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NUCLEAR IRAN: FRAMING THE U.S. RESPONSE USING A SCENARIO-BASED APPROACH

by

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ABSTRACT

Iran will have nuclear weapons. Diplomatically, the United States is unable to stop it. Economically, the United States is unable to stop it. If the United States attacks Iran pre-emptively, Iran will use its oil reserves as leverage to cripple the United States economy, damaging global economies in the process. The international community at large would then pressure the United States to cease all operations against Iran.

This paper looks at these issues in-depth while using a scenario-based approach to form a U.S. response to a nuclear-armed Iran. If the United States elects to be proactive in dealing with Iran, it will seek regime change. Yet, the Iranian people have now rallied behind their current regime in the face of U.S. opposition. For this reason and others, the United States must use internal actors in Iran to bring about regime change. Ultimately, the question becomes, how quickly does the regime change need to take place?

Nuclear weapons per se are not the problem – bad guys with them are.
– George Perkovich

On March 29, 2006, the President of the United Nations Security Council completed his remarks on Iran. "The Security Council requests in 30 days a report from the Director General of the IAEA [(International Atomic Energy Agency)] on the process of Iranian compliance with the steps required by the IAEA Board, to the IAEA Board of Governors and in parallel to the Security Council for its consideration" (United Nations Security Council 2006, n.p.). 30 days. The clock is ticking…

The political wrangling and rhetoric over the next few weeks will be insignificant to whether or not Iran will ultimately acquire nuclear weapons. Iran has been developing nuclear technologies with the intent of nuclear armament since the 1980s (Joseph 2006). They are too far down the path to be dissuaded now (Howard 2004). Iran will have nuclear weapons. The big question is: what will be the U.S. response?

Formulating a meaningful response to a nuclear-armed country is multi-faceted. It requires a logical framework to consider all implications and potential outcomes. The scenario-based approach described in *WHAT IF? The Art of Scenario Thinking for Nonprofits* offers a framework suitable for such a task (Scearce 2004). This five-phased approach appears in Figure 1.

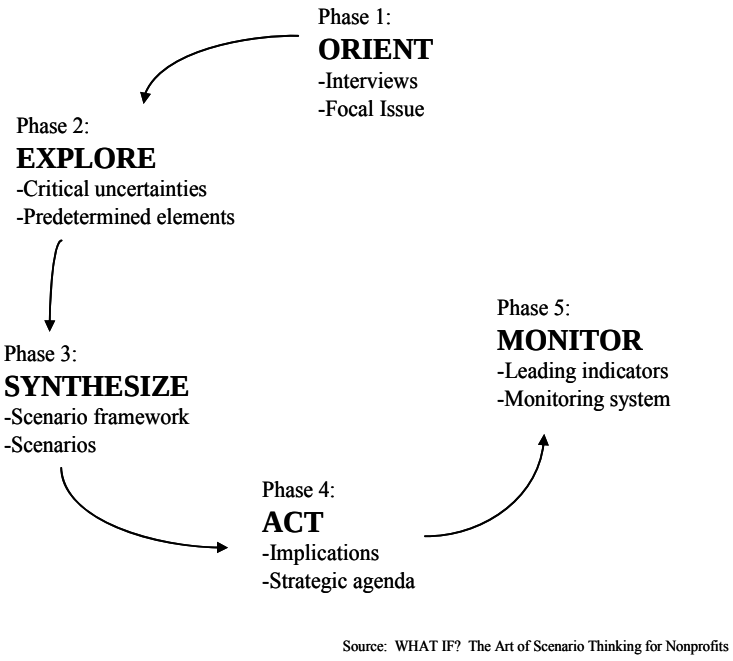

Figure 1

This paper will provide the framework for a U.S. response based on this five-phase process. Part One will use the scenario approach to address the present-day turmoil and the issues pertinent for the foreseeable future. After developing a context for the U.S. response, the five-phase process will be used again in Part Two to offer four possible responses, two of which are plausible.

PART ONE

Phase One, Orient: Establishing the Focal Issue and Setting a Timeline

"The goal of phase one is to identify the issue at stake, and to use that issue as an orienting device throughout the remaining four phases" (Scearce 2004, 24). Before answering the question, "What should be the U.S. response to a nuclear-armed Iran?" it is necessary to understand the overall situation and all the subtle nuances it presents. The underlying relevant issue is Iran's persistence in purchasing and/or building nuclear weapons. That issue provides the backdrop for the entire situation. Other important issues include: how the two governments

interact, their respective leaders, oil, and the general hostility between Islamic nations and Israel. Future scenarios should address these issues.

"The timeline should reflect how rapidly the issue in question is likely to change" (Scearce 2004, 25). Relations between the United States and Iran are extremely volatile now. In his State of the Union address, U.S. President George Bush called Iran "a nation now held hostage by a small clerical elite that is isolating and repressing its people" (Bush 2006). Iranian ambassador to the IAEA, Ali-Asghar Soltanieh, recently threatened, "The U.S. has the power to cause harm and pain. But the U.S. is also susceptible to harm and pain. So if that is the path that the U.S. wishes to choose, let the ball roll" (Omestad 2006, 33). Iran's recent military exercises and weapons capability statements could certainly be considered an attempt to ward off potential adversaries, namely, the United States ("Iran Says It Can Now Confront Any Invasion" 2006).

The fact that the overall situation has more parties involved than just the United States and Iran only adds to the volatility. The United Nations (including the IAEA), Israel, China, Russia, the European Union (EU) (particularly the EU3, Britain, France, and the United Kingdom), India, Pakistan, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and Iraq all have strategic concerns affected by the outcome. Any one of these nations or organizations could change the situation irreversibly. Due to the volatility and number of parties involved, this paper will consider the strategic implications applicable for the next three to four years. There are simply too many variables to consider for a timeframe longer than that. Many of these issues may persist much longer, or they may be overcome by events during this timeframe. With the underlying issues in mind, it is possible to address the second phase, Explore.

Phase 2, Explore: Determining Predetermined Elements and Critical Uncertainties

In the Explore Phase, the driving forces which will ultimately shape the future in predictable and unpredictable ways are examined (Scearce 2004). These forces are divided into two groups: predetermined elements and critical uncertainties. Predetermined elements are those driving forces which are relatively certain given the timeframe (Scearce 2004). The predetermined elements for the future of the United States and Iran (with respect to this situation) include:

- Iran will have nuclear weapons.
- Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is not a favorable actor (from the U.S. perspective).
- Iran's current form of government is not favorable to the United States.
- Iran is a major actor in the oil and energy fields.
- U.S. citizens are tired of war.
- The international community is generally tired of U.S. unilateralism.

Critical uncertainties are unpredictable driving forces which will have an important impact on the future (Scearce 2004). The critical uncertainties include:

- With whom will the international community stand?
- Will Iran put a chokehold on oil, or attempt to destroy the U.S. economy through oil contracts?
- How far is the United States willing to press the issue? What if Israel acts pre-emptively?
- Will Iran use first-strike capability against Israel? If so, will it be nuclear?
- Will Iran use its connections in Iraq to further bind the United States?

These issues all have the potential to change the future between the United States and Iran. Each will be addressed in turn, starting with the predetermined elements.

Iran will have nuclear weapons.

Iran wants nuclear weapons. In his 1997 research paper, "Rogue or Rational State? A Nuclear Armed Iran and U.S. Counter Proliferation Strategy," Major Richard Perry addressed Iraq's use of chemical weapons against Iran in the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s. When the West did not intervene, Iran surmised that the West was only interested in its own best interests and

not in enforcing international law without bias (Perry 1997). As a result, Hashemi Rafsanjani, the speaker of parliament who would later be Iran's president, commented in 1988 that Iran needed nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons (NBC) (Aryan 2001). Iran never wanted to be placed in a position of weakness again (Perry 1997).

The Middle East has changed since the end of the Iran-Iraq War. The United States flexed its military might in Operation DESERT STORM in the early 1990s, and Saddam Hussein spent the bulk of the 1990s trying to develop nuclear weapons (Venter 2005). Iran now had a practical reason for seeking nuclear weapons…a peer competitor with whom it had recently been at war. In 2001, the United States conducted military operations against the Taliban in Afghanistan. With a significant military presence already on its western border, Iran certainly took notice when the United States launched Operation IRAQI FREEDOM on its eastern border in 2003. And the main reason? The United States sought regime change based on weapons of mass destruction (WMD) (Allison 2004). Iran has believed for some time that the United States might be more reluctant to attack if it had nuclear weapons (Chubin 1995). Clearly, Iran sees nuclear weapons as a deterrent which enhances its security (Bodansky 1991). It also sees them as the pathway to becoming a significant regional power ("NBC Race Marks Iraq-Iran-Libya Threat" 1996; Eisenstadt 1999). Finally, developing nuclear weapons was cheaper than re-building its conventional forces (Gertz 1996; Aryan 2001).

If security and hegemonic aspirations were not enough, Iran's citizenry believes Iran has a moral and legal right to develop nuclear weapons. A July 2003 article in *Jane's Islamist Affairs Analyst* stated, "For many Iranians, even those opposed to the Islamic government, nuclear arms are a legitimate national aspiration. They insist that Iran is morally, as well as legally, entitled to nuclear weapons status as long as nearby Israel, Pakistan and India also have

such arms" ("Iran's nuclear ambitions" 2003, 16).

For years, individuals have speculated about exactly when Iran will have nuclear weapons. In a 1992 article in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, Yossef Bodansky addressed how Iran had purchased weapons parts from former Soviet bloc countries, smuggled the parts into Iran, and hired experts to re-assemble those parts. He predicted Iran would have nuclear weapons by June 1992 (Bodansky 1992). Louis Beres, author of "Israel, Iran, and Prospects for Nuclear War in the Middle East," similarly reported in 1993 that Iran might already have purchased nuclear weapons (Beres, 1993). Yet, Iran has not identified itself as a nuclear power since that time. While purchases of nuclear weapons may not have been confirmed, the acquisition of technology transferable to an indigenous nuclear weapons program has been confirmed by several sources (Knights 2005; Timmerman 2005; Venter 2005; Romano 2006).

This has led to a great deal of speculation on exactly when Iran could build its own nuclear weapons. Major Richard Perry asserted that Iran would "have nuclear weapons in a 5-10 year time frame—barring a black market technological leap," which would only hasten Iran's development of nuclear weapons (Perry 1997, 21). Estimates within the last two years place Iran's successful indigenous nuclear weapons capability between the years 2006 and 2016 (Mokhtari 2004; Dehghanpisheh 2006). "In an April 2004 speech, John R. Bolton, the Bush Administration's primary policymaker [at that time] on [WMD], said: 'If we permit Iran's deception to go on much longer, it will be too late. Iran will have nuclear weapons'" (Timmerman 2005, 288). In August 2005, the *Jerusalem Post* reported that the "point of no return" would be a few months to a year ("Nuclear Weapons – Western Assessments" 2005). That time is nearly up.

In 2003, Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the IAEA, wrote that a state with a

fully-developed [nuclear] fuel cycle could step away from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and produce a nuclear weapon within months (ElBaradei 2003). In 2004, Iran claimed its efforts were focused on developing a complete fuel cycle for civilian purposes ("Nuclear Weapons – 2004 Developments" 2005). The same fuel cycle, while legal under the NPT, could be used to produce nuclear weapons ("Nuclear Weapons – 2004 Developments" 2005; ElBaradei 2003). Outlining a complete nuclear fuel cycle is beyond the scope here. But "acquisition of reprocessing equipment and skills, as well as the other components of the fuel cycle, would clearly signal a latent nuclear weapons capability" (Boureston 2004, 40). According to Robert Einhorn, author of "A Transatlantic Strategy on Iran's Nuclear Program," once a country can enrich uranium or produce plutonium, it has traveled most of the way to developing nuclear weapons (Einhorn 2004). A March 2005 Report for Congress details how Iran has developed these skills. "In two years of intensive inspections, the IAEA has revealed significant undeclared Iranian efforts in uranium enrichment (including centrifuge, atomic vapor laser isotope separation and molecular laser isotope separation techniques)... [and] undeclared separation of plutonium" (Squassoni 2005, 2).

In February 2006, the IAEA noted that parts of Iran's civilian nuclear fuel program and military weapons program seemed to have connections (Romano 2006). Those interconnections involved the conversion of uranium into a product potentially used for bomb material, explosives testing, and missile designs "specifically meant to carry nuclear warheads" (Romano 2006, 30). In summary, if Iran does not already have an indigenous nuclear weapons capability, it is extremely close.

Iran has developed missile technology simultaneously with its nuclear technology. Its Shahab-3 missile, based on the North Korean Nodong-1, was declared operational in 2003 and

has an approximate range of 800 miles ("Iran" 2005). This places Israel within range. In 2001, Iran purchased 12 X-55 missiles from Ukraine. These missiles have a 1,900 mile range and were made to carry nuclear weapons (Romano 2006). This places Italy within range. The Shahab-4, 5, and 6 are purportedly in development. They are expected to have ranges of approximately 1,250 miles; 3,450 miles; and 6,280 miles, respectively ("Missiles" 2005). The potential range of the Shahab-6 stretches nearly to the continental United States. The investment in its missile inventory demonstrates Iran's desire to be able to deliver weapons (potentially nuclear) if necessary.

Finally, Iran has not been swayed to lay down its nuclear weapons aspirations by diplomatic, security, or economic incentives. In January 2006, the EU3 offered Iran significant incentives to step away from "sensitive [nuclear] activities until international confidence was restored" ("Europe: 'Our Discussions with Iran Have Reached an Impasse'" 2006, 65). "Last August [2005] we [the EU3] presented the most far reaching proposals for co-operation with Europe in the political, security, and economic fields that Iran has received since the Revolution" ("Europe: 'Our Discussions with Iran Have Reached an Impasse'" 2006, 65). Iran declined.

There are some significant issues related to this predetermined element which are beyond the scope of this paper, but at least worth mentioning. 1) The United States is currently pressing the international community to change the NPT to punish nations which withdraw while in non-compliance (Knights 2005). Unfortunately, Iran will still have nuclear weapons if this change is implemented. 2) If Iran announces that it has become a nuclear power, it will be potentially damaging to the future of the NPT. Yes, and Iran will still have nuclear weapons. 3) Iran received help from Pakistan, the AQ Khan Network, China, Russia, and North Korea in developing its nuclear technologies and missiles (Koch 2004; Timmerman 2005; Venter 2005).

Regardless of how, Iran will ultimately have nuclear weapons. 4) Iran is the fourth largest oil exporter in OPEC (Hart 2005). Why does it need nuclear power? That is an excellent question related to non-proliferation. Regardless of the answer, Iran will have nuclear weapons. 5) Iran is producing other WMD which are beyond the scope of this paper (Venter 2005).

Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is not a favorable actor (from the U.S. perspective).

Iran President Ahmadinejad was the surprise winner in a run-off election in 2005. He ran on a platform of improving the economy (Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: what lies beneath?" 2006). Unfortunately, he is now best known for his inflammatory comments about the holocaust and the destruction of Israel (Dehghanpisheh 2006). In their article, "Devoted and Defiant," Babak Dehghanpisheh and Christopher Dickey report that Ahmadinejad has nostalgia for war, longs for confrontation, and believes that the regime was nobler when it included suffering and martyrdom (Dehghanpisheh 2006). He has even galvanized students. A third-year law student, Reza Tawana, stated, "We are witnessing the start of a fundamentalist uprising in the region from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to Hamas, Hizbullah in Lebanon and of course Mr. Ahmadinejad in our own country" (Dehghanpisheh 2006, 29). By making the pursuit of nuclear technology and weapons a nationalist issue, he has garnered even more support for himself (Dehghanpisheh 2006).

Reports on Ahmadinejad's economic results are mixed (Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: what lies beneath?" 2006; Dehghanpisheh 2006). But since taking office, he has arrested hundreds of "trouble-makers," closed a newspaper, and banned a women's publication ("Hundreds arrested in crackdown in northeast Iran" 2006; "Iran closes newspaper and bans women's publication" 2006). Aljezeera.net (reprinted in *Middle East Quarterly*) reports Ahmadinejad has banned American films since they promote the "arrogant powers" (Aljezeera.net 2005). In addition to

his inflammatory rhetoric and hard-line, conservative fundamentalism, Ahmadinejad is a Twelve-Imam Shi'ite (Dehghanpisheh 2006).

Twelve-Imam Shi'ites, also known as "Twelvers," "believe that the twelfth Imam, the Mahdi, …is not outwardly present in this world and yet alive…He will appear one day to bring justice and peace to the world as part of eschatological events that will bring human history to a close" (Nasr 2003, 12). "In a speech in Tehran in November [2005], Ahmadinejad reportedly said his main mission is to 'pave the path for the glorious reappearance of Imam Mahdi, may Allah hasten his reappearance'" (Klein 2006, n.p.). "Given the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to pursue nuclear programs, having a leader with a messianic vision is no cause to rejoice" (Timmerman 2005, 325).

Yet, Ahmadinejad should not control nuclear policy. "It is Iran's secretive mullahs, not its elected politicians, who decide nuclear policy" ("Mahmoud and the atomic mullahs" 2005, 14). However, Ahmadinejad is close to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader. Is his influence great enough with Khamenei to suggest nuclear war? If not, is his powerbase growing strong enough to take on more authority or even overthrow Khamenei? The answers to these questions are unknown. But his mission to possess nuclear weapons (and even use them) would be rational if he actually thought he was chosen to bring about the end times. On the other hand, he would be rational by pursuing nuclear weapons for deterrence, without an underlying intent to use them. Since he could be deemed rational either way, that question must be set aside, giving all his words meaning. He has been shown here as a leader who longs for revolutionary days, intent on oppressing his people, and a believer in his role to usher in the one who would end the world. All things considered, he is dangerous to the United States.

Iran's current form of government is not favorable to the United States.

While a complete discussion of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is beyond the scope of this paper, suffice to say, it is not a true democracy. Here is a simplified synopsis of the Supreme Leader's stranglehold on power in Iran, according to Global Exchange, an international human rights organization, and supported by the Public Broadcasting Service ("Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic of Iran" 2005; "Iran's Governmental System" 2005). The Supreme Leader appoints six of the 12 members of the Guardian Council. The other six members of the Guardian Council are recommended by the Head of the Judiciary (who is appointed by the Supreme Leader) and then "officially" appointed by Parliament. Members of the Guardian Council determine who can run for the Assembly of Experts (who "elect" the Supreme Leader from amongst themselves). The Guardian Council also determines who is fit to run for the Parliament, the Presidency and the Assembly of Experts. The electorate gets to vote on the candidates they (the Guardian Council) select. Once elected, the Supreme Leader essentially holds the office for life (although the Assembly of Experts could technically remove him, they have never exercised that option). See Figure 2 for a graphic depiction.

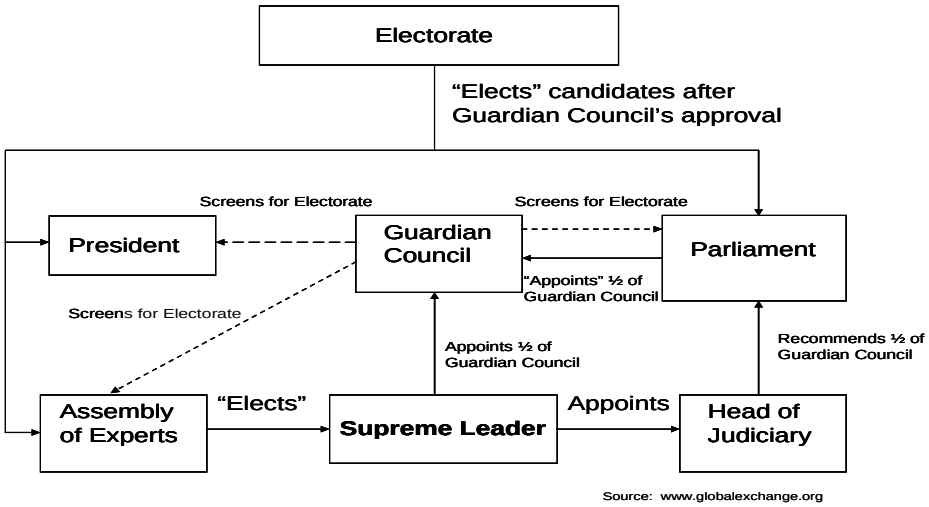

Figure 2

This form of government is an attempt to cross democracy and theocracy ("Iran's Iraqi interests" 2006). Unfortunately, the people (electorate) hold very little power. The Supreme Leader holds the power. He can wield it as he sees fit, and use it to oppress potential adversaries. The danger with this type of government lies in giving one individual too much power. Under the guise of democracy, that individual basically becomes an "elected" monarch or dictator depending on the point of view. The current Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, "is no friend of reform" ("Is the president-elect as grim as he sounds?" 2005, 42). Why should he be? He wants to stay in power. The U.S. State Department confirms that "a succession of power struggles eliminated first the center of the political spectrum and then the leftists, leaving only the clergy" ("Background Note: Iran" 2005). However, the middle, sometimes referred to as the "modern pragmatists" is re-emerging (Takeyh 2004b). In any case, "democracy's defining feature—the freedom to hire and fire your government—does not guarantee that countries will make wise choices," but it does guarantee they will at least have a voice ("The one thing Bush got right" 2006, 9). The Supreme Leader in this type of government has an incentive to oppress opposition to stay in power, keeping voters from choosing change.

Iran is a major actor in the oil and energy fields.

According to the *Oil and Gas Journal,* Iran is OPEC's second largest oil producer and holds 10 percent of the world's known oil reserves ("Iran Country Analysis Brief" 2006). It also has the world's second largest natural gas reserves ("Iran Country Analysis Brief" 2006). Oil and natural gas fuel economies across the globe. Unfortunately, both are finite natural resources, and the demand for oil will continue to increase for the foreseeable future. This is due in large part to burgeoning economies like India and China. Take China, for example. In "Fueling the dragon, China's race into the oil market," Gal Luft explains that by 2015, 70 percent of China's

imported oil will come from the Middle East (Luft 2003). Add this to the fact that China's need for oil is growing seven times faster than that of the United States, and it becomes clear that demand for these limited natural resources will only increase over time (Luft 2003). Energy will have a serious effect on the international landscape in the future.

Iran considers Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Europe its major consumers ("Iran Country Analysis Brief" 2006). Some of these nations are key U.S. allies in the nuclear non-proliferation struggle against Iran. This poses an interesting conflict of interest which will be addressed in the critical uncertainties portion of this paper. There is one glimmer of hope here. Iran's oil fields and refineries need modernizing ("Iran Country Analysis Brief" 2006). Iran requires foreign investment to make these improvements, unless it can somehow put them off until it has enough money to make them itself ("Iran Country Analysis Brief" 2006). The time to take advantage of this leverage is now. Unfortunately, Iran has not had a shortage of nations anxious to partner with it for their energy needs: Japan, China, India, and Pakistan (Mihailescu 2005; Luft 2003; "Iran Country Analysis Brief" 2006).

U.S. citizens are tired of war.

American soldiers entered Afghanistan in 2001 to fight against the Taliban in the War on Terror. American soldiers are still in Afghanistan. In 2003, the United States launched Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. American soldiers are still in Iraq. According to a February 2006 article in *The Economist*, some Americans are wondering, "What's the point…of engaging such people? We gave the Iraqis freedom…and they repaid us with roadside bombs" ("The isolationist temptation" 2006, 27). "The proportion of Americans who think the Iraq war worth fighting has fallen from 70 [percent] in April 2003 to about 45 [percent] now" ("The isolationist temptation" 2006, 28). To quote the same article, "The public's exhaustion with Iraq makes it

harder for the president to tackle Iran" ("The isolationist temptation" 2006, 28). A Pew poll in October 2005 found that 42 [percent] of Americans would like to mind their own business and let the world take care of itself ("The isolationist temptation" 2006). Quite simply, Americans are tired of fighting for what seems (to them) like little return.

The international community is generally tired of U.S. unilateralism.

"One reason people…object to [President] Bush's 'freedom agenda' is that they see it as a veil for something else: an American policy of stomping about the world and deposing unfriendly regimes at will" ("The one thing Bush got right" 2006, 9). That statement was made about the American people, but it could be applied to the international community as well. Dr. Julia Sweig, author of *Friendly Fire: Losing Friends and Making Enemies in the Anti-American Century*, recently discussed why the United States has become so unpopular with the international community over the last few years. International polls have dropped as a result of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States withdrawal from the Kyoto Agreement and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, and the United States rejection of the International Criminal Court (Gwertzman 2006). Dr. Sweig contends that these have left the international community with a perception that the United States is "thumbing its nose" at major global issues (Gwertzman 2006). Overcoming issues like torture at Abu Ghraib (prison) will be difficult, but the United States can overcome them by embracing the Geneva Conventions and punishing those responsible, according to Sweig (Gwertzman 2006). Changing perceptions will take time. In general, the United States needs to have more humility on issues it has placed in the center of its foreign policy agenda, like democracy and regime change (Gwertzman 2006). Until then, the international community will continue to resent the United States' unilateralism.

Having addressed the predetermined elements, it is now possible to consider the critical

uncertainties.

With whom will the international community stand?

As discussed earlier, energy (and particularly oil) is becoming a major factor in international relations. Governments sit on a fine line between upholding and enforcing international agreements like the NPT and their country's need for oil. India and Pakistan seek a natural gas pipeline with Iran (Mihailescu 2005). Japan is investing in Iran's Azadegan oilfields despite voting in favor of referring Iran to the United Nations Security Council (Goodenough 2006). Luft addresses a U.S. Congressional report that warns of China's policy of maintaining good relations with oil producing counties even though they may sponsor terrorism (Luft 2003). Russia is the prime contractor on Iran's Bushehr reactor, a contract worth a reported $800 million (Kerr 2005). All represent conflicts of interest in getting these countries to deal with Iran's nuclear aspirations. Ilan Berman, vice president for policy at the American Foreign Policy Council, stated in 2005 that "Russia might wake up to the dangers of proliferation," but China had spent the last year making energy deals which could provide a United Nations Security Council veto (Berman 2005, n.p.). For now, the international community stands united behind a unanimous vote by the IAEA to send Iran before the United Nations Security Council and the Security Council President's remarks giving Iran 30 days to comply. One has to wonder, will the economics of oil, at some point, override a nation's willingness to enforce international treaties?

Will Iran put a chokehold on oil, or attempt to destroy the U.S. economy through oil contracts?

What if Iran elected to sell its oil only to those nations unopposed to its nuclear ambitions? Iran has threatened retaliation against those countries which stand against it (Goodenough 2006). That has yet to happen. However, Iran could significantly interrupt worldwide economies by turning down the oil tap. Since oil is a finite natural resource, those

nations purchasing Iran's oil would be forced to seek it elsewhere, further driving up demand. While Iranian oil sanctions (or a complete embargo) would certainly hurt world economies, Iran would also be affected. Iran's economy relies heavily on its oil revenue. Oil exports represent "80-90 percent of total export earnings and 40-50 percent of the government budget" ("Iran Country Analysis Brief" 2006, n.p.). A second option for putting a chokehold on oil would be the use of the military.

Iran could use its position in the Persian Gulf to attack petroleum ships. The Abu Musa, Qeshm, and Sirri Islands are perfectly positioned for such operations. "The islands are strategically located near the Strait of Hormuz shipping lanes. During a press conference on 18 December 1997, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Maleki stated that Iran supported the free flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz, but reserved the option of closing off the shipping route if it is threatened" ("Abu Musa Island" 2005, n.p.). A third option to use oil as leverage against the international community would specifically hurt the United States.

Iran has threatened to attack the U.S. economy. In his article, "Iran takes on U.S. but at what cost?" Ed Blanche acknowledges that Iran has threatened to disrupt oil supplies (Blanche 2006). Perhaps even more disturbing, however, is the recent movement afoot in Iran to change contracts from dollars to euros. The dollar has been the basis for OPEC oil sales since 1974, when Henry Kissinger, U.S. Secretary of State, formed the U.S.-Saudi Arabian Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation (Blanche 2006). Many in the international community see the transaction fees associated with this policy as an additional tax on oil which benefits the United States (Blanche 2006). If Iran were able to promote a change in contracts to euros, other nations might fall in line, simply as a way to protest U.S. expansionist policies in the Middle East (Blanche 2006). Since using dollars would no longer be required to purchase oil, many nations

would certainly divest them, causing the value of the dollar to plummet. Hurting the U.S. economy would invariably hurt the worldwide economy. But logically, the United States would be the first to feel the pain.

How far is the United States willing to press the issue? What if Israel acts pre-emptively?

Would the United States seek sanctions against Iran? Absolutely. President Clinton signed the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) on August 15, 1996. The main purpose of that law is to punish foreign investment in the Iranian and Libyan energy sectors (Katzman 2003). It has been in effect since 1996, but as of 2003, the United States had never imposed sanctions on those who violated the law (Katzman 2003). (There is currently no evidence to support the imposition of sanctions as a result of the ILSA since 2003.) The ILSA would certainly apply to all the energy-related investments made with Iran by the countries already mentioned. Yet, those countries have invested with Iran anyway. And the United States has allowed them. Sanctions might be effective if they were executed by more than one country. Yet, sanctions were imposed on North Korea, and North Korea has nuclear weapons today. Unfortunately, according to Roger Howard, author of "Meeting the Iranian Nuclear Challenge," "Iranian authorities know that any such sanctions are unlikely to be imposed at all, just as North Korea escaped their imposition after withdrawing from the [NPT] in 2002" (Howard 2004, 67).

An embargo against Iranian oil could be used. But "the sharp increases in the price of crude oil that have been prompted by recent instability in Iraq have also made an embargo on Iranian oil appear even more remote," according to Howard (Howard 2004, 67). A military blockade, similar to the Cuban Missile Crisis, would be a precursor to war. The United States would need to determine if it was willing to go to war, even nuclear war, with Iran over its nuclear aspirations.

Further use of the military in the Middle East would most likely not bode well for the United States in the international community. As addressed earlier, the world is generally tired of U.S. unilateralism. Israel would be willing to join the fight, but that would cause a myriad of complications across the Middle East. (A military response by Israel is addressed below.) Forming a coalition for military action would be difficult due to Iran's significant leverage with oil reserves. In fact, even regional allies who have supported military actions by the United States in the Middle East would most likely bow out for fear of being within range of Iranian missiles (Knights 2006). If the United States was willing to confront Iran militarily, it would probably need to convince Israel to stay at home. The United States would have to go it alone…more unilateralism. But say for a moment it was willing to strike Iran. What could it expect?

A January 2006 article in *The Economist* states, "The Iranians are believed to have, in addition to its [sic] main sites, at least a score with a role in the [nuclear] programme [sic], and more than 100 sites suspected of having a role" ("When the soft talk has to stop" 2006, 31). It would be a challenge for the intelligence community to find them all on that basis alone. Yet, they are not only dispersed, but also hardened, and buried, some up to 75 feet underground ("When the soft talk has to stop" 2006; Falk 2006; Romano 2006). Hence, it would be a daunting task to eliminate Iran's entire nuclear capability. Launching a strike solely for the purpose of delaying Iran's successful indigenous nuclear weapons capability, would most likely have the opposite effect. If Iran did not already possess nuclear weapons, it would send their program into overdrive by reinforcing the reasons for which Iran thought it needed nuclear weapons in the first place. In addition, it would likely cause Iran to legally leave the NPT. This would end the little control the international authority still exerts over Iran's nuclear program

(Knights 2005). If it led to Iran's "coming out" as a member of the "nuclear club," Israel would almost certainly announce its nuclear weapons capability as well. If Israel announced its nuclear capabilities, it might cause others in the Middle East to seek nuclear weapons—essentially ushering in the dawn of a new arms race (Eisenstadt 2005). This would undoubtedly be the end of the NPT, at least as it is known today.

The United States would certainly face Iran's military forces. Yet according to Steven Ward in *The Middle East Journal*, "If war occurs, Iran [will] try to increase the costs to its opponents through attrition and unconventional warfare, including terrorism against an opponent's interests anywhere in the world" (Ward 2005, 567). He goes on to state, "Iran's doctrine appears to call on using military forces to threaten regional oil exports to internationalize the conflict and bring diplomatic pressure to end the fighting on terms less costly to Tehran" (Ward 2005, 567). The United States would face terrorism (probably against its troops in Iraq), economic warfare by an oil demand increase, and international diplomatic pressure against unilateralism. Launching strikes against Iran could mean a war of survival on all fronts (diplomatic, informational, militarily, and economic) for the United States.

Israel takes pride in its history of destroying the nuclear reactor at Osirak in 1981. Yet against Iran, Israel would be less effective at striking targets than the United States. While Turkey might consider allowing Israel to use its airspace (answering the question how fighter aircraft would get there), Israel would still need help (Burris 2003; Peraino 2006). Israel faces the same scenario as the United States above. Yet, Israel has faced hatred by its neighbors for years. It may be less concerned. Of interesting note, many sources address how an Iranian nuclear weapons capability would be bad for Israel (Beres 1993; Howard 2005; Devenny 2006). In contrast, Trita Parsi, in January 2006's *Jane's Intelligence Review*, suggests an Iranian nuclear

weapons capability would be good for Israel by bringing balance to the Middle East through deterrence (Parsi 2006).

Will Iran use first-strike capability against Israel? If so, will it be nuclear?

Iran President Ahmadinejad made inflammatory threats against Israel. As mentioned earlier, he could be rational by using a first-strike capability or rational by not using it. Certainly, his language and religious zealotry have upset certain members of Iran's government, including former president, Ali Hashemi Rafsanjani ("Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: what lies beneath?" 2006). Yet, he is close to the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who would supposedly control nuclear weapons. In 2004, Khamenei's advisors expressed interest in defusing tensions with the West and particularly the United States (Takeyh 2004). Short of an apocalyptic death wish, Iran would see Israel's nuclear arsenal as a deterrent.

Will Iran use its connections in Iraq to further bind the United States?

"Iranian cash is [currently] being sent to an array of often competing armed Shia groups in Iraq, partly to tie down coalition forces and partly to keep any one militia from consolidating power," according to a January 2006 article in *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst* ("Iran's Iraqi interests" 2006, 7). Iran wants to keep Iraq from getting too strong so it will not be threatened ("Iran's Iraqi interests" 2006). Iran would be insulted to see Iraq become a true democracy and not some form of a democratic theocracy ("Iran's Iraqi interests" 2006). Yet "historically, Sunnis and Shias in Iran and Iraq have maintained allegiance to their respective states at the expense of their Islamic strands" ("Iran's Iraqi interests" 2006, 8). To answer the question stated above, yes, Iran would use its connections in Iraq to bind the United States. However, on the hopeful side, Iran has recently agreed to talk with the United States about reducing the sectarian violence (Atlas 2006).

Phase Three, Synthesize: Combining the Driving Forces to Develop Scenarios

In Phase Three, driving forces are prioritized based on the degree of importance to the focal issue and the degree of uncertainty surrounding them (Scearce 2004, 27).

Iran's type of government and its leadership are critical to how the United States will interact with it. On one end lie the hard-line conservatives, who are in power now. They are oppressive against their opposition and decidedly anti-secular. They believe their government should stay the way it is. Conservatives see the United States as the "Great Satan" (Atlas 2006). Leaders at this end of the spectrum are Khamenei and Ahmadinejad. On the opposite end are the reformers. They would like Iran's government to change to a more modern, secular one. They do not disdain religion, but believe it should be practiced by individuals who are involved in the state (Ansari 2003). Iran's former president, Mohammad Khatami, is an excellent representative for this group. In the middle are the modern pragmatists. These individuals believe that their form of government is right, but that it should be more open to western ideals. They believe in keeping their international commitments (like the NPT) and opening their industries to foreign investment. They seek to be good neighbors. Former president Rafsanjani kept Iran neutral in Operation DESERT STORM and patched relationships with the international community in the 1990s (Hart 1991). He represents the modern pragmatists. There is one note worth mentioning for the modern pragmatists. These individuals still believe in their democratic theocracy. Their leadership could still be replaced by a hard-line regime under that system. As a result, they are not quite capable of fully partnering with the international community. Iran's type of government is represented by the (x) axis.

Just how far is the United States willing to push Iran? While the international community will play a pivotal role in this axis, the general purpose of this paper is to produce a

recommended U.S. response. It is recognized that this is based on public information, although several key transactions may take place privately. This is due to the fact that certain entities in Iran would be unwilling to accept aid from the United States publicly for fear of retribution (Esfandiari 2006). U.S. involvement is represented by the (y) axis. See Figure 3 for a graphic depiction.

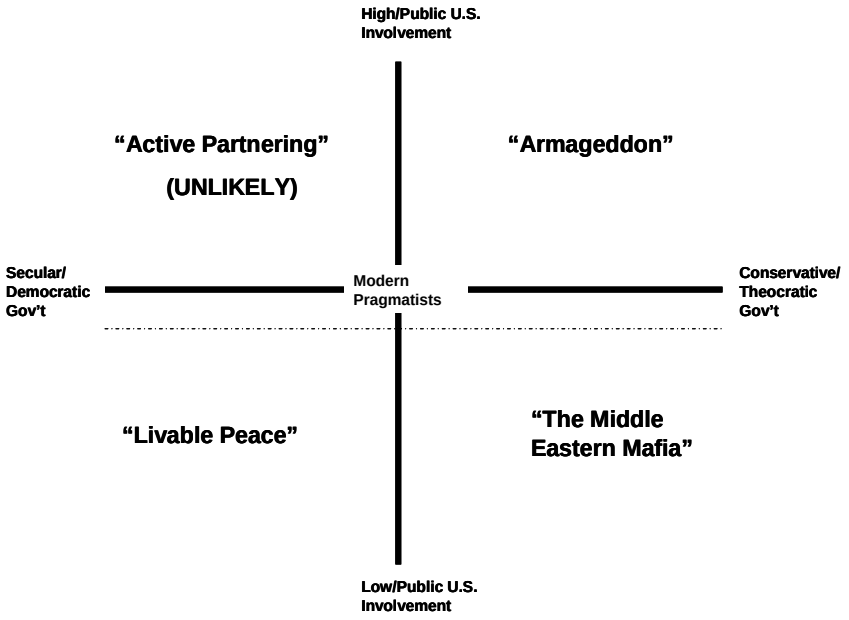

Figure 3

(The dashed line below the government axis is also of note in Figure 3. It represents the modern pragmatist's inability to "Actively Partner" and most likely ability to avoid "Armageddon." As mentioned earlier, while having a modern pragmatist at the government's helm would prevent war, the government itself would still be relatively dangerous since the next leader could move the government back to its oppressive roots.)

The following is a brief description of the four scenarios:

<u>"The Middle Eastern Mafia"</u>

With low U.S. involvement and a conservative Iranian government comes "The Middle Eastern Mafia." This scenario is taking place today. Over the last several years (since the 1979 Revolution actually), the United States has had very little to do with Iran. In FY06, Congress

appropriated $10 million to support freedom and human rights there. The U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, has prompted the government to increase this by $75 million dollars to increase freedom broadcasts, support local activists and human rights, and increase student loans and exchange programs (Burns 2006). In addition, The U.S. government has worked tirelessly to generate a united opposition to Iran's nuclear aspirations (Burns 2006). The United States is moving up the (y) axis.

Iran, for its part, has moved further right on the (x) axis. Ahmadinejad's inflammatory remarks have solidified his place as the (public, albeit not "true") leader of the government (Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: what lies beneath? 2006). In Richard Falk's editorial article, "Storm Clouds Over Iran," Falk confirms that Iran's hard stance on the nuclear issue has given the current regime "nationalist" support (Falk 2006). Roger Howard asserts that diplomatic relations with the United States (as a result of it nuclear aspirations) will give the current regime legitimacy, pushing it further right on the axis (Howard 2005).

Yet, the reason this scenario is called "The Middle East Mafia" is a result of the relationships Iran has cultivated and is cultivating with terrorist and fundamentalist groups. R. Nicholas Burns, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, addressed these issues before the House International Relations Committee in March 2006. He stated that Iran provides resources to Hamas and other Palestinian rejectionist groups to affect violence in Israel (Burns 2006). Iran also supports Hezbollah in Lebanon, Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Burns 2006). The actions of these terrorist groups are not pertinent to this paper. However, the coalition of terrorist forces aligning under Iran's umbrella demonstrates the effect Iran can have on the world, especially if armed with nuclear weapons. Certainly, the possibility of one of these groups having access to a nuclear weapon is a point of concern

(Eisenstadt 2005).

"Armageddon"

This scenario will occur when the level of U.S. involvement crosses the military threshold. As Iran moves further right on its axis and the United States moves further up its axis, open conflict becomes more likely. This conflict does not have to be nuclear initially, but it could ultimately end with nuclear devastation. Tensions are escalating. Military intervention by Israel and Iranian policies to prevent oil exportation are both possible flashpoints which could lead to this scenario.

"Livable Peace"

This scenario does not seem likely for the given timeframe, three to four years. However, if cooler heads prevail and Iran's government can be persuaded to work with the international community rather than against it, tensions could de-escalate. Informal meetings between the United States and Iran would be a sign by both sides of reaching out to prevent confrontation. The meeting between Iran and the U.S. ambassador to Iraq mentioned earlier is a good sign.

"Active Partnering"

This scenario is unlikely for the next three to four years. According to the graph, Iran would need to transform its government to a democracy. In the absence of a wildcard like government overthrow, this scenario will not happen.

Phase Four, Act: Use Scenarios to Inform and Inspire Action

In Phase Four, the scenarios are used to inform and inspire action (Scearce 2004). By imagining what each scenario involves and entails, a plan to maximize positive outcomes and mitigate negative outcomes can be devised (Scearce 2004).

"The Middle Eastern Mafia"

Iran feels that it needs nuclear weapons. Based on the evidence presented, it is very unlikely that Iran can be dissuaded from its aspirations. However, it is worth a try. It would be a shame for the United States not to at least openly offer Iran the opportunity for a constructive dialogue. If war is inevitably in the future between these countries, the men and women in both countries at least deserve an honest, open effort at diplomacy.

"Armageddon"

As stated above, every effort must be made to avoid this scenario. If in this scenario, everything must be done to prevent escalation to the nuclear level of warfare.

"Livable Peace"

This scenario would be a welcome refuge from the current escalation toward "Armageddon." Iran will have nuclear weapons. If it does not use them for intimidation or terrorism in the international community, the United States should focus its efforts on improving its relationship with Iran. With a better relationship, the United States might actually get a positive voice there. This could ultimately lead to improvements in Iran's human rights record and an Iranian populace which yearns for democracy and freedom.

Phase Five, Monitor: Create Mechanisms to Track Shifts and Adjust Strategy

Phase Five involves creating indicators which will show signs of potentially significant change (Scearce 2004). "As leading indicators are identified, strategies can be put in place to respond to the emerging reality (Scearce 2004, 33).

"The Middle Eastern Mafia"

The leading indicator in this scenario is the continual "stair step," moving up the axis for the United States and moving right on the axis for Iran. If either side publicly moved in the

opposite direction, it would represent a de-escalation of hostilities. See Figure 4 for a graphic depiction. The U.S. government is increasing public spending on Iran to support freedom and human rights (moving up its axis). The Iranian government has stated it will continue to enrich uranium, against the wishes of the IAEA and United Nations Security Council (moving further right on its axis) ("Iran's uranium enrichment decision irreversible: Soltaniyeh" 2006).

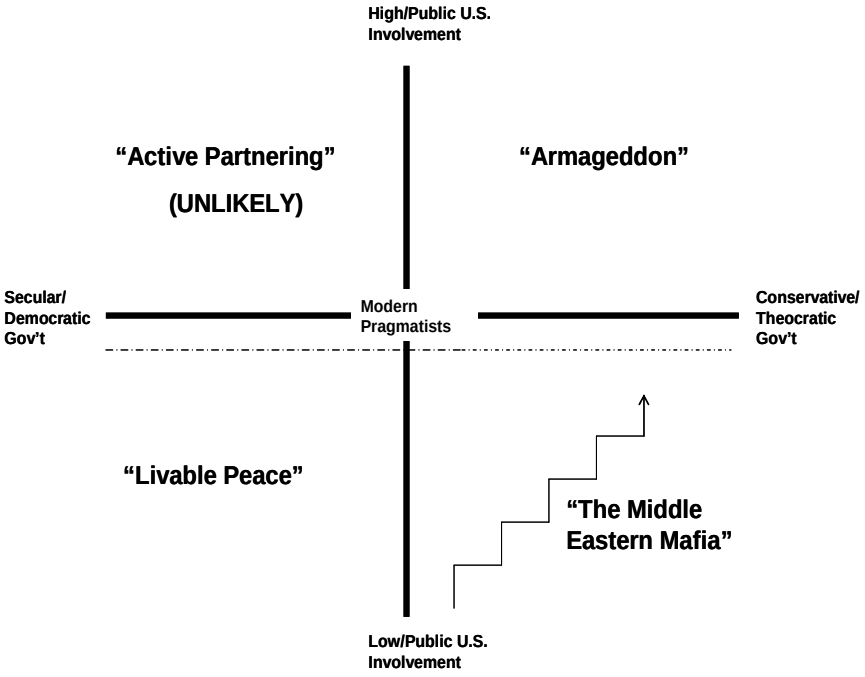

Figure 4

"Armageddon"

This scenario begins with open conflict with Iran. As the stair step climbs, it becomes more likely. It is assumed this scenario will start with conventional military action and potentially escalate to nuclear war. A nuclear first-strike would effectively bypass the conventional portion of the scenario.

"Livable Peace"

Any attempt at positive negotiations is a sign of moving toward this scenario. Iran's agreement to meet with Zalmay Khalilzad, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, to discuss violence in Iraq

is a prime example. Another example could be Iran's allowing IAEA inspectors into its country to conduct inspections of its nuclear facilities. This, however, is not as solid due to Iran's known history of clandestine nuclear technology development.

Summary for Part One

The five-phase approach offered in *WHAT IF? The Art of Scenario Thinking for Nonprofits* offered a logical framework for considering one of the most dynamic issues of today: a U.S. response to a nuclear-armed Iran. With this backdrop forming a context, it is now possible to use the same approach to formulate specific responses.

PART TWO

Phase One, Orient: Establishing the Focal Issue and Setting a Timeline

Based on the analysis presented in Part One, the best way to ensure a nuclear armed Iran is not a threat to the world is to change its government. Iran's current form of government encourages those in power to repress the populace in order to stay in power. The people have little (if any) voice in their government. The current regime of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad have shown themselves as individuals not willing to work within the international community nor abide by their nation's own commitments. Ahmadinejad has verbally threatened the existence of Israel and is known to consider himself a "Twelver," committed to bringing about the end of humanity. Even if his comments were simply to solidify power in Iran, he is still known to reminisce about revolutionary days when individuals suffered and died for their fundamentalist views. The current government in Iran is also known to sponsor terrorism. Yet, changing the government leadership to a modern pragmatist will not be sufficient. Modern pragmatists are still bound by

the confines of a theocratic democracy. Ruling modern pragmatists could be overcome by elections or death, and there is no guarantee that a subsequent ruler will not resort to fundamental, autocratic conservatism. Iran's government must be changed to a "truer" form of democracy, where the people, not a select group of nepotistic clerics, are empowered to choose their leadership.

In her article, "A Lesson from Vietnam," Wendy McElroy discusses how the United States failed to implement regime change in Vietnam by supporting Ngo Dinh Diem (McElroy 2004). This historical situation exemplifies how it is impossible to be certain of a potential leader's actions until that individual (or group) actually rises to power. McElroy warns,

> In the best of circumstances, regime change most often goes astray owing to unintended consequences, popular resistance, and the almost-inevitable tension between the installed regime and the regime-makers. In a foreign and complex culture, forced regime change seems to be a formula for disaster no matter what the underlying conditions (McElroy, 2004, n.p.)

While her comments are certainly relevant to this situation, it would seem based on the information presented, a regime change in Iran (whether forced or voluntary) would make the world a safer place. In his article, "Iran and the West," Dr. Assad Homayoun, a Senior Fellow of the International Strategic Studies Association, agrees (Homayoun 2003). "The most feasible way to solve the problems of WMD, terrorism and anti-peace activities of the Iranian clerical leadership is to support, openly and enthusiastically, the people of Iran who are ready and resolved to change the national leadership of Iran" (Homayoun 2003, 11). While those comments are three years old, they still ring true today.

The timeframe for this change will be left to the United States government. The model presented below will address different timeframes.

Phase 2, Explore: Determining Predetermined Elements and Critical Uncertainties

Predetermined elements include the following:

- The Iranian people would undermine external actors and external interests involved in regime change (particularly those supported by the United States).
- The United States could not build a coalition for military action.

Critical uncertainties include the following:

- Would regime change in Iran require violence?
- Would regime change conducted by internal actors result in a better democracy for Iran?
- Would the United States support the People's Mojahedin of Iran (PMOI), also known as the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK)?
- If Iran's Supreme Leader, the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, dies, who will fill the power void?

The predetermined elements and critical uncertainties will be addressed in turn, starting with the predetermined elements.

<u>The Iranian people would undermine external actors and external interests involved in regime change (particularly those supported by the United States).</u>

In "Continuous Regime Change from Within," Ali Ansari contends that the proudly nationalist people of Iran are aware of the deficiencies in their government (Ansari 2003). According to Ansari, "[They are] proud of the fundamental principles of freedom and independence that the revolution seemed to herald while condemning and lamenting its excesses and the corruption of those values by an increasingly isolated hard-line conservative elite" (Ansari 2003, 279). However, Ansari warns that the United States should avoid direct intervention in Iran because its nationalist populace, suspicious of U.S. motives, does not want to be "characterized as foreign stooges" (Ansari 2003, 280).

This sentiment is echoed by Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, co-founder of the Center for Human Rights Defenders. Dadkhah explained to Radio Free Europe that "democratic changes should come from inside the country – without outside interference" (Esfandiari 2006, n.p.). Many sources inside Iran feel that accepting money or outside support would immediately put

them at risk to be judged as U.S. spies (Esfandiari 2006). Hence, U.S. public support for pro-democracy groups and individuals inside Iran may prove ineffective. Private support for such voices inside Iran, particularly from other nations, would likely fare better.

This rules out the likely return to power of the former shah's son, Reza Pahlavi. Pahlavi lives in the Washington, D.C. area. He has become a staunch advocate for government change in Iran. He has appeared on radio and television broadcasts in Iran and has also used the internet to reach Iranians ("Shah's son wants role in Iran future" 2004). While Pahlavi may one day have a future in the government of Iran, it is highly unlikely in the near term. Pahlavi has simply been away too long. Iranian suspicions of his American loyalties would certainly undermine his credibility.

The United States could not build a coalition for military action.

As addressed in Part One, it is highly unlikely that the United States could garner support for military action against Iran. This is based on: current isolationist tendencies by the American people, unpopular U.S. unilateralism, Iran's vast energy reserves and the future demand for oil, and the international fear of retribution by Iran through missile strikes, oil sanctions, or terrorism.

Having addressed the predetermined elements, it is now possible to consider the critical uncertainties.

Would regime change in Iran require violence?

As addressed in Part One, the current ruling regime in Iran has solidified its powerbase within the nation. Ahmadinejad has made the nuclear issue a nationalist one, galvanizing internal support. In addition, the current regime has continued its siege against a free society by imprisoning "troublemakers," closing down the press, and banning American films (also

addressed in Part One). In Part Two, Iranian suspicions of U.S. intentions have been presented, as well as the proud nationalist sentiment espoused by many of its citizens. Considering these issues, the logical supposition must support the use of violence if regime change will take place in the near future.

On the other hand, if regime change is deemed unnecessary in the near future, violence may not be required. The longer the timeframe, the greater becomes the chance for Iran's citizens to back away from nationalist tendencies surrounding their current government leadership. When nuclear tensions fall away, the ruling elite will be forced back into the same patterns of repression to stay in power. Eventually, Iran's citizens will seek freedom from tyranny, democracy, and economic opportunity on their own (Rubin 2006). But that may take years.

Would regime change conducted by internal actors result in a better democracy for Iran?

The basis of this question focuses on the type of government the individual or group responsible for regime change would establish in the aftermath. Any regime change has the potential to lead to a dictatorship. As mentioned earlier, it is impossible to determine what someone or some group will do in power until it actually ascends to power. The United States must carefully consider whom it will support (or if it will support anyone or any group specifically) for this reason. For example, the United States might consider "sponsoring" Hashemi Rafsanjani, the former president, or the PMOI.

Hashemi Rafsanjani, former Iranian president, has been presented as a modern pragmatist. That being the case, he believes in the current democratic theocracy and would most likely try to work within its constraints. As discussed earlier, simply removing the figureheads from the current regime and replacing them with others could still lead to the same problems the

United States faces in Iran today. But what if Rafsanjani were afforded the opportunity to change the government? If he could be convinced that a truer, less theocratic democracy were better for Iran, would he change it? Would he become a reformer, rather than a modern pragmatist? In *When Illness Strikes the Leader*, Jerrold Post and Robert Givens discuss how George Washington turned down the opportunity to be an "elected monarch" in the early United States (Post 1993). Would Rafsanjani be enough of a statesman to turn down an "elected monarchy" in Iran?

John Roos surmised the PMOI's intent in his 1992 article, "Group Unveils Iran's Nuke Weapon Plan, Plots 'Equal Opportunity' Overthrow." The PMOI wants to establish a central, democratic government in Iran with suffrage for women and a separation of church and state (Roos 1992). But the question remains, what would the group actually do if it rose to power? And, the PMOI is a recognized terrorist group, a matter discussed in the next critical uncertainty.

Would the United States support the People's Mojahedin of Iran (PMOI), also known as the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK)?

The United States has recognized the PMOI as a terrorist group since 1997. It was involved in the 1979 overthrow of the shah, but later fell out of favor with the new government ("Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK or MKO) et. al." 2005). Since 1979, it has sought to overthrow the Iranian government and conducted military strikes against select (Iranian) government targets ("Country Reports on Terrorism" 2005). During the 1980s, it established headquarters in Iraq and received funding from the Hussein regime ("Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK or MKO) et. al." 2005). Since late 2001, PMOI's involvement in terrorism has declined ("Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK or MKO) et. al." 2005). In 2003, PMOI surrendered to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM Coalition Forces in Iraq. "The voluntary, peaceful resolution of this process by the [PMOI] and the Coalition significantly contributed to the

Coalition's mission to establish a safe and secure environment for the people of Iraq" ("Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK or MKO) et. al." 2005, n.p.). The PMOI, it would seem, has been transforming itself from a radical, militant organization to a political one, seeking a legitimate voice in the government of Iran. Yet, it is still on the U.S. Department of State's list of terrorist organizations.

Many, including Congressman Tom Tancredo (R-CO), believe that the PMOI was listed as a terrorist organization by the Clinton Administration simply to pacify Iran back in the 1990s ("Policy-group outlines U.S. options on Iran in Capitol Hill session" 2005). The Iran Policy Committee, a group comprised of former officials from the White House, State Department, Pentagon, Intelligence agencies, Congress, and other noted experts, supports the PMOI as "an enabled and determined opposition on [Iran's] borders ("Policy-group outlines U.S. options on Iran in Capitol Hill session" 2005, n.p.). It seems others agree. In March 2006, a British parliamentary delegation called for the EU to remove the PMOI from its terrorism list as well ("British lawmakers denounce terror label for Iran opposition group" 2006).

To those who would argue against working with the PMOI on principle, politics is about making choices. In "National Interest: From Abstraction to Strategy," Michael Roskin addresses how states are entities which rationally pursue their own interests (Roskin 1994). That being the case, a state might choose a diplomatic or economic benefit over the opportunity to condemn a history of terrorism. To an individual, generally bound by morality, this might seem reprehensible. To an amoral state, it is merely seeking what is in the national interest. Politics means making choices. Sometimes the best choice might be the lesser of two evils. In this case, it would seem more appealing to deal with a (perhaps former) terrorist organization than to struggle through international tensions with a nuclear-armed enemy.

If Iran's Supreme Leader, the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, dies, who will fill the power void?

In his 2006 article, "A Mullah's-Eye View of the World," Michael Ledeen reports that Ayatollah Khamenei has less than a year to live (Ledeen 2006). The succession struggle is underway and former president Rafsanjani is in the middle of it, much to the chagrin of Khamenei and his increasingly powerful son, Mushtaba (Ledeen 2006). Ahmadinejad may have solidified his powerbase enough to join in the succession race. This is a very interesting development. What if Rafsanjani could actually become Iran's Supreme Leader? Would he work within his government's confines (modern pragmatist), or might he actually be a true Iranian statesman (reformer)? Would it even be possible to convince him that reform would be better for Iran?

Phase Three, Synthesize: Combining the Driving Forces to Develop Scenarios

When considering regime change, actors or forces both internal and external to the nation must be considered. What form of government is ultimately desired? In this case, democracy is desired. Which actors can best bring that about? Internal actors and external actors (to Iran) comprise the (x) axis.

The (y) axis is based on the level of violence required to bring about regime change. For the purposes of this model, the level of violence required would be directly related to the duration over which the regime change would take place. As addressed earlier, violence would most likely be required to bring about regime change in Iran in the near term. Iranians have essentially "fallen in line" behind the current regime based on the nationalist nuclear issue. The one instance where the violence construct may not apply is the case of Khamenei's death and Rafsanjani's ascension to power. Of course, Rafsanjani would need to reject the current democratic theocracy, and spur on open, democratic elections. That would be a tall order for a

current modern pragmatist, but perhaps one worth exploring. On the other end of the axis, waiting for Iran's citizens to overthrow their current government (without violence) on behalf of democracy could take years. A graphic depiction of these axes appears in Figure 5.

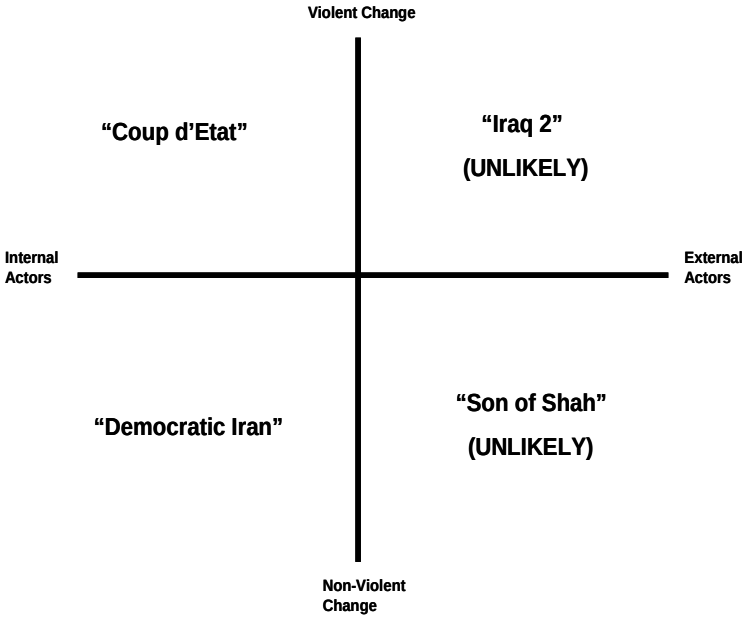

Figure 5

The following is a brief description of the four scenarios:

"Iraq 2"

"Iraq 2" would involve a violent regime overthrow by an external actor. The external actor in this instance would most likely be the United States. Based on discussion in Part One, this scenario is extremely unlikely because the American people are tired of war, the international community is tired of U.S. unilateralism, and Iranian reprisals could be devastating to oil sales around the world, not to mention the world economy.

Of particular note in this scenario is the absence of the PMOI. The PMOI, while driven from Iran, maintained relations with many Iranians and operated in Iran, albeit with lower intensity, during the 1980s and 1990s ("Country Reports on Terrorism" 2005). For this reason, it is considered an internal actor here. Public U.S. support for the PMOI could, however, cause the

Iranian people to distrust the PMOI, essentially shifting it to the level of an external actor.

"Son of Shah"

"Son of Shah" is the scenario described by a non-violent, external actor seeking regime change inside Iran. This scenario is highly unlikely since Pahlavi, and virtually all other external actors, would have virtually no credibility in Iran.

"Democratic Iran"

In this scenario, an actor or actors internal to Iran would foster regime change through a peaceful process. It is possible for Rafsanjani to become the Supreme Leader of Iran. It is also logical to assume that he would govern Iran within current theocratic confines, barring any external influence prior to his ascension to power. Therefore, one possible course of action for the United States is to make every effort to influence Rafsanjani (and those like him) prior to any rise to power. Regime change at the hands of Rafsanjani is unlikely, however. First, he would have to rise to power. Then, he would have to be willing to set his power aside for the good of the country. Both events would have to take place for Rafsanjani to create a "Democratic Iran."

A more likely version of this scenario results from the people of Iran taking control of their own government and ousting the clerical elites. While this version of "Democratic Iran" might involve a small level of violence, it would not be marked by armed conflict between formed militias or the military. Relying on Iranians to overthrow their government peacefully might make for a better, longer-lasting democracy, but it could also take years. This option would not defuse current tensions in the world. In her 2005 article, "Perceptions of Iran," Dr. Jo-Anne Hart recommends patient non-interference in Iran while engaging it through trade (Hart 2005). Improving relations with the Iranian people would result from "mutual prosperity" (Hart 2005). Timothy Gash recommends another path for encouraging Iranian citizens to achieve

democracy.

In his article, "We need a European approach to supporting democracy in Iran," Timothy Gash recommends that Europeans should take part in a European "Iranpolitik" (Ash 2006). He asserts that all Europeans should "weave a dense web of human contact between Iranians and freer countries" (Ash 2006, n.p.). These links, bridging government institutions, trade unions, student groups and the like, would encourage Iranian people to strive for freedom and democracy from the society-level rather than the government-level (of which so many Iranians are suspicious) (Ash 2006). The United States should follow the same advice. Promoting democracy at the individual level will be more effective than at the government level. Unfortunately, that takes time.

"Coup d'Etat"

The "Coup d'Etat" scenario is the nexus of an internal actor executing a violent regime change in Iran. Dr. Homayoun states, "It is time, and indeed the acme of patriotism, for the Iranian Armed Forces and Revolutionary Guards, who are guarantors of the integrity of Iran, to discontinue their support of the clerical Government. They must help the people to establish a representative democratic government" (Homayoun 2003, 11). However, the Supreme Leader exercises control over the Supreme National Security Council and Armed Forces ("Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic of Iran" 2005). According to A. William Samii, author of "Factionalism in Iran's Domestic Security Forces," security institutions are generally under the control of the hard-line elements (Samii 2002). While orchestrating regime change is possible for these institutions, it is highly improbable.

A more likely version of the "Coup d'Etat" scenario would be the violent overthrow of the current clerical regime by the PMOI. The PMOI has been addressed earlier as a known

terrorist group, but also as a group transforming itself into a political body with a military arm. If the United States chose to take the PMOI off the terrorist list and support it (though perhaps only privately), the PMOI could potentially lead to a democratic Iran. This would most likely involve violence, but regime change could come quickly with victory.

Phase Four, Act: Use Scenarios to Inform and Inspire Action

The scenarios can now be used to inspire action.

"Democratic Iran"

The United States should immediately begin to foster individual and societal relationships with Iranian citizens. While these actions may take years to actually build a strong enough desire to stand against an autocratic regime, there is no time like the present to begin. Increasing public spending to broadcast messages of freedom and promote certain groups is also a step in the right direction. However, the United States must be leery about causing domestic trouble for those it would support. It must also be cautious when dealing with the current regime. Legitimizing Iran's current leaders through diplomacy would only weaken the voices of democracy inside Iran. The major drawback to this scenario is the potentially long length of time required to actually bring about regime change.

The United States should also approach Rafsanjani (and those like him) in this scenario (albeit very privately). Rafsanjani could potentially rise to be Supreme Leader within the next year. If the groundwork was laid now to convince him that reform was necessary, there is an outside chance he could prove himself to be a true Iranian statesman and give the people democracy unbridled by conservative theocracy.

"Coup d'Etat"

The United States must decide how long it is willing to suffer through the current regime,

and if it is willing to induce violence into an already highly flammable situation. Regime change through a violent overthrow by government agencies, to include the military, is highly unlikely. In this instance, the United States would need to throw its support (perhaps very privately) behind the PMOI. This would mean removing the PMOI from the terrorist list and could potentially render the United States open for public scrutiny due to that support. In this instance, the United States must make a political choice, seemingly the lesser of two evils. The real benefit of this option lies in the speed with which it could take place.

Phase Five, Monitor: Create Mechanisms to Track Shifts and Adjust Strategy

Leading indicators for "Democratic Iran" and "Coup d'Etat" can now be developed in order to track changes and prepare for the future.

"Democratic Iran"

The United States has already begun working in this scenario. The increase in public spending is an excellent indicator of United States' intentions. A great portion of the effort for "Democratic Iran," however, may take place privately based on the suspicions of the Iranian people and authoritarian regime. A very significant indicator of how the scenario plays out will be the relationship between the Iranian people and their current government. As tensions between the two escalate, more public demonstrations against the regime will take place. The public will most likely never know if any western group or individual is able to contact former president Rafsanjani and discuss government reform.

"Coup d'Etat"

The key indicator for "Coup d'Etat" will be if and when the United States removes the PMOI from its terrorist list. The United States will most likely not make a public announcement to this effect. One day, the group will just disappear from the list without fanfare. For those

paying attention, it would seem that the United States has decided to support regime change in the near term, rather than the long term.

Conclusion

The five-phased scenario-based approach described in *WHAT IF? The Art of Scenario Thinking for Nonprofits* has proven itself a suitable framework to formulate proposed U.S. responses to a nuclear-armed Iran. Based on predetermined elements and critical uncertainties, axes were developed to look at four possible futures addressing the form of government in Iran and U.S. involvement. Those possible futures led to the decision that regime change in Iran is necessary from the U.S. perspective.

To instigate regime change in Iran, the United States will not be able to form a coalition for military action. Likewise, the United States will be unable to execute military operations against Iran by itself for diplomatic and economic reasons. The United States must rely on actors internal to Iran to bring about this regime change. A violent overthrow would be relatively quick compared to a non-violent, lengthy process of "Iranpolitik." Yet, the violent approach would involve removing the PMOI, a recognized terrorist group today, from the terrorist list. Politics is about making decisions.

The decision before the United States is whether it can afford to wait for regime change in Iran?

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