

VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The assumption that the military option would force the Ayatollah to consider diplomacy rests on the false projection that Ayatollah's government is motivated by the protection of the Iranian people's life, property and sovereignty. Iran's presidential elections should have put such an assumption to rest. Iran's nuclear program allows the Ayatollah to keep Iran in a state of permanent political and economic crisis. He gets to blame the West for conspiring to deprive the Iranian people of the right to enrich uranium while stripping the Iranian people of fundamental rights. It is only natural that keeping the nuclear dispute alive, even if it is at the price of sanctions and war, serves his interests. A theocracy whose ideology is premised on sacrifice and martyrdom can only survive as long as its leaders can capitalize on the death of the Iranian people.

The number of casualties behind the Ayatollah's nuclear gamble cannot be ignored. Between 3,500 and 5,500 people at Iran's four nuclear sites would be killed or injured as a result of the physical and thermal impact of the blasts. If one were to include casualties at other targets, one could extrapolate to other facilities, the total number of people killed and injured could easily exceed 10,000. At Isfahan alone, anywhere between 240,000 to 352,000 people could be exposed to toxic plumes. Similarly, a strike on Bushehr would not only expose the 240,000 residents of Bushehr to fallout, it would essentially contaminate much of the Persian Gulf. Major cities, business centers, and trading routes throughout the region would be at risk. The environmental and economic costs of strikes on the facilities would be in the tens of billions of dollars, and that is assuming that there will be no war.

While such attacks would almost certainly destroy many of Iran's nuclear facilities, as El-Baradei and others have pointed out, military attack can only temporarily slow down Iran's nuclear program.¹⁹³ But while strikes may have tactical allure and domestic appeal as a quick fix to the nuclear dispute, the death of thousands of Iranians cannot be dismissed as collateral damage. It would draw the United States, Israel and Iran into a strategic quagmire — a cycle of war and hostility every bit as destructive and pernicious as the decade long Arab-Israeli conflict.

The human casualties alone should make it clear that it is a mistake to assume that the failure of diplomacy makes the military option the only real, effective or reliable default option. The military option, should be judged on its own merits, and virtually no one has explained how the humanitarian fiasco—the death of thousands of Iranian civilians from military strikes—will do anything other than unleash a war that will strengthen the Ayatollah and his allies at the expense of the United States, Israel and the Iranian people.

For Israel or the United States to target the Iranian people as the only way to destroy Iran's nuclear capacity is to allow Khamenei and Ahmadinejad to drive a permanent wedge between the United States, Israel and the Iranian people. As with the Iran-Iraq war, strikes would turn thousands of Iranians into the martyrs of a bankrupt ideology premised on hatred and enmity. Khamenei would convert the wreckage of Iran's nuclear program into a stage and the remains of the Iranian people into a prop for salvaging a broken and bankrupt theocracy held together by fraud, fear, and force. As former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and others have cautioned, while Israel could strike Iran without American support, "any strike would only delay Iranian plans by one to three years, while unifying the Iranian people to be forever embittered against the attacker."¹⁹⁴ The Iranian people, the Islamic world, the United States, Israel, and the Arab world would get drawn into a catastrophic war in which Khamenei, Ahmadinejad, and other extremists would emerge as the only victors.

The costs of the Islamic Republic's policies have become increasingly apparent to the Iranian people, both inside and outside Iran. This study attempts to make the risks and costs of the Ayatollah's gamble and Ahmadinejad's rhetoric apparent. By classifying the nature and quantifying the extent of this threat, we have tried to define parameters for understanding the scale of the damage facing the Iranian people, especially the people of Isfahan, Natanz, Arak, and Bushehr. This does not mean that the people of Tehran, Qom, and other cities would be immune. A disastrous, obscurantist foreign policy that has converted Iran's nuclear program into a strategic liability rather than an economic or industrial asset puts all Iranians at risk.

Although, for the most part, we have sought to inform and address decision-makers about the dangers of attacking the Iranian people and falling into the Ayatollah's trap, the Iranian people—both inside and outside Iran—cannot remain silent before a calamity on this scale. We believe that virtually all sectors of Iranian society have a responsibility to protect one another from the Ayatollah's gamble. With the fate of Isfahan and the future of Iran at stake, virtually all sectors of Iranian society—scientists, engineers, doctors, and soldiers as well as merchants and farmers—have a stake in finding an alternative solution that leads to the peaceful—and permanent—resolution of the nuclear dispute. Far from being a sign of humiliation, demonstrating Iran's commitment to its international obligations is a badge of honor.

While Ayatollah Khamenei may have every reason to play a game of nuclear poker with the Iranian people and nuclear program as his chips, once the price of his gamble becomes apparent to the Iranian people, his willingness to risk the destruction of Isfahan alone would turn millions of Iranians against his belligerent policies. The Iranian

193 <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2012/03/news-former-un-atom-agency-chief-attack-cant-stop-iran-nuclear-program.html>>.

194 Jo Becker, James Glanz and David E. Sanger, "Around the World, Distress over Iran," *The New York Times*, 28 November 2010.

people put a much higher price on their cultural heritage than do their current leaders.

Rather than planning a military attack that can have more than 400 aim points, and result in the devastation of Isfahan, it is time to recognize that the Iranian people pose a far greater threat to the Islamic Republic than the U.S. or Israeli military power. While President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu have repeatedly stated that they do not view the Iranian people as the enemies of the United States and Israel, the scale of the casualties resulting from military strikes will allow the Ayatollah, and other extremists, to portray them as aggressors: enemies of Iran, the Islamic world and humanity. It is time to adopt a strategy that recognizes that the Iranian people are the primary victims—not the defenders—of the Ayatollah's policies. It is they, and not the United States and Israel, who are the hostages of the Islamic Republic's tyranny and terrorism. Discounting the impact of massive military strikes on their lives and their future is a moral and strategic failure of the highest order.

The Iranian people and their political and religious leaders — the parliament, clergy, military, and others—have an interest and an obligation to bring about an end to reckless policies purchased at the price of gambling with the security and prosperity of the Iranian people. Whatever the differences between the Iranian people, there is a clear, urgent, and immediate need for them to unite against the Ayatollah's nuclear gamble before they are drawn into yet another

disastrous war—a calamity for Iran, the United States, Israel and the rest of the region. At stake is not only the future of generations of Iranians, but the peace, security, and prosperity of their friends and neighbors in the Middle East and beyond. Such an historic opportunity to defend the honor, reclaim the future, and establish the standing of their nation as a bastion of peace is one that all Iranians—inside and outside Iran—must welcome and seize. As with elections, so too with Iran's nuclear program, it is time for Ayatollah Khamenei to recognize that the days of gambling with the lives, the votes, and the future of the Iranian people have come to an end.

As ancient civilizations and peoples whose attachment to the springs and sources of life is etched in the scripture, history, culture, and geography of the Middle East, the Iranian people and their neighbors in the region must not allow Khamenei and Ahmadinejad to convert the reflection of their faith—the hands, hearts, and faces of one another's children—into the tattered and torn shroud of scars and burns covering their own tormented image. And the U.S. Israel and international community cannot and must not fuel the fire of the wars Iran's Ayatollah seeks to ignite. Rather, they should join the Iranian people in their efforts to protect their country against the Ayatollah's macabre and murderous policies. An Ayatollah who holds Iran hostage by usurping religion to sanctify violence—nuclear or otherwise—has no legitimacy, no authority, no claim and no place in Iran's future. As with Saddam, Qadhafi and Assad, his time is up.