Strategic Forum

John F. Rechit
Adverse Use of NBC Weapons: A Neglected Challenge (No. 117, December 2001)

U.S.-Iran Relations: Normalization in the Future?

Key Points

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, the United States has faced a host of complex issues stemming from its recent revolutionary past. The U.S.-Iran relationship has been characterized by a series of failed diplomatic initiatives, military confrontations, and economic sanctions. Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons, support for terrorism, and its role in the Middle East have further complicated the relationship. The current administration, under President George W. Bush, has taken a harder line against Iran, escalating tensions and making normalization of relations less likely. In this context, the U.S. policy of containment, as well as the long-term implications of a potential military strike, continue to be major concerns in both countries.

The Burden of History

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, the relationship between the United States and Iran has been characterized by mutual suspicion, economic sanctions, and periodic military confrontations. The current administration, under President George W. Bush, has taken a harder line against Iran, escalating tensions and making normalization of relations less likely. In this context, the U.S. policy of containment, as well as the long-term implications of a potential military strike, continue to be major concerns in both countries.

Conclusion

The U.S.-Iran relationship is complex and multifaceted, with a rich history of interactions. While the U.S. policy of containment remains in place, recent developments suggest a potential for normalization under the right circumstances. The current administration, under President George W. Bush, has taken a harder line against Iran, escalating tensions and making normalization of relations less likely. In this context, the U.S. policy of containment, as well as the long-term implications of a potential military strike, continue to be major concerns in both countries.

References


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Panel B

Panel A

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...Or Deliberate Ambiguity?

In contrast, Khatami’s remarks while in New York in October conveyed a very different message from the more-or-less unambiguous signals issued to the international community by his predecessors. Khatami’s remarks suggest that Tehran may be ready to extend U.S. concessions to reformists. He expressed strong anti-American sentiments. Khatami’s expression of sympathy to the mayor of New York in October was more nuanced and balanced, at least in style. In his UN speech, he called for an end to the bombing campaign in Afghanistan. According to Mr. Yaphe, the consensus includes a transition phase as Iranians attempt to determine the post-Taliban government. This, of course, raises the difficult question of whether there should be an opening to Iran. Many Iranians are war-weary and fearful of further sanctions. Khatami expressed his condolences to the families of the American military personnel forced to land on Iranian soil in late summer 2001 under United Nations sanctions. Strategic isolation. If Iraq or Israel has nuclear, biological, or chemical (NBC) capabilities, the more predictable and transparent the weapon threat, the less value there will be to Iran in acquiring nuclear weapons. A country that is independent and self-sufficient in strategic and military technologies? Iran surely is not immune to the temptation of nuclear testing. If Khatami’s remarks while in New York were genuine, they could have significant implications for U.S. policy toward Iran. As a leading conservative, former president and current Supreme Leader, Khamenei set the limits of what Iran will do under any circumstances. If Khatami renews his call in 1997 for a dialogue of nationals, or as a means of influencing Iranian foreign policy, has a softer policy on the Middle East come to pass?...
indications of recogni-
Encour-
vilayat-e faqih
Strategic Forum

Defense University. Please direct any questions or comments to Dr. Yaphe at (202) 685-7737.

York shortly after the attacks. Iranian officials
victims, and the mayor of Tehran sent his
critics

According to the U.S. State Department, Iran
expressed strong anti-American sentiments.

Mohsen Rezai
Committee on Afghanistan. Most recently,

Iranian actions display more continuity than
overall strategic direction. The United States
stated that its policy of supporting and arm-
ing the resistance to Iranian-backed groups
in the region is unchanged. However, the U.S.
government has acknowledged that Iran may
be more willing to engage in diplomatic
negotiations than in the past. The United States
has offered to negotiate directly with Iran,
without preconditions, to discuss a wide
range of issues, including nuclear weapons,
terrorism, and regional stability.

Nevertheless, Iranian politics—and there-
fore Iran’s policies—undergo frequent shifts.
For every fracture in the opposition to
tehran’s policies, there is a fracture in the sup-
port of the government. The government
continues to court the hardliners, while the
opposition is courting the centrist and
even the reformists inside Iran. The
government is trying to downplay the threat
of reformism; the opposition is trying to
demonstrate its resolve.

A third round has drawn attention to the
issues of national security and the role of
Iranian armed forces in domestic and
regional politics. Iran’s armed forces
play a significant role in the
country’s political stability.

The United Nations, United States, and
Europe are all concerned about Iran’s
nuclear program. However, the United States
and Europe have different approaches
to this issue. The United States prefers
diplomatic solutions, while Europe prefers
sanctions and other economic measures.

Despite these differences, there is a
consensus among the United States, United
Nations, and European Union that Iran
must comply with international
institutions, such as the International
Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

These are the arguments that
argue for sanctions:

- The potential for further
sanctions against Iran is
limited. The United States
and Europe are already
applying sanctions, and
there is little room for
additional sanctions.

- Sanctions are likely to
have little impact on
Iran’s economy. Iran
has diversified its
economic base,
and sanctions will not
prevent Iran from
developing new
sources of revenue.

- Sanctions may backfire
and harm the United
States and Europe. Iran
may respond by
increasing its nuclear
program or
expanding its influence
in the region.

These are the arguments
against sanctions:

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September 11: Missed Opportunity . . .

The attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon opened a floodgate of emotions in Iran. President Khatami of Iran personally expressed sympathy for the victims, and the mayor of Tehran sent his condolences at the opening in New York in October were more nuanced and dovish. According to an interview with

President Khatami — and in the year following — Iran and the United States...
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Conclusions
The United States is in a position to avoid the costly and risky confrontation with Iran that has occupied the attention of policymakers. It is the era of opportunity rather than threat, a time when offering an alternative and a peaceful course of action is more likely to succeed. The United States is in a position to avoid the costly and risky confrontation with Iran that has occupied the attention of policymakers. It is the era of opportunity rather than threat, a time when offering an alternative and a peaceful course of action is more likely to succeed.
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The Burden of History

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, U.S. officials have pursued a multilateral strategy to contain and, if possible, defeat Iran. Iran has been the target of a new Iranian-U.S. rapprochement—both as a nuclear power and as a regional player. Iran has always raised hard choices for U.S. foreign policy.

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Key Points

1. Iran has been a consistent target of U.S. sanctions and pressures, including economic and military sanctions. Iran has also been a significant threat to U.S. interests in the region, and the United States has sought to contain Iran’s influence in the region.

2. The United States has been working to contain Iran’s influence in the region by supporting and empowering moderate forces and encouraging the Iranian opposition inside the country.

3. The United States has been engaged in diplomatic efforts to engage Iran in a dialogue on its nuclear program and to isolate Iran’s regime.

4. The United States has been working to increase the economic pressure on Iran and to isolate Iran from the international community.

5. The United States has been working to build international cooperation and support in the region to contain Iran’s influence.

6. The United States has been working to build diplomatic and economic leverage to engage Iran in a dialogue on its nuclear program and to isolate Iran’s regime.

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