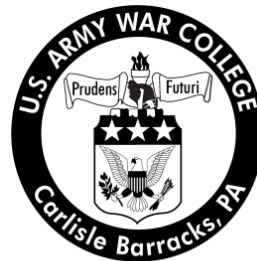


# Civilian Research Project Senior Service College Fellow

## The Third Track: The Military Instrument and U.S. Policy Towards Iran

by

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United States Army War College  
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IRAN**

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## ABSTRACT

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## THE THIRD TRACK: THE MILITARY INSTRUMENT AND U.S. POLICY TOWARDS IRAN

### **Introduction**

U.S. foreign policy toward Iran focuses on a dual-track approach, engaging in diplomacy and leveraging economic sanctions. Despite more than 30 years of pursuing this approach, the U.S. has failed to lessen Iran's threat to regional and international stability. Iran continues to pursue and come ever-closer to establishing nuclear capability. This historical approach has only proven to be a mild distraction to Iran's goal. The U.S. should pursue an aggressive third approach - establishing red lines backed a credible and sustained threat of military action.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton refers to the current U.S. approach as moving simultaneously on the "dual track" of diplomacy and sanctions.<sup>1</sup> However, according to the 2010 National Military Strategy, military power and America's other instruments of statecraft are "more effective when applied in concert."<sup>2</sup> Instruments of statecraft or "power" refer to the diplomatic, military, economic, and informational means used to achieve national military objectives – yet, efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear capabilities have not benefitted from the use of all of these instruments. Thus, U.S. policy undervalues the military instrument in changing Tehran's pursuit of nuclear weapons, support to terrorism, and threats against its neighbors.

Although U.S. administration officials continue to state "all options" are on the table, Iran seemingly continues to hedge its bet that the military instrument will not be used against them in a lethal capacity. Prudently implemented, the military instrument provides a degree of influence needed to strengthen diplomatic and economic pressure against Iran. A more effective option then is a complete strategy integrating political,

economic, and military elements and seeing the matter through to a defined and achievable end.<sup>3</sup> Combined with his description of red lines, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta supports this approach saying, “I continue to believe that pressure – economic pressure, diplomatic pressure – and strengthened collective defenses are the right approach.”<sup>4</sup> Properly applied, the integration of the military instrument now could save the U.S. from a much larger investment of U.S. military power later.

### **Historic Failures of the Dual Track Approach**

The historic track record of engagement between the U.S. and Iran does not provide a solid foundation for optimism. In 1979, Tehran rebuffed then-President Jimmy Carter’s attempt to send the U.S. ambassador back to Tehran as a gesture of reestablishing relations following the Iranian revolution. President Ronald Reagan’s 1985 “secretive” attempts at engagement, later known as the Iran Contra Affair, ended in embarrassment – a major blunder involving the trade of arms for hostages and attempts to undermine the Iranian regime by strengthening Iranian moderates. Efforts of engagement and concessions through much of the late 1980s and 1990s by the George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations produced little impact on Iran’s behavior.

Engagement efforts of the Bush 43 administration with Iran were destined to fail when then-President George W. Bush identified Iran in the “axis of evil” along with Iraq and North Korea. Many critics speculate that this comment by Bush 43 closed an opening for engagement with Iran. Based on the proximity of U.S. forces in Iraq, critics argue that Iran changed behaviors based on a perceived imminent military threat. The Obama administration’s era of engagement began with three rounds of direct talks with Iran as well as two letters sent by President Barak Obama to the Iranian Supreme

Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. These efforts of engagement have not provided a foundation for renewed dialogue with Iran either.

Changing Iran's behavior through diplomatic efforts has proven to be a serious challenge. As a result, Iran sees their continued intransigence as eventually producing the outcomes they most desire; possession of nuclear capabilities and regional hegemony. Nonetheless, Iran's negative behavior denies them the credibility needed to leverage diplomacy as a means to reach agreeable solutions. The recent foiled assassination attempt on the Saudi ambassador to the United States, threats to close the Strait of Hormuz, clandestine operations of nuclear facilities, and the detention of a U.S. citizen whom Iran claims to be a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) spy are the latest acts and negative behavior that serve as barriers to diplomatic progress. Compounding the problem, Iran's suspicion of the U.S., its own perceived position of strength, and its perception that U.S. power is in decline, makes it increasingly difficult for Tehran to agree to offers of diplomacy. Changing these behaviors will require more than diplomatic rhetoric or economic pressure to which Iran has proven effective at absorbing.

Thirty years of sanctions have not made a profound impact on Iran's nuclear ambitions due in part to two interrelated factors. Iran has proven to be skilled in using subsidies and alternative approaches to receiving payment for oil sales to lessen the pressure of sanctions. High energy needs of developing countries and a lack of strict international adherence to sanctions further complicate the goal of altering Iran's behavior. In addition, surmounting sanctions have affected Iran's ability to conveniently acquire needed materials and high quality technology for its nuclear program. Recent oil

embargoes imposed by the European Union have also added even more strain to Iran's ability to generate much needed oil revenues.

Regardless, the fact that Iran boasts the third-largest proven oil reserves, the second largest gas reserves, and the second largest petrochemical manufacturing capability in the Middle East complicates multilateral enforcement of sanctions and the ability to cripple Iran's economy.

The list of sanctions against Iran is quite extensive. The U.S. Treasury website (2011) highlights 30-years of U.S. and UN sanctions represented in 18 executive orders (19 including the most recent E.O. 13382), 6 laws, 19 federal register notices and 5 UN Security Council resolutions related to the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>5</sup> Sanctions are a preferred alternative to the high costs of military options, but fall short of achieving the desired outcome of halting Iran's nuclear ambitions indefinitely.

International support is crucial for sanctions to exert any meaningful pressure on Iran. Nevertheless, some countries do not comply with sanctions against Iran as they are more costly than not complying. China serves as the biggest offender of this quasi compliance. Chinese trade with Iran was projected to reach \$40 billion in 2011, a \$10 billion increase from the previous year.<sup>6</sup> China continues to fill Iran's financial void even as EU and other Asian countries try to curtail their financial dealings with Iran.

China is not the sole offender that has aided Iran in avoiding some of the sting of sanctions. As reported by a 2010 Congressional Research Service Report, China, Japan, United Arab Emirates, India and South Korea followed China as Iran's top overall trading partners respectively.<sup>7</sup> With regard to exports Japan, India, and Turkey topped the list of Iran's commercial trade partners behind China.<sup>8</sup> In terms of oil

revenues, almost three-quarters of Iranian oil exports in the first 11 months of 2011 were purchased by four countries: China (27 percent), India (18 percent), South Korea (12 percent), and Japan (16 percent).<sup>9</sup> With trade partners of such magnitude, Iran is able to survive extensive and prolonged sanctions.

Inconsistent international adherence and Iran's economic adaptability to sanctions make it highly improbable that Iran will change its behavior. Even the latest round of sanctions signed into legislation by President Obama in February appears to had little visible effect on Iran's behavior though they have had a dramatic impact on their economy.

When a change to Iran's behavior is not achieved, applying increased sanctions is the standard U.S. response. This is evidenced by the most recent rounds of sanctions enacted in January 2012. This dynamic restarts the cycle of applied sanction, Iran's adjustment, sanction violations, and the U.S. response of applying harsher sanctions.

The military instrument must be integrated to create a more comprehensive approach to changing Iran's behavior. However, there is a reluctance to use the military instrument in ways that can alter or even change Iran's behavior.

### **Reluctance to Use Military Instrument**

Fear of high cost, miscalculation, and jeopardizing U.S. - allied cooperation are top reasons why the use of the military instrument is viewed as an unfavorable option. The high cost in lives and resources make use of the military instrument against Iran unappealing. Jeffrey White, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute asserts, "we are talking here about war, with attendant potential high costs to all combatants in terms of military casualties, civilian damage, and economic disruption."<sup>10</sup> In a time of fiscal

austerity, military operations in the Middle East are the last desire of the American public.

The danger of being drawn into direct conflict with Iran due to miscalculation weighs heavily on U.S. approaches towards Iran. Joint Chiefs Chairman, General Martin Dempsey, echoes similar sentiments in stating: “My biggest worry is they’ll miscalculate our resolve. Any miscalculation could mean that we’re drawn into conflict. And ... that would be a tragedy for the region and the world.”<sup>11</sup> The potential of miscalculating poses significant challenges to U.S. policy, therefore the military instrument is exclusively viewed as a last resort option when it is considered.

Fears of jeopardizing international cooperation also play a critical role in U.S. restraint placed on the military instrument. Any U.S. action against Iran would have to be weighed heavily against the views of the international community which at best are not in unison regarding Iran. Deputy Secretary of Defense, Ashton Carter asserts that a military strike without a wider strategy that was clearly understood and supported by these other nations would also likely cause them to distance themselves from the U.S.<sup>12</sup> Any U.S. unilateral action without the agreement of Russia, the European Union, or China runs the risk of reducing any future efforts for multilateral diplomacy. These three key players represent significant leverage in helping the U.S. to shape Tehran’s behavior.

Past reluctance to integrate the military instrument in any manner encourages Tehran’s negative behavior exemplified by Iran’s recent threats to close the Strait of Hormuz and military exercises initiated by the Revolutionary Guards Feb. 3, 2012 to signal Iran’s ability to subject its neighbors to “retaliatory aggression by our armed

forces.”<sup>13</sup> Iran however, does have much to fear and much to lose with any military action and this should be exploited by the U.S. to the fullest means available.

The military instrument must be used to play on Tehran’s fears. Military signaling and capabilities will convince Iran that their vital interests are vulnerable. Iran’s fears are inextricably linked to what they value. Staying in power and oil revenues are what Tehran values most.

Many experts agree that Iran’s core national security goals are “to protect itself from foreign, primarily U.S., interference or attack” that could unseat the regime.<sup>14</sup> The military instrument’s contribution to changing Tehran’s behavior hinges on the ability to explicitly target those key areas. A military focus on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) is the most direct approach to both of Iran’s vulnerabilities. The threat of military force focused on the IRGC would be viewed by Iran as a clear sign of regime change.

The IRGC is linked to multiple facets of protecting the regime. The IRGC is charged with defense of the regime and the country.<sup>15</sup> As examples, the IRGC oversees a robust apparatus of media resources, training activities, education programs designed to bolster loyalty to the regime, prepare the citizenry for homeland defense.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Patrick Clawson asserts that “the IRGC has become even more powerful, to the point that the regime’s survival and perhaps control are in its hands.”<sup>17</sup>

However, the IRGC forces are not without exploitable vulnerabilities. Kenneth Katzman concludes, “Iran’s armed forces are extensive but they are widely considered relatively combat ineffective.”<sup>18</sup> Exploiting IRGC’s vulnerabilities is synonymous with exploiting the regimes vulnerabilities. Tehran only has to look at recent examples to

confirm the link between a regime's powers and its security apparatuses: the defeat of the Republican Guard followed by the capture of Saddam Hussein to the military collapse of Moammar Qadafi's security forces that led to his capture and death. Regimes protected by military security apparatuses are highly vulnerable once the military forces themselves are the targets of aggression. Targeting the IRGC further complicates an internal political environment that is has "deep-seated" concerns about regime survival.<sup>19</sup>

Threats to oil revenues and export ability are another major fear of Iran. Tehran's ability to relieve the pressure of sanctions and continue their nuclear efforts is in part derived from receiving continued oil revenues. Oil revenue provides at least three-fourths of government income and at least 80 percent of export revenues. In addition, targeting the IRGC also places this highly valued capacity at risk. IRGC affiliates have assumed control over many remaining energy and construction projects.<sup>20</sup> Therefore targeting Iran's critical oil infrastructure also targets the IRGC. Iran's outdated drilling, transport, and refining facilities are easy targets for air attack.

Iran is apt to hedge on the assumption that their oil infrastructure is safe due to the importance and impact of Iranian oil to the global economy – but must be convinced otherwise based on military posturing. If Iran's oil capabilities were disabled, Iran could sustain itself for potentially up to a year with its foreign exchange reserves.

It is essential to play on Tehran's most critical fears through posturing of military capacities and signaling activities. Further, by focusing a majority of the military instrument activities on the IRGC removes much of the ambiguity as to U.S. intent. In conjunction with U.S. allies in the region, the military instrument would confirm to



Tehran that the cost of actions against the IRGC would far outweigh the benefit of any retaliatory actions from Tehran.

It is only through a comprehensive and robust three-pronged strategy of diplomacy, sanctions, and the credible threat of military force that the United States can hope to compel Iran to negotiate in earnest over its nuclear program.<sup>21</sup> As reinforcement of this idea, Ambassador and former Middle East special assistant to the Obama administration Dennis Ross asserts, “Diplomacy backed by coercion has always been a part of diplomacy done well.”<sup>22</sup> To be effective, coercive diplomacy requires the backing of a credible threat. To be credible, the military capability and capacity must reflect the political intent. It is only through this connection that a “three-pronged” policy approach will work.

The January 2012 Department of Defense strategic guidance, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense*, outlines the necessary framework to make such a “three-pronged” approach reality. The guidance states, “U.S. policy will emphasize Gulf security, in collaboration with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries when appropriate, to prevent Iran’s development of a nuclear weapon capability and counter its destabilizing policies.”<sup>23</sup> It goes on to state that, “whenever possible, we will develop innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches to achieve our security objectives, relying on exercises, rotational presence, and advisory capabilities.”<sup>24</sup> However, the U.S. has not “undertaken the necessary military preparations to convince Iran of its seriousness.”<sup>25</sup> And as asserted by Dennis Ross and David Makovsky In their book *Myths, Illusions, and Peace*, when the administration says that military force is not being taken off the table, it “must be more than a slogan.”<sup>26</sup>

To increase U.S. “believability,” definitive actions such as force posture adjustments, military exercises, and declaratory statements must be used in a concomitant fashion. To increase threat credibility and prove U.S. resolve among allies in the region, the military instrument must be used to shape ally and adversary perceptions and behavior.

Military shaping operations are conducted primarily to shape perceptions and influence adversaries and allies behavior.<sup>27</sup> Shaping is not an effort to deter, but a way to set conditions in the event deterrence is required or a crisis escalates.

### **Recommendations**

The 2012 Defense Strategic guidance represents a positive step in the direction of outlining ways to better integrate the military instrument with regard to Iran. To change Iran’s perceptions and behavior, there are three vital activities in which the U.S. must enact to convince Iran of its commitment to allies in the region and national security interests. The following recommendations focus on activities reflective of comprehensive shaping operations as means to influence Iran:

First, expansive military exercises, enable U.S. – Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) collaborative efforts to send clear signals that Iranian threats of any nature would be countered with collective, coordinated, and cohesive actions.

Second, presence in the Middle East must consist of a rebalanced mix of capabilities needed to establish a credible threat and strengthen diplomatic and economic pressures.

Third, and most importantly, the establishment of a red line would be necessary to illustrate the willingness to use force versus allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons.

## **Encouraging Regional Collaboration: Joint Exercises**

The GCC's capacity and collective willingness to overtly leverage existing technology and exploit Iranian vulnerabilities, lends credibility to the overall threats against Iran. The utility of approaches such as joint and multilateral exercises would have great effect in increasing GCC capacity to negate threats posed by Iran.

In addition, they allow the U.S. to leverage the GCC's ability to "share the costs and responsibilities of global leadership" by building GCC confidence in their capability and capacity to defend themselves against Iran.<sup>28</sup> Exercises allow the U.S. and GCC partners to exploit "our technological, joint, and networked advantage."<sup>29</sup> In recent years, the Bush and Obama administration announced billions in arms deals for the Persian Gulf States. Demonstrating the capability of equipment purchases through joint and multilateral exercises provide the GCC nations with a technological and psychological advantage against Iran. Further, exercises would underscore the readiness of GCC militaries which is a critical component to threat credibility.

Exercises would help convince Iran that their missile and rocket arsenals would be less effective against their Gulf neighbors. Air and missile defense systems purchased by the GCC from the U.S. are highly capable of defeating and countering the mixed bag of Iranian systems. A vulnerability of Iran's vast arsenal is the incompatibility of the systems. As an example, the ability of their Russian-made radar tracking systems to interface with U.S. or Chinese made missile intercept systems is technically unlikely at best and tactically unsound at worst. Further, Iran's ability to sustain disparate weapon systems is an interoperability challenge due to the munitions incompatibility of these systems. Exploiting this vulnerability discourages Iran from enacting a vital

behavior of intimidation through threat of missile and rocket attack. Therefore, Iran's capacity to sustain certain types of operations would be at risk.

U.S. and GCC exercises must occur on a consistent and frequent basis as a continual way to influence Iran's decision and risk calculus. CENTCOM conducts approximately 68 military exercises on a biannual and annual basis in the Middle East region.<sup>30</sup> A majority of these exercises are Computer-Assisted Exercises (CAX) using state of the art war-gaming technology as opposed to Field Training Exercises (FTX) which is troop and equipment-intensive. Eagle Resolve, a multilateral exercise hosted by UAE and in conjunction with their GCC partners in June 2011, is an optimal exercise model that incorporates a balance of CAX and FTX training opportunities. The Eagle Resolve exercise is part simulation and part practical application; the simulation portion is designed "to strengthen communication and interoperability" while the practical field events focus on "military and interagency consequence management and interdiction/border security."<sup>31</sup> New exercise models that achieve a balance of simulation and practical components, while providing an overt signal to Iran regarding GCC capabilities is added value regarding use of the military instrument.

To this extent, the synchronized and coordinated use of interoperable systems by the GCC, in conjunction with limited U.S. forces, would send clear signals to Iran. Iranian threats of any nature would be countered with overwhelming response. Further, enabling GCC countries to do more of the burden sharing with the U.S. military as supporting enablers meets the intent of using a high technology solution, a "small footprint" and a lowered cost by conducting more dual-focused exercises, (CAX / FTX) for shorter durations.

## **Force Presence**

Changing Iran's behavior requires rebalancing U.S. capabilities in the Middle East. The post Iraq and Afghanistan presence in the Middle East, must demonstrate to Iran that they are the central focus of U.S. and GCC military power. Adjusting U.S. capabilities and the capacity to execute sustained lethal operations against Iran provides an added degree of pressure on Iran. Tehran is quick to warn that pressure won't change their decision calculus, but the truth of the matter is that "when regimes say pressure won't work on them that is precisely what they are trying to head off".<sup>32</sup> As an example, Tehran's decision to suspend uranium enrichment in 2003 based on the U.S. invasion of Iraq provided an indication of Iran's willingness to adjust their behavior based on the perception of an imminent and credible U.S. military threat. A modified U.S. force presence in the Middle East is essential to adding to the cumulative pressure of sanctions to force a diplomatic solution. Force presence underscores three important factors of a credible threat: proximity, capability, and capacity.

The proximity of a threat to an adversary tends to have a profound effect on that adversary's decision calculus. Ross and Makovsky assert, "the prospect that Iran would face increased pre-emptive and retaliatory capabilities nearby" would give them reason to "consider the efficacy of their moves."<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Secretary Clinton alludes to the psychological effect of U.S. presence in the region stating that Iran "would be badly miscalculating if they did not look at the entire region and all of our presence in many countries in the region."<sup>34</sup>

However, maintaining the conditions to retain a mixture of permanent and rotational capabilities in the Middle East could be an issue. Vali Nasir confirms that

“Muslim public opinion is the achilles heel of U.S. alliances with Muslim-majority states.”<sup>35</sup> This opinion is even more pronounced with regard to U.S. presence in the region. To prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear capabilities requires Gulf governments continued support of U.S. presence in the region. When asked “How much, if at all, do you think U.S. bases in the Middle East are a threat to Iran”, a majority of Iranian respondents saw U.S. bases as a major threat.<sup>36</sup> A robust permanent presence is not required, but retention and ability to improve current facilities is essential to success.

U.S. capabilities, in conjunction with GCC militaries, must reflect an ability to deal with multiple contingencies and threats in a swift and decisive manner. The current capability footprint is sufficient to deal a significant blow to Iran’s military capabilities, communication infrastructure, and known nuclear facilities. However, capabilities focused specifically on Iran must have a better unity of effort, ability to partner and advise GCC militaries, and augment GCC capability gaps in order to underscore credibility of U.S. threats.

In addition, Iran’s reliance on human intelligence and covert operations is a critical vulnerability that is susceptible to direct and indirect influence.<sup>37</sup> Integration and training of GCC military forces on intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities would disrupt Iran’s terrorist activities. Increased intelligence collection and information sharing among GCC states would be an essential byproduct of these increase efforts. Used successfully in Iraq, U.S. Battle Field Surveillance Brigades (BFBS) offers more “precise” intelligence collection capabilities ranging from human to signals intelligence.<sup>38</sup> U.S. Army capabilities like BFBSs linked to U.S. Air Force and

Navy ISR networks is the model for “innovative” approaches focused on Iran and GCC capacity building.

### **Red Lines: The Last, Most Important Measure to Effect Results**

Red lines are critical to changing Tehran’s behavior. They represent “the application of coercion” necessary to surmount the diplomatic impasse with Iran.<sup>39</sup> As the link between U.S. military capability, capacity and political intent; red-lines represent thresholds that when crossed, trigger military retaliation. To this end, three reasons make it necessary to establish red lines: 1) reduce perceptions of a U.S. in decline 2) reassurance of allies 3) elimination of ambiguity associated with the increased costs of Iranian actions.

Red lines are necessary to reduce perceptions that could contribute to Iran’s calculus of miscalculation. Iran sees the U.S. as a power in decline. U.S. fiscal challenges combined with a shift in U.S. defense posture, priorities, and force structure changes, aid in feeding these perceptions.

Iran would at best be given reason to pause in their calculus based on an administration policy backed by overt signals such as exercises and capability adjustments in the region.

After the foiled Iranian assassination plot against the Saudi Ambassador on U.S. soil, Bahrain’s foreign minister stated, “We’re asking the U.S. to stand up for its interests and draw the red lines.”<sup>40</sup> Drawing this red line would confirm the President’s messaging that U.S. power is not in decline by virtue of a willingness to draw the proverbial line in the sand. Although this approach carries risk, it is a responsible way to assure allies and influence Iran. Critics of red lines see such measures as provoking Iran into

miscalculation. But these critics ignore the point that diplomatic or economic pressure could just as easily provoke miscalculation. The military instrument takes a brunt of the criticism as being the easiest path to escalation.

Second, establishing red lines is the lesser of two evils considering the alternative of a nuclear capable Iran and a Middle East nuclear arms race. The consequences of an emboldened Iran and U.S. allies seeking nuclear capabilities as a means of self-protection will become a reality as opposed to a distant fear. Vali Nasr asserts that the GCC states would opt to pursue “indigenous nuclear programs” if faced with negative perceptions regarding the U.S. ability to honor security guarantees.<sup>41</sup> To this end, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan and Egypt have all expressed interest in nuclear technology.<sup>42</sup> Not only does establishing red lines assure U.S. allies in the region, it also obligates those allies to accept the inherent risks of the red lines. As the lesser of two evils, mitigating the risks of red lines should be more acceptable than risk mitigation for a nuclear arms race in the Middle East.

Last, establishing red lines is a way to reduce ambiguity associated with U.S. intentions in the Middle East. Red-line proponents assert that these thresholds can decrease the ambiguity of U.S. policies.<sup>43</sup> Ambiguity is reduced by identifying a vital adversary action that once violated, will result in military retaliation. In this sense, every action cannot be deemed vital based on the cost and consequences of retaliation. To decrease the ambiguity, red lines must be enforced and unambiguously defined.

A red line must be a single trigger mechanism, and not a series of triggers commonly referred to as “pink lines.” Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, as well as other administration officials have made it clear what the red line is; “The U.S. does not



want Iran to develop nuclear weapons”...”that’s a red line for us.”<sup>44</sup> Although this red line has been phrased differently by various administration officials, the intent behind the phrasing is similar even though the message may be interpreted differently. Nonetheless, Iran has engaged in brazen provocations in recent years -- including mock attacks on U.S. vessels, the seizure of Western hostages, and attacks on U.S. targets -- that have provoked limited Western response.<sup>45</sup> In this sense, “from Iran’s perspective, a whole series of U.S. red lines became pink when Iran actually crossed the line.”<sup>46</sup>

The latter perspective of red lines that fade to “pink” once crossed undermines the credibility of U.S. retaliation measures. In this sense, U.S. retaliation is likely to be avoided. In making a definitive statement to Iran, tit for tat actions will not suffice in changing Tehran’s behavior. Confirming the perception that all means will be used once a red line is crossed will reduce any level of uncertainty regarding cost to Iran. This perspective views red lines as fixed and are not subject to fading to pink. Once the line is crossed, retaliation is inevitable; the line is the line. If every provocation is deemed vital, then no provocation is vital nor are the retaliation measures. To this end, additional red lines must be held to a minimum. As an example, Panetta’s statement on Iran’s threats to close the Strait of Hormuz, “that’s another red line for us and that we will respond to them.”<sup>47</sup> Due to the effect that this would have on the global economy, international pressure would probably prevent this from occurring and therefore eliminating the need for the U.S. to add this to a running “series” of red lines.

A red line must be broadly defined with narrowly scoped metrics. Defining a red line precisely makes the line unambiguous. Clear metrics confirm or deny the necessity to retaliate. If a red line is defined too narrowly or as a “series,” it could lead Iranians to

assume “we can do everything up to that red line” with impunity.<sup>48</sup> Every provocation enacted by Iran serves as an indicator and / or warning that inform the decision to retaliate. These indicators and warnings confirm or deny Iran’s intent. If the U.S. misreads any of these actions, Iran willingly accepts the consequences of playing a strategic game of limbo. Based on their actions, Iran bears the burden of proof to clarify their intentions.

Establishing red lines linked to sufficient and strategically postured military force are the essential conditions required to compliment diplomatic coercion and economic pressure. Diplomacy and economic pressure alone has not worked as National Security Advisor, Tom Donilon sums it up wisely as, “Put simply, the Iranian regime has not yet fundamentally altered its behavior.”<sup>49</sup> Although not in relation to red lines, John Limbert suggests “Thirty-two years of sanctions and bluster haven’t worked. It’s time to try something different.”<sup>50</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The optimal solution to breaking the nuclear impasse with Iran is diplomacy. However, preventing Iran from proceeding with their nuclear ambitions cannot be left to a “dual track” of economic sanctions and dormant diplomacy. Iran’s dual track approach of offering talks while continuing to build nuclear capabilities has arguably proven more effective than the U.S. dual track. Trading space for time has enabled Iran, albeit slowly, to move dangerously close to achieving their nuclear ambitions.

To consider sanctions and dormant diplomacy a dual track approach with regard to Iran is close to conceding to failure. Additionally, the U.S. is limiting “all options” by undervaluing the military instrument. In order to affect or change Iran’s behavior, all

instruments of national power must be used in coordination. Unless the military instrument is better integrated into U.S. policy to change Iran's behavior, the reality of a nuclear armed Iran will occur sooner rather than later.

The consequences of a nuclear capable Iran and GCC states likely to acquire their own nuclear security blankets present a much greater threat to the world. The cost of managing the risk of potential escalation with Iran outweighs the cost of a world with a Middle East nuclear arms race.

Integration of the military instrument to shape Iran's behavior and influence their actions is essential to bolster U.S. policy in the region. Building GCC military capacity through combined and multilateral exercises, tailoring the force posture of U.S. capabilities in the region, and emphasizing the intent to protect U.S. vital interest through red lines is essential to changing Iran's behavior.

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<sup>23</sup> Leon Panetta, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, January 2012), 2.

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