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DENIAL AND JEOPARDY: DETERRING IRANIAN USE OF NBC WEAPONS

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PREFACE

This study is part of a larger effort at the NDU Center for Counterproliferation Research to identify regional strategies that contribute to enhanced deterrence of employment of nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapons and their means of delivery. This particular assessment of Iran and the challenges of deterring its use of NBC weapons was the annex to a broader evaluation of regional deterrence, which includes Iran and North Korea as case studies. Both the broader deterrence paper and the North Korean case study will be published separately.

While much unclassified literature is available on both deterrence theory and Iran, the present study was facilitated by the fairly narrow scope of the questions being asked about Iran: what makes Iran easier or harder to deter, and what can the United States do to enhance our ability to deter Iran's use of NBC weapons? The Islamic Republic of Iran presents a particular challenge to the Western analyst: Iranian leaders do not see the world from the Western view and have demonstrated a willingness to undertake actions at times seemingly contrary to their national interests and at a cost other states would find unacceptable. This does not make them irrational or necessarily undeterrable. The factors that influence their cost/benefit calculations, however, may be very different than those that have guided Western concepts of deterrence over the past 50 years. Thus it was important throughout the research to make every effort to avoid imposing Western perspectives and values on the evidence. Conclusions based on superimposed but inaccurate perspectives are often wrong and, in light of the need to deter Iranian NBC use, could be dangerously wrong in the not-distant future.

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1.

THINKING ABOUT REGIONAL DETERRENCE

War is a matter of vital importance to the State; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied.

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

Are existing U.S. deterrence approaches and forces adequate to deter nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapons use by regional states? Perhaps, but there are appropriate concerns that the regional states that have pursued NBC weapons will not readily or necessarily be deterred from using them, not only against their regional enemies but also against U.S. forces. If current approaches and forces are inadequate, why are they? What makes certain regional states hard to deter? Can U.S. deterrence approaches and forces be strengthened? How?

These questions take on a critical importance and urgency, because a growing number of regional states are aggressively pursuing the possession of NBC weapons and increasingly sophisticated means of delivery, including longer range missiles. In fact, several already possess extensive chemical weapon inventories, and a growing number have biological weapons in their military inventories. While the costs of war are always high, the potential use of NBC in regional conflicts further elevates the consequences of deterrence failure. The threat of use against U.S. forces, allies, or citizens requires recalculation of the risks associated with confronting such states

when they take actions inimical to U.S. interests. If the United States cannot deter NBC use, it may ultimately be the United States that will be deterred from pursuit of its objectives. The threat of NBC use may also cause traditional allies to reassess the value of supporting U.S. policies and operations and will almost certainly require changes in the conduct of U.S. military operations. The use of such weapons could cause large-scale American casualties and lead to a U.S. humiliation, withdrawal, or even defeat.

Because the consequences of deterrence failure are significant, deterrence strategies must be based on more than an assumption or assertion that states will be adequately deterred by U.S. conventional superiority or the direct or implied threat of nuclear retaliation. Rather, regional deterrence should be based on critical analysis of deterrence requirements, which should be based in large part on examination of the strategic personality of the states we seek to deter. Thus, deterrence strategies must be tailored to the strategic calculations those states are likely to make and the national context within which decisions will be made. In-depth "strategic profiles" that provide insights into our potential foes have been lacking, particularly with regard to likely strategies for employing NBC weapons and how these states might be deterred.

Among regional states pursuing NBC weapons, few have done so as aggressively as Iran, and few offer a more clear-cut challenge to U.S. presence and traditional deterrence approaches. Iran therefore provides a worthy case for analysis of U.S. deterrence requirements, to include:

- Identification of needed alterations in regional deterrence approaches
- Development of a strategic profile of Iran as a case study of challenging proportions
- Identification of means of enhancing deterrence of Iranian NBC use or follow-on use should conflict occur.

While no deterrence strategy is guaranteed to succeed, [1](#) efforts to maximize deterrence require affecting the opponent's cost/benefit analysis. Effort must be made to communicate so clearly and credibly to opponents, by word or deed, that the cost to be imposed if the proscribed action is taken will so exceed expected benefits that any thought of implementing the proscribed action is abandoned. Many assume that regional states will be deterred from use of NBC by the implied threat of unleashing the vastly superior U.S. conventional forces or the threat of U.S. nuclear retaliation. However, although this assumption may reflect unquestioned conventional wisdom, unfortunately the assumption may prove incorrect. The threatened action may not be

credible, may not raise the cost of the action to a level deemed unacceptable to the enemy decision maker, or may not ensure that the enemy's war aims are thwarted. Thus, even if the threatened retaliation would, from the Western perspective, impose unacceptable costs on an enemy, what constitutes unacceptable costs in one culture may not necessarily be unacceptable to decisionmakers who weigh and calculate costs and benefits differently and who operate in a strategic culture vastly different from the Western tradition.

Denial strategies, which combine counterforce attacks [2](#) with active and passive defenses to diminish an enemy's offensive capability, would provide a substantial deterrence enhancement over the threat of retaliation alone, but still may not be adequate. Determined foes would certainly employ mobility and concealment to hide weapons to diminish the effectiveness of counterforce attacks. They might also seek to harden targets and evade active and passive defenses. The ability to degrade the enemy's forces through denial means will heighten his uncertainty about the success of his attack, but the risk may rationally be deemed to be acceptable to the enemy if he calculates that his use of NBC might enable him to attain his objectives at an acceptable cost. In these circumstances, the risk of deterrence failure is high.

Denial strategies must therefore be supplemented by a rigorous effort to identify and put in jeopardy those elements most likely to convince the enemy that he cannot attain his post-war objectives and, especially, that the cost of using NBC is unacceptable. An opponent must believe that costs will far outweigh gains, as both are calculated and weighed. These elements are best understood in the context of what Clausewitz called the opposing state's "centers of gravity:"

We can identify . . . principles that underlie all strategic planning and serve to guide all considerations. The first principle is that the ultimate substance of enemy strength must be traced back to the fewest possible sources, and ideally to one alone.

[3](#)

Rigorous examination of the critical characteristics of a state will enable definition of this "ultimate substance of enemy strength" or "centers of gravity." A center of gravity should be: "the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends-the point against which all our energies should be directed." [4](#) The centers of gravity will thus be the targets, the destruction of which increases the probability that the cost to the enemy of initiating war will be unacceptable and ultimately makes it impossible for the opponent to continue execution of war. Credible threats to destroy the centers of gravity should convince the enemy that the post-war situation will be his defeat.

Combining these threats with denial strategies, which support protecting our own centers of gravity, offer a significant deterrence enhancement over either approach alone or general retaliation.

Implementing a well-calculated strategy for deterrence by retaliation or denial may well include or overlap the tools and targets identified for putting centers of gravity in jeopardy. Then again, unless a specific effort is undertaken to ensure that the centers of gravity are identified, they may remain elusive and therefore untargeted.

"Deterrence by jeopardy," what we will call ensuring that the centers of gravity are identified and targeted, should be part of a strategy for regional NBC deterrence and part of U.S. analysis and regional deterrence strategy.

The centers of gravity to be put in jeopardy will differ depending on the state. For some states, the center of gravity may be the military forces; for others, it may be the leadership of the state, and for still others, the will of the people to fight. If the military forces are a center of gravity, the actions taken to support denial strategies will parallel the actions needed to make credible a strategy for deterrence by jeopardy. For other centers of gravity, the targets will not always be threatened by attacks on traditional military targets or even political leadership.

Getting the center of gravity right is critical. If, for example, the United States were to retaliate against the political leadership of a state, but the center of gravity was the military forces, war would not be terminated, and indeed, the attack on the political leadership could destroy the entity essential to war termination. If elements of an enemy's military forces (such as those that control use of NBC forces) are the center of gravity, failure to destroy those elements in a general attack on military targets could be a serious mistake, because it would permit the enemy to continue to fight and, particularly if some NBC weapons may remain, enable NBC use; follow-on use could be even more likely. Similarly, striking against religious targets might engender the wrath of the people, leading to an escalation in the enemy's war aims, decreasing any reluctance to use NBC, and making it likely that the war would be more protracted. Thus, care should be taken in analyzing potential opponents to ensure correct identification of the center of gravity for the state-in this case, Iran.

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2.

SHI'ISM AND IRANIAN ISLAMIC RADICALISM

The Iranian regime is not easy to understand. There is a gap between its rhetoric and its actions; between its sense of grievance and its inflammatory behavior; and between its ideological and national interests. Nor are its actions consistent. However, it remains hostile to the United States and its allies and unreconciled to the current international order. It has not renounced its revolutionary aims and it continues to support international terrorism. Its ideology remains a potent motive force, and it seeks to exploit weakness where it can locally in the Persian Gulf, regionally in the wider Middle East, as well as farther afield.¹

NATIONAL, INTEREST VICE REGIME-DRIVEN BEHAVIORS

Iran occupies a critical strategic location, with access to the Strait of Hormuz through which the majority of the world's oil supplies transit; its position acts a bridge between East and West; and it possesses significant resources, both human and natural. Iran's pursuit of its national interests, especially its historical role as a claimant to regional hegemony, ensure that Iran and the United States will occasionally find themselves in conflict. The current Iranian regime, however, has characteristics that exacerbate and underscore differences with the West and that make deterrence far more difficult than with an Iran, even an Islamic state of Iran, that did not pursue the current revolutionary

objectives.

RISK TOLERANCE

Risk tolerance is probably the single most important factor to consider for assessing the ease or difficulty of deterring a particular state. While a state's leadership may have hostile objectives, as well as NBC capability and the centralized decision structure necessary to use NBC weapons, it is less likely to strike first and risk defeat if it is risk averse. The same characteristics within a state with high risk tolerance would more likely result in that state using NBC.

What then, is the chief determinant of high risk tolerance? The answer seems to lie in what Eric Hoffer calls inclination for "unified action and self-sacrifice" in the creation of a mass movement:

Such diverse phenomena as a deprecation of the present, a facility for make-believe, a proneness to hate, a readiness to imitate credulity, a readiness to attempt the impossible, and many others which crowd the minds of the intensely frustrated are, as we shall see, unifying agents and prompters of recklessness.²

This intense frustration and deprecation of the present are associated with "true believers" whose primary attributes are zealotry and willingness to die for a cause. The willingness to die for a cause is directly proportionate to the risk tolerance of a state. Thus deterrence strategies are likely to be less effective-particularly those that emphasize retaliation-against risk tolerant states.

Iran is a religious state whose political leadership is guided by religious leaders who emphasize the most violent aspects of its religious tradition. As discussed in chapter 5, The Iranian Shi'ite interpretations of Islam appear to enable a declaration of religious war, or *jihad*. The religious fervor of the leadership and the majority of the population raises the specter of "true believers" who would die for the cause and gain paradise. The political, religious, and military leadership has fostered a cult of martyrdom and death that could be used to strengthen its ability to conduct war and to accept casualties. While it appears that there is a growing gap between the population and the leadership, and while their emphasis on martyrdom may not succeed, Iran's leadership may be prepared to take risks and to accept casualties at levels other modern states would deem unacceptable.

The leadership's commitment to its religious and revolutionary ideology and its risk

tolerance indicate that Iran is a state that more closely resembles the early Bolshevik state than the tired Soviet Union the United States deterred and ultimately defeated in the Cold War. Like the early Bolshevik state, Iran has defined its objectives as inimical to the United States, defining the United States as "the Great Satan" and the primary impediment to attainment of global Islamic revolution, which will, of course, be led by Iran.

Like the Bolsheviks, Iran has a self-appointed revolutionary vanguard, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. The IRGC sees the Islamic revolution as critical and its own role as critical to the success of the revolution. It seeks not only to take Iran into a leadership or hegemonic role in a region deemed to be critical to U.S. interests, but also to diminish the U.S. role regionally and perhaps globally as an end in and of itself. The Revolutionary Guard has the lead within Iran for the production and employment of weapons of mass destruction and sees itself as on the leading edge of the battle between Iran and the Great Satan.

Iran is a state that seems to many Westerners to be irrational or, at best, unpredictable, but Iran also exemplifies the national security challenges facing the United States as it moves from the better understood Cold War world.

IRANIAN POLITICAL STRUCTURES

Five political entities control post-revolutionary Iran: the Supreme Islamic Jurisprudent or *velayat-e-faqih*; the Council of Guardians, a group of high level clerics which select the *faqih*; the President; the legislature or Majles; and the Supreme Defense Council. The most powerful is the Supreme Islamic Jurisprudent. "The position of *faqih*, as originally conceived, was to be held by a cleric who was a religious source of emulation (*marja taqlid*) eminently qualified as an Islamic jurist, and efficient administrator, and who enjoyed the confidence of the majority of the people."³

The first *faqih* was, of course, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Article 110 of the Iranian Constitution, published in spring 1980, granted the *faqih*:

sweeping powers to appoint other high ranking officials; approve Presidential candidates and dismiss incompetent incumbents; serve as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces (regular and Guard); appoint and dismiss regular and Guard commanders; and organize the Supreme Defense Council, Iran's highest military decision making body. It was intended that this melding of supreme religious and

political authority would ensure Islamization of the government and society.⁴

The Faqih also declares war and peace.⁵ Because he does not carry the same weight in either religious circles or the population, the role is weaker under ayatollah 'Ali Hoseyni Khamene'i, the present *faqih*, but remains substantial.

The Faqih is selected by the "Council of Guardians," who have "risen to prominence within the domain of the clergy."⁶ By virtue of their control over the selection of the Faqih, the clergy exercise control over the leadership of Iran.

Iran no longer has a Prime Minister; a President acts as the chief executive. On May 23, 1997, the Islamic Republic of Iran elected its fifth President since the Islamic revolution, Mohamed Khatami, a cleric considered to be more moderate, at least on social issues, than his chief opponents for the post. Whether his objectives include changing Iranian policy from the support of terrorism, pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, and open hostility toward the Middle East peace process and the United States remain to be seen. His ability to effect such changes, furthermore, is also an open question. The previous Iranian President, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, held the post since 1989, the entire post-Revolutionary period. Rafsanjani was also considered by most analysts to be a "moderate" by Iranian standards, but it was during Rafsanjani's "moderate" tenure that the Iranian policies so objectionable to the United States were developed and implemented. Rafsanjani is expected to continue to play a significant role in Iranian politics and government.

The Iranian Parliament, or Majles, is involved principally in the budgetary process, as well as in reviewing appointments and military and economic policies.⁷ Most assessments of the 1996 Majles elections indicated that Rafsanjani supporters, who are more pragmatic and technocratic, were in the majority, but others have a different assessment: "It is now clear that conservative ideologues . . . are the dominant force in the Iranian Majles."⁸

The role of religion in decisionmaking in Iran is significant. While geographic and national issues certainly carry weight in decisions, the impact of Shi'ism (to be discussed later) is significant and has consequences for deterrence. One analyst highlighted the role of religion in determination of foreign policy:

The Islamic religion is a vital element in traditional Iranian culture, but in addition, Islam is the embodiment of the alternative to Western culture in every sphere of life. By focusing on Islam as the center of the conflict with Westernism, Iranians can see

the conflict not as a matter of narrow national pride but as a clash of civilizations, each of which claims to be universal. Furthermore, emphasizing Islam allows Iranians to represent themselves as the center of human civilization through the claim that they uphold true Islam. A claim that marries Shiite prejudices, Iranian pride, and revolutionary conviction.⁹

The highest Iranian military decisionmaking body is the Supreme Defense Council, which presides over both the regular military and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. More than strictly a military body, in many ways, the Guard sees itself as the vanguard and ultimate defender of the Islamic revolution, not just in Iran, but in the wider Iranian perceived battle between Islam and the West.

TRUTH, DECEPTION, AND THE IRANIAN PERSONALITY

The "Iranian personality" has roots in historical events surrounding the origins of modern Iran and, more significantly, the Persian state and Shi'ism. There are many interesting facets to this personality, but analysis here focuses on those that may make Iran more difficult to deter and more likely to use NBC weapons.

Scholars familiar with Iran, including Iranians, note (although seldom in writing) that the fixation on historical and religious conspiracy is pervasive in Iranian culture. This appears to have led to a premium placed on deception and dissimulation that continues in the present: "Exaggeration is a common trait in all politicians, but the leaders of some countries engage in it more than others. The Islamic leaders in Iran certainly fall into this category."¹⁰

From a deterrence perspective, the consequence of this valuation of deception or "exaggeration" is twofold. First, little credence may be placed on Iranian statements that are not independently confirmable, so it will be important to assess skeptically any self-serving Iranian statements. Second, because the Iranian leadership routinely engages in exaggeration and outright dishonesty, they can reasonably be expected to dismiss Western statements as lies as well. Clear communication, a critical element of effective deterrence, promises to be difficult at best.

THE "RIGHTEOUS MINORITY"

Shi'ites hold that the Prophet Mohammed's son-in-law Ali should have inherited the

status of Caliph and Imam, or religious leader. The Shi'ites further believe that no one can rightfully take the title of Imam unless they are the descendants of Ali and Fatima (Mohammed's daughter) and that inheritance of Islamic authority is narrowly proscribed.¹¹ That Shi'ites have always been in the minority of the Muslim population yields a personality characteristic that is distinctly Shi'ite:

Shi'ism was born as a minoritarian and esoteric movement with . . . an attitude of mind which refuses to admit that majority opinion is necessarily right. The history of Shi'ism is replete with episodes in which a minuscule minority opposed a large majority. Thus, despite the consensus among the majority of the Prophet's companions to select Abu Bakr the caliph, a handful favored the succession of Ali. And, Hossain defied all odds and confronted Yazid's intimidating army in Karbala with only seventy-two confidants [all or most of whom were killed]. In these cases, the Shi'ites insist, Imams Ali and Hossein were right because their message was divine.¹²

From the massacre at Karbala to this day, Iranian Shi'ites have a sense of martyrdom and persecution and believe this divides them from Sunni Moslems and from the West:

The doctrinal differences between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims are of minor importance, far less than those that divide the rival churches of Christendom. But the Shiite sense of martyrdom and persecution, reinforced by their long experience through the centuries as a minority group under rulers whom they regarded as usurpers, raised a psychological barrier between them and the Sunni state and majority, a difference of experience and outlook, and therefore also of religious and political attitudes and behavior.¹³

The association in Iranian Shi'ism between the underdog and the divine complicates deterrence. Indeed, Shi'ite tradition attributes strength and primacy to "the righteous minority." For example, opposition by the West, by the United Nations or any other majority collection of international states opposed to Iranian actions would be more likely to lead Iranian leaders to conclude that they were in the right than that they should reconsider a course of action.

These Shi'ite tendencies are elevated exponentially in the political, religious, and military leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran, although it may be modified among those segments of the population that are not as zealous. For the current leadership, however, these traditions have served their own purposes. Since Iran defines itself as the rightful leader of the Islamic world, opposition or resistance to its "leadership" may reinforce its hostile inclinations and its active efforts to export

revolution or simply to engage in expansionism. Unfortunately, this also reinforces the value assigned to national martyrdom by the leadership.

MARTYROM AND THE CULT OF DEATH

Particularly disruptive to the traditional deterrence perspective is the emphasis in Iranian Shi'ism, particularly under the current regime, placed on the sacred consequences of martyrdom. One study compared older school children's textbooks under the Shah to the newer ones under the Islamic Republic, and found death and martyrdom to be a predominant theme of the Republic's political culture:

The clergy, aware of the numbing effects of death, and the fear and fascination evinced by martyrdom, uses this psychological game quite effectively. In this context, death becomes the rule, while life, as stated frequently by the clergy, is just a transitory stage, meant for purification of the soul. A new phenomenon which may be called the "politics of the corpse" is another aspect of the obsession of the draconian Islamic state with death. Not only does the clergy adore cemeteries and treat them as national parks, it also overtly utilizes corpses for its political purposes.¹⁴

The same study notes that violence and martyrdom are identified by the state as the "path taken by the chosen people of Allah to bring down the unjust world."¹⁵ Death alone, however, does not by itself connote martyrdom. Martyrdom requires that death be in service to defending "the cause" or "the faith" against the unbeliever. The cause, of course, includes the Iranian revolution and its goals as defined by the mullahs or Revolutionary Guard. In this context, if persuaded that death brings martyrdom, then death is axiomatically preferable to life. Ayatollah Motahari, cited as a leading theoretician of the Islamic movement, defines the philosophy of martyrdom as follows:

There is a concept in Islam enjoying a special sacredness. If someone is familiar with Islamic concepts . . . he can sense that a halo of light has engulfed this word, . . . that of . . . [martyr] . . . From Islam's point of view, whoever achieves the status of [martyr] . . . achieves one of the highest statuses and ranks that a human might reach in his ascending trajectory.¹⁶

The Islamic culture promotes an ascetic philosophy of life centered on the high worth of sacrifices and sufferings; stoicism, fasting, self-flagellation, and the cult of martyrdom are manifestations of this viewpoint that has penetrated many aspects of everyday life.

An example of this approach may be found in the "Tazyieh" practiced in Iran during the "Ashura:"

Tazyieh is the enactment of the martyrdom of the third Imam of the Shias, Imam Hussein and that of his 72 followers and the life of his haram during the days following the Ashura, the tenth day of the Muslim month of Moharram . . . this was the day Imam Hussein and his closest followers, the men who remained faithful to him knowing they would die, were martyred by the army of the usurper Yazid for their refusal to acknowledge an unworthy man as the caliph of the Muslim community. Every lunar year, from the first to the thirteenth of Mohram and on the 10th of Safar, the 40th day after Hussein's death, Shias worldwide, mourn his and his followers' martyrdom. Tazyieh is a part of the mourning. The "actors" who are common people (bakers, grocers, laborers and so on) replay the heartbreaking events. [17](#)

More than a historical reminder, however, this event is staged to enhance the cult of martyrdom:

Tazyieh is not just a play, however, and is not intended to amuse either . . . it also attempts to awaken in the people, the shia notion of martyrdom and prepare them to die, if necessary, for God and justice.[18](#)

The import of this cult of martyrdom and death for deterrence are clear: threats of personal or societal death may not carry the same impact for the Islamic leadership that the threat conveys in Western cultures.[19](#) This is not to say that the entire Iranian population embraces martyrdom; rather, it is to highlight that the leadership and those that control the use of Iran's NBC forces might risk large-scale casualties in pursuit of a goal they believe is worthy.

Equally disturbing is that even the execution of punitive retaliatory threats, attacks that kill civilians and military alike, could be perceived as strategically beneficial to the Islamic state, rather than as a defeat-the exact opposite of what would be expected from the Western perspective. This is because such an attack would lead to martyrdom of the dead; possible elimination of internal factions and opposition; and, justification for actions the employers of NBC want to take anyway. It would not necessarily end the revolution or kill those who made the decision to employ NBC or those who would use NBC in follow-on attacks. The political situation for the Iranian survivors, especially those who make NBC employment decisions and who know when to seek secure cover, could well be enhanced.

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3.

THE IRANIAN REVOLUTIONARY GUARD CORPS

Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC),¹ created in the early days of the Islamic revolution, has the lead in Iran for the production and employment of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. The United States would certainly want to understand the Guard from an operational perspective in order to deter NBC use, but the Guard is far more critical at the strategic level than any other entity. If the United States is able to deter the Guard, it will be far better able to deter Iran.

The Guard is described as an effective revolutionary unit that has not only survived, but thrived, in the post-revolutionary period with a structure reminiscent of the old Bolshevik Red Army but independent of the regular military. The IRGC and the IRGC Ministry are the focal points for the two items of greatest concern from a deterrent perspective. First, the IRGC is the focal point for Iran's efforts to produce and deploy

nuclear and biological weapons and missiles (chemical weapons may be available to the regular army). Second, the IRGC, which would be the focal point for Iranian efforts to "export the revolution," appears to be destined to survive for some time, as Katzman has stated:

To a great degree, its (IRG) acquisition of a progressively more complex organizational structure is an indicator of the Guard's institutional strength within Iran. Its ability to develop a complex and structured organization without sacrificing its revolutionary character distinguishes it from other revolutionary armed forces that similarly developed regular military structures and functions but sacrificed revolutionary zeal and enthusiasm.²

IDEOLOGY, STRUCTURE, STRENGTH

Exporting the Revolution

The Iranian revolution was portrayed by Ayatollah Khomeini as being only the first step in a wider Islamic revolution. The 1979 Iranian Constitution included a preambular passage stating that the Iranian army "will be responsible not only for safeguarding the borders, but also for accomplishing an ideological mission, that is, the Jihad for the sake of God, as well as for struggling to open the way for the sovereignty of the Word of God throughout the world."³ This mission was adopted by the IRGC. Thus, one of the IRGC's primary missions is that of exporting the Islamic revolution outside Iran:

Foremost among the responsibilities stemming from its self-proclaimed status as pathfinder and model is solidarity with oppressed Muslims everywhere. This is a core value of the revolution rather than a vital security interest, but it is an important part of Islamic Iran's sense of legitimacy and one of the few areas in which the regime can claim to be principled and unique.⁴

This objective has been the basis for support of terrorist groups outside Iran, including Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, and is the rationale behind Iranian intrusions into the internal politics of other states. It also could assist Iran in instituting opposition groups or even successor leadership groups in neighboring states that would draw their own legitimacy from the Iranian revolution.

The IRGC has been the primary advocate within Iran for the funding of terrorist groups. While the defeat of the IRGC would not necessarily guarantee the end of Iran's support for Islamic radicalism, it would certainly mean the end of the primary source of internal advocacy for such groups as Hezbollah and eliminate a strong source of

pressure for the continuation or expansion of policies aimed at exporting the revolution.

Cohesion and Commitment to "the Revolution"

The IRGC places tremendous emphasis on ideological correctness. Its approach during the Iran/Iraq war, for example, was that "a maktab (ideologically pure) army is better than a victorious one."⁵ Ideological correctness and commitment to the revolution led in earlier years to its undertaking high-risk military operations "rich in ideological content but militarily ill advised and potentially detrimental to the Guards' own military posture and prestige."⁶

This connection to the Islamic revolution defines and orients the IRGC and could lead it to take risks that more traditional and conservative military institutions would not take. The Guard retains ideological loyalty to Ayatollah Khomeini, who defined the purposes of the revolution and the IRGC:

Our war is one of ideology and does not recognize borders or geography. We must ensure the vast mobilization of the soldiers of Islam around the world in our ideological war. God willing, the great Iranian nation, through its material and moral support for the revolution, will compensate for the hardships of war with the sweetness of the defeat of God's enemies in the world. What is sweeter than the fact that the great Iranian nation has struck the United States on the head like lightning?⁷

The IRGC's self-defined role as defender of the revolution also appears to require it to oppose any liberalization within Iran. IRGC leader General Mohsen Rezai said in April 1996, while urging voters to vote conservatively, "The fate of the Islamic Revolution would be dependent on the results of the cultural and political war of Hezbollah with liberals in Iran."⁸ He was then quoted as having pointed out that liberalism was "a cancerous tumor that was growing up in parts of the country without having ever been seriously grappled with by the authorities."⁹ Linking the problem to the continued need to fight the West, he added, "The velayat-e-faqih (supreme religious Jurisprudent) and the ulema (the religious faithful) were the number one target of Washington in its fight with the Islamic revolution."¹⁰ The IRGC leadership also believes that Islam, in particular its faith in the value of martyrdom, empowers Iran in its fight against the United States. IRGC Commander Rezai said it clearly in June 1996: "The U.S. is unable to grasp the faith and spiritual power of the forces of Islam and is quite helpless against the martyrdom-seeking spirit of the Islamic combatants."¹¹

IRGC VIRULENCE AND INDEPENDENCE

The Guard tends to be more virulently anti-U.S. than the rest of the leadership and might be willing and able to act independently of the political or even religious leadership of Iran. For example:

The Guard fails to meet the substantive criteria of professionalism: unquestioned obedience to civilian authority, absence of political involvement, and a scientifically based decision making process. The Guard's resistance to professionalism in turn, reflects the depth and strength of the Guard's continuing commitment to the hard line ideological principles of the revolution, which are incompatible with the scientific and politically neutral foundations of military professionalism.¹²

There are other indicators that the Guard is more virulently anti-Western than the rest of the Iranian leadership and that it is willing to step beyond the rest of the political leadership. For example, in May 1995, Iranian President Rafsanjani responded to the U.S. embargo on Iran with assertions of its ineffectiveness: "In a world which has pressing need for energy resources, Iran cannot be shut out of world markets."¹³ The head of the IRGC, General Rezai, however, called upon his forces to prepare for war: "A military confrontation with the U.S. is inevitable and Iranian forces must be ready for war."¹⁴ Iran then held military maneuvers that Rezai said were in preparation for war.¹⁵ In response to a question of whether Rezai's words and the exercise meant that the next armed conflict in the Gulf would take place between Iranian and American troops, Iranian Foreign Minister 'Ali Akbar Velayati said: "There is absolutely no reason for concern, no matter what Rezai has said."¹⁶ Thus, the political Iranian approach was far different from the IRGC approach and the Foreign Ministry sought to downplay Rezai's statements, contradicting him in public. No change in the IRGC maneuvers or military acquisitions was evident after this exchange. Other evidence of IRGC independence and ideological zeal exist, and Katzman has noted that the Guard, while not openly defying civilian authority or acting to formulate major military, internal security, or external revolutionary policies in contravention of the wishes of the civilian leadership, has taken a lead role:

It can be argued that the Guard was able to drive most aspects of war strategy throughout the conflict, and that, without necessarily countermanning specific orders, it undertook hard-line actions and operations that sometimes conflicted with the goals of its civilian superiors.¹⁷

IRGC ROLE IN WEAPONS PROCUREMENT

By the end of the Iran/Iraq war, the IRGC was directing 37 secret weapons development projects¹⁸ and working closely with another revolutionary entity that acted as its "corps of engineers"-the "Construction Jihad" or "Crusade for Reconstruction." In addition to setting up defensive emplacements and other infrastructure for tactical operations, it also was charged with developing Iran's indigenous military production capabilities to circumvent the international arms embargo against Iran,¹⁹ including, apparently, the production of material for Iran's nuclear, biological, chemical, and missile programs. In April 1986, the IRGC Minister announced,

the armament industries of the Corps have made notable progress in the missile, aircraft, biological, chemical and nuclear fields as well as in construction of engineering equipment such as a variety of bridges, mortar launchers, and rocket-propelled grenades.²⁰

The IRGC role is also reflected in the fact that IRGC Commander Rezai led the Iranian side in 1994 talks with North Korea on arms cooperation. The North Korean delegation, headed by Air Force Commander General Cho Myong-nok, consisted of 28 "scientists, technicians, and officers." These talks were reportedly extended to include efforts for the development of new weapon systems, including missiles, such as the Nodong.²¹

NAVY AS VANGUARD OF NBC

The Iranian Navy is the branch of service most closely tied to the IRGC and is clearly the military force seen by Iran as spear-heading Iran's war with the United States:

As the situation in the Gulf is getting tense with more U.S. warships heading for the Gulf, Iran is strengthening its naval defense in the region. In addition to the regular Navy, the newly formed naval units of the Revolutionary Guards have been active. . . . Chief commander of the Revolutionary Guards, Mohsen Rezai, who is also in Bandar Abbas, said yesterday that Iran was not only capable of attacking U.S. warships but also could capture some of them.²²

The Guard has its own naval forces, but they have increasingly merged with the regular navy. It was the Guard navy that, "in contradiction to the wishes of the political leaders in Tehran," may have been responsible for mining the Gulf shipping lanes during the 1980 U.S. reflagging of Kuwaiti ships. Following the Kuwaiti reflagging, however, the IRGC navy was "lavished with resources and publicity not for its role in the Iran-Iraq war, but for its challenge to the U.S. naval buildup in the

Gulf."²³ In its confrontations with the United States, the navy has relied on operations, tactics, and goals that are unconventional.²⁴ Recent indications are that it is prominent in the formulation of tactics and deployment of at least chemical weapons at Abu Musa²⁵ and thus appears to remain both the vanguard of Iran's ongoing war with the United States and for NBC deployment and, perhaps, use.

The navy appears to be at the forefront of Iran's efforts to deter the United States and its naval forces in the Gulf, which are identified by Iran as being the primary and indeed only real threat to Iran. In December 1995, for example, the Deputy Navy Commander said that "the Iraqi threat has been eliminated for the moment. Our southern neighbors are small and weak and cannot be considered a threat." He also stated that "the only potential threat is an external one: the presence of foreign forces in the Gulf where there are about 50 foreign warships, mostly American."²⁶ Iran indicated again 2 days later that it would be the navy that would take the lead in any confrontation with the United States: "Naval and air forces would play the biggest role in confronting the Americans" and "there is no other country in the region that could be considered a threat."²⁷

THE IRANIAN ARMY: BRINGING REVOLUTIONARY DOGMA TO THE MASSES

The Iranian Army has emerged from early post-revolutionary purges to offer, primarily through the Basij, or volunteer corps, a means available to the regime and the IRGC of bringing the revolution to the masses and to ensure that the population of Iran can be brought into war should Iran's leaders wish to do so. This is to be accomplished in two ways. First, revolutionary education and indoctrination is used as a means of strengthening the zeal of the masses that might not otherwise have adequate revolutionary commitment. Second, the Basij is usable as a deterrent to those who might stray from the regime's dogma, or to punish those not adequately deterred.

The Basij was formed during the Iran-Iraq war, when old men, young men, and boys were inducted to serve primarily as human cannon fodder. Its revolutionary zeal, considered to be its most important attribute, was enhanced by their IRGC training:

The military training of the Basij by the Guard consisted of a two week instruction program in the use of hand grenades and automatic rifles, heavily infused with the promise that death in the war would provide automatic acceptance in heaven. Plastic keys were hung around each Basiji's neck; each was told that the key would open heaven's gates. Prayers, Koranic

readings, songs and fiery speeches by the Guard commanders comprised much of the training program and life at the front line.²⁸

The Basij remains zealous and seems to be viewed by religious leaders, including Khamene'i, as a useful instrument in ensuring suppression of internal strife. One analyst describes the political use made of the Basij in recent years:

The regular army and Revolutionary Guards alike have protested at being ordered to suppress citizens demonstrating against Iran's worsening economic conditions. In August 1994 they refused orders to open fire on protesters in Zazvin: the Basij had no such qualms and killed around 40 people. Up to 400 may have been injured. . . . Since 1991, full-time manpower has tripled to 300,000 and the organization's budget has increased fourfold.²⁹

The IRGC has expanded its joint training with the Basij and regular army, and, as discussed in the section on Iran's Exercises and Maneuvers, a significant element in the joint maneuvers appears to include training to enable Iranian forces to operate in an NBC environment.

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DENIAL AND JEOPARDY: DETERRING IRANIAN USE OF NBC WEAPONS

4.

IRANIAN NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Some assert that Iran is seeking ballistic missiles, and indeed nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons capability, exclusively for defense of its borders or strictly for regional objectives. Defense of its homeland against an Iraqi type threat would almost certainly make the Iranian leadership conclude that use of NBC and missiles as their means of delivery (NBC/M) was justified. Yet, beyond responding to an attack, NBC would be an option should its threat or use be perceived as supporting other Iranian national objectives. Iran can and may already be able to use chemical and biological weapons, as well as missiles, to intimidate its regional neighbors, but this is not adequate to explain the Iranian NBC/M program.

The United States is also a certain target of the Iranian threat. One point of evidence lies in Iran's exercises and maneuvers, particularly that of its naval forces, as discussed in chapter 5. While some land operations appear to be designed to deter or defend against Iraq, these exercises and maneuvers include a significant number almost certainly designed to prepare Iran to operate against the United States. Iranian deployments in the Gulf increasingly appear to be designed to give it options to strike at U.S. military assets or to threaten such attacks. Another indicator is the Iranian effort to increase the reach of its weapons of mass destruction, currently through acquisition of the longer range Nodong missile. Iran could already use its ballistic missiles to strike against U.S. forces in the Gulf, as well as Iran's nearest neighbors. The addition of the Nodong would enable Iran to threaten U.S. bases in Turkey, which are important for any U.S. military operations against Iran. Saudi Arabia and Israel are

also under threat of Iranian missiles. This capability, therefore, poses a real and growing threat to the U.S. ability to defend its interests.

But if Iran were to contemplate war with the United States, what could cause it to undertake such a dangerous course of action? Further, are there indicators that might provide warning that such a course were under consideration? Beyond Iran's hatred for "the Great Satan," its leaders have explicitly urged war against the United States and advocated terrorism as a means of turning their hostile words into action. Iranian leaders routinely make statements before cheering crowds such as "O mankind, don't think the White House will remain forever. No, it will be destroyed!"¹ While much of this may be dismissed as hyperbole and Iranian-style mass politics, such statements indicate a genuine hatred and fear of the United States, which could rationalize nuclear, biological, or chemical attacks for retribution and vengeance.

It is important, therefore, to understand the Iranian context within which decisions to enter war will be made. The first question to be considered, given that Iran is ruled by Islamic religious leaders, is whether there are religious imperatives that make war more or less likely or perhaps even necessitate war. Next, the political and religious public justifications that would be deemed necessary by the Iranian leadership prior to initiation of war will be considered to ascertain if warning can be derived.

OFFENSIVE VERSUS DEFENSIVE JIHAD

Nation states have rules, written or unwritten, that provide guidelines as to when war is justified and what behaviors are acceptable in the prosecution of war. The United States has adopted a just war tradition held for centuries that guides Western states. The just war tradition is based on the notion of *jus ad bellum*, relating to the causes and conditions in which war is justified, and *jus in bello*, which circumscribes the acceptable boundaries of behavior in war.² The just war tradition comprises seven criteria that must be satisfied to justify resort to military force: just cause, right authority for the use of such force, right intention, the goal of restoring peace, overall proportionality of good over evil, a reasonable hope of success, and a situation of last resort.³

Iran does not accept the Western just war tradition. Rather, Iran's "just war" doctrine is guided by Shi'ite interpretations of the Koran, particularly as applied by Ayatollah Khomeini. What determines the justification of war, or holy jihad,⁴ for the Shi'ites? What consequence does the declaration of jihad have for the U.S. ability to deter Iran?

First of all, Shi'ism distinguishes between offensive and defensive jihad. Offensive jihad, that is the Koranic struggle in the path of God, can only be declared by 'the Imam' or his deputy. This Imam is the Hidden Imam who has not yet reappeared after his disappearance ten centuries ago. Since there is no Imam at present, in the context of the Koranic tradition from which the Government of Iran derives its legitimacy, no declaration of offensive jihad can be made:

For the Shi'ia, the offensive jihad . . . required the presence of the just Imam, not (as the Sunnis argued) just any leader; or, in the absence of the Imam, the person deputized by him could authorize such a struggle. . . . But when the Imam or his specifically designated deputy is absent, as is the case of Shi'ism from the tenth century on, the obligation to engage in offensive jihad lapses, and, according to the Shi'ia jurists, it is not proper to engage in jihad at all.⁵

Defensive jihad, however, does not require the permission of the Imam. Rather, there is a standing authority and indeed an obligation to use force to defend Islam, and such use of force is not considered to be offensive, because the persecution of believers is qualitatively the same as an attack. Initiating aggression was prohibited, but notions of self-defense are far different from the international law interpretation of self-defense or even anticipatory self defense:

Fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! God loveth not aggressors. And slay them wherever ye find them, and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for *persecution [fetna] is worse than slaughter*. " To reiterate, the Koran justifies the use of force by believers as a response to *actively hostile disbelief*. . . . Nonetheless, in the context of the historical development of Islam, the jurists regarded this principle of the Koran as abrogated. They maintained that fighting was obligatory for the Muslims, even when the unbelievers had not begun the hostilities.⁶

When unbelief takes on an actively hostile dimension, the Koran is interpreted as justifying and even commanding the use of force by the believers. If Iran's leadership believed it could justify a judgment that disbelief had taken on a hostile nature, and particularly if the disbelief constituted "persecution," defensive jihad would be justified and obligated. Even if Iran's enemies did not strike first, Iranian leaders could view war as defensive in nature: acts of war against Iran are not required to justify jihad.

Persecution," from the perspective of the Iranian political leadership, includes the United States economic embargo against Iran. Indeed, as a practical matter, virtually any act contrary to Iran's interests taken by the West could be defined as "persecution."

Persecution of the righteous justifies initiation of defensive jihad. The justification for war, so long as the war is between believers (Iran) and non-believers (everyone else), therefore, has a significantly lower threshold than that established by the Western just war theory.

In the Western just war tradition, there is a positive obligation to limit to the greatest degree possible the impact on noncombatants and to wage war in a restrained manner, but once defensive jihad is being waged, there need be little if any restraint in the prosecution of war. One scholar, for example, notes that the rules of treatment for non-Muslims who were vanquished or captured in jihad were based on the notion that non-Muslims had no right to resist Islam, and that "in refusing to submit to Islam, they were doing a wrong that justified harsh treatment."⁷

Predictions of how Iran will operate in war based on Western perspectives are therefore likely to be dangerously misleading. Iran might make statements to the effect that it would engage only in defensive war, which could be consistent with its own version of just war tradition, but which would not foreclose the use of preemptive strikes against their enemies, even including employing NBC/M. Such dissimulation would be consistent with the Iranian approach. Therefore, assessments that Iran would use NBC weapons strictly in what the West considers a defensive manner or as a weapon of last resort should be re-evaluated.

JUSTIFICATION FOR WAR

Traditional warfare generally requires the support and participation of a significant portion of the population, and such wars, if conducted without the consent of the governed, will not be long supportable. The possession of NBC weapons, however, may mean that unlike traditional warfare, war involving NBC use can be initiated by a small centralized group. Thus, even if the Iranian people are not convinced that war, and particularly the use of NBC weapons, is justified, a very destructive war that involved NBC weapons could be initiated by the leadership or the IRGC and conducted by the IRGC.

Because of their ties to radical Shi'ite Islam, however, the Iranian leadership or IRGC would still want to believe that their actions are ideologically justifiable. Furthermore, should the leadership believe that it is necessary to have access to public support, publicly stated justifications for their actions and additional preparation of their public propaganda efforts would be likely and could provide some warning. On the other hand, Iran could have a strong interest in attaining surprise or in creating ambiguity

regarding its actions or culpability for the actions of others.

A deterrence strategy must begin with a clear understanding of the conditions under which Iran might believe that war with the United States, with its nuclear weapons and vast conventional superiority, is justified. More than any other point, such understanding requires educated speculation based on analysis of the Iranian perspective. This is difficult for Western strategists to do because, for example, the Iranian perspective views victory itself in a manner far different from their own. This point was crystallized in a statement by the Iranian Army Chief of Staff speaking in September 1995:

It is also possible that the U.S. military presence [in the Gulf] is itself one of the U.S. objectives. But a military confrontation by these forces with Iran would be counter to U.S. interests in the region and ultimately would be to their disadvantage. . . . This is because . . . only Muslims believe that "Whether we kill or are killed, we are the victors." Others do not think this way.⁸

His perspective has roots in the writings of Ayatollah Khomeini, who said in a 1988 speech: "We must smash the hands and the teeth of the superpowers, particularly the United States. And we must choose one of two alternatives: either martyrdom or victory, which we both regard as victory."⁹

In light of this decidedly non-Western cost-benefit analysis, what circumstances would lead Iran to initiate war? Shahram Chubin has proposed a list of "contingencies" for which Iran seems to be preparing:

First, a large scale U.S. naval intervention, as in 1987-88 and 1990-91. Second, an attack on Iran similar to the allied attack on Iraq in 1991 or some variant of the punitive cruise missile attack by the United States on Iraq in June 1993. Third, an attack on Iran's nuclear infrastructure that is intended to destroy its weapon-making capabilities. (This could be either the United States or Israel).¹⁰

Although credible as far as it goes, Chubin's list of contingencies inadequately explains Iran's observed force deployments and helps little with an effort to anticipate Iran's likely actions. This list considers only attacks against Iran by outside states, which leaves the impression that Iran's force deployments are merely defensive and that one need not anticipate pre-emptive strikes or other actions that escalate hostility and destructiveness rapidly. A more robust list would begin with motives. Such motives could include war to divert attention from internal problems or to advance one group's internal situation over a competitor's. Iran could seek to gain sympathy from

the international Islamic community by fighting with the United States, a broader grouping of Western states, or Israel, and thereby enhance and export their revolution. Finally, Iran may seek to achieve its regional and expansionist goals at what it considers to be an acceptable level of risk. Any or all of these could be easily rationalized in the context of defensive jihad.

Divert Attention from Internal Problems

Iran is plagued by socioeconomic problems that have led, in recent years, to strikes and riots and, more generally, a growing alienation of the people from their leaders. Yet, while its socioeconomic problems have most of their roots in internal policies by the Iranian leaders, they may be exacerbated by, and are often attributed in the Iranian press to, the impact of U.S. hostile actions, including the economic embargo. High inflation, slower than promised economic development, growing demands of a young population, the flight of the poor and young to large cities with its resultant risk of easily ignited frustrations, and accusations of governmental corruption at the highest levels of Iranian leadership all point to a regime increasingly at risk of collapse. Under these conditions, Iran, and especially the IRGC, could seek to strike out to obscure their own culpability in the problems besetting Iran or to strengthen themselves in the face of internal divisions and weaknesses.

War seems to strengthen the Revolutionary Guard. When internal opposition occurs, there have been a number of examples of the Iranian regime and the Guard seeking outside enemies as a means of consolidating strength:

As the war (Iran/Iraq) dragged on, it expanded in scope, giving the Guard greater opportunity to assert its independent role. This particularly held true for fast-breaking, crisis situations in which extended debate was not possible and the Guards' internal opponents were less able to constrain the Guard. Such opportunities were afforded the Guard by deepening involvement of foreign (particularly the U.S.) and Arab parties in the war. The Guard Navy was the optimum instrument for striking at some of these outside parties. [11](#)

While the Guard and other Iranian leaders, including Khamene'i and the mullahs themselves, have relied on suppression to reduce the threat of counter-revolution, the effectiveness of internal measures is finite and diminishes each time they are employed. They could well conclude that the diversion of focusing the population on an external enemy is needed.

Regional Intimidation and Expansionism: The Strange Case of Abu Musa

The islands in the Persian Gulf are a continuing source of friction between Iran and her neighbors. The islands of Tunb, Nabi Tunb, and Abu Musa are considered by the international community and the GCC as property of the United Arab Emirates. Iran has taken full possession of Abu Musa (shown on map) and has deployed military forces there, including chemical weapons and perhaps biological or radiological weapons as well. SA-6 missiles are also located at Abu Musa Island and could be used offensively. An Iranian commentary clearly identifies Iran's belief in the strategic importance of Abu Musa:

From the point of view of the southern littoral states, as well as the United States, the Abu Musa issue is quite meaningful as this island-because of its geographical location and its geostrategic role-can provide the opportunity for them to use their submarines, and it can also be used to control a large part of the Persian Gulf, its waterways, and the routes of their vessels. Another point that should not be ignored is that the United States will need to muster and accumulate forces in the region in order to combat Iran, and this highlights the importance of submarines. These three islands can be used to station nuclear submarines, as well as other military units and vessels.¹²

The consensus of analysts, however, is that Abu Musa is not necessary to dominate the Strait. Further, Iran's related military deployments are probably not strictly, or even primarily, defensive. One analyst has assessed the situation as being simply an Iranian attempt to intimidate its neighbors:

If Iran wanted to deny the waterway to the U.S. Navy, missile sites near Bandar Abbas would be more valuable since they are on the Iranian mainland and the USA would be less willing to attack them for both political and military reasons. Hence full control of Abu Musa offered little additional help in controlling the Strait. It does, however, give Iran a base for projecting its power and influence south towards the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).¹³

This assessment is reportedly shared throughout the GCC. Iran has overtly threatened the UAE to coerce it to lessen its support for a U.S. presence with such statements as "It is up to the Arab states in the Gulf to think about their long-term interests and avoid whatever conflicts with the security of the region."¹⁴

Iran has repeatedly and assertively stated that U.S. presence in the Gulf is "illegal" and "illegitimate," warning its regional neighbors that reliance on U.S. forces for security and stability is dangerous. In March 1995, for example, Deputy Navy Commander Admiral Mohtaj warned that the presence of foreign forces in the region "was not in

the interest of regional countries and that the Islamic Republic of Iran condemns such an illegal presence. The task of preserving the security of the region rests solely with the countries of the region."¹⁵

In June 1995, an Iranian editorial, describing the significance of the IRGC's 'Ashura maneuvers, said:

The maneuvers impart a message to friends, especially those in the sensitive region of the Persian Gulf, that they can count on Iran as a strong ally capable of defending the interests of the region with their cooperation. The regional countries, therefore, should shake Iran's friendly hand for protecting our common interests.¹⁶

Similarly, a Senior Commander of the IRGC and the commander of the second naval area of the IRGC in Bushehr, Hoseyn Kargar, said in December 1995, on the occasion of the "Lightening" naval and missile maneuvers the Navy and IRGC were conducting:

The illegitimate presence of foreigners in this sensitive and strategic waterway harms regional stability and security . . . as stated by the respected officials of the Islamic Republic on many occasions, true security can be achieved only by the regional nations and governments; what we are doing today is preserving our readiness to defend our Islamic homeland's borders. Therefore, the active presence of the Islamic Republic's combatants throughout . . . the Persian Gulf is needed only in order to confront encroachments by the enemies of Islam and to safeguard our country's borders and is no threat to anyone else.¹⁷

Thus, like a gangster in a protection racket, Iran has offered its "friendly hand" in aggressive maneuvers, asserted its rights to provide security in the Gulf and warned its neighbors against supporting the U.S. presence there. The meaning of such warnings concurrent with military exercises and maneuvers has not escaped Iran's neighbors.

Moreover, Iran's military growth, particularly its pursuit of NBC capabilities and missiles has not gone unnoticed by Iran's regional neighbors, and one report notes that the GCC members viewed with apprehension the Iranian arms programs and "Iran's excessive interest in nontraditional weapons."¹⁸

Iran's Deputy Navy Commander Mohtaj said in December 1995 that Iran is ready to fight an "80-year war" to defend the three islands.¹⁹ Iran is obviously willing to undertake provocative actions with respect to Abu Musa, but it is not clear whether it will be satisfied with control of the islands or actively exploit them for further

expansion. Moreover, Iran has sought to destabilize Arab and African states, especially in the eastern part of the African continent.²⁰ Iran may believe that it can exert its power and influence on its neighbors directly and indirectly and may be willing to go to war to do so.

Iran clearly sees itself as the rightful regional hegemon, and because U.S. presence is seen as an illegitimate intrusion on Iran's rightful zone of influence or security, repulsing such presence could also be rationalized by Iran as being legitimate defense.

These motivations are Iranian, rather than Islamic. The combination of the nationalistic goals of Iran and the radical Islamic and anti-Imperialistic perspective of the mullahs and the regime creates a disturbing confluence of factors.

Exporting the Revolution

The supreme religious and military leader of Iran continues to consider Iran to be the vanguard of Islamic resistance to evil and particularly to Western dominance. In December 1995, for example, on the birthday celebration of Imam Hoseyn (the third imam of the household of Prophet Mohammed), which is also, notably, IRGC Day, Ayatollah Khamene'i said, "The Islamic revolution and Iranian Muslim nation constitute the main center of resistance against the U.S. and that is why the American statesmen bear a grudge against the Iranian people."²¹

A commentary on the speech drew a direct comparison between Khamene'i's description of the life of Ali Hoseyn, "filled with fight and combat against suppression and corruption and a great lesson for the world of Islam," to Iran's fight against the United States:

The leader-s speech is in fact a reference to the confrontations that exist between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the world arrogant powers. The combat has turned into a model for the freedom-loving states who are involved in the struggle against suppression. The Iranian nation-s fight against America is known all over the world.²²

Thus, the fight against the United States and the "defeat of world arrogance" justifies the existence of the Republic of Iran, ties her leaders to their religious heritage, and endows them with a sense of righteousness and purpose. For example, Ayatollah Mohammad Emami-Kashani, Council of Guardians spokesman said on January 22, 1993:

Today, world arrogance relies on force, on the bayonet, on the spilling of blood. This is the miserable state of the world. But the good tidings that Islam brings to the Islamic society-that such a society will come about-does not mean that Muslims should sit there cross-legged hoping for that day. No, it is based on this principle: O mankind, don't think the White House will remain forever. No, it will be destroyed. (Crowd chants "Islam is victorious, America will be destroyed") God willing!

O Islamic ummah (faithful), you are one-fifth of the people of the world. Arise! The peoples of the world are with you! Fight the powers! The meaning that human society will see a new dawn is that human society must move toward that day. Human society must not tolerate oppression and crime.²³

In a manner reminiscent of the Bolshevik conclusion that they were the vanguard of an international revolution and that they would stand against the West to lead the revolution, Iran's leaders have defined themselves by their opposition to the United States. Having defined themselves as rightful leaders of Islam, Iranian leaders see their confrontation with the United States as a key source of respect and support from other Islamic states and Muslim (especially Shiite) opposition groups in other states. In December 1995, Iranian President Rafsanjani said that "the Islamic Republic of Iran has the potential to develop into a motherland for the great Islamic civilization."²⁴ Ratifying this motivation, one analyst noted, "*By attacking U.S. interests, the Guard hoped to create greater appeal for the Islamic revolution among those in the Arab, Muslim, and Third World who resented Western domination.*"²⁵

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DENIAL AND JEOPARDY: DETERRING IRANIAN USE OF NBC WEAPONS

5.

IRANIAN NBC POLICY, CAPABILITIES, AND EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS

There are five methods of attacking with fire. The first is to burn personnel; the second, to burn stores; the third, to burn equipment; the fourth, to burn arsenals; and the fifth, to use incendiary missiles.¹

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

IRANIAN NBC POLICY

In the early post-revolutionary period, Iran's position on chemical and other weapons of mass destruction weapons was that they were contrary to Islam. During the Gulf War with Iraq, however, as Iraqi chemical weapons (CW) use became more frequent and more effective, and as the international community failed to respond, the Iranians changed their position, apparently even using chemical artillery rounds captured from Iraq. As the war continued, Iran developed its own chemical weapons capability; by the end of the war Iran had embarked on the production of biological weapons (BW) and probably had begun planning pursuit of nuclear weapons.

In September 1987, then Majlis Speaker Rafsanjani spoke to a group of "Personnel of the Chemical, Biological, and Radioactive Warfare Units of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps," stating, "Muslims should equip themselves with a deterrent weapon to

counter the arsenal used by world blasphemy against them" and vowed that "we declare that if we are invaded in any way, we will counter them the same way as ordered by the Koran."² The following year Rafsanjani stated to the Majlis,

Chemical and biological weapons are poor man's atomic bombs and can easily be produced. We should at least consider them for our defense. Although the use of such weapons is inhuman, the war taught us that international laws are only scraps of paper.³

After he became Iran's President, Rafsanjani is quoted as having said,

With regard to chemical, bacteriological and radiological weapons training, it was made very clear during the war that these weapons are very decisive. It was also made very clear that the moral teachings of the world are not very effective when war reaches a serious stage; the world does not respect its own resolutions, and closes its eyes to the violations and all the aggressions which are committed on the battlefield. . . . We should fully equip ourselves in the defensive and offensive use of chemical, bacteriological and radiological weapons. ⁴

In April 1990, Fakhreddin Hejazi, a Majlis Defense Committee member was asked the following question:

Iraq is being extensively armed with the most advanced weaponry (atomic and biological). In view of the fact that all of us know how the Ba'thist regime has been a great threat in the region, what steps have been foreseen in our country's five-year plan as far as the strengthening of our armed forces is concerned? ⁵

His answer was:

What is important in a war now is first belief and faith, then strong manpower, and last technical and scientific strengths. As far as manpower is concerned, thank God we are strong. As far as faith is concerned, I can say that our faith is unprecedented in the world and we will never abandon the Koran, which is the source of our strength. As for arms, we are striving not to depend on foreigners for them. In our five-year plan, we have allocated budgets to arms and research. Of course I cannot go into details. ... We can say that we have achieved great success in the nuclear field. I should not go into more details on this. Of course we will never start a criminal war like the Iraqi regime. As an example, even though we have the equipment and the raw materials for biological and chemical weapons in hand, nevertheless, we never intend to arm ourselves with this weapon unless one day we have to do so to retaliate. But our war will never be inhuman. We want to give you the good tidings that our competent Iranian researchers and scientists are carrying out research both in the armed forces and in the (IRGC) Corps and they have scored

successes which we will talk about in due course.⁶

Significantly, this relative openness if not outright pride regarding NBC programs changed abruptly in the aftermath of *Desert Storm*. Until UNSCOM dismantlement operations in Iraq showed Iran that the possession of such weapons could have burdensome international consequences, Iran made public references to its pursuit of NBC capabilities. After that, its statements, particularly those in English rather than Farsi, generally asserted that Iran abhorred such weapons and embraced arms control. In 1994, for example, an English language newspaper published an interview with IRGC Commander Rezai in which he scoffed at reports that Iran was pursuing nuclear weapons, arguing on military grounds that Iran did not want nuclear weapons: "Political logic, morality, our own culture and above all the situation in today's world does not allow us to have such deadly weapons." He went on to add, "Of course, we are for traditional weapons and that too just for self-defense."⁷ Thus, Rezai tried to argue, Iran is not pursuing NBC capabilities, is pursuing only self-defense, and has no expansionary or offensive purposes for its military forces. While the Iranian definitions of self-defense are based on their interpretations of offensive versus defensive jihad, such a statement is blatantly contrary to available evidence.

A 1995 article in the English language version of Iran's official news agency denied on humanitarian grounds that Iran had ever used chemical or biological weapons and that it had any nuclear program:

The Islamic Republic of Iran is itself one of the victims of chemical and biological weapons and has always expressed its severe opposition to production and use of such weapons of mass destruction and considers it as violation of humanitarian principles. Despite heavy casualties of Iranian combatants during the Iraqi imposed war on Iran (1980-1988) and its physical and psychological consequences which is obvious among those combatants who were exposed to such chemical attacks, Iran never resorted to use chemical and biological weapons against the Iraqi forces.⁸

Contrary to such assertions, which might lead to the conclusion or hope that Iran's religious beliefs would lead them to eschew the development and use of weapons of mass destruction, a decision *was* made to develop whatever means are necessary to further Iranian interests. Iran did indeed use chemical weapons against the Kurds, and it is believed that there was limited use against Iraq near the end of the Iran/Iraq war.

The decision to develop such weapons came reluctantly. In 1993, for example, Ayatollah Khamene'i told a ceremony for the air, land, and sea units of the IRGC, "The use of science in the service of force and deception is a bitter truth."⁹ "Science"

here is a thinly veiled reference to NBC weapons. As recently as October 4, 1996, the First Deputy Speaker of the Assembly of Experts, said:

How many times have I said this to you that any weapon that kills human beings is banned by Islam, mass destruction weapons in particular. Initially it has banned them. However, if someone has embarked on this banned activity and produced weapons, it is incumbent upon you to make more superior ones.¹⁰

Thus, Iran's public assertions that it is not pursuing and would not use NBC weapons are countered by statements more consistent with other pronouncements indicating a perceived need for NBC weapons and a willingness to use any means necessary to attain their objectives.

NBC AND MISSILE CAPABILITY

Information and misinformation in the public realm aside, Iran has indeed pursued the acquisition of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapon capabilities. Their chemical weapons program began during the war with Iraq, as apparently did their biological weapons program. They also are likely to possess radiological weapons and have an active ballistic missile program. Iran is believed to be pursuing nuclear weapons.

Chemical Weapons

Iran has been actively engaged in chemical weapons production for over a decade. Iran was the target of Iraqi chemical weapon use during their war. Anthony Cordesman has described CW use in the Iran/Iraq war as follows:

According to one estimate, Iraq used chemical weapons 195 times between 1983 and the 1988 cease-fire. . . . Iraq also developed the capability to use gas at least as effectively for tactical and strategic purposes as it did in using gas to produce casualties. Iranian forces often found that gas gave Iraq the tactical initiative or a dominant tactical position, and each successive Iraqi use of gas had a cumulative strategic effect in breaking Iranian morale.¹¹

As for the overall impact of chemical weapons on the war, even the highest estimate of the total number of casualties from gas weapons makes up less than 5% of the well over one million military and civilian casualties that resulted from the war. Nevertheless, chemical weapons had a critical effect on Iranian military and civilian morale by late 1987, and during the Iraqi counter-offensives and 'war of the cities' in 1988. Sheer killing power is not the key measure of success: it is rather the strategic, tactical and psycho-political impact of the use of such weapons. Even when troops

are equipped with defensive gear, they often feel they are defenseless and break and run after limited losses. Populations which fear chemical attacks may well cease to support a conflict.¹²

The Iraqi chemical weapons use had two predominant effects on Iran. First, genuinely shocked at the lack of response by the international community, as indicated by Rafsanjani,¹³ Iran came to understand that international agreements and organizations such as the United Nations offered no substitute for military capability and weapons of mass destruction.¹⁴ Second, Iran concluded late in the war that it needed chemical weapons of its own, although Iran apparently did not use chemical weapons on a large scale. While it is believed that Iran used chemical artillery shells captured from the Iraqis during the Iran/Iraq war, Iranian use was far less extensive than the Iraqis', and even then primarily against the Kurds.¹⁵

While Iran began its chemical weapons production as a result of Iraqi use in the Iran-Iraqi conflict, it has not only continued its program in the face of UNSCOM degradation of the Iraqi CW program but has actually expanded chemical weapons production:

Iran has been producing chemical agents at a steadily increasing rate since 1984, and has cumulatively produced at a minimum several hundred tons of blister, blood, and choking agents. Tehran has weaponized some of these chemical agentsCa weapons stockpile to support ground combat operations. In addition, Iran could attempt to deliver chemical bombs against targets such as airfields, ports, or oil installations across the Persian Gulf.¹⁶

Iran is unlikely to terminate its CW program as a result of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). According to the CIA's Nonproliferation Center:

Iran has continued to upgrade and expand its chemical weapons production infrastructure and chemical munitions arsenal, despite signing the CWC in January 1993. Iran produces a variety of chemical agents, including blister, blood, and choking agents. As part of this expansion, Iran is spending large sums of money on long-term capital improvements to its chemical warfare program, suggesting that it intends to maintain a CW capability well into the future.¹⁷

Biological Weapons

As with its CW program, Iran is believed to have begun its biological weapons program in the 1980s, during its war with Iraq. This production, which was initiated

by the IRGC, was certainly underway by 1986, as evidenced in an April 1986 announcement by the Minister of the IRGC:

The armament industries of the Corps have made notable progress in the *missile, aircraft, biological, chemical, and nuclear fields* as well as in construction of engineering equipment such as a variety of bridges, mortar-launchers, and rocket-propelled grenades (emphasis added).¹⁸

Official U.S. assessments of the Iranian offensive biological weapons program indicate a BW production and weaponization program:

The Iranian BW program has been embedded within Iran's extensive biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries so as to obscure its activities. The Iranian military has used medical, education and scientific research organizations for many aspects of BW agent procurement, research, and production. Iran has also failed to submit the data declarations called for in the CBMs. The United States Government reiterates its previous finding that Iran probably has produced biological warfare agents and apparently has weaponized a small quantity of those agents.¹⁹

Biological weapons can be delivered in the same munitions that deliver chemical weapons, including "artillery shells, rockets, bombs, missile warheads, and covert devices."²⁰

Nuclear/Radiological Weapons

Iran is believed to be pursuing nuclear weapons under a program that reportedly began but was not completed under the Shah. The Iranians have sought significant German and Argentine technological support in several key aspects of its nuclear weapons effort,²¹ as well as Russian and Chinese assistance:

In 1985 Iran purchased a "subcritical" experimental reactor from China, without declaring the purchase to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In July 1987 Iran purchased from China equipment that is used for enriching uranium. On January 21, 1990, Chinese and Iranian officials signed an agreement to build a twenty-seven-megawatt plutonium production reactor in Isfahan. U.S. satellite photographs taken in September 1991 documents major construction work at the site and the presence of large numbers of Chinese technicians. In 1991 Iran also attempted to purchase a research reactor from India and a nuclear fuel fabrication plant from Argentina.²²

The IAEA, however, has never acknowledged evidence of Iranian wrongdoing, and

the Iranians have touted their IAEA clean bill of health and publicly thanked the IAEA. As recently as November 1995, Iran's permanent envoy to the United Nations expressed Iran's appreciation to the IAEA "for its efforts in promotion of international cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and nonproliferation of nuclear weapons in all its aspects."²³ Russia, which has agreed to assist Iran's "peaceful nuclear program," has assured the international community that its assistance will be under the supervision of the IAEA. None of this guarantees, however, that the materials produced will not be part of an Iranian nuclear weapons program. The CIA Nonproliferation Center's (NPC) March 1995 Report states:

Iran is aggressively pursuing a nuclear weapons capability and, if significant foreign assistance were provided, could produce a weapon by the end of the decade. Tehran is devoting significant resources to its nuclear program. Foreign suppliers, including Russia and China, are key sources of necessary technologies not only for Iran's nuclear program but also for its other WMD capabilities.²⁴

While no convincing evidence has emerged to indicate that Iran now has nuclear weapons capability, the necessary material for a nuclear weapon, sporadic news reports²⁵ indicate that Iran may have actually sought sensitive nuclear materials, and even nuclear warheads, from the former Soviet Union. Such a possibility cannot be fully discounted. Iran may, in any event, have already acquired enough material for radiological weapons. Radiological weapons, or radiological dispersal devices (RDD), are defined as "any explosive device that is intended to spread radioactive material in detonation. An improvised nuclear device can also be an RDD if the explosion does not cause a nuclear yield, but 'fizzles,' spreading radioactive materials."²⁶ Iran reportedly possesses "stockpiles of uranium,"²⁷ and the assessment that they have pursued RDD is supported by the frequent training of Iran's "Shim-Mim-Re," the chemical, biological, and radiological units.

While little information is available on an Iranian radiological weapons program, some exists on the Iraqi radiological weapons program. According to Iraqi statements and reports given to UNSCOM inspectors and the IAEA, Iraq conducted experiments in 1987 to explore radiological weapons as a means of area denial but subsequently did not pursue the program beyond the initial phase. In August 1995, Iraq stated:

A number of lead-shielded metal containers with irradiated zirconium oxide were exploded . . . each container, which weighed about 1 ton (because of extensive shielding), had from 0.5 to 1 kilogram of irradiated zirconium oxide.

In December 1995, additional information was provided:

Three prototypes were made based on modified Nasser 28 aerial bombs. These prototypes had a gross weight of 1,400 kilograms and had a radioactive content of some two curies deriving mainly from the hafnium impurity present in the zirconium oxide that had been irradiated . . . all three bombs were exploded at test sites.²⁸

The Iranians may also see such weapons as offering area denial applicability or as weapons of terror. Radiological weapons could be used as a means to deny the United States access to key ports or air bases in somewhat the same manner as biological weapons, but probably with less loss of life, and could wreak havoc among civilian populations. There are limitations on the effectiveness of radiological weapons that would almost certainly make them less attractive to the Iranians than biological weapons or even chemical weapons, to include that their use could, with limited military utility, be perceived as "nuclear" and entail an escalation in conflict. While the radiation effects could likely be cleaned up rather expeditiously, the requirement to do so is cost associated with operating in a radiological environment. Clean-up operations could be further hindered with subsequent attacks.²⁹

Delivery Means

Iran appears to be pursuing both conventional and novel means of attacking its targets and to believe that both would be useful against U.S. forces. Among conventional forces, Iran has pursued options for ballistic and cruise missiles as well as more traditional strike fighters. Anthony Cordesman highlighted the effectiveness of modern strike fighters for delivery of chemical or biological agent:

Most Middle Eastern states already have modern strike aircraft that can hit any city or target in neighboring countries. If such aircraft face a higher probability of intercept in a few countries like Israel, they can carry far higher payloads—often as much as eight to ten times the payload per aircraft of an extended range Scud. They also fly at speeds and altitudes that make the delivery of biological and chemical weapons far easier than the high reentry speeds of missiles.³⁰

Other conventional Iranian forces identified by Cordesman could be used as NBC delivery systems:

- Old F4D/E aircraft, SU-24 and Mirage F-1 fighters acquired from Iraq. New Soviet aircraft may be on order.
- Possible order for PRC-made M-9 missile (280-620 kilometer

range).

- Iranian made Iran-130 missile with 150+ kilometer range.
- Iranian Oghab (Eagle) rocket with 40+ kilometer range.
- New SSM with 125 mile range may be in production, but could be modified FROG.
- HY-2 Silkworm missiles.
- Multiple rocket launchers and tube artillery.³¹

Iran possesses an impressive arsenal of ballistic missiles and, particularly in light of the Iranian experience as the victims of ballistic missile attacks, understands their great political and military utility—particularly if the enemy is undefended. The CSS-8, provided by China, has a 150- km-range. The 320-km Scud B missile, with a 1,000-kg warhead, was sold to Iran by North Korea³² and gives Tehran the ability to threaten U.S. forces in the Gulf. The 500-km Scud C, with a likely 700- to 800-kg warhead and also acquired from North Korea, puts key oil installations and ports under threat of attack. If armed with nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons, these missiles, despite their inaccuracy, could present a major threat to U.S. and coalition forces in the area. While such warheads may, according to Cordesman, be "extremely difficult to engineer and require well planned testing efforts to produce predictable and effective results," they would, at a minimum, require that the United States and its allied forces consider employment of active and passive defenses and could thereby change logistics requirements as well as alter the pace and tempo of operations. More significantly, these weapons may be most effective as "political weapons," changing the higher level considerations, such as risk of military and civilian casualties, raising questions about allied support and the support of the American public, and, in turn, influencing the policy context in which a war is prosecuted.

Like Iraq in the late 1980s, Iran may be seeking to reduce the inaccuracy and extend the reach of its ballistic missiles and to enhance accuracy with more advanced cruise missiles. Iranian Foreign Minister 'Ali Velayati would neither confirm nor deny that during his visit to China in spring 1995 he "received missile control systems to increase the precision of Iranian Scuds,"³³ reported to be among the key purposes for his visit. The commercial availability of the Global Positioning System (GPS), particularly the follow-on or newer systems, will make it possible for the Iranians to enhance the accuracy of their ballistic missiles.³⁴ GPS also promises to enhance the accuracy of Iranian cruise missiles. Cruise missiles are "much cheaper to build than ballistic missiles, do not present the problem of high reentry velocities, and can strike a specific target within 10-20 meters." Their introduction with terminal command guidance promises to make Iranian biological and chemical weapons even more

usable.³⁵ Iran reportedly possesses the HY-2 Silkworm cruise missile, and China is reported to have built a plant in Iran to assemble the Silkworm. China is also reportedly helping the IRGC to increase the Silkworm's range to over 400 kilometers³⁶. There is also evidence that Iran is deploying the Chinese C802 antiship cruise missile. The C802 has a 120-km range with an "adequate guidance system and a 700-km warhead." ³⁷

In addition to efforts to increase the accuracy of its missiles, Iran is seeking to extend the range of its ballistic missile inventory. Iran is expected to supplement its existing ballistic missile inventories with the purchase from North Korea of the 1,000- to 1,300-km Nodong, and, with North Korean and Chinese help, is seeking to develop and produce its own 3,000-km-range ballistic missilesCwhich could hold much of eastern and central Europe at risk.³⁸ The chart on the following page demonstrates the Iranian effort to expand its reach using ballistic missiles.

Iran has also pursued novel delivery means. In August 1987, for example, Mohsen Rezai, the Commander of the IRGC, announced that "the most formidable weapon in the hands of the Revolutionary Guards are motorized speed launches, loaded with explosives which are specially designed for offensive." He added: "In case the enemy attacks us during the maneuvers, thousands of such boats will be launched and we are sure that the enemy warships in the Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and Oman Sea will be destroyed by them."³⁹

In more recent years, Iran also began mass-producing remotely piloted vehicles (RPVs).⁴⁰ RPVs offer a potentially accurate delivery mode that might be particularly useful for delivering biological agents. It takes a smaller quantity of biological weapons to inflict a given number of casualties than the quantity of chemical agent needed.⁴¹ Again, this sort of novel delivery mode could give the advantage of surprise to the attacker; RPVs in particular, while unlikely to be capable of carrying large quantities of agent, would present unique challenges to defenses. The quantity of agent delivered and the challenge posed to U.S. defenses could be multiplied by launching swarms of RPVs. Iran may want to maintain its novel delivery means as more than interim capabilities as improvements in accuracy and precision in warhead delivery enhance the military effectiveness of its ballistic missiles for delivering NBC, thereby further complicating U.S. defense efforts.

Such an approach's unconventionality could enhance surprise and other measures of effectiveness, particularly if U.S. forces are not prepared to confront such novel threats as a thousand motorized speed launches loaded with radiological, biological, or

chemical weapons on suicide missions. The Iranian pursuit of a robust ballistic missile capability would be consistent with a reasonable desire to keep the conflict as far away as possible from the Iranian homeland and to be able to extend the reach of the Revolutionary Guard. The value of a ballistic missile program was not undermined by Iraq's defeat in *Desert Storm* and likely has been reinforced by the lessons from that conflict:

First, unlike aircraft bombing, missile penetration was not so dependent on the skills of a pilot and the range was much greater. Second, the terrorizing effect Iraqi missile attacks had on Israel was out of all proportion to any possible military utility. Third, even the odd, chance missile hit could amplify this terror. Fourth, mobile missiles were survivable, effective if well deployed, and difficult to locate.⁴²

Ballistic missiles, novel delivery means, NBC weapons and an emphasis on naval forces all reinforce the proposition that the primary target for Iranian forces will not be regional neighbors but rather the United States. Iranian forces are thus assessed to be deployed to strike at the primary symbol of U.S. power projection, the U.S. Navy, with its large carrier battle groups. Other targets are also likely, however, as will be discussed later.

EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY AND DOCTRINE

Would Iran use NBC? How would they use it? Do they have a strategy or employment doctrine? Some have hypothesized that such weapons would be used only as a weapon of last resort and that countries like Iran certainly have no formal doctrine for their employment. Iran's official position since *Desert Storm* has been that it does not seek or possess NBC weapons and would not use them. Evidence, however, supports a different assessment: that Iran has sought NBC capabilities and has given weighty consideration to such questions, sees NBC weapons as usable and as means to counterbalancing U.S. military strengths, and has prepared to operate in an NBC environment, almost certainly of their own making.

Military Education

In 1986 the IRGC opened Imam Hosein University, which offers "advanced studies in military sciences, engineering, management, and even medical sciences."⁴³ In addition, the Guard also founded a military think-tank that supports it, the Academy of Multilateral Defense and Strategy of the Revolutionary Guard.⁴⁴ While the products of these higher military education programs are not available publicly, the existence of

these programs lends weight to the proposition that the IRGC has considered questions related to military doctrine. Further, given that the IRGC has also led the Iranian pursuit of biological and chemical weapons and would have the lead in their use, it is logical to assume that their military university and their academy devote some consideration to such questions as how and when NBC weapons can be threatened or used to advance Iranian interests.

Exercises and Maneuvers

Iran has exercised its BW and CW capabilities in tactical maneuvers and exercises that explicitly train the "Shin-Mim-Re," or "chemical, biological, and radiological units." While it is possible that these exercises are "defensive," in the sense that their purpose is to prepare Iranian forces to operate in an NBC environment created by hostile forces, it is even more likely that such training prepares them for an NBC environment of their own making. Most of these exercises are offensive, involving assaults on enemy positions. Before *Desert Storm*, when the Iranians tended to be more direct about their NBC intentions, official language made this quite clear. But despite the defensive spin added since 1991, the offensive character of chemical, biological, and radiological weapons related training may still be discerned.

Several unclassified descriptions of Iranian force exercises support the probable offensive purpose of Iranian exercises and the probable exercise of chemical, biological, and radiological weapons forces. Table 1 highlights a number of such exercises since 1987. The first, in August 1987, was Iran's "Martyrdom" maneuver, a 3-day naval action by the Revolutionary Guard. The first stage of the exercise included four divisions and the launch of Iran's first home-made submarine. Guard leader Mohsen Rezai clarified the purpose of the maneuver:

Ground-to-air, ground-to-ground and ground-to-sea missiles were aimed at mock targets but would not be fired during the maneuvers. However, if the enemy takes action in the Gulf, the Guards' missile maneuvers will become a real military operation.⁴⁵

Consistent with this paper's discussion of delivery systems that Iran could against the United States, Rezai also said at the time:

The most formidable weapon in the hands of the Revolutionary Guards are motorized speed launches, loaded with explosives which are specially designed for offensive. In case the enemy attacks us during the maneuvers, thousands of such boats will be launched and we are sure that the enemy warships in the Gulf, the

Strait of Hormuz and Oman sea will be destroyed by them.⁴⁶

Iran's Persian news service described the June 1989 "Bey'at Operational Exercise" as including offensive operations:

The following units took part: the 15th Ramazan Corps, the Imam Khomeyni Battalion, the Special Martyrdom Battalion, the Engineering Equipment Battalion, the Air Defense Unit, and some Shin-Mim-Re [chemical, biological, and radioactive warfare] units. They used combat tactics on two axes and in three phases performed guerrilla operations using light-and medium-weight weapons. The forces attacked predetermined objectives and a hypothetical enemy. After destroying the enemy's trenches and crossing his canals, earthworks, and minefields they captured the heights of the hypothetical enemy.⁴⁷

The May 1990 "Sahand" naval exercise was also reported by the official Iranian news agency. The Iranians announced that Sahand would be conducted to test:

the assault capability of submarines manufactured by the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy against the surface units of a hypothetical enemy. In this stage of the maneuvers, naval vessels passed through channels which had been cleared of mines and, engaging in special naval battles in special naval formations, they repulsed the air attacks of the hypothetical enemy with the support of air defense units.⁴⁸

The fourth stage of the Sahand maneuvers, which were held in the presence of the Commander of the Iranian Navy, Captain Sham'khani, and a number of other high-ranking navy commanders, included:

tracking fighter-bombers over the sea, guiding helicopters in anti-surface operations, carrying out exercises of electronic warfare, launching attacks by fighter-bombers against surface naval targets-as well as Shin-Mim-Re operations and anti-germ attacks on light and heavy naval vessels.⁴⁹

Before Iran's January 1991 Grand Fajr military exercises, the commander of the Iranian Ground Forces reported on Tehran radio, "During these month-long exercises, the Air Force's capability to provide combat and defense support to the ground forces and, ultimately, the readiness of the ground forces' chemical and biological unit will be assessed."⁵⁰ These maneuvers, along Iran's border with Iraq, tested the SA-2 and SA-6 missiles "as well as other weapons." It is not known if these anti-aircraft units were trained in a defensive or offensive mode, but the Acting Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary Guards said they were "directly linked to the presence of foreign forces" in the region,⁵¹ that is, at the U.S.-led *Desert Storm* coalition. The Fajr

exercises were also announced to be for the purpose of testing: "The combat readiness of the special forces of the IRGC in the face of likely enemy attacks, performance of air assaults in taking the bases of the joint aggressive enemy, and the cooperation between the IRI armed forces Airforce and the Special Forces of the IRGC, so that *special tactics and operational techniques* are put into practice."⁵²

These special tactics and techniques probably included offensive use of biological and chemical weapons because these maneuvers focused on the chemical and biological units.

In August 1995, the Iranians held the "Beyt-ol-Moqaddas" operational maneuver, the stated purpose of which was to "strengthen the combat readiness of security units" and "display the combat capabilities in the face of possible conspiracies by the enemies of the sacred system of the Islamic Republic of Iran."⁵³ The Commander of the maneuver said:

Infantry, armored and air units, as well as Shin-Mim-Re defense units, of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Army ground force will be taking part in the maneuver which will be carried out in five stages with delay and defense operations and assaults on the positions and fortifications and breaking through the attack of the hypothetical enemy-with full coordination and unity-in order to achieve the predetermined aims. A number of helicopters and aircraft will also be used in this military maneuver to bomb the hypothetical enemy's axes and fortifications."⁵⁴

In April 1996, the Iranian Navy held an exercise that included "naval units, including missile-launching frigates, support personnel-carrying and logistic warships."⁵⁵ Iranian descriptions indicate that the Shin-mim-re often participates with the exercises and maneuvers. The maneuvers included "loading and disembarking of forces on the coast in attack position."⁵⁶ U.S. Navy sources have confirmed that Iranian naval exercises "often emphasize naval blockade and amphibious assault, the kinds of issues about which the U.S. Navy is most concerned. This year's exercise (*Victory 6*) included chemical and biological warfare defense exercises."⁵⁷

Thus, Iran, and the Iranian Navy in particular, has exercised its BW and CW capabilities in tactical maneuvers that explicitly train the IRGC's Shin-mim-re units. Most of these exercises involve offensive assaults on fixed enemy positions. Thus, they are not strictly defensive. References to the "defense" aspect of the Sin-Mim-Re units began only after *Desert Storm*, when Iran began denying its possession and pursuit of NBC weapons.

The Shin-mim-re and naval forces in particular have exercised numerous times against hypothetical naval forces that certainly represent those of the United States. Some have speculated that, even though Iran might indeed use NBC weapons offensively, it would do so only against other regional states and not the more powerful United States. This assertion is not supported by the evidence. In fact, considerable evidence indicates that U.S. forces, and especially U.S. naval forces in the Gulf, are the most likely target of Iran's offensive preparations. The Deputy Commander of Iran's naval forces, Rear Admiral Abbas Mohtaj, said on November 24, 1994, "The presence of alien forces in the Persian Gulf, especially the Americans, is tantamount to a basic threat against the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Iran's naval unit should be capable of repelling it."⁵⁸ The following March, Mohtaj called the U.S. presence in the region illegal,⁵⁹ and in December 1995 he reiterated that Iran's only potential threat was the United States.⁶⁰

The frequent exercise of the Shin-Mim-re units cannot be to protect Iranian forces against a U.S. NBC attack, because Iran must certainly know that the United States has not possessed biological or radiological weapons for decades and is eliminating its entire chemical weapons stockpile. The more credible explanation is that Iranian forces are training to operate in an NBC environment of their own creation.

Iran's Analysis of Desert Storm

The Iranians watched *Desert Shield* and *Desert Storm* carefully, and their published assessments yield two strategically interrelated conclusions. First, Iran believed that Iraq would certainly use battlefield chemical and biological weapons. Second, Iranian observers viewed the United States as politically and strategically vulnerable should the war involve high Iraqi civilian casualties, an extended engagement, or high U.S. military casualties.

On January 17, 1991, for example, on the first day of *Desert Storm*, *Ettela'at* assessed the Iraqi situation:

There will be the vast use of chemical and biological weapons, which Iraq has explicitly stated it will use. Of course the Americans have said that they have deprived Iraq of this weapon with their aerial bombings. This propaganda-military argument has pushed the area into 'military hysteria' in which a comparison of the capability of both sides in a war in which technical calculations are based on military materiel and war techniques shows that the Americans will succeed in a 'phased war' and that Iraq will suffer a severe defeat. Only by considering the possibility that the war will be prolonged, by considering Saddam's inflexible stand

and refusal to withdraw from Kuwait, and by considering the political-ideological developments that can come about with Israel's entry into the war can we see that the conditions of the current crisis speak of the transition from a phased war to an all-embracing regional and international political-military crisis.⁶¹

The Iranian Domestic News Service contained the following January 1991 assessment of U.S. and Iraqi wartime objectives and possible NBC use in the early days of *Desert Storm*:

America has not rejected even the use of the atomic weapon, and Iraq, too, considers it its duty to use its chemical and biological weapons if the need arises. The two sides are continuing the war with two different strategies. America is still thinking of a limited time factor and the geography of the battle in order to avoid a protracted conflict, which would have psychological, political, and economic repercussions. It is using everything at its disposal to prevent an extension of the war, which could create a deep schism between its allies and the stands of the Arab countries that are siding with it. An example of this effort can be seen in America's request of Israeli authorities to refrain from responding to Iraqi attacks on Israel. But Iraq has aimed all its efforts at a war of attrition and is trying, by various means, to extend the battle arena.⁶²

Another article reaffirms Iran's assessment that Iraq was producing biological weapons:

The smoke-filled air over Kuwait and the coast of Saudi Arabia, resulting from the blaze in the oil wells and the bombardment of the nuclear research center in Baghdad and factories manufacturing chemical and biological weapons, has raised fears about environmental contamination.⁶³

In a February 1991 Iranian press assessment, unnamed military experts are quoted as both criticizing the Iraqi tendency to pay excessive attention to fixed defense while neglecting other routes of penetration during the war with Iran, and also the likelihood that the Iraqi leaders would ignore such risks ("Iraqi infantry does not have a very brilliant reputation for resistance under such circumstances.") The article then adds:

The Iraqi Armed Forces now find themselves in a situation where they do not benefit from satellite information, as they did before [in the Iran-Iraq war] and lack air security. Thus, finding a way of stationing the coalition forces behind Iraqi forces should not be too difficult or impractical, especially since these forces enjoy special engineering facilities for crossing the region's marshlands or quicksand. On the other hand, even if the leaders of Iraq, without paying attention to these problems, persist in not evacuating Kuwaiti territory and the multinational forces begin land operation

in the way just mentioned, Iraqi infantry does not have a very brilliant reputation for resistance under such circumstances. The deployment of chemical or biological weapons by the Iraqi Armed Forces will be effective on a limited scale and will not raise the soldiers ability to resist to the extent that Iraqi commanders expect.⁶⁴

Other Iranian assessments of *Desert Storm* address the importance of effective propaganda. For example, one article focused in the early stages of *Desert Storm* on "the inefficiency of Iraq's propaganda to whip up the necessary support for its occupation of Kuwait," and highlighted the importance to the United States of minimizing civilian casualties and obtaining a swift victory, on grounds that the war had "reopened the Vietnam dossier."⁶⁵

Since *Desert Storm*, Iran has continued to apply these lessons to its geopolitical situation and military preparedness. In a September 1995 interview with IRGC Commander Rezai, for example, we learn several indicators of Iran's strategy, from a decidedly Iranian standpoint. Consistent with a shift in Iranian public statements after *Desert Storm* in which the Iranians, who once made fairly open public statements regarding pursuit of NBC capabilities, vehemently deny pursuit of these weapons, Rezai states emphatically that "the Western propaganda that Iran is trying to acquire nuclear weapons is an outright lie." He argues, in response to a question about how Iran would respond if Israel attacked Iran's nuclear installations, that Israel will not carry out a threat to do so, because "if they were they would not have announced the threat in the first place," but also that "anyone who delivers the slightest threat or commits the slightest violation against use will receive a much stronger answer." After noting that Iraq did not use nuclear or biological weapons, and used only chemical weapons against Iran, he says that the "international code of behavior shows that the weapons that were manufactured after World War II and were relied upon for decades are obsolete. We are pursuing other things and seek to base our defense potential on other factors." In this interview, quoted at length below, Rezai speaks of moving to what he calls a deterrent strategy:

Resalat: In view of your long record on the battlefields, how do you assess Iran's military capabilities? If there were heavy attacks like the ones of 30 Shahrivar 1359 [Iraq's September 21, 1980 invasion of Iran's western border] against our country today, would we be ready to defend ourselves?

Rezai: Our country has higher readiness now than it did then. Now we consider the 30 Shahrivar 1359 assault to have been of the simplest kind that we could encounter. Not only can we resist that magnitude of threat, we have even prepared to counter more serious threats. We are currently taking a more important step: Transitioning from being able to triumph to being able to deter. Previously we concentrated on our ability to conquer and repulse the enemy in even of war. But now we are trying

to prevent any war from occurring-something much better and greater than conquering the enemy. *It is true that we will defeat the enemy.* But when the enemy occupies our territory, destroys our land and our economic capabilities, even if we oust them we will still have suffered heavy losses. *Therefore, today we are striving to achieve a deterrent capability.* Of course, we do not want to move toward strategic weapons; and the Western propaganda that Iran is trying to acquire nuclear weapons is an outright lie. But we are trying to create an 'Ashura force that will actually be a rapid reaction force. We have in mind the creation of an organized force with modern equipment that will be able to deploy with lightening speed wherever we want. Such an immense force would be equivalent to a strategic and deterrent force. The 'Ashura maneuvers were the first exercises of this force; and they were successful, thank God. . . . *If something like America's war against Iraq takes place, at least 20,000 American forces will be taken captive by us before America can attack us. But America will be ready to sit down at the negotiating table even with the first 1,000 captives. So our defense system is very different and we ourselves have discovered these rules of war, which, we think, are extremely effective.*⁶⁶

The reference to an "'Ashura force" is noteworthy. 'Ashura marks the anniversary of the battle at Karbala referred to earlier between Hossein and 72 of his followers and a much larger army in the year 680.⁶⁷ This event marks the core value placed on martyrdom and the elevation of the small against the mighty. Moreover, in December of the same year, the Iranian news agency cited an editorial as stating, "As a basic rule, there are ten factors that affect the outcome of a war . . . having more sophisticated weapons is only one such factor." IRNA then reported:

Although the Iranian navy enjoys superiority over the Americans in at least six or seven of these factors, it is doing all it can to improve its defense capabilities and increase its chances for superiority in the ten factors. It is also going ahead with its strategy to ensure Iran's leadership and superiority in the Persian Gulf.⁶⁸

There is likely some relationship between the strategy referred to and Iran's assessment of the factors that determine the outcome of war and reports that emerged in November 1995 of a new "modern war plan" that was begun in 1989 and which would be completed "within the next few years."⁶⁹ One explanation would be a combination of novel delivery modes for NBC weapons along with the threat of NBC use to "deter." It is also noteworthy that the focus of these efforts is defeat of U.S. forces in the Gulf.

EMPLOYMENT SCENARIOS

The following scenarios are suggested by either actual Iranian statements, exercises, force deployments or a combination of these. Any or all of these use concepts could be executed should the IRGC determine that conditions call for action.

Terrorism

On July 8, 1987, IRGC Commander Rezai was cited as having said that:

Lots of letters from Islamic States and world Muslims had reached Iranian authorities asking permission to attack the U.S. interests and embassies but that the Iranian officials had yet withheld permission.⁷⁰

This statement could foretell a strategy to blackmail the United States with Iran's terrorist allies or surrogates.

An October 1995 Iranian editorial reminded readers that Iran's sympathizers could respond to the United States and admonished that the United States should not label the sympathizers of the Islamic republic as "terrorists, radicals, or hijackers." It stated,

Iran was not alone and while its sympathizers would not hold the American public responsible for the crimes of its leaders, they would definitely retaliate against the anti-Islamic plots of Washington.⁷¹

By such statements, Iran threatens the United States but does so in such a way that "sympathizers" and not Iran itself would undertake retaliation against the United States for its opposition to Iran. Iran would then likely seek to take "credit" with its allies for the act but without full or unambiguous culpability. The introduction of such ambiguity provides a cover that could be sufficient to avoid any U.S. sanction or retaliation. Such an approach has been identified by one U.S. analyst as an important Iranian lesson from *Desert Storm*. Hardcastle has suggested that Iran might:

challenge U.S. interests incrementally and ambiguously. . . . Iraq and Iran will have learned to settle for gains that do not provide clear justifications for U.S. retaliation or intervention. While it has demonstrated the ability to respond to *unambiguous* threats, the United States has repeatedly demonstrated its difficulty responding to *ambiguous* threats to its interests, a lesson also reinforced in peacekeeping operations since the 1991 Gulf War.⁷²

A terrorist strike directed or encouraged from Tehran could include use of a chemical, biological, or radiological weapon and in the future could possibly include a nuclear weapon. The targets could vary, as could the means of delivery. If the United States does not respond to Iran, or is capable only of a response that Iran believes is less than the perceived benefits associated with the action, Iran will credit itself as having won

the battle or at least with strategic progress. On the other hand, should the United States respond, Iran may be prepared to counter the U.S. conventional military superiority directly with its own NBC weapons in the region, and would be clearly fighting in a self-rationalized defensive jihad.

Attacks on U.S. Forces in the Gulf

In policy statements and exercises, Iran appears to have put great emphasis on enabling Iranian forces to confront the United States by attacking U.S. forces in the Gulf. Such a confrontation could include either closing the Strait of Hormuz and holding its chemical,⁷³ biological, or radiological options in reserve to deter a U.S. response or a less subtle, outright preemptive attack.

Closing the Strait while threatening NBC use could fulfill Rezai's threat to take "at least 20,000 American forces" captive. The threat or actual use of NBC weapons against the first "1000 captives" if the United States takes any response would complete the scenario predicted by Rezai. Under this scenario, whose purpose is to force the United States to "sit down at the negotiating table," one could imagine Iran demanding a U.S. force drawdown in the Gulf or reversal of the U.S. embargo on Iran. Such a strategy applies Iran's deterrence and defensive jihad principles. Indeed, an attack that marked the anniversary of the downing of the Iranian airbus by the USS *Vincennes* would likely be considered to be a defensive act. The Iranians have held that the July 3, 1988, accident in which an Iranian airliner with 290 persons aboard was purposeful.⁷⁴

Of course, Iran could also attack U.S. forces outright (preemptively or in response to some "oppression") and seek negotiations later. In response to U.S. reflagging of Kuwaiti oil tankers in 1988, Rezai announced on Iranian television that "the plans of the Islamic Republic Army and IRGC to confront the U.S. plots in the Persian Gulf were approved by the Supreme Defense Council." He explained that Iran had duplicated "missiles (Scuds) . . . and reproduced them with some changes," adding that "if Iran had launched one of these missiles at the USS *Stark* while the warship was being escorted out of the Persian Gulf waters last Friday, it would have been cut in two."⁷⁵ Thus, even when Iran's military capabilities were quite limited, the IRGC thought in terms of a strike against U.S. forces. While this could have been rhetoric, the proposition that their intention was to consider such a risky option seriously is supported by subsequent actions that would make such an attack more deadly, including continued expansion of their NBC/M programs and their exercises and maneuvers.

Today, with deployed chemical, biological and possibly radiological forces in the Gulf, there are several plausible scenarios in which Iran could use these weapons against U.S. forces. The effect of such a dramatic act, in an era of instant international television reporting, would, from the Iranian perspective, serve Iran's strategic purposes, even if U.S. casualties were limited in number. It is not without insight that Iran defines the will of the people to support military operations as a U.S. center of gravity. Beyond Vietnam in the 1970s and Beirut in the 1980s, after all, the United States withdrew its forces from Somalia after gruesome footage of one dead American body was portrayed on global TV screens. How much more endurance would a calculating adversary expect in response to the use or threat of use of NBC weapons?

From the perspective of Iranian leadership, and the IRGC in particular, the advantages of a strike or threat of strike on U.S. forces could include the "image exaltation" they would immediately draw from other radical states and groups opposed to the United States. This easily anticipated result would be possible, from their perspective, whether the United States responded diplomatically or militarily. Diplomatic response would elevate Iran in global terms, and military confrontation with the United States may be a "win-win" situation. The IRGC is physically dispersed (and certainly would be even more so should they take provocative action); war consolidates power within Iran for the IRGC; and, Iranian leaders define "victory" in a way that need not exclude large numbers of Iranian casualties. It is useful to recall the words of the Iranian Army Chief of Staff: "Whether we kill or are killed, we are the victors. Others do not think this way."⁷⁶ Iranian war calculations, therefore, must be affected to persuade Iran that its objectives are unlikely to be attained and that they will not be attained at an acceptable cost. The consequences of acting on such a calculation need to be costly for the IRGC, who would most likely lead the decision to use biological, radiological, or chemical weapons rather than the population as a whole, who would likely be unaware that such a decision had been made and may not support such a decision.

Attacks on Nonmilitary Gulf Shipping, GCC States, or Israel

Attacks on nonmilitary Gulf shipping, a GCC state, or Israel could advance Iranian claims to regional hegemony. Striking out against Israel would serve Iran's self-image as the defender and vanguard of Islam. Moreover, given the quiescent international response to Iran's confiscation of Abu Musa island, Iran could well believe that a series of incremental attacks will, over time, substantiate its claims to hegemony. Attacks, or threats of attacks, particularly with NBC weapons, could be used by Iran to force the GCC states to withdraw their support for U.S. operations, bases, and

presence in the Gulf.

Response to U.S. or Israeli Attacks

Iran could use NBC in response to an attack on its territory. Indeed, Iran would almost certainly prefer that war's initiation be, as in the case of the Iran/Iraq war, attributable to others. If Iran believed that an open conflict with the United States or Israel would move Iran or the Islamic Revolution closer to its goals at acceptable costs, they might wish to achieve the benefits they have in operating in a war that is clearly (to them) defensive. Therefore, Iran might even conclude that there are adequate incentives to provoke the United States and/or Israel to strike first, thus "necessitating" (internally if nowhere else) its NBC "response."

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DENIAL AND JEOPARDY: DETERRING IRANIAN USE OF NBC WEAPONS

6.

DETERRING IRAN

*Invincibility lies in the defense; the possibility of victory in the attack.*¹

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

UNRELIABILITY OF CURRENT

U.S. Position

Iran is developing and deploying the capability to inflict massive casualties on civilian and military personnel in the region. U.S. naval forces provide a lucrative target for NBC, particularly if employed in novel ways. The minimal ballistic missile defense capability available to the United States and its allies in the region leaves cities and military forces vulnerable to attack by missile, potentially with NBC warheads. Because Iran's understanding of military victory differs from that of the West, and because, consistent with its emphasis on martyrdom and righteousness, its own Army Chief of Staff draws no distinction between killing and dying as a means to the achievement of war aims, traditional threats of conventional force or even nuclear retaliation will likely pay minimal returns toward deterrence.

It is very likely that Iran has calculated that, if it holds U.S. forces and regional civilian populations at risk with NBC, it will be able to dictate terms that fulfill at least some

of its strategic objectives. If so, Iranian leaders may well calculate gains from the threat or use of NBC, leaving only the secondary question of how to best minimize the cost of U.S. retaliation. Steps Iran seems to have taken to diminish such costs are therefore of non-trivial concern.

Iran has probably calculated that as long as the extent and location of its NBC capabilities are ambiguous, the United States would be unlikely to launch a disarming pre-emptive strike. Two factors result from enemy possession of NBC weapons. First, even if the United States had high confidence in the ultimate success of a counterforce attack against the enemy's NBC/M forces, the deadly force of NBC weapons increases the priority that must be assigned to the destruction of the NBC and missile forces, which will divert U.S. forces from other targets. Second, the high priority assigned to NBC targets and the possible requirement to operate in an NBC environment will require changes in U.S. operations and, at a minimum, alter the tempo of operations. Even if the United States had the political will and counterforce capability to diminish significantly Iran's NBC capabilities, the probability of high confidence in total or even moderate success is low. Mobility, cover and concealment efforts, hardening facilities and putting them underground, and expanding the variety of possible NBC delivery modes, both traditional and novel, all enhance the survivability of Iran's forces. These steps take advantage of and exacerbate limitations in U.S. intelligence and in the capabilities of U.S. counterforce weapons to destroy NBC weapons. Counterforce alone, therefore, can never foreclose the possibility of Iranian strikes using NBC. The small quantity of NBC weapons, particularly biological weapons, needed to inflict significant casualties, raises the consequences of any surviving Iranian NBC weapons.

Thus, the United States will have significantly less freedom of military action against Iran until it has developed and deployed effective active and passive defenses in the region. In the absence of such defense, Iran may calculate that the risks associated with NBC acquisition or even use against smaller states are tolerable and that U.S. interference or intervention will itself be deterred. Indeed, Iran may well calculate that the United States will be deterred from retaliation by the complexity of countering a country so risk tolerant and that possesses such an array of offensive NBC/M capabilities. If the only option for meaningful response to Iranian biological or chemical weapons use were nuclear retaliation, the standard of evidence decisionmakers would require of the intelligence community (as to whether BW or CW had indeed been used, whether use was intentional, and whether the use had been sanctioned by the Government of Iran) would be so high that, as a practical matter, no timely judgment of use is likely, further limiting the probability of a U.S. response and

the variety of available U.S. response options.

In other words, the threat of nuclear retaliation against Tehran is not likely a reliable deterrent to NBC use by Iran. For one thing, in the eyes of Iran's religious leadership, including the IRGC, "the revolution" could continue or perhaps even be facilitated if the United States struck Tehran with a nuclear weapon. For another, the IRGC may be capable, independent of a political decision in Tehran, to employ NBC. For example, should they believe that the political leadership was moving away from the religious standards of which they hold themselves to be a vanguard, they may be willing to use NBC. The IRGC leadership would be dispersed from Tehran-and therefore likely to survive-if such a decision were implemented.² Finally, the Iranians may assign a relatively low probability that the United States would weigh *any* regional interests worthy of the public and international censure such a strike would invoke. The strike could cause massive civilian casualties, would raise the threshold of violence, and possibly lead to still greater follow-on use of NBC by Iran. Would the United States, Iran might wonder, undertake such an action in response even to its own NBC- related military casualties, let alone the civilian casualties in another state?

While the United States may have been able to persuade Iraq that use of NBC raised the possibility of a U.S. nuclear retaliation, the subsequent revelations by senior Bush administration decisionmakers, including former Secretary of State Baker, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Colin Powell, and President Bush himself, have publicly indicated that these veiled threats were bluff.³ It is unlikely that the same indirect ambiguous threats will communicate a credible threat to Tehran. Thus, while Tehran may be aware that the use of NBC entails some risk of nuclear retaliation, it is hardly self-evident that that such a threat is highly credible, that the risk would be considered unacceptably high, or that such retaliation would necessarily inflict damage Iranian leaders would regard as unacceptable.

DETERRENCE BY DENIAL

The most direct U.S. option that enables the United States to deny Iran its goals is to deploy robust active and passive defense combined with greater counterforce capabilities. Until the active and passive defense portions of the denial equation are available, the United States must increase its ability to conduct surgical counterforce operations against Iranian NBC capabilities.

Counterforce Alone is Inadequate

The United States should seek the ability to destroy NBC/M even when facilities are hardened and underground or when missiles are mobile. Further, more robust capabilities to attack such targets without wide dispersal of NBC effects will expand the utility of such capabilities. Counterforce capabilities alone, however, are unlikely to be sufficiently credible or pervasive enough, particularly in the face of a determined aggressor's tactics, to deter NBC use or to diminish the threat and consequence of NBC employment. Iran has clearly anticipated the counterforce option and has sought to reduce its vulnerability through adopting novel NBC delivery capabilities, such as RPVs. In combination with more traditional NBC delivery modes and mobility, concealment, and hardened structures, such novel delivery systems, dispersed widely, radically diminish the contribution of counterforce alone to deterrence of Iranian NBC and denial of their intended effects.

Active Defense

Because ballistic missiles have become an NBC delivery means of choice for Iran, which is seeking increasingly longer range capabilities, even a moderately effective active defense capability would have a deterrent multiplier effect, particularly when combined with improved passive defense and counterforce capabilities:

- U.S. allies can be expected to be more supportive of U.S. policies if they are not threatened by NBC attacks against undefended populations and military forces. Thus, effective defenses would bolster the probability of coalition cohesion and host state support for operations. These advantages would deny the enemy a key option (weakening coalition and host country support) to attack the United States.
- The deployment of effective active defenses would give the United States more policy options. If the United States can only retaliate against an undiminished attack, it will be more compelled to retaliate and to make the retaliation more significant than it might against an attack diminished by effective active defenses. While any NBC deaths in U.S. or allied forces or the host country population are significant and would call for a U.S. response of some sort, certainly the death of an entire city would call for a far more significant response than in response to a far more limited number of deaths. Diminishing the attack, therefore, permits the United States to examine a broader range of response options.
- The deployment of effective active defenses would also provide the United States with additional time within which effective responses to threatened NBC use could be considered. If a failure to act, for example to unleash the full range

of U.S. counterforce capabilities, will mean an undiluted NBC attack against undefended populations or forces, then the United States must respond (in this case by attacking) urgently.

- The deployment of advanced ballistic missile defenses, particularly when combined with passive defense and robust counterforce capabilities, will offer a high probability of neutralizing hostile missile programs, thereby restoring the deterrent effects of superior U.S. conventional forces.
- The annex to this paper offers a set of potential deployment options for defending against Iranian ballistic missiles. The more robust the deployment, the more likely the capability will deter Iran by degrading the value of its ballistic missiles. Early investment by the United States in a rapidly deployable or predeployed regional ballistic missile defense for U.S. forces would undermine not only the value of ballistic missiles but also the benefits of further acquisition and production of missiles; such a force would also deter both use of existing missiles and acquisition of longer range ballistic missiles, possibly discrediting those who diverted scarce resources toward weapons that contribute neither to blackmail nor political/military use.

Passive Defense

Biological weapons may lend the advantage to the offense, but the employer may be uncertain as to the precise effectiveness of protective measures and could find the employment of biological or toxin agents difficult to plan, especially when the cost of employment includes escalation of the defender's war aims. The military advantage of employment of biological, toxin, or chemical agents will be easier to assess, however, if the offense is confident that there will be no defense at all. Perceptions of U.S. and allied vulnerability to BW and CW have probably been instrumental in encouraging Iran's pursuit and acquisition of BW and CW and could greatly increase the probability of their use and incentives to use them against U.S. forces or allied populations. Thus, the employment of passive defense complicates the requirements associated with using BW, reduces the attacker's confidence that BW and CW use will further his objectives, and thus can greatly contribute to deterrence of biological, toxin, or chemical weapon use. The absence of passive defense contributes to the likelihood of its use.

DETERRENCE BY JEOPARDY

Until the United States is able to deploy active and passive defenses and counterforce capabilities to deny Iran the ability to pose a meaningful and credible threat of NBC

use, the best available option will be to credibly threaten retaliatory actions that would make use of NBC appear "too costly" to the Iranian leadership. These actions should be credible and unambiguous and should put in jeopardy Iran's centers of gravity. Once denial strategies are in place, these may take on a lesser role but should remain viable to enhance deterrence.

The United States needs to emphasize both the tools of denial and the capability to jeopardize Iran's centers of gravity. The credible threat to do so will greatly enhance deterrence. If the United States can credibly put Iran's centers of gravity at risk while protecting its own through active and passive defense and counterforce, then Iran will more likely be deterred.

Credibility must be enhanced, because Iran has almost certainly been attentive to indicators that U.S. will and resolve are weakened. Revelations by former Bush administration officials that the U.S. threatened option for nuclear response to Iraqi biological or chemical weapons use was more bluff than real, U.S. withdrawal from Somalia, and the very limited U.S. retaliation against recent Iraqi violation of the Northern no-fly zone have likely reduced U.S. credibility to carry out significant responses to Iranian actions. Credibility, however, might be enhanced by even so small an effort as providing demonstration videos to Iran of U.S. tests of those forces designed to implement U.S. denial strategies, such as capabilities for deep underground facility destruction. Destruction of two centers of gravity will have different effects and thus, priorities, at different phases of our ongoing conflict with Iran.

Revolutionary Guard Survival/Legitimacy

Because the Iranian entity most likely to advocate or execute use of NBC is the IRGC, which provides the focal point for NBC acquisition, employment, and Iranian state terrorism, the United States must be able to hold the IRGC itself unmistakably at risk. In a crisis or outbreak of hostilities, the United States must have the ability to ensure the swift destruction of the IRGC. How much of the IRGC would need to be destroyed is an important question. With the destruction of the IRGC, however, the probability of NBC use would decrease dramatically, making it a national center of gravity, particularly during war.

Psychological Operations/Information Warfare: Prior to an outbreak of hostilities, the United States should consider options to undercut the IRGC's legitimacy as a means of undermining its survival. Undercutting IRGC legitimacy could include psychological

operations that, for example, draw comparisons between the IRGC and its operations and that of SAVAK, the Shah's secret police. An additional approach could be informing the Iranian population that its government's denial of pursuing NBC is false. At a time when the economy is declining and the population's economic needs are not being met, such information could be meaningful. The population might also react negatively to the type of war the IRGC could involve it in because of the NBC weapons the IRGC has acquired but has been denying since 1991. Seeking to dismiss criticism, the Iranian Government has warned its population that the enemies of the regime are likely to undertake psychological operations against it.

This paper does not seek to identify plans for such psychological operations, which does have associated risks, but notes that they should be explored and a plan devised.⁴ As noted earlier, the IRGC might respond to its impending demise by initiating war and NBC use as a means of enhancing or consolidating power. Thus, the other option that must be available to decisionmakers is the physical destruction of the IRGC as an entity.

IRGC Destruction: IRGC destruction will be a difficult task in light of its physical dispersal and decentralized command structure. While it is possible that destruction of IRGC personnel would render its NBC forces unusable, the highest priority of the counterforce effort should be made to eliminate the NBC forces as well. Destruction of the military capability of the Guard, particularly their NBC capabilities, would leave Iran vulnerable to attack, especially from Iraq, and thus threaten both their ability to achieve their war aims and their ability to survive, let alone reconstitute, in the postwar period.

An additional advantage to targeting the IRGC is that if the IRGC is destroyed or delegitimized, the resulting political regime may be far more moderate. Although no opposition group stands out as a self-evident alternative at this time, serious consideration should begin now as to what type of post-war Iranian regime the United States would like to see emerge if a war could not be averted. Efforts to establish communications with Iranians within and outside of Iran⁵ begun now can only increase the probability of identifying and potentially shaping a better relationship with the next Iran. The IRGC has earned enemies among the educated, Westernized upper and middle classes in Tehran, perhaps the clerics,⁶ and maybe some of the masses who paid the price of Iranian radicalism, including manning the fronts of the human wave attacks in Iran's last war, bearing the burden of international sanctions, and serving as the anvil of the state's political and religious repression. Valid concerns are frequently expressed about certain of the larger opposition groups, and it would be

prudent to avoid "support" for any particular group or individual. Receptivity to contact and openness in communicating U.S. long-term goals and interests in the region, and a U.S. willingness to establish positive relations with a future Iran more disposed toward the United States could be a low-cost investment that could offer dividends in the long term.

Deny Iran Ambiguity: Ambiguity is Iran's ally against the United States. The United States should deny Iran this by taking a two-pronged approach: better intelligence and a reinvigorated capability to respond in the face of ambiguity. The requirements for better intelligence regarding Iran are fairly straightforward:

- Better ability to detect BW
- Consideration of Iran's options for NBC employment, including use in early stages of conflict and novel delivery modes
- Most importantly, identification of IRGC location, vulnerability of key personnel, and NBC forces.

The requirements for the second prong are more complex but critical to enhanced deterrence.

No intelligence information is likely to be sufficient to provide absolute certainty of activities if another state seeks to cover and conceal the information. Alternative explanations are always possible, if not probable or even sensible. For this reason, standards of evidence are established in, for example, a court of law or in compliance assessments or in the sanctions process. In previous years the United States has not required "proof" or other unattainably high standards of evidence. For example, despite lack of releasable data, the U.S. population was convinced by the President's judgment that Libya was behind terrorist acts and that Libya should be attacked. Further, it also believed that the Government of Granada was Marxist and that Granada should be invaded. A standard of evidence that requires proof "beyond a shadow of a doubt" is almost certain to cripple the U.S. ability to respond to Iran. A "preponderance of evidence" standard would be a high standard but is attainable.

Whatever standard is adopted, the question of whether, under what circumstances, and how the United States can and should respond to Iran should be considered prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Advance consideration would aid decisionmakers who will face Iranian surrogates or other ambiguous attacks on U.S. or allied interests in the Gulf. Options could then be developed that would clarify for Iran how the United States will respond to assessments that Iranian leaders are responsible for any terrorist actions

involving NBC that are linked to Iran. Such signals could render surrogate use less appealing as a means of creating ambiguity and also give Iranian decisionmakers, particularly the IRGC, further incentives to prevent terrorist NBC use against U.S. or allied interests or to ensure that the United States is convinced of Iranian innocence.

Improving U.S. ability to respond in the face of ambiguity will enhance our overall ability to respond to some of the options the Iranians have probably considered for attacking the United States, and thus will enhance our ability to deter such actions in the first instance.

Economic Vulnerabilities

A second national center of gravity is the access the Iranian economy and specifically its oil revenues, without which the state of Iran almost certainly cannot survive.

Iran is vitally dependent on oil production for internal use and export. Oil exports account for more than 95 percent of its foreign exchange revenues, without which it be even less able to import food for its exploding population.⁷ Should Iranian ability to produce oil, or to access its oil reserves be interrupted, its economy would be further crippled. All Iran's oil exports currently go through the Gulf, offering specific targets for impeding their access to revenues from their oil resources. While the rest of the world is dependent on oil transiting the Strait of Hormuz, options for interrupting Iran's exports should be developed, particularly those that minimize the impact on Iran's oil customers.

Iran is also vulnerable "in the extreme" to price fluctuations. Lower oil income resulting from either price decreases with the same quotas or lowered oil quotas makes it very difficult for Iran to meet the demands of its rapidly expanding population. This problem is challenging Iran today and it is for this reason that "Iran depends on keeping oil prices as high as possible and on maintaining some form of price stability within an OPEC cartel capable of influencing if not dictating prices."⁸ While this option may seem fairly easy to implement compared to the challenges associated with destroying the IRGC, the dependence of other states (including allies of the United States) on Iranian oil will complicate execution of this option.

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DENIAL AND JEOPARDY: DETERRING IRANIAN USE OF NBC WEAPONS

7.

ENHANCING U.S. DETERRENCE

The reaction of most readers, including those with expertise in Middle Eastern issues or military analysis, may be that this assessment greatly overstates the Iranian threat. Other reactions may assert that this assessment presents the challenge of deterring Iran as far too complex, because many believe that Iran is and will remain deterred from NBC use by the threat of U.S. conventional or nuclear retaliation. Yet others may believe that the recommendations are far too simplistic, because deterrence is complex.

It is difficult for any Western analyst to project onto another state actions clearly beyond the realm of the possible, yet other states frequently behave in ways that make little or no sense from a Western perspective.

Iraq was not deterred from invading Kuwait, but perhaps this miscalculation of U.S. will and intent was a one-time error. Throughout Operation *Desert Shield*, however, the United States sought, through both words and deeds, to communicate clearly what Iraq had to do to avoid a U.S. attack-and still Iraq did not behave as they "should" have. The United States did attack, Iraq was defeated, and an international coalition is conducting the most intrusive inspection regime in history designed to discover and eliminate the Iraqi NBC threat. Despite this execution of a threatened response and imposition of tremendous burdens for Iraq, the Iraqi regime remains intact and appears to be successfully thwarting international efforts to eliminate its NBC capability. Iraq's capability to conduct war is greatly diminishedCbut it is not yet deterred.

Can the United States expect more "reasonable" behavior from Iran? Iran has much to lose, and any potential benefit of attacking the United States, particularly with NBC weapons, would appear to "sensible" minds to be dwarfed by the risks of a U.S. response. The sensible approach would view Iran's pursuit of NBC weapons as either pursuit of status or as defense against lesser threats such as Iraq, because it would not be "sensible" for Iran to pursue NBC for use; to train to use radiological, chemical, or especially biological weapons offensively; or to consider using NBC against the United States. It could therefore be asserted that Iran's NBC capabilities must be overstated, their Shin-mim-re forces must be for strictly defensive purposes, and the only threat against which Iran might consider offensive NBC use, if it were to be so "unreasonable" as to consider offensive use, would be against states other than the United States or its allies, namely, states such as Iraq.

Iran is a large country rich with potential, in both its population and natural resources. It is strategically located. It has much to lose. Yet Iran today, with its pursuit of NBC and its support for terrorism, has taken positions and followed policies that carry costs well beyond the apparent benefits of such actions. Even when relations with Germany and other European states were on better terms, Iran's pursuit of its political enemies abroad put a serious upper limit on the extent of relations and trade. To what benefit? Indeed, should Iran abandon policies and activities so contrary to international norms, it could almost certainly take a lead role in the political and economic world of the coming century. Why, one wonders, does Iran not take its place among the emerging economic powerhouses? What role could it play if its offers of regional leadership were not tinged with threats? This approach, however, has been rejected by Iran for almost two decades.

The reason can be explained only by Iran's revolutionary dogma and institutions. To change its policies of exporting the revolution, of sponsoring and supporting terrorism, and of hostility toward the United States would require a redefinition of the regime and, in essence, its demise. Moderation in its external relations and abandonment of its pursuit of military means to attack the United States has not been adopted as Iranian policy for just this reason.

While it is hoped that moderation and redefinition of the regime will be part of the future history of Iran, the United States must address the NBC threat of the current regime. Under the current religious and political structures, and with the continuing influence of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, Iran's political and religious culture and personality will make Iran violent and extremely difficult to deter, particularly unless the United States better focuses its efforts. Iran has an active biological and chemical

weapons capability, may have radiological weapons, and has exercised its forces, particularly IRGC forces, for operations in an NBC environment. NBC weapons offer Iran an indirect approach of countering the United States because they provide a means of leveraging its strengths (terror, use of ambiguity, a cult of martyrdom and death, and high risk tolerance) against the vulnerability (nonacceptance of high casualties in battle and an inability to act in the face of ambiguity) of the United States, the world's most powerful military.

While the U.S. hopes for or seeks moderation in the Iranian regime, highest priority should be placed on deterring and defending against Iranian NBC use. The approach recommended is neutralizing Iranian NBC capability through a combination of active and passive defenses and counterforce capabilities reinforced with the credible threat of putting Iran's centers of gravity in jeopardy.

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Paula DeSutter joined the National Defense University in August 1995 as the Senior Fellow for Arms Control and Nonproliferation at the Center for Counterproliferation Research, on detail from the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. There Ms. DeSutter was responsible for assessing compliance with other nations' arms control obligations and with preparing and coordinating policy guidance for implementation of inspections under the START and INF Treaties. Ms. DeSutter received an MS in National Security Strategy from the National War College in 1994, where she was a Distinguished Graduate and received the NDU President's Strategic Vision Award for Excellence in Research and Writing. Ms. DeSutter also holds an MA in International Relations from the University of Southern California, an MA in Economics from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and a BA in Political Science from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

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