journalist Seymour Hersh, 'allowing Iran to have the bomb is not on the table. We cannot have nukes being sent downstream to a terror network. It's just too dangerous'.<sup>29</sup> The

27. T. Galen Carpenter, 'Iran's Nuclear Program: America's Policy Options', *Policy Analysis*, The Cato Institute, no. 578, 20 September 2006, available at < [www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa578.pdf](http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa578.pdf)>.

28. 'Iran's "Unacceptable" Bomb: Deterrence and Prevention in the Age of Terror', Proceedings of the 2007 Soref Symposium, 9-11 May 2007, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, pp. 39-41, available at <[www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=278](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=278)>.

29. S. Hersh, 'The Iran Plans: Would President Bush go to War to Stop Tehran from Getting the Bomb?' *The New Yorker*, 17 April 2006, p. 5, available at <[www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/04/17/060417fa\\_fact](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/04/17/060417fa_fact)>.

underlying assumption is that the irrational Iranians *would* invest the money and effort in a nuclear weapon only to then pass it on to a third party for use against the United States or one of its allies.

Clearly, the prospect of another nuclear weapons state, whichever one that happened to be, is a major concern for the United States. But it is not the only, nor even necessarily the most important US concern. Back in 2005, Cyrus Safdari argued persuasively in *Le Monde Diplomatique* that the real target of the Bush administration was not Iran's suspected nuclear weapons program, but the economies of developing countries.<sup>30</sup> After all, the discovery of vast petroleum reserves in the Persian Gulf at the beginning of the twentieth century established producer-consumer relationships that will likely be reversed in the nuclear era. As an established nuclear power, the US empire would surely not want its position in the elite nuclear energy-producing monopoly compromised by an aspirational Persian Gulf power. Safdari offered this compelling assessment of US logic:

Under the guise of non-proliferation, the EU and the US are not only undermining the grand bargain between nuclear-armed and non-nuclear armed states that is the NPT; they also want to create an underclass of nuclear energy have-nots, concentrating what could become the world's sole major source of energy in the hands of the few nations that have granted themselves the right to it.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, the sense of *puissance oblige* that drives the United States' Persian prerogative lies at the heart of current US efforts to prevent the emergence of a nuclear-powered Iran as we near the post-petroleum era. US frustration at being incapable of preventing Iran's emergence from this underclass could be heard when Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, R. Nicholas Burns, bemoaned Iran 'thumbing its nose at the international community'.<sup>32</sup> (For his part, French President Nicolas Sarkozy has disproved Safdari's argument insofar as it applied to France, by recently promoting nuclear technology in the Middle East precisely in order to avoid

30. C. Safdari, 'Iran Needs Nuclear Energy, Not Weapons', *Le Monde diplomatique*, November 2005, available at <mondediplo.com/2005/11/02iran>.

31. C. Safdari, 'Iran Needs Nuclear Energy, Not Weapons'.

32. H. Cooper and D. E. Sanger, 'U.S., Annoyed by U.N. Report on Iran and Uranium, Hopes to Use It to Widen Sanctions', *New York Times*, 24 May 2007, available at <www.nytimes.com/2007/05/24/washington/24diplo.html?\_r=1&oref=slogin&pagewanted=print>.

the maintenance of the class structure seemingly desired by the United States.)<sup>33</sup>

### Where to Now?

If a confrontation between the United States and Iran over their rapidly maturing nuclear program is to be avoided, a number of factors and US behaviours need to be altered.

Firstly, the United States needs to reverse the dangerous state of nuclear *disorder* it alone has been responsible for creating over the past fifteen years. If it truly considers the increasingly likely proliferation of nuclear weapons in Iran and the broader Middle East, and the possible acquisition of them by terrorist organizations, to be a serious problem, then it should reconsider the example it is currently setting. However, a return to the painstakingly managed order of the Cold War would not suffice.

The only sustainable solution was put forward recently in *The Wall Street Journal*. Entitled 'Toward a Nuclear-Free World', it was not conceived by some idealistic pacifist.<sup>34</sup> A bi-partisan cadre of highly experienced former US government officials — George Schultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn — authored it. They list a number of practical measures that should be implemented as part of our progression towards a nuclear-free world, but the crucial point is articulated in the penultimate paragraph:

Progress must be facilitated by a clear statement of our ultimate goal. Indeed, this is the only way to build the kind of international trust and broad cooperation that will be required to effectively address today's threats. Without the vision of moving toward zero, we will not find the essential cooperation required to stop our downward spiral.<sup>35</sup>

To put it another way, the practical measures outlined in this article will amount to very little unless the United States and the other nuclear powers state their position clearly and unequivocally. Without the sort of leadership that the United States provided

33. See M. Moore, 'Sarkozy Pushes Nuclear Energy in Mideast', *The Washington Post*, 20 January 2008, available at <[www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008)>.

34. G. P. Schultz, W. J. Perry, H. A. Kissinger and S. Nunn, 'Toward a Nuclear-Free World', *The Wall Street Journal*, 15 January 2008, available at <[www.online.wsj.com/article/SB120036422673589947.html?mod=Letters](http://www.online.wsj.com/article/SB120036422673589947.html?mod=Letters)>

35. Schultz et al, 'Toward a Nuclear-Free World'.

during the Cold War, other states — particularly the non-nuclear states — are most unlikely to get behind a movement perceived as insincere or half-hearted.

In terms of Iran, the United States needs to urgently reconsider the perpetration of its ineffective and destabilising Persian prerogative. Stronger sanctions and greater isolation are unlikely to bring about the desired end in Iran, and are, in fact, more likely to alienate those Iranians who are amenable to the US position. Alternatively, were Iran to be brought into the fold, and convinced of the nuclear powers' genuine commitment to a new and equitable nuclear order — where access to nuclear energy was guaranteed and security against annihilation assured — we might see significant shifts in Iranian behaviour. Until that happens there is no incentive whatsoever for Iran not to go nuclear. To paraphrase Richard Butler, as long as Israel possesses nuclear weapons, it is axiomatic that Iran and its Arab neighbours will see no alternative for the provision of their security than the nuclear one.

Finally, our societies need to recognise both the lessons of history and our changed circumstances. The recent *Wall Street Journal* piece inevitably copped flak for being written by a bunch of 'Cold War Warriors' who are out of touch with today's realities. A letter to the *Journal* echoed this sentiment, arguing that it is not nuclear weapons per se that are dangerous, but rather that nukes in the hands of certain 'authoritarian' states such as Iran are dangerous because they are 'unstable'. However, for true stability to be realized we need to overcome the ethnocentric thinking that considers 'them' more dangerous than 'us', as well as the deeply entrenched political culture that has hitherto prohibited the nuclear powers from taking the first step towards ending the dangerous state of disorder we find ourselves in today. Certainly, Iran has shown itself to be a belligerent and a more than willing contributor to Middle East instability, but so has the United States. Until such time as the United States recognizes this most basic fact, the entire community of nations will face only greater levels of insecurity and disorder.