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Middle East Brief

What to do about U.S. Sanctions and Israeli Threats: Iran's Muted Nuclear Debate

Prof. Farideh Farhi

The leaders and people of Iran have been watching with keen interest the rather loud debate in the United States and Israel regarding the relative efficacy of different means for preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Even the hard-line Iranian media duly and quite nonchalantly report on, for instance, both former Mossad Chief Meir Dagan and former IAEA Director Mohamed ElBaradei opining that an attack on Iran is a bad idea or "crazy,"[1] or explain why Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan thinks that an Israeli attack would devastate the Middle East.[2] Iran's hard-line media are also quite comfortable—even ecstatic—relaying the angst expressed in neoconservative circles in the United States regarding the failure of sanctions to halt Iran's nuclear program.

But Iran's being on the receiving end of a heightened onslaught, both economic and verbal, has naturally given rise to a conversation quite different from the debates *about* Iran occurring in either Israel or the United States. In addition, Iran's domestic politics have made certain positions not subject to public debate or negotiation.

This Brief examines the public debate in Iran around the nuclear issue by identifying two areas of contention: the credibility of an attack on Iran, and the possibilities of meaningful negotiations with the United States. It

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concludes by examining the implications of Iran's internal debate for the future of international talks over Iran's nuclear program.

The Limits of Iran's Public Debate

While Israeli and American officials and pundits publicly and privately argue over whether to bomb or not, Iranian officials have had to:

- address issues related to the impact of ever-tightening economic sanctions;
- create an environment that will deter potential attacks, or at least make them appear very costly; and
- contend with a population unhappy with deteriorating political and economic conditions and worried about instability and war.

The impact of economic sanctions, it should be noted, is hardly addressed in public discourse at all.[3] The official position on sanctions is that Iran is managing the harmful impact of sanctions well—and that, if anything, sanctions are making Iran more self-reliant and its economy more rationalized. (For example, through policies, such as subsidy reform and gasoline rationing, that would have been politically difficult to pursue had there not been external pressures.) And it is difficult to encounter an argument made in public against this position. Hints regarding the deleterious impact of sanctions can be found in the utterances of business leaders, but there is really no public conversation about whether backing down on the nuclear issue might be an option to consider as a way to hasten the lifting of sanctions.

The possibility of temporarily suspending Iran's enrichment program used to be part of the public conversation. But today it is simply not considered to be a politically acceptable position inside the country. It has in fact been articulated publicly only by a segment of the opposition in exile, who advocate it as a means to prevent a military attack.[4]

This situation is not new. Since the referral of Iran's case to the United Nations Security Council in February 2006 and the subsequent imposition of sanctions against Iran, which more or less coincided with the entrenchment of conservative control over all levers of government in Iran, the public conversation about what should be done about Iran's nuclear dossier has become much more restricted.[5] The nationalist discourse that had from the beginning been *part* of Iran's case for pursuing its nuclear program became, for all practical purposes, the *whole* of the case.[6] In the process, arguments proposing acceptance of a temporary suspension of enrichment-related activities were viewed as a reflection of meekness or complacency—or even as treason and abetting the enemy.[7]

As a result, no significant national leader has been willing to publicly challenge the government's decision to stand its ground on the question of Iran's right to pursue all the elements of a peaceful nuclear program. Giving in to "Western bullying" and abandoning "Iran's internationally sanctioned legal rights" is simply not an option in an environment in which, despite limitations, there is a contested political terrain.

Also not discussed in any serious manner are some issues of great relevance elsewhere. Whether Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapons program or whether it poses an existential threat to Israel are really questions external to Iran's internal political discourse. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's repeated identification of nuclear

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weapons as religiously illicit (*haram*) has effectively ended the conversation regarding Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. As to the question of Iran's being a threat to Israel, to be sure, there is a long-standing conversation in Iran about the fate of what in the Iranian public discourse is identified as the "fabricated Zionist regime": whether or not it will eventually give way to one state not dominated by its Jewish population; and whether Tehran should make Israel and its occupation of Palestinian lands a centerpiece of its foreign policy. But this is a conversation that predates the nuclear issue and, in the Iranian mind, is distinct from it.[8]

Instead, the conversation that exists in Iran essentially involves an atrophied tactical discussion about the need to use acumen in diplomacy and avoid verbal adventurism—the latter usually a reference to President Ahmadinejad's fiery speeches on non-nuclear-related matters, such as Israel and the Holocaust. Since the 2009 election, this atrophied public conversation has in many ways come to reflect a constricted political process, in which any challenge to or criticism of the direction of the country is represented as promoting division, weakening Iran's hand, and knowingly or unknowingly playing into the hands of the country's enemies.[9]

It is in this context that someone like Ahmad Tavakoli, a conservative member of the Parliament (Majles) and director of the Majles Research Center, can say that the various political factions that are competing for dominance in the Majles over the next four years have the same position regarding foreign policy and that, in the face of Western pressures, "their resistance is good. Of course they have differences [regarding] tactical approaches in confronting the West."[10] These tactical differences include disagreements on how to respond verbally to threats of attack against Iran's nuclear installations; on the extent to which Iran needs to use active diplomacy to reassure regional countries regarding its intentions; on the extent to which reliance on Russian or Chinese support for Iran's nuclear position is wise or realistic; and on how to confront the tightening sanctions noose, particularly in relation to countries that continue to rely on Iran's oil and gas exports.

These are important tactical differences, with one side essentially advocating a more aggressive stance with respect to what is considered to be Western powers' belligerent posture toward Iran while the other calls for more active diplomacy in order to placate Western powers and calm the concerns that other regional countries such as Saudi Arabia have regarding Iran's intentions. But, as will be discussed below, these tactical differences also reveal profound divergences with regard to both the assessment of risks and threats Iran is facing in its determined pursuit of a nuclear fuel cycle and the need to engage in serious negotiations with the United States.

Is the Threat of an Attack against Iran Credible?

The credibility of American and Israeli threats against Iran is a debate with important implications for Iran's conduct. While both civilian and military officials have been quick to threaten commensurate retaliation in the event Iran is attacked,[11] generally speaking the hardliners in Iran have taken the position that all the talk regarding attacking Iran is part and parcel of "psychological" or "soft" war. In their minds, this psychological war is intended either to convince Iranian leaders to agree to "concessions" with respect to the country's nuclear program out of fear or to set the stage for "crippling sanctions" and other policies designed to bring about regime change. Publications coming out of the U.S. and Israel appear to support both contentions, as they indeed argue for an information campaign designed to rattle the Iranian regime and sow divisions within its leadership.[12]

In short, based on their assessment of American politics in the post–Iraq invasion era, the Iranian hardliners do not see a credible threat of military force coming from either the United States or Israel. This position is buttressed by their belief in a further weakened or at least confounded United States in the wake of monumental changes in the Arab Middle East and North Africa. The lack of credibility imputed to the military threat was articulated by the daily *Kayhan*'s Mehdi Mohammadi in a rather direct way. Writing the day after Ayatollah Ali Khamenei gave a Friday Prayer speech affirming Iran's support for those who attack Israel,[13] Mohammadi argued in an editorial that the speech was less about issuing a direct threat against Israel and more about relaying the message that Iran "does not take the military threat against it seriously.... And...that, in contrast to what the Americans imagine, Iran does not consider the [U.S.] strategy of establishing a credible military threat [to be] against [Iran's] interest.... It is only sufficient to take a glance at the price of crude oil for the depth of this issue to become evident."[14]

Not taking the possibility of attacks seriously, on the other hand, worries Sadeq Zibakalam, a University of Tehran professor, who wrote an unusually forthright essay for a website managed by former reformist deputy foreign minister Sadeq Kharrazi. "We should not count much on the West not attacking Iran," he argues.[15] Pointing out that the West is deeply conflicted on this issue, Zibakalam notes that there are those in the West "who are convinced

that the only solution to the Iranian program is military attack." On the other side, he notes, are more moderate forces that consider an attack on Iran to amount to only a temporary solution to the Iranian problem, and one that would be quite destabilizing for the Middle East region. Zibakalam believes, however, that in the past couple of years the balance has shifted toward those favoring the military option.

More importantly, Zibakalam finds the argument made by "many officials"—that Iran is not Afghanistan and Iraq and cannot be occupied—quite dangerous in terms of its implications for Iran:

> The point not given attention to is that the Americans are not supposed to occupy Iran the way they occupied Afghanistan and Iraq. What will happen is not a ground war. What will possibly happen is that hundreds of cruise missiles will be directed toward hundreds of targets in Iran from American ships in the Persian Gulf. . . . It is not as though the Americans will come to Iran facing the Iranian people. The point is that if there is an attack against Iran, it will be so severe that it will effectively paralyze the industrial, agricultural and productive infrastructure of Iran.... The ultimate loser will be Iran.

Zibakalam goes on to suggest that there is really no conflict between the "fundamental demands" of the West and Iran. If Iran wanted to produce nuclear weapons, then there would be a conflict. "The Westerners have never said that Iran's peaceful program has to be destroyed, and Iran has never said it is seeking anything but a peaceful program." The issue is mutual lack of trust. Iran can address Western concerns, argues Zibakalam, by, for example, limiting enrichment levels and agreeing to "systematic" inspections. The West in turn can provide Iran with better technology. "It is time to utilize new and advanced technology instead of utilizing technology which only advances with much effort or relying on second-hand and used technology acquired through a contraband market."

Note that in this discussion, there is very little reference to the potential for or implications of an Israeli attack. The assumption for someone like Zibakalam is that the real destructive capability comes from the United States, and hence he sees no need to even address a potential Israeli attack. The United States may attack Iran on its own or may be drawn into an attack by Israel, but Iran's destruction will be caused by the United States.

Iranian hardliners, on the other hand, do acknowledge the Israeli military threat but dismiss it either as bluster or as merely amounting to political strategy. For instance, reacting to Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Moshe Ya'alon's statement playing down the prospect of an imminent attack on Iran and contending that its controversial nuclear program could still be set back by sanctions and sabotage,[16] the hard-line Rajanews writes:

> It is important to note that the strategy of using sabotage such as explosions and assassinations in order to slow down Iran's nuclear program was among the plans of Meir Dagan, the former Mossad chief, and he insisted on the effectiveness of these tactics and repeatedly suggested to the officials of the Zionist regime to continue such approaches and not think of war. It seems that the Zionist regime, by publicizing the illusion of Iran's nuclear slowdown through sabotage, wants to prevent the loss of its credibility in its effort to prevent the phenomenon of a "nuclear Iran" and at the same time forward a justification for not implementing its attack bluff.[17]

Others flatly question the assumption that Israel might attack Iran and insist that it will not do so under any circumstances because of the clear understanding the Israeli leadership has that such an attack "will seriously threaten the life of this Zionist regime."[18] As such, hardliners do not see a need for discussion of the extent to which monumental changes of leadership in the region might limit Iran's capacity to retaliate against a military attack on its nuclear installations.

The bottom line is that Iran's current strategy, as delineated by Khamenei's "We will answer threats with threats" or "We will attack at the same level they attack us," is premised on the belief that all the talk about military attack is bluster, intended to frighten Iran and lower the government's confidence while at the same time pressuring it to come to the negotiating table with a weakened hand. This argument is further tied to Iran's domestic politics by the belief that the American strategy intends that by pressuring Iran, "some [Iranian] domestic groups would extend their lobbying and force the system to talk with America."[19]

Responding to threats with threats is intended to disabuse the West and Israel of the belief that its strategy is working. It is also based on the principle that with "Westerners one must use the same language they have become used to in talking with others."[20]

In effect, the hardliners argue, by calling the "war bluff," while at the same time reiterating the position that Iran considers nuclear weapons a sin, Khamenei has given the West a choice between a "peaceful, nuclear Iran" and "an

Iran that will defend itself with all its capacity against any aggression."[21] But this choice is offered with the claimed confidence that the West will eventually have to choose Iran's peaceful nuclear program over war.

Negotiations with the U.S.?

The conversation regarding negotiations with the U.S. has as its backdrop a profound lack of trust in American intentions as well as a history of bungled negotiations, extending now to the 2009 experience with the Obama administration. Khamenei has been the most articulate spokesperson for this lack of trust. Rejecting the notion that the Islamic Republic's policies and behavior are the real reasons for Western hostility, Khamenei retorted that:

> [t]hose who think that backing down on the nuclear issue will put an end to America's enmity are suffering from lack of vigilance because there are certain countries in the region that have nuclear weapons, but America does not show any sensitivity to them. Therefore, the nuclear issue and human rights are not the real reason behind the enmity of the bullying powers, rather the main reason behind these enmities is that the Islamic Republic and the Iranian people proudly protect Iran's oil and gas resources.[22]

Taking a somewhat different position is former President and current Chair of the Expediency Council Rafsanjani, who insists that Iran "can now fully negotiate with the United States based on equal conditions and mutual respect." Rafsanjani does concede Khamenei's point that Iran's nuclear program is not the West's main problem, arguing against those who "think that Iran's problems [with the West] will be solved through backing down on the nuclear issue." At the same time, he calls for proactive interaction with the world, and for understanding that after the recent transformations in the Middle East, "the Americans... are trying to find "new models that can articulate coexistence and cooperation in the region and which the people [of the region] also like better."[23] In another interview, Rafsanjani argues that the current situation of "not talking and not having relations with America is not sustainable...The meaning of talks is not that we surrender to them. If they accept our position or we accept their positions, it's done."[24] In Rafsanjani's worldview, negotiations over Iran's nuclear program are merely one step in a process that will eventually also address other sources of conflict with the United States in the region.

Former Deputy Foreign Minister Sadeq Kharrazi goes further and argues that the "reality is that the interests of Iran and the United States are similar in many instances. We have cooperated on many issues. We have had common threats."[25] Arguing that Iran's "Jewish and Arab competitors" have begun a dangerous game, Kharrazi goes on to identify the most important fear of these "competitors" as "the realignment of relations between the United States and Iran." This analysis becomes the basis for Kharrazi's criticism of Iran's diplomatic ineptness under Ahmadinejad's presidency with respect to improving its regional standing and its relations with the United States. But criticism of Iran's diplomatic ineptness under the Ahmadinejad administration is really a cover for a deeper disagreement within Iran's foreign policy establishment.

As the person who was reportedly involved in the 2003 proposal for comprehensive negotiations with the United States,[26] Kharrazi can be considered one of the most important advocates of wide-ranging negotiations with the United States on the basis of mutual interests. The dismissal by the United States of the possibility of negotiations undermined the case for negotiations on the basis of mutual interests in the eyes of many officials in Iran. But it has not fully undermined the case for negotiations premised on other grounds.

It is true that Khamenei and the hardliners who seem to have his ear do not think that the United States is trustworthy. But that does not mean that they shun every form of talks with the United States. Given the fact that the same Khamenei has given the go-ahead to several attempts at talks on the nuclear issue and Iraqi security with the United States, the argument that he is ideologically and politically against all forms of talks is not credible. But for hardliners, talks must proceed from what they identify as "a position of strength" and will not necessarily be based on broader mutual interests, even if the *consequences* of talks may end up being more cooperation on the basis of common interests. Here is one take, from a website affiliated with the Islamic Revolution's Guard Corps:

> The Islamic Republic through reliance on the Doctrine of Resistance has been able to perform its role in the arenas of diplomacy, economy, and smart military actions and present itself as a regional power to the point that the enemy accepts this and announces that "we have no choice but to accept Iran's significant role in the region; although we have problems with Iran's leaders, Iran's role in the region cannot be ignored."[27]

The confidence exhibited in such statements has implications for Iran's posture regarding the utility of talks with the five permanent members of the UN Security

Council plus Germany (P5+1). While the failure of the 2009 talks led most hardliners to see no point to talking with the U.S., there has been a perceptible change in their position on this issue in the past couple of months, notwithstanding their loud criticism of Rafsanjani for suggesting talks.

For instance, discussing the upcoming April 13 talks with P5+1, the editorial in the hard-line daily *Kayhan* alluded to above (see endnote 14) continues to question the Obama administration's willingness to pursue a "just solution" to the nuclear issue but entertains the possibility that America's "strategic calculations have been corrected to a large degree," hence making talks with the U.S. worth having.

Kayhan finds several reasons why the U.S. has changed its assessment of the situation. The first and foremost pertains to what *Kayhan* considers the West's previous miscalculation regarding Iran's technical capabilities. *Kayhan* claims that the Western countries assumed that once the 2009 negotiations over the transfer of Iran's low-grade enriched uranium in exchange for fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor failed, Iran would be seeking a new round of negotiations soon enough because of its need for 20 percent enriched uranium and fuel rods for medical purposes. There was the additional assumption that sabotage was slowing down the program at the same time as divisions within Iranian society were weakening the government.

Iran's ability to produce fuel and plates for the Tehran Research Reactor; its capacity to make Fordo—a facility more immune to aerial attack—operational; Russia's and China's increased uneasiness with unilateral sanctions, particularly after Western military involvement in Libya; and Iran's ability to overcome the divisions generated by the 2009 elections through the holding of an orderly parliamentary election in March 2012 have all contributed, the *Kayhan* editorial argues, to the West's "pressure path turning into an impasse." The existing "cliché model in the minds of Westerners that they could turn Iran's external resistance into domestic crisis should by now have fallen apart." With both the war and sanctions options revealing their limits, negotiations and accepting the reality of Iran as a country with a nuclear program is the only option left, according to the editorial.

This confidence then allows a degree of agreement or convergence with the argument that Iran needs to and can negotiate with the United States on the basis of mutual interests. If indeed Iran has now reached a point such that Western powers have no choice but to accept its peaceful nuclear program, then there is no reason not to begin negotiating over some sort of compromise that would address both Iran's and Western powers' concerns. According to Iran's former nuclear negotiator Hossein Mousavian:

> The first step toward a workable proposal is to identify the bottom line of both parties. For Iran, this is the recognition of its legitimate right to create a nuclear program—including enrichment—and a backing off by the P5+1 from its zero enrichment position. For the P5+1, it is an absolute prohibition on Iran from creating a nuclear bomb, and having Iran clear up ambiguities in its nuclear program to the satisfaction of the International Atomic Energy Agency.[28]

Although Mousavian's suggestions for a step-by-step process of addressing both sides' concerns were published in English, outside of Iran, they were translated and widely reported even in the hard-line media *inside* Iran.[29] Within this framework, the question of what objective guarantees Iran is willing to give in exchange for the recognition of its legitimate rights and in order to clear up ambiguities in its nuclear program will again be at the center of negotiations. In the negotiations Mousavian was engaged in with the European troika of France, England, and Germany between 2003 and 2005, Iran's interlocutors, prodded by the Bush administration, insisted that objective guarantees could mean only the complete cessation of all enrichment and enrichment-related activities. Iranians across the political spectrum now believe that technological advancements have changed the realities on the ground, making the West realize the unrealistic nature of that demand, and setting the stage for talks that focus instead on transparency measures and possible curbs on Iran's nuclear program.

What is not clear is whether this convergence on the question of holding talks, whether arising out of necessity or confidence, is accompanied by some sort of agreement regarding what Iran can or should offer in order to resolve ambiguities with respect to its nuclear program. In the past, Tehran has agreed to a more robust inspection regime, albeit one that did not include anything that would have treated Iran as a special case. It was also willing to limit its level of enrichment, and even to import uranium enriched at 20 percent level. Iran's decision to build the Fordo enrichment facility under a mountain could also conceivably be explained as a reaction to military threats against its nuclear facilities. So in theory all of these matters could be placed on the table for negotiation.

But the conversation about what Iran should offer in negotiations has not really begun in Iran, at least not in public. And in any case, no matter what is being discussed inside the halls of power in Iran, the ensuing conversation will also be shaped by what Iran's interlocutors are willing

to give in return, and by how the mutual respect demanded by Iranian officials across the political spectrum—which essentially means a process of give-and-take rather than Iran's being told what to do—does or doesn't play out in the negotiating room.

Conclusion

Given the different mindsets described above, it is clear that there are real differences of opinion in Iran regarding the extent to which American intentions can be trusted as well as with respect to the basis for and scope of negotiations with the U.S. The reality is that Iran now actually produces 20 percent enriched uranium for the Tehran Research Reactor—and that may have produced a group of people in the country insisting that Iran refuse to give up this new indigenous capability.[30] On the other side of the spectrum, as mentioned above, there are those who see value in replacing "old and second-hand technology" with Western help that can only come about by replacing enmity with some sort of accommodation.

That there are real differences of opinion in Iran has always been understood by Western powers. In fact, U.S. government officials' argument that wide-ranging sanctions are intended to "alter Iran's calculations" has been premised on the existence of those differences. But the use of these sanctions as a blunt instrument outside the negotiating room has had the effect of strengthening the position of Iran's hardliners, who have had an easy time finding support for their mistrust of Western intentions. There can be no doubt that they have so far won the argument inside of Iran while standing outside of the negotiating room.

Whether the same will hold true *inside* the negotiating room will have as much to do with the extent to which Western powers are willing to compromise as with the relative weight of contending positions inside Iran.

Endnotes

1 See, for instance, "El Baradei: harkas qasd hamleh beh iran ra dashteh bashad kamelan dvaneh ast" (ElBaradei: Whoever intends to attack Iran must be completely crazy), *Farsnews*, March 27, 2012.*

2 "Erdogan: Hameleh beh iran khavarmianeh ra beh naboodi mikeshanad" (Erdogan: An attack on Iran will lead the Middle East to destruction," *Farsnews*, April 2, 2012.*

3 According to Borzou Daragahi, Iranian news outlets were issued a three-page letter from the Supreme National Security Council listing forbidden topics, which included the effects of sanctions on everyday life and on Iranian banks, along with travel bans on Iranian nuclear and military officials. "Iran Tightens the Screws on Internal Dissent," *Los Angeles Times*, June 10, 2007.

4 A statement by a group of Iranian activists outside of Iran can be found at *Daneshjoonews.com*.*

5 For a discussion of how public opinion and the public conversation were reshaped after the 2006 referral of Iran's case to the UNSC in 2006, see Farideh Farhi, "Atomic Energy Is Our Assured Right: Nuclear Policy and the Shaping of Iranian Public Opinion," pp. 3–18 in *Nuclear Politics in Iran*, ed. Judith S. Yaphe (Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, 2010).*

6 Interestingly, in a recent interview, former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani blames the "extremists" in the administration of his successor, Mohammad Khatami, for initiating the process of politicizing Iran's nuclear program. See the interview with Rafsanjani conducted by Sadeq Kharrazi at *Kharazi.ir*.*

7 For a vivid expression of this view, see the poster carried during the organized protests on the anniversary of the Iranian revolution this year. It shows former reformist president Mohammad Khatami bowing to the American, British, and Israeli flags and states: "Mr. Khatami, you were a servant and engaged in treason. Shame on you..." *Farsnews*.*

8 In 1991, former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani made a connection—the only time he ever made one—between Iran's nuclear capability and Israel's existence. "We really do not intend to build nuclear weapons and a militarized nuclear system. I even once advised the occupying Israeli regime in a Friday Prayer that a nuclear bomb is not to Israel's benefit either. After all, if there is a military conflict, a small country like Israel doesn't have the capacity to tolerate a nuclear bomb. It is a small county, and all its facilities are easily destroyed. Although they interpreted this advice as a threat, we deeply believe that there should be no nuclear weapons in the region, and this is has been and is a principle of our policies." *Khabaronline*, February 2, 2012.*

9 Referring to the 2009 protests, Khamenei said: "The great sin of those involved in the sedition of last year is making the enemy hopeful. This immense popular presence in the election could have made the people of Iran successful is many political arenas, but by engaging in sedition and making the enemy hopeful, the seditionists harmed the Islamic revolutions and people of Iran." *Mehrnews*, December 29, 2010.*

10 "Pishbini-ye Tavakoli dar mored majles-e nohom" (Tavakoli's predictions regarding the ninth Majlis), *Tabnak*, March 5, 2012.*

11 Khamenei encapsulated Iran's official position with these words: "we do not have a nuclear weapon and...we will not produce one, but we also announce that in case America or the Zionist regime attacks us, we will attack them on the same level that they attack us." in "Supreme Leader: Intimidation, Main Goal of Enemy Threats," *Khamenei.ir*, March 20, 2012.*

12 See, for example, the analysis by the Islamic Revolution's Guard Corps' weekly publication *Sobh-e Sadeq* of "The Missing Lever: Information Activities against Iran," written by Michael Eisenstadt for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.* Using Eisenstadt's piece as evidence, *Sobh-e Sadeq* posits the U.S.'s soft war of disinformation as the most important counterweight to Iran's doctrine of resistance based on religious beliefs, national unity, and rejection of any kind of accommodation. The piece is reproduced in Basirat, another IRGC-connected website, *Basirat.ir*.*

13 Friday Prayer speech, *Khamenei.ir*, February 3, 2012.*

14 Mehdi Mohammadi, "Behrouz resani-ye mohasebat-e gharb darbareye Iran" (Updating Western calculations regarding Iran). *Kayhan*, February 5, 2012.*

15 Sadeq Zibakalam, "Etemadsazi tanha rahe borounraft az bombast mozakerat" (Confidence-building the only way out of the nuclear impasse), *Diplomasi-ye Irani*, March 10, 2012.*

16 "Ya'alon: No Imminent Strike on Iran." *Jerusalem Post*, March 27, 2012.*

17 "Chera dast-e rast-e Netenayhu as ide-ye hamleh beh iran ja zad? (Why did Netanyahu's right hand back away from the idea of attacking Iran?), *Rajanews*.*

18 Interview with Saadollah Zarei, *Borhan.ir*, April 17, 2012.* Zarei goes on to say that Iran's strategic thinking considers Israel a "child" of the United States and not the other way around.

19 Mohammadi, "Behrouz resani-ye mohasebat-e gharb darbareye Iran."

20 Ibid.

21 Interview with Zarei, April 17, 2012.

22 "Supreme Leader: Intimidation, Main Goal of Enemy Threats," *Khamenei.ir*, March 20. 2012.*

23 Interview with Rafsanjani conducted by Sadeq Kharrazi, *Kharazi.ir*, April 16, 2012.* In this interview, Rafsanjani identifies Israel as a "country that has always been a nuisance for our foreign policy, but...all of our priorities in foreign policy are not Israel."

24 "Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani: Chera ba amrika mozakereh nakonim" (Why shouldn't we talk to America?), *Shargh*, April 3, 2012.* This is an abridged version of an interview published in *Faslnameye Motale'at-e Beynolmelali* 8,3 (Spring 2012): pp.1-28.

25 Interview with Sadeq Kharrazi, *ISNA*, December 19, 2011.*

26 The 2003 proposal for comprehensive negotiations is reproduced by the Arms Control Association.* Notes of the Swiss Ambassador who communicated the message from Kharrazi (May 4, 2003) can be found at the Washington Post.*

27 "Taqi Pour-rezaie, Doktrin-e moghavemat: rahbord jomhuri-ye eslami dar mobareze ba estakbar" (The resistance doctrine: The Islamic Republic's strategy in combating arrogance), *Basirat*.*

28 Hossein Mousavian, "Real Solutions to Nuclear Deadlock with Iran." *Boston Globe*, March 31, 2012.*

29 *Farsnews*, April 1, 2012.*

30 Fereydoon Abbasi-Davani, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, called the Western demand for the closure of Fordo and the transfer of Iran's current stockpile out of the country as being "without logic." From his point of view, Iran had needs that were not being addressed by the outside world, so it acted on its own, only to produce "at the level of those needs." In this formulation, although backtracking is not an option, not producing *beyond* those needs is certainly an option. Abbasi-Davani even mooted the idea of recalibrating the machinery that produces 20 percent enriched uranium to produce lower, 3.5 percent enriched product. *Farsnews*, April 8, 2012.*

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