

DANGEROUS AND GETTING MORE DANGEROUS:  
THE DELICATE SITUATION BETWEEN  
THE UNITED STATES AND IRAN

SAM GARDINER, COLONEL, USAF (RET.)

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*The first U.S. shot on Iran would set the United States' vital interests in the world on fire.*

—Ali Shirazi, Representative of the Iranian Supreme Leader, July 8, 2008

## INTRODUCTION

U.S. President George Bush says he is committed to solving the problem of Iran's nuclear program with diplomacy. He keeps repeating the message, but there is more on the U.S. policy agenda regarding Iran than its nuclear program. The evidence is overwhelming. The United States is moving ahead on multiple fronts to change the playing field—and to further its objectives, it recognizes a role for covert violence.

Iran understands what the United States is doing. Tehran's leaders have already told the people of Iran to steel themselves. The clerical regime believes the United States is seeking regime change through violent means, and it has started implementing measures to counter the U.S. efforts.

On the public side, the United States is working to change Iranian behavior: Stop enrichment. Stop involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. Stop support of groups such as Hezbollah. On the covert side, the United States is taking actions that, perversely, are likely to strengthen those inside the Iranian power structure who are the most adamant in refusing to change course. It is a U.S. policy in conflict with itself. It is bad policy, and it is dangerous.

This report draws on my long experience of forecasting crisis scenarios and running military war games that examine the use of force in the Middle East. It draws on the extensive coverage of telltale incidents in the Iranian press and occasionally even in the U.S. media. It also is an update of my previous work.<sup>1</sup> Two years ago, I wrote about the pressures that were moving the United States toward the military option against Iran. In that report, I examined rational

policy choices and the potential efficacy and limitations of military action. The situation has changed.

This report will describe how the United States policy has evolved over the past two years, moving more and more toward covert operations as policymakers have come to see the costs of “preventive” military attack as prohibitive. The report will consider Israel’s role as strategic rival to Iran in the region, and it will assess the ways the Iranians have reacted to what they believe the United States and Israel have done. The consequences of the action and reaction have produced the current delicate situation. The report will describe that situation and conclude with recommendations to reduce the danger of an unintended escalation of violence.

The situation has become very fragile, and may well take on a life of its own. The situation is likely to become more delicate and more explosive in the final months of the Bush administration and in the early months of a new U.S. administration.

## **THE MILITARY OPTION**

The military option is on the table, as the president has repeatedly underscored. We have heard talk of a military strike for the past two years. Nothing happened. Why not?

Part of the answer has appeared in the press. The first firebreak to the strike option, as military planners inside the Pentagon pushed back, came in the spring of 2006. The White House made a great deal of what was to be the “summer of diplomacy.” Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced that if Iran suspended enrichment, the United States would open dialogue. The summer ended with no suspension of enrichment and no diplomatic engagement.

Pressures to keep to the diplomacy path and eschew violence have come from a number of directions. Internationally, the Russians and, ever more vocally, the Europeans have been quite open about opposing the military option. Inside the administration, Robert Gates, the secretary of defense who replaced Donald Rumsfeld after the 2006 congressional elections, and Admiral Michael Mullen, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, have made public statements against using military force. House and Senate members have pressed legislation

that would prohibit the use of military force against Iran without congressional approval. In addition, grassroots networks of the peace movement have organized themselves to give voice to opposition to the military option, to seemingly greater effect than when Capitol Hill ignored their warnings on Iraq in 2002.

The second reason for delay in the strike option seems to have been to give covert operations a chance to work. For those alert to clues in press reports, this seems to have involved covert operations inside Iran as well as the funding of groups to take on Hezbollah, Iran's presumed proxy in Lebanon.

Finally, senior officials inside the administration, as well as many in Congress and most leading allies in Europe, insisted that sanctions had to be given a chance. It took protracted negotiations to get approval of sanctions by the U.N. Security Council, but now the administration has the third successively tightened sanctions package from the United Nations.

Have we achieved anything with Iran over the past four years? One can imagine this is the exact question that Vice President Dick Cheney asks. He listened to the arguments about diplomacy and sanctions. From the beginning he was skeptical of these alternatives. Perhaps he was right.

Iran has openly continued enriching. From recent reports, Iran may have installed more sophisticated centrifuges at the Natanz facility. And beyond the nuclear issue, Iran continues to support Hezbollah. Iran continues to send arms into Iraq, and may be increasing arms shipments to the Taliban in Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup>

## **THE UNITED STATES PUSHING IRAN**

The president has said many times that the war on terror is being carried out on fronts known to the American people—and on fronts unknown to the American people. There are increasing signs that one of those fronts is now Iran.

Intelligence operations inside Iran by Americans, even involving U.S. troops, probably began in 2004, while moderate Mohammad Khatami was still Iran's president. Some reports appeared in the Western press about elements of the operations, as did reports in the Iranian media. According to reports, U.S. and Israeli troops were planting sensors. In early 2005, the United States began flying Predator drones into Iran, again according to both Western and Iranian sources.

The support for proxy groups appears to have begun in mid-2005. The first group to which the United States funneled training and money was the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), the Iranian opposition group on the State Department's list of terrorists groups. The day-to-day dealings with the MEK during this period may have been handled through a contractor.

Early operations inside Iran were done without a governing presidential finding, a formal authorization for covert operations. The secretary of defense assumed the activities were within the authorizations that existed to conduct military operations.<sup>3</sup>

The specific objective of the United States to destabilize the government of Iran was reported by ABC News nineteen months ago. According to that report, a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) plan was approved for action with a non-lethal presidential finding. Again, according to ABC News, which the White House did not explicitly deny, the plan included "a coordinated campaign for propaganda, disinformation and manipulation of Iran's currency and international financial transactions."<sup>4</sup> The Iranians describe these activities as the use of soft power against them. They say the United States is seeking to deny them the tools they need to govern.

The covert and clandestine operations were significantly escalated in late 2007 or early 2008. A new presidential finding was signed and at least partially briefed to the appropriate intelligence committees and leaders in the Congress. Substantial amounts of funding were approved, and the scope of the operations against Iran was greatly expanded.<sup>5</sup>

Whether explicitly approved in this latest presidential finding or not, it is now fairly clear that assassinations are being carried out.<sup>6</sup> Terms like "targeted officials" and "high value targets" have clear meaning in the sterile language of covert operations. To clarify for the lay reader, use of these terms customarily signals to an implementing agency that officials obstructive to the government's purposes should be rendered nonobstructive. There is considerable unease in the national security community about whether this means possible complicity in proxies killing Iranians holding leadership positions, possibly leadership positions in the government, the military, or the nuclear program.<sup>7</sup>

The United States is now supporting at least four groups to do proxy operations. Management of the groups comes from the CIA and the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command.

The MEK has been doing work for the United States for at least three years. Intelligence seems to be the most important product of their efforts. The individuals in the political, nonterrorist wing of the group wear expensive suits and give press conferences.<sup>8</sup>

More direct combat operations are coming from The Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK). This well-uniformed, high-publicity group operates out of the Kurdish area of northern Iraq. It is equipped with Russian arms, as is standard for U.S.-backed proxy groups throughout the world. The *Los Angeles Times* quotes a Kurd as saying that every two or three months, U.S. military vehicles can be seen entering the PJAK strongholds. If the Kurdish group's Web site and Iranian reports are to be believed, PJAK are heavily engaged inside Iran, and take casualties.<sup>9</sup>

The next group, known as Jundullah, is particularly scruffy looking and seems to bungle operations frequently. It operates out of Afghanistan and the Baluchistan province of Pakistan and seems to take particular care to leave behind videos of its operations.<sup>10</sup> A Pakistani official told ABC News that the group had hundreds of men for unspecified missions across the border in Iran.<sup>11</sup> The leader of Jundullah has announced with pride that the group has the capability and will to take operations to Tehran.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, a new group recently has surfaced, the Ahwazi Arabs of southwest Iran.<sup>13</sup> Although this group has been identified as being a component of U.S. covert operations, not as much is known about it. The group has made claims of operations, and Iran has reported incidents consistent with the claims.

## EVIDENCE OF COVERT OPERATIONS

Tracing covert operations always presents a problem of evidence, which often is circumstantial. The Iranian situation is unusual because many sources are reporting parts of the picture. The groups that the United States is supporting have their own public relations programs, and reporting raids and clashes is crucial to their efforts to be seen as effective opponents of the Islamic regime. In addition, Iranian press services very often report on clashes when they occur. Many times, claims by a group can be matched with an Iranian report. Although the picture may not be complete, the evidence is strong.

The flow of clashes and attacks can be seen to have grown with the escalation of presidential approvals. Here is some of what has been reported:

- The Jundullah, one of the identified U.S. proxy groups, claimed credit for killing eleven members of the Revolutionary Guard in February 2007. The official Islamic Republic News Agency also reported the bombing of the bus in which the troops were killed.<sup>14</sup>
- Iranian television reported in May 2007 that authorities captured ten men crossing the border with \$500,000 in cash along with maps of sensitive areas and spy equipment. A senior Pakistani official told ABC News that the men were members of the Jundullah organization.<sup>15</sup>
- The Ahwazi Arab group issued a statement in which it claimed responsibility for the assassination of an Iranian cleric, Abbas Abbasian. The killing took place during an attack on a convoy on March 27, 2008, near an Iran/Iraq War battlefield.<sup>16</sup>
- In one of the most significant recent incidents, on April 12, 2008, a cultural center in Shiraz was bombed. Fourteen were killed and over 150 were injured. At first the Iranians said it was an accident. After a few days, they began to mention individuals trained by the United States. They then settled on saying it was a group sponsored by the CIA and that this was the first of what was to be many bombings planned by the group.<sup>17</sup> By June, Iran announced that it had evidence that it would present to the world of U.S. sponsorship.<sup>18</sup> A previously unknown group claimed credit for the bombing. The group's statement said it was done in the name of the minorities of Iran. This list included all the minorities being supported by the U.S. program.<sup>19</sup>
- Although it never presented the evidence of U.S. sponsorship that it claimed to have, Iran did make an official protest to the United States through a Swiss intermediary.<sup>20</sup>
- On April 24, 2008 a U.K.-based element of the Ahwazi Arab group reported the killing of a colonel of the 92nd Armored Division of the Revolutionary Guard inside Iran. In its press report, the group said the colonel was "assassinated."<sup>21</sup>
- In June 2008, nine members of the PJAK were killed in fighting with police in Western Azerbaijan province of Iran. The clash was described in the Iranian press.<sup>22</sup>

- In June 2008, a “terrorist group” was responsible for a blast on the natural gas pipeline through which Iran supplies gas to Turkey. According to the Fars News Agency, the PJAK was responsible. The pipeline has been a source of some tension between the United States and Turkey.<sup>23</sup>
- Iran reported the arrest of eleven individuals “with links to foreigners” who were responsible for an attack on a bus convoy in March 2008. The bus attack was previously unreported by the Iranians but was in the area where the Ahwazi Arab group has been operating.<sup>24</sup>
- In another front of proxy operations, ABC News reported in June 2008 that Pakistan had in custody six members of the Jundullah group. Pakistan was threatening to turn the individuals over to Iran.<sup>25</sup>
- In an unusual press release on June 4, 2008, the PJAK claimed heavy fighting inside Iran. The group said ninety-two Iranian soldiers had been killed between May 25 and June 2. Some of the clashes in the press report.<sup>26</sup>

*May 27*

Military base near Kamiyaran attacked—many soldiers killed and wounded.

Army units in Alwatan area attacked—seven Revolutionary Guard soldiers killed.

Military vehicle in Kirmanshah city attacked—four Revolutionary Guard members killed.

Military vehicle destroyed in the village of Zale—thirteen soldiers killed.

*May 31*

Military base close to Shno attacked—thirteen soldiers killed many wounded.

*June 1*

Military base near Saghez attacked—fifteen Revolutionary Guard soldiers killed and two cars destroyed.

High-ranking Basij member by the name of Asad killed.<sup>27</sup>

- The Iranian Fars News Agency reported on June 22, 2008, that the “terrorist group” Jundullah was responsible for kidnapping sixteen Iranian policemen near the border with Pakistan.<sup>28</sup>

- Iran's Press TV reported on July 7, 2008, that Iranian security forces had killed an insurgent and captured another in Tabriz, the East Azerbaijan province in the northeast part of the country. Four others escaped. The broadcast quoted a Revolutionary Guard commander as saying, "They had intruded into Iranian territory to destabilize the situation."<sup>29</sup>
- The PJAK reported on its Web site that on July 14, 2008, the military station at Geragor was hit. The PJAK say they took control of the station, destroyed the site building, destroyed six military vehicles, and killed sixteen Iranian soldiers.<sup>30</sup>
- On July 18, 2008, the Iranian News Agency reported that two Revolutionary Guard soldiers were killed by the PJAK. A colonel was one of those killed.<sup>31</sup>
- In a major escalation, according to press reports, a major event took place on July 19, 2008. A massive explosion hit a military convoy carrying munitions in the suburbs of Tehran. The ammunition was reported to be bound for Hezbollah.<sup>32</sup>

The covert programs of the United States involve efforts for propaganda and disinformation and the support of political minorities. Since 2004, the United States has funded an initiative to do the same kind of thing in a more open way—the Iran "Democracy Program." Over \$120 million has been spent on this effort. Most has gone to fund broadcasting efforts, but some seems to have been passed to exile groups that can make connections with opposition groups inside Iran.

Steven Hadley, the president's national security adviser, said the United States would "increase pressure" on Iran in his briefing to the press aboard Air Force One as the president flew to the Middle East in May of this year.<sup>33</sup> For some, this recalled the kinds of statements that were made in the summer and early fall of 2002 as the White House began marshalling public and media support for the invasion of Iraq.

The White House has a very well established and fairly disciplined strategic communication apparatus. It worked—critics might say "spun"—at its best in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq. It has a fairly simple strategy: saturate the media with a strong story line.

The result of the White House pressure on the issue of Iran can be traced from that Hadley statement through the warnings and missile firings by Iran in

response to escalating Israeli and American threats of attack. Iran is emerging as a national security issue, even if many experts and allies may view it as mostly a manufactured one. Still, public anxieties are stoked at home—and in Iran, tensions build.

## THE ISRAEL FACTOR

“George Bush understands the severity of the Iranian threat and the need to vanquish it, and intends to act on the matter before the end of his term in the White House,” declared Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert after his June meeting with the president in Washington. Clearly, Israel’s security establishment feels it is able to move decision-makers in the United States, and its firm conviction that Islamic Iran is the major remaining threat to Israel in the region heightens the risk of miscalculation in the current situation.

Often missed in the discussion of the Iranian threat is the Israeli position that the threshold of serious danger occurs not when Iran has a nuclear weapon, but when Iran has mastered the knowledge of the enrichment cycle.

President Bush used to say the United States could not allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon. He began to adopt the Israeli line of argument almost two years ago. When he is being precise in a warning to Iran, he will say, “We cannot allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon or the knowledge to produce one.”

The knowledge threshold significantly changes the situation. It means the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate that Iran had terminated its weapons efforts does not affect either U.S. or Israeli policy. When will Iran master the enrichment cycle? That becomes the driving question for the intelligence communities of both countries. Israel believes Iran will cross this “knowledge red line” sooner than does the United States.

The consequence of this shared understanding of a knowledge red line brings U.S. and Israeli timelines together. Although Iran is a long way from a nuclear weapon, the situation is not seen as a problem to worry about some time in the future. It is an immediate problem with immediate political resonance.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee met in Washington in June. Within days of that meeting, over two hundred cosponsors had put their names to a resolution introduced into the House of Representatives that used

almost the exact words of the committee in describing the threat from Iran and what should be done about it. The resolution urged the president to lead an international “effort”—without reference to the U.N. Security Council—to prohibit the export to Iran of all refined petroleum products, to prevent Iranian diplomats from leaving the country except for nuclear negotiations, and to impose inspections of all people and cargo leaving from or bound for Iran.

Reports of cooperation between the Israeli intelligence services and those of the United States in Iran have been in the press for over four years. Coordination of covert and clandestine operations has to be assumed by the Iranians.

The *New York Times* recently described an Israeli military exercise in early June that “appeared to be a rehearsal for a potential bombing attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities.” The piece in the *New York Times* quoted an American official that the exercise was meant to send a signal to both the United States and Iran that Israel was prepared to carry out a military strike if diplomatic efforts fail.<sup>34</sup> Israel’s hard-nosed security establishment has the capacity, it seems, to escalate Washington’s sense of crisis.

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak has recently taken a less strident public position about striking the Iran nuclear facilities, especially after a meeting at which Secretary of Defense Robert Gates was said unequivocally to have ruled out such an attack by either country. Still, given Israel’s own internal political infighting as Olmert’s government unravels, one should not underestimate its share of responsibility for the volatile situation becoming more dangerous.

## THE IRANIAN REACTIONS

What is in the minds of the leaders of Iran? It is very difficult to know. We do know they do not understand the United States very well. Few in the highly conservative circles currently running the government have had contact with Americans, and few have even traveled outside the country.

It is fairly certain the leadership of Iran is of one mind on what the United States is doing. The United States may continue to insist publicly that diplomacy is the preferred path for dealing with Iran, but from the perspective of

Tehran, the U.S. administration's actions speak louder than its words. Tehran has to believe the U.S. objective is regime change. Not-so-circumstantial evidence of that objective is in their face continuously.

Regime change is the message that Tehran reads in Washington's Iran Democracy fund. Despite the possibility that Washington might simply be sending subtle signals to Iranian leaders (for example, as a warning against Iranian interference with Shiite factions in Iraq), regime change seems to them to be the objective of the covert and clandestine operations.

The evidence of major U.S. covert operations being conducted against them is not news to the Iranians. The regime there has been accusing the CIA as well as United Kingdom and Israeli intelligence operatives of many acts inside Iran. The CIA has specifically been fingered as the source of a bombing of a cultural center in April.

The Iranian press limited itself to a summary of the Seymour Hersh article on covert operations. Iranian television went farther. According to the *Los Angeles Times* blog, Iranian television went "bonkers" over the story. The *Los Angeles Times* said a roundtable discussion on the article was entitled, "Sabotage of the U.S. in Iran and a new wave of psychological warfare."

Iranian PRESS TV

**US Backs Jundullah to destabilize Iran**

Wednesday, 9 July 2008

Pakistan's former Army Chief, Retired General Mizra Aslam, says the US is supporting the outlawed Jundullah group to destabilize Iran.

He said that the US is providing training facilities to Jundullah fighters—located in eastern area of Iran—to create unrest in the area and affect the cordial ties between Iran and its neighbor Pakistan.

For a regime with a relatively controlled press, the question of whether or not to make a big deal out of these kinds of revelations of outside involvement in the country is an important decision. Letting it be known widely that the United States is operating inside Iran is a message that the regime is not able to protect its borders. On the other hand, choosing to let the people of Iran know

suggests that the leadership is preparing the population for something that might follow. Citing the CIA in Iran is a particularly potent weapon to generate support for the government.

In a step of escalation, Iran has mobilized portions of its volunteer Basij forces in response to apparent U.S. covert operations. Iran announced that beginning on May 23, 2008, the Islamist Basij militia would begin dusk to dawn patrolling of urban areas across the country. According to the report, the patrols are to provide security for “governmental, public and private buildings.”<sup>35</sup>

In the past, the Basij have dealt with student unrest and even enforced dress codes. What’s significant about this mobilization is that the government has connected it to the claimed CIA bombing of the cultural center in Shiraz.

Iranian officials have often parried their enemies’ attacks on them by adroit use of “soft” power. Again, they have responded accordingly. Within the Armed Forces General Headquarters, they have created an organization called the Passive Defense Bureau. According to the order creating the organization, it is to defend the Islamic Republic against the enemies’ moves.

The head of the Passive Defense Bureau in an interview described the enemies’ moves as attacks on the ability of the government to govern the nation. He mentioned propaganda, software attacks, and protection of infrastructure as the countermeasures available to Iranians.<sup>36</sup>

All of the activity has made Iran jittery about protecting its nuclear facilities. On July 4, 2008, the sea patrols that guard the Bushehr nuclear reactor stopped and detained four fishing boats that were in international waters. The boats were from Saudi Arabia and had Indian crews. According to reports in the Indian press, the boats and the seventeen crewmen were fifty kilometers from the reactor.<sup>37</sup>

Iran is responding in other ways. Military units have fired artillery into Iraq against the PJAK for quite a while. More recently, the cross-border attacks into Iraq may have included air strikes. And in a more serious escalation, a Kurdish Web site has reported that Revolutionary Guard troops have begun conducting ambushes inside Iraq.<sup>38</sup>

I have done numerous war games simulating the decision-making of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council. I have seen a consistent player conclusion: when facing the kinds of actions the United States is doing right now, the primary objective becomes regime survival—do everything, anything necessary to protect the Islamic Republic.

In late June 2008, 70,000 people attended a rally outside Paris sponsored by the National Council Resistance for Iran. They were protesting the failure of the European Union to remove from its list of terrorist groups the MEK, one of the groups whose operations inside Iran the United States is supporting. This is not lost on the Iranians.

The warnings and threatening actions accumulate. It has become almost a daily event for one or more of the three countries to ratchet up the threats. A very significant characteristic of the Iranian threats is that they are not coming from the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The Iranians who are making the statements are individuals who are closely associated with the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

- June 28—Commander of the Revolutionary Guard: if attacked, “one of Iran’s steps will definitely be to exercise control of the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.”
- June 29—Iranian brigadier general: “We will dig 15,000 to 20,000 graves in each of our border provinces” for the burial of enemy soldiers.
- July 4—Commander of the Revolutionary Guard: if nuclear facilities are attacked, “any action against Iran will be interpreted as the start of a war.”
- July 8—Iranian Supreme Leader spokesman: “Iran would set fire to Israel and the U.S. Navy if it were attacked.”
- July 9—Iranian Missile Firings and Commander of the Revolutionary Guard: “have to know that our finger is always on the trigger and we have hundreds even thousands of missiles ready.”
- July 12—Representative of the Supreme Leader: “before the dust from these attacks settles on the ground, our armed forces will strike the very heart of Israel and 32 U.S. military bases in the region.”<sup>39</sup>
- July 16—Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei: “Punishment will be meted out to anyone who dares and try to attack Iran.”

Ahmadinejad is known for off-the-wall rhetoric, but except for a general threat on July 13, he has been silent in the flow of threats during this three-week period. What makes these threats unique is that they have been coming from the office of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and from people who work directly for him. Ahmadinejad does not control the Revolutionary Guard,

which reports directly to the Supreme Leader; when the Commander of the Revolutionary Guard makes a public statement, it has a heightened importance.

The other aspect that is different is that the threats have become more specific than in any previous times I can recall. It is almost as if the Iranians were announcing what they would do rather than just making a threat to show they were serious.

We cannot know if the Iranians have thought through consequences of the position they are staking out in the current situation. In the policy realm, it is possible to find yourself forced into doing something to deal with a message you have over-used. Iran has heavily used the message that the United States is working to destabilize the government.

At what point do increasingly belligerent U.S.-sponsored “pressures” trigger more forceful Iranian countermeasures? What becomes the Iranian tipping point? If we were in a Supreme National Security Council meeting being chaired by the Supreme Leader, we would probably not get a good answer. But the United States needs to think about the question.

When does the regime decide it has been pushed too far? When does it begin to do some of the things it has threatened? What action by the United States warrants Tehran’s restricting the flow of oil from the Gulf? Or, might the Iranians respond more indirectly, through more covert measures in new places?

Iran shares responsibility for making the volatile situation more dangerous.

## **THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE**

A quarter-century of U.S. sanctions, previous threats of the military option, the off-and-on deployment of an additional aircraft carrier group to the region, and intensification of Iran’s isolation have not moved the Iranians to capitulate.<sup>40</sup> Iran continues to enrich. Although at a less visible level than before, Iran continues to be involved in Iraq. Iran continues to be involved in Afghanistan. Iran continues to support and rearm Hezbollah.

On the surface, the expanded U.S. covert operations against Iran seem like pin pricks. The United States is training and supporting at least four Iranian minority groups to conduct attacks against targets inside Iran. Soldiers of the Revolutionary Guard have been killed. Soldiers and police have been kid-

napped. A cultural center was bombed. An air base in Tehran was struck. All are relatively minor incidents.

It does not take esoteric analysis to see the hollowness of the hope that the United States will destabilize the Islamic republic in the near future. The reality is that the campaign of sabotage will likely have just the opposite effect. Moderate voices will be drowned out by the rabidly conservative elements inside Iran. We can see that happening already. Tehran is using the violence to shore up public support for the clerical regime. Tehran is blaming the CIA, an organization whose past history in the country has left it widely hated by the Iranian people. Tehran is citing U.S. covert operations as an argument to mobilize the Basij.

But if financing for covert operations will not bring down the mullahs' regime, what is it supposed to accomplish? One possibility is to provoke Tehran into escalation. As Seymour Hersh was told, Vice President Cheney is very interested in a *casus belli*, a reason to move to the next step in the use of force against the Iranians. According to Hersh's sources, the vice president has even had a brainstorming session on how to start a war with Iran.

There is historical precedent for provoking an adversary. The United States has explored that route in politically charged cases that go back over twenty years—in its contra war against Nicaragua in the 1980s, and in scenarios in 2003 that senior officials hoped could create the impression that Iraq had initiated the hostilities.

There is another possibility for what U.S. policymakers might intend by the covert operations in the immediate future. Maybe the goal is just to punish the Iranians for bad behavior, to make them understand there is a price to pay for continuing enrichment, for trying to expand their influence in Iraq under the very nose of the large U.S. military deployment, and for supporting terrorist groups around the Middle East. Maybe it is the very simple notion we have to show bad guys the United States is tough. The president and vice president want people to believe they are tough.<sup>41</sup>

Although sending messages through the use of force has never been very successful as a policy tool, message-sending is a preferred White House objective. Maybe the immediate United States objective is just about sending a message to the Iranians. Maybe we will see the United States use covert operations to attack an important target inside Iran.

It is not easy to interpret what is happening within the U.S. government on Iran. The military and now civilian leadership of the Pentagon seem to be fairly strong that a conflict with Iran should be avoided. It would be a mistake to conclude that is a major restraint. Covert operations are not being directed by the Department of Defense. There are likely very few individuals who even know the extent of the effort beyond what they can read in the open press. The State Department is out of the loop. The focus of both covert and clandestine operations seems to be the White House. They are being run and coordinated from there.

Finally, looking to the immediate future, there is the political situation. President Bush is not going to escalate the use of force against Iran simply because Senator Barack Obama may be elected to succeed him. On the other hand, the more it appears as if Obama is likely to be elected, the more President Bush may be tempted to respond forcefully to an untoward event and to the options of escalation. Fearful that a liberal-minded successor may not have the resolve to confront and take down a mortal enemy, some political analysts suggest, he might prove more susceptible to upping the ante in a dangerous sequence of events.

## **DANGEROUS EVENTS**

The U.S.-Iranian situation has previously weathered some rather serious events. The USS *Vincennes* shot down an Iranian civilian airliner by mistake in 1988. A U.S. Air Force barracks in Saudi Arabia was blown up, killing and wounding U.S. military personnel, and the Saudis convinced the FBI that Iran was behind the act.<sup>42</sup> In the current environment, it is difficult to imagine either of these events not leading to some form of retaliation.

The political situation in the three countries compounds the fragility. President Bush has reportedly promised to deal with the Iranian problem before the end of his administration. Prime Minister Olmert, facing serious corruption charges, will have stepped down after a party leadership election in September. The Iranian leadership is facing a presidential election in June 2009 amid rising discontent over the economy and cannot be certain it can completely manage the event.

Even if all three capitals have essentially gone into default mode, counting down the days until a U.S. administration with a fresh mandate comes to power, the proxies in the region to whom the shadow combat has been subcontracted may not share their restraint. The possibilities of proxies initiating events that could trigger a war in the Middle East are more extensive, and the consequences more serious. The scenarios include:

- *High-casualty event in Iraq with some “Iranian DNA.”* Many killed and wounded, and it appears in the early analysis that the missiles used against the base were the kind being supplied by Iran. It is important, political leaders will say, to show strength after an incident like this. The United States must do something.

In this situation, the U.S. military probably already has the targeting ready for a response: attack the terrorist training camps in Iran.

- *Encounter in the Gulf between U.S. ships and Revolutionary Guard naval forces.* The incident in January 2008 when five Iranian speedboats seemed to threaten three U.S. ships in international waters seems to have changed U.S. perceptions and procedures. Rather than making it easier to defuse an incident, the new rules of engagement and reporting procedures make it more likely the U.S. will respond with force rapidly.

If the objective of the White House is to find a *casus belli*, this is a danger very close to the surface. A U.S. Navy officer who has spent time in the Persian Gulf has told me that it takes work to prevent having an incident. The greater the tensions are, the more the danger an incident will not be prevented.

- *Major casualty event inside Iran with “U.S. (or U.S.-backed) DNA.”* Twelve Iranians were killed and over 140 wounded in a blast in a cultural center in Shiraz in April of this year. The Iranians have blamed the CIA. Their only response has been to promise to produce the evidence before an international body, although they have not done so.<sup>43</sup>

Obviously, one has to ask if a second incident might lead the Iranians to retaliate. Would they respond if one hundred were killed? Although the Iranians are not suicidal and seem not to want to trigger an armed confrontation with *any* U.S. president, it is certainly within their capabilities to put together an attack against the United States in the region, and possibly even within the United States.

- *Assassination of an important figure in Iran.* The Ahwazi Arab group has already claimed it assassinated a colonel in the Revolutionary Guard armored division.

What if the commander of the Revolutionary Guard Engineering Division, the unit probably directly connected with the nuclear program, were killed? At some point, an assassination could be a tipping point for the Iranians.

What if Ahmadinejad were killed? He has already accused the West of attempting twice to kill him, once while he was visiting Rome and again while he was in Baghdad.<sup>44</sup> Even if the United States were not directly or indirectly responsible, it is easy to see how the Iranians could be convinced it was, and be pushed to a response.

- *Major intelligence item that Iran is more advanced than we thought.* The scenario is simple. An Iranian scientist walks into a U.S. embassy in the region with the story that he is concerned that what his country is doing may bring about a serious war. He cannot stand to have that on his consciences.

The defector describes a secret enrichment facility buried in the mountain in the Natanz area. Iran is much farther along with enrichment than we previously thought. Because of the U.S. and Israeli knowledge red line, the defector does not have to say Iran is close to a weapon to generate action. He just has to tell the intelligence types that Iran is farther along with enrichment.

The CIA checks out everything possible about the defector. They cannot find holes. What he is saying is also consistent with some of the information the United States is getting from Israel.

I have played this kind of intelligence with former U.S. officials in war games. Even with the uncertainty and the negative hangover from defectors before the invasion of Iraq, this will stimulate decision-makers. A strike could well be the option selected.

- *Sanctions that are more than sanctions.* About a year ago, proposals for a more substantial level of sanctions against Iran surfaced. The idea was to stop the flow of refined petroleum products going into Iran. It seems more and more as if this option will be considered seriously in the near future.

On the surface the notion has an attraction. Gasoline has been a sensitive topic with the population. Iran imports around half of the refined petroleum products it uses. It seems like vulnerability. Pressure the people, and the government will be forced to terminate enrichment and stop support for terrorism.

Like many countries, Iran has subsidized gasoline prices for many years. Although there have been some price increases, the regime has felt the people would not tolerate paying anything remotely close to the international market price. This “sanction” would open a window for the government to increase prices while blaming the great Satan.<sup>45</sup>

Then there is the question of blockade. How would the United States prevent the import of refined products? It would have to be by stopping ships going to Iranian ports. That is a blockade—considered an act of war (absent Security Council authorization), yet it is a feature of the congressional resolution pressed by the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

- *Major destructive event at an Iranian nuclear facility with U.S. DNA.* The targeting of U.S. covert and clandestine operations to this point has been trivial. It might not remain that way. If the United States and Israel want to show Iran there is a price to pay for continuing with enrichment, one of the nuclear facilities in Iran might be targeted. As part of the preparations for one of the war games I conducted, I counted over twenty-five separate targets that are part of the Iranian nuclear system. It would be very difficult to covertly target some of these. The facility where the banks of centrifuges are working at Natanz is hardened and well protected. Other facilities are vulnerable to this kind of attack, however. The research facility in Tehran, for example, is not very well protected. It is possible that an attack by a resistance group on an Iranian nuclear facility could be a tipping point for the United States.
- *Russian agreement to provide Iran with the S-300 air defense system.* Iranian air defense capabilities are not very good. They did get a boost two years ago when Russia delivered a low-altitude missile and radar system. For almost ten years, there have been press reports that Russia would sell its S-300 system to Iran, with high altitude radar and missile

capabilities—a deal that was in the works even before the South Ossetia crisis of August 2008 and which Israeli defense sources now believe to have been consummated.<sup>46</sup>

The S-300 could prove to be a tipping point for the United States and Israel. It would add significant problems to attacking Iran's nuclear facilities. A dangerous situation would be more dangerous.

## REDUCING THE DANGER

The January 2008 encounter between U.S. Navy ships and Iranian speedboats should be a warning of how small events between Iran and the United States could escalate into an unintended larger conflict. Even during the most dangerous periods of the Cold War, the United States agreed to confidence-building measures with the Soviet Union. One of the most important of those was an agreement dealing with incidents at sea. Navy commanders have said such an agreement would make sense with the Iranians given the close quarters in the Persian Gulf. Leading members and key committees of Congress ought to press the administration to work on this kind of agreement with the Iranians, with provisions for:

- not interfering in the maritime formations of the other party,
- avoiding maneuvers in areas of heavy sea traffic,
- not simulating attack on the other party's ships, and
- informing vessels when submarines are operating near them.<sup>47</sup>

In November 2002, an armed unmanned aerial vehicle operated by the CIA over a remote part of Yemen killed an individual suspected of having been involved in the bombing of the USS *Cole*. The Iranians see that capability and believe the United States is engaged in a parallel campaign of assassination of individuals inside Iran. They claim some evidence to support their argument.

In 1975, a Senate Select Committee investigated assassinations in intelligence activities. The committee stated, "We condemn assassination and reject it as an instrument of American policy."<sup>48</sup> This is clearly an area where congressional oversight could have an impact. A similar select committee needs to be

formed to investigate the actions taken under (or perhaps notwithstanding) the presidential findings of President Bush. The American public needs to know if assassination by proxy has become U.S. policy; and if it has not, the suspicious Iranians need to know that.<sup>49</sup>

The presidential candidates could help. The candidates could declare that fomenting regime change is a counterproductive approach for dealing with Iran, and that the Iranian people's right freely to choose new leadership next year must be respected. This would be a major step in softening an Iranian reaction to an incident between now and the change of administration in the United States. And the winner on November 4 should discreetly but quickly telegraph to the agencies concerned that he will suspend the covert operations program on January 20.

Policy is often driven by weak assumptions. The dangerous situation with Iran reflects that dilemma. Those who write and speak about national security issues could help with a better examination of some of the assumptions of the current and prospective new leadership in the United States and Israel:

- *Iran's nuclear program presents an existential threat to Israel similar to the Holocaust.* This kind of exaggeration is not helpful. Iran is a long way from having deliverable nuclear weapons. Even ten nuclear weapons would not threaten Israel's existence. As a former Israeli intelligence chief has said, a greater Middle East war caused by rash actions stemming from this assumption could be a real existential threat to Israel.
- *Iran could give nuclear weapons to terrorist groups.* This is a speculative assumption contradicted by actual experience. The evidence is just the opposite. Iran has an extensive chemical weapons capability, and chemical weapons have not been given to terrorist groups.
- *The United States can dominate the escalation ladder.* This is probably more wishful thinking rather than an assumption that can be supported. There is nothing in Iranian history that suggests it will tolerate continued U.S. covert attacks. There is nothing in Iranian history that suggests that if the United States were to strike Iran with conventional forces it would accept the blow and not respond. If nothing else, the Iranians could be forced to respond by their own rhetoric.
- *If the causing-incident is right, the American people will support attacking Iran.* Seymour Hersh has described this as an assumption of the White

House that came out of the January 2008 incident between Iranian speed-boats and a U.S. destroyer. This assumption that the public will simply rally around the flag crumbles when the question of support is posed not in terms of the day *of* an attack, but the day *after*: is it obvious that the American people would support a military strike precipitating oil prices of \$200 or \$250 per barrel, much less a tax increase?

## FINALLY

The president and other members of the administration say, “The first option for the United States is to solve this problem diplomatically.” That might be the case for the nuclear problem, but the administration has other, deeper problems with Tehran for which it has consistently refused any diplomatic option. The option the United States has picked involves beginning with the use of proxy forces and conducting direct action inside Iran. The immediate future could produce an event that would justify the military strike. Diplomacy on the nuclear problem becomes a cover for that option.

Since the United States has more objectives than just halting enrichment, contingency planning for possible future events suggests another problem. Even if the Iranians were to halt or suspend enrichment, the United States may still be unwilling to halt the covert and clandestine activities. If the Iranians were to conclude the same, the United States would have eliminated any incentive for them to halt enrichment. Perhaps they have already concluded as much, at least regarding the expiring administration, and imagine they can hold it at bay with counterthreats, hints of nuclear flexibility, and oil jitters till a new team enters the White House.

At some point, U.N. Security Council members and the European Union are going to realize the United States has several layers of ends and means, of which the hard-negotiated Security Council “5+1” track on the nuclear program is but one. The United States is not interested just in Iran’s nuclear program. While it has been talking about diplomacy on the one hand, the United States has been working on multiple levels that involve very little coordination with allies and Security Council partners.

Since the increased funding for covert operations by the United States in Iran has only recently been approved, we have not yet seen the full extent of

the effort. We can expect more incidents, and we can expect the risk of retaliatory incidents to increase. As that happens, the point resurfaces. When does Iran reach its tipping point and begin to fight back, not with words, but with expanded terrorist acts? When and how do the Europeans and other U.N. Security Council members begin to work together to refocus the “real” U.S. policy back on nuclear containment?

Through history, war has often begun when one side concludes that war is inevitable and that postponing the inevitable only gives the other side the advantage. Looking ahead, the United States is almost certainly going to become militarily more and more disengaged in Iraq. Some Iranians might conclude that such a change would simply free up U.S. forces for operations against Iran—and that if war is inevitable, fighting it now, with U.S. forces overextended and worn down, is better than later.

During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union operated with an unwritten understanding about covert operations, in which both were often engaged. An important assumption in the current U.S. efforts is asymmetry—that we have a right to do these kinds of things, and the Iranians do not, cannot, or will not.

We must hope the White House has guessed right about Iran’s limitations. We hope the White House strategy of ratcheting up the pressure has not pushed the Iranians too far. I hope the fallout of the covert operations against Iran will not be a “game-changing” terrorist attack that generates pressure for an immediate retaliatory escalation—least of all in the heat of a presidential campaign.

The final months of the Bush administration—and even the first months of a new administration—may be very dangerous indeed.

## NOTES

1. Sam Gardiner, Colonel, USAF (Ret.), *The End of the "Summer of Diplomacy": Assessing the U.S. Military Options on Iran*, The Century Foundation, 2006.

2. "Two Iranian Men Detained On Suspicions of Spying," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Afghanistan, May 7, 2008. This report describes a large arms cache, 785 land mines and 445 tripod-mounted machine guns. "Authorities say they suspect the weapons were sent from Iran and were intended for the Taliban."

3. On numerous occasions in 2006, I discussed the activities in Iran with members of the House of Representatives. Even members of the intelligence committee lamented that they did not understand why Secretary Rumsfeld thought he could do these kinds of operations without informing them. They professed indignation but seemed at a loss as to what they could do.

4. Brian Ross and Richard Esposito, "Bush Authorizes New Covert Action against Iran," ABC News Blotter, May 22, 2007.

5. Although the findings themselves have never been published, it is possible to construct their contents from two directions. First, by carefully monitoring the Iranian press, it is possible to get indications of what is happening on the ground there. Second, there are two apparently well-informed press accounts that reveal much about them—Seymour M. Hersh, "Preparing the Battlefield: The Bush Administration Steps Up Its Secret Moves against Iran," *New Yorker*, July 7, 2008, and Andrew Cockburn, "Secret Bush 'Finding' Widens the War on Iran," *CounterPunch*, May 2, 2008. Cockburn was the first to report the existence of the finding.

6. Cockburn, "Secret Bush 'Finding' Widens the War on Iran." In his article on the intelligence finding, Cockburn reports that the types of actions permitted are "up to and including the assassination of targeted officials." Circumstantial evidence of assassination follows in this report.

7. Executive Order 12333, "U.S. Intelligence Activities," states that no person employed by or acting on behalf of the United States Government shall engage in, or conspire to engage in, assassination. This prohibition was in the 1981 version and was left unchanged in the July 31, 2008 revision. The legal aspects of whether this provision is being violated are complex. Since the Revolutionary Guard was designated a terrorist organization in September 2007, killing of its members would most likely not be considered assassination. On the other hand, as I point out below, groups supported by the United States have been directly involved in the killing of police and members of the Basij organization, which would more clearly seem to be assassination.

8. Both Seymour Hersh and Andrew Cockburn have reported on U.S. support of the MEK. An extensive description of the history of U.S. involvement with the MEK can be found in Larisa Alexandrovna, "On Cheney, Rumsfeld Order, U.S. Outsourcing Special Ops, Intelligence to Iraq Terror Group, Intelligence Officials say," *The Raw Story*, April 13, 2006. I have also been told by a very good source that a few years ago a search was under way to find a former CIA individual to "run" the MEK operations.

9. The fact of U.S. support for the PJAK has been reported in numerous outlets. An important article was Borzou Daragahi, "Iran Says U.S. Aids Rebels on its Borders," *Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 2008. I wondered how the United States prevented the PJAK camps from being bombed. Turkish press reported that General Petraeus has an agreement with Turkish generals. Before a PJAK area is struck, Turkey will coordinate.

10. I have seen some of the videos that were left in Iran but not released to the public. One shows the execution of a Revolutionary Guard soldier by Jundullah just after the leader reads a statement of condemnation. The soldier was killed with what sounded like fifty rounds from

an AK-47. I am told another video left inside Iran records a very gruesome beheading of a Revolutionary Guard soldier.

11. Ross and Esposito, "Bush Authorizes New Covert Action against Iran."

12. Al-Arabiya TV, August 7, 2008, translated by the Middle East Media Research Institute, "In Al Arabyia TV Interview Iran's Most Wanted Man Jundallah Leader Abd Al-Malik Says: We Can Now Carry Our Operations to Tehran," September 3, 2008.

13. The group has been mentioned in the Iranian press as the Ahwazi Region Occupation Brigades and has been described as the Ahwazi National Resistance Movement.

14. Emile Tayyip, "Weapons Used in Iran Attacks Come from the U.S.," Alzazerra.com, February 18, 2007.

15. Ross and Esposito, "Bush Authorizes New Covert Action against Iran."

16. "Ahwazi Group Claims Responsibility for Cleric Assassination," Ahwaz Human Rights News, May 8, 2008.

17. "Iran Says Mosque Bombers Planned Oil Pipeline Attack," Reuters, May 17, 2008.

18. "New Findings Divulge U.S. Hand in Shiraz Bombing," Islamic Republic News Agency, May 17, 2008. Also, "Shiraz Mosque Bombers Linked to the U.S.: Minister," Mehr News Agency, May 21, 2008. The Mehr News Agency is a semi-official news agency of the Government of Iran.

19. The group claiming credit was Jihadi Movement of the Sunna People of Iran. In some of the reports of this bombing the place has been described as a mosque, though "cultural center" is the more accurate description. "Sunni Group Claims Bombing of Iran Mosque," Reuters, June 16, 2008.

20. "Iran Arrests 11 behind Deadly Bus Ambush," Reuters, June 1, 2008.

21. "Iran: Army Commander Assassinated," Ahwaz Human Rights News, April 24, 2008.

22. "Iran Says Kills 12 'Terrorists' near Iraq: Report," Reuters, June 5, 2008.

23. "Iran Resumes Supplies to Turkey after Pipeline Blast," FARS News Agency, June 1, 2008.

24. "Iran Arrests 11 over Shooting on Bus Tour," Khaleej Times Online, June 1, 2008.

25. Richard Esposito and Brian Ross, "Pakistan May Turn Over U.S. 'Spies' to Iran," ABC News, May 23, 2008.

26. "PJAK: 92 Iranian Soldiers, Officers and Counter Guerillas Have Been Killed," PJAK Coordination Committee Press Release, June 5, 2008.

27. The Iranian news agency reported clashes during this same period, although as is typical in military operations, the casualty figures are different. Iran reported twelve members of "an armed group" and four border guards were killed in the fighting. "Iran Says Kills 12 in Clash near Iraq: Report," Reuters, June 5, 2008.

28. "U.S. Backs Terrorist Groups in Iran," FARS News Agency, June 22, 2008. Jundallah, in an earlier press release, claimed credit for the kidnapping. "Pak Militant Group Claims It Has Kidnapped 16 Iranian Guards," Pakistan News, June 15, 2008.

29. "Iran Security Guards Kill Intruder," Press TV, July 7, 2008.

30. Each month, the PJAK Web site updates its summary of operations inside Iran. It is [www.pjak.org](http://www.pjak.org).

31. "Rebels Kill Two Iranian Revolutionary Guards: Reports," Reuters, July 20, 2008. The Reuters article was an echo of the Iranian News Agency piece of July 18.

32. This story of this attack was first carried by the *Telegraph*: Con Coughlin, "Iranian Military Convoy Rocked by Mystery Explosion," *Telegraph*, July 25, 2008. When I first saw the report, I dismissed it because Coughlin has been the source of planted stories in the

past, but I received confirmation from two additional press sources who have contacts with different national intelligence agencies.

33. The idea of increasing pressure on Iran was a theme of the president's trip. See Steven Hadley, "Briefing by National Security Advisor Steve Hadley," The White House, May 16, 2008, [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/05](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/05).

34. I do not believe an Israel-only military option is in the cards. In fact, it is likely that the White House has told Olmert that the United States cannot allow that to happen. Moreover, Israel's military capabilities to carry out a decisive strike are questionable.

A paper written at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2006 by Whitney Raas and Austin Long ("Osirak Redux? Assessing Israeli Capabilities to Destroy Iranian Nuclear Facilities") analyzes Israel's military options and is a good representation of how Israel thinks about the targeting problem.

According to Raas and Long, in a strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, Israel would be interested in three targets: the enrichment facility at Natanz, the conversion facility at Esfahan, and the heavy water plant at Arak. They say Israel would want to attack these three facilities with a combined total of thirty-six aircraft. Getting thirty-six bombing aircraft into the targets connects well with the description of the early June exercise of one hundred aircraft reported in the *New York Times*. Three strike packages of F-15I and F-16I aircraft, escorted by F-15A/C's with other supporting aircraft, would be around one hundred aircraft. An Israeli strike would not be much of a strike. Working the calculations, Israel would hit approximately one hundred aim points, single weapons on a single part of the target. I would call the Israeli strike "disruptive" rather than "destructive." It has taken three to five years to build the three facilities, which we know from overhead imagery. A strike would have to destroy most of the facilities to come close to setting back the program just three to five years.

35. "Basij to Help Police Enhance Security in Iran," Fars News Agency, May 22, 2008.

36. The interview with Dr. Gholam Reza Jalali-Farahi was published in the Iranian newspaper *Hamshari* on June 30, 2008, a translation from BBC Monitoring Newsfile.

37. "Arrests: India in Touch with Iran," *The Hindu* (New Delhi), July 5, 2008. Some Indian reports went so far as to say the reason the four boats were stopped was because the Iranians feared the boats contained U.S. Special Operations troops.

38. My point about air strikes into Iraq by Iran actually comes from a statement made by the Iraqi government. The Web site describing infiltration comes from "Iranian Troops Infiltrate into Iraqi Kurdish Region," BBC Monitoring Newsfile, July 17, 2008.

39. The threat to attack "32 military bases" has been a recurring theme over the summer. It first surfaced in July. See "Iran Warns It Would Destroy Israel, 32 U.S. Bases if Attacked," RIA Novosti, July 12, 2008.

40. The Khatami government had offered a wide-ranging normalization package to the Bush administration in 2003 that some Iranian hardliners thought came dangerously close to capitulation, but Washington peremptorily dismissed it. See Flynt Leverett, *Dealing with Tehran: Assessing U.S. Diplomatic Options Toward Iran*, The Century Foundation, 2006.

41. The best description of this thread in White House thinking is in Ron Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America's Pursuit of Its Enemies Since 9/11* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).

42. Gareth Porter, a historian and writer who has done considerable research on the 1996 bombing of the USAF barracks, Khobar Towers, insists that the conclusion that Iran

was behind the bombing was not from an FBI investigation but came from Saudi sources. There was, he notes, no separate U.S. investigation.

43. In May the Iranian judiciary announced that it would file “international lawsuits” against the United States and the United Kingdom for providing financial support to the group that conducted the attack. See “Iran Says to Sue U.S., Britain over Mosque Blast,” Reuters, May 12, 2008.

44. “Ahmadinejad Pledges to Prove the U.S. Planned to Assassinate Him,” RIA Novosti, June 25, 2008.

45. There are potential secondary consequences that would cause problems for the United States. Iran produces 20 percent of its electricity by burning refined petroleum products. Iraq imports electricity from Iran. According to one official, Iraq currently imports 470 megawatts per day, and that will be growing by 300 megawatts in the near future. It is easy to see Iraq would suffer from the “sanction.”

46. Dan Williams, “Iran to Get New Russian Air Defences by ’09: Israel,” Reuters, July 23, 2008.

47. On August 1, 2008, at the Friends Committee on National Legislation in Washington, I led a simulation with representatives of various peace and security groups. It was called “Getting Ahead of a Conflict: An Examination of Potential Actions.” We examined most of the strategic incidents I mention in this report. The idea of an incidents at sea agreement surfaced during that session as an immediate option for reducing dangers.

48. United States Senate, Report No. 94-465, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 1975), p. 281.

49. Calls for an investigation of proxy wars have come from other sources. “Needed now are congressional hearings to determine if President Bush has authorized a proxy war against Iran—by funding or arming guerrillas to attack the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.” Patrick J. Buchanan, “Who’s Behind the Proxy Wars?” [buchanan.org](http://buchanan.org), April 18, 2008.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SAM GARDINER is a retired U.S. Air Force colonel who has taught strategy and military operations at the National War College, Air War College, and Naval War College. In 2004, he conducted a war game organized by the *Atlantic Monthly* to gauge how an American president might respond, militarily or otherwise, to Iran's rapid progress toward developing nuclear weapons. He recently designed and conducted a series of war games on irregular warfare in Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, and Poland for the U.S. Air Force. He has been involved in planning and facilitating recent State Department strategy reviews on Burma, Kosovo, Haiti, Bangladesh, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe, and Nepal. He has been supporting the Brookings Institution on simulations focused on U.S. strategy for Cuba. He is the author of The Century Foundation Report, *The End of the "Summer of Diplomacy": Assessing the U.S. Military Options on Iran* (2006).

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