
Nuclear Iran facing the USA¹

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Abstract:Iran's efforts to endow nuclear capacities date back to the Shah's era, and were at that time developed through a close collaboration with the USA. Those plans were presented as civil programmes, but comprised, beyond any doubt, some military potentialities. As a first step, the 1979 Islamic Revolution completely interrupted any activity in this field. But more recently, uranium enrichment activities were developed to a pace that triggered the reaction of the USA, preoccupied by the potentiality to see a nation of the 'Axis of evil' to endow massive destruction weapons. Although they did not find any proof of any prohibited activity, IAEA inspections did not dissipate the doubts, and pressure grew up against Teheran (such as sanctions taken by the Security Council). Nevertheless, it may be thought that the line taken by Teheran is more subtle, and does not consist in having the nuclear weapon, but rather to be in a position to have it.

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1 Introduction

In July 2007, nuclear issues have been showing up. It is common knowledge that North Korea has decided to shut down the Yongbyon power plant, according to the 13 February agreement on KPDR (Korea People's Democratic Republic) denuclearisation. North Korea agreed to have IAEA inspectors visit the place. This power plant, cocooned as per the 1994 agreement with the USA, was recommissioned in 2003, during the second nuclear crisis. That decision was a major step in the normalisation process that took place with the KPDR, and that underwent crucial periods.²

Iran, on the other hand, publicised an agreement with the AEIA, aiming at authorising inspectors to visit the Arak site reactor, a decision that could anticipate a resumption of international talks on this conflicting matter.

The Brazilian President announced on 11 July 2007 that his country was ready to spend 1 billion Reïs³ on a nuclear programme, so as to finance research on enrichment processes aimed at energy production.⁴ Brazil was not the only Latin America country to develop nuclear technologies: Argentina and Mexico were doing likewise. But the Brazilian President went one step further as he suggested: ‘Why don’t we dream of bigger things? We could even endow ourselves with a nuclear submarine’. That obviously goes beyond civil technologies. In the past, Brazil was already on the verge of conflicting with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), when they refused to grant access to Agency inspectors to Brazilian plans, alleging spying risks.

In France, Nicolas Sarkozy, who announced during the presidential campaign that dissuasion will be subject to a cost-efficiency optimisation, committed during his visit to the Ile Longue to provide ‘required means’ to the National Security.⁵

In Russia, the setting up of the Atomenergoprom,⁶ announced in 2006, will allow, from its early days in 2008, to integrate the entire process from uranium mining, and fuel manufacturing, to erection of power plants. This huge group positioned Russia on the same foot as French (Areva), American (General Electric), and Japanese (Toshiba-Westinghouse) companies, and initiated an international network of enrichment plans, controlled by the IAEA, thus limiting proliferation risks.

That is the context in which the Iranian nuclear industry issue should be looked at, that goes far beyond the sole responsibility of this country.

2 Iran and nuclear power: a long story

2.1 US and Europe assistance

In the early 1950s, Iran, under the leadership of Shah Reza Pahlavi, after Mossadegh was overthrown, initiated a relationship with USA on nuclear issues. In a splendid speech given in 1953 to the United Nations, Eisenhower kicked off the *Atoms for Peace* programme (Eisenhower, 2003). Within that framework the Teheran Nuclear Research Center (TNRC)⁷ was constituted in 1959 in Teheran and headed by the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization (IAEO). The USA delivered a research reactor, running on highly enriched uranium.⁸ Bilateral agreements signed between those two countries in the 1960s enabled the Iranians to develop their activity in this field.

After the first oil crisis, Iran envisaged, under different views, both their energy supply and their military equipment. The Shah accelerated the acquisition of military equipment (F-14 Tomcat, the only country apart from the USA that owns this aircraft), thus positioning his country as the ‘policeman of the Gulf’. The new status acquired with oil as the energy source involved a long-term less costly management. Therefore, an important nuclear power programme implementation was started, at the same time as significant countries (such as France) started wide-scale programmes. Stanford Research Institute issued a survey that estimated the needs of the country around the 1990s to be in the vicinity of 20,000 MW. Thus, the USA encouraged Iran to develop its own non-oil-based energy production means. The Shah proposed to build 23 nuclear power stations, and his

government contracted with Siemens⁹ to build two 1200 MW reactors for the Bushehr site, whose erection started in 1974, as well as a contract with Framatome for two pressurised water reactors in Darkhovin.¹⁰

Iran invested a 1 billion US dollar share (10%) in the Eurodif consortium for the erection of the Tricastin enrichment plant in France. France also delivered the technical assistance required to build the Esfahan Nuclear Technology Center. Four Chinese research reactors will be operated in this Center. In the following year, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) signed with the IAEO an agreement for training a first group of nuclear engineers, and India, that became a military nuclear power in 1974, entered into a nuclear cooperation treaty with Iran.

In 1976, Iran contributed to the financing of an enrichment plan in South Africa, and received 700 million dollars' worth of uranium ore. In 1977, the American government anticipated supplying eight power stations to Teheran,¹¹ and in July 1978 reached a global agreement to supply nuclear equipment, enabling Iran to dispose of the American technology.

Civil features of the Iranian nuclear programme in the era of the Shah, as such summarised, are hardly debatable. It is plain that the Shah engaged in an ambitious nuclear power production programme, following the example of France and Japan, both non-oil-producing countries, and of the USA, in contrast a large oil-producing country. The long-term vision on oil resource exhaustion and the likely shortage with regard to the demographic growth of the country persuaded the Shah to look for alternative sources, such as nuclear power.

The military features of the Iranian nuclear programme in this period were rather controversial, to say the least. IAEO founding member and former president (1974–1978), Akbar Etemad, mentioned trials undertaken with plutonium extracted from the reactor fuel (Etemad, 1987). At that time, several witnesses close to the Shah, such as former minister Asadollah Alam, hinted at a research team on nuclear weapons in the Teheran Research Center, and believed that the Shah had the will to raise Iran to military nuclear power status.

2.2 The Islamic revolution disrupted the deal

In February 1979, the overthrow of the Shah Government opened up a new era when the nuclear programme was overshadowed to begin with, both because the new government did not require it any more, and because Western powers no longer wished to equip the country.

At that time, the Bushehr site reactor erection was not yet complete, and the Bazargan government put a stop to it, and foreign contractors left. During the Iraqi war, the site was almost completely razed to the ground by repeated shelling.¹²

Once the war was over, several attempts were made under Rafsanjani's presidency to renew connections with Western companies, in particular to have Kraftwerk Union deliver spares parts and technical documentation on the Bushehr reactors, which the German company¹³ refused to do under American pressure. The same opposition from the USA prevented a consortium of Argentinean, German, and Spanish companies to further the site erection, and, in the 1980s, the Spanish National Institute for Industry and Nuclear Equipment to complete the project.

Likewise, in 1993, the Italian company Ansaldo, and in 1994, the Czech company

Skoda were compelled, under American boycott threat, to suspend commercial negotiations. This suspension of relationship led Iran to look towards Russia and China. In 1991, the latter country delivered two tons of uranium, partly as hexafluoride (UF₆)¹⁴ and partly as tetrafluoride (UF₄)¹⁵, and in 1995, Iran signed a contract with Russia to complete the Bushehr site plant, under AEIA supervision, despite pressures from Clinton administration on their Russian counterparts.

However, it was in a later period that American concerns grew.

3 The nuclear ‘crisis’

In January 2002, President Bush denounced, in a State of the Union speech, the ‘Evil Axis’ constituted of Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. The Iraqi war took weapons of mass destruction as an excuse, although no evidence substantiated it. North Korea was already on the American radar for their nuclear activities. In this context, in August 2002, a Moudjahidine People representative, working for the American channel Fox News, disclosed that non-declared nuclear installations did exist in Natanz (enrichment plant), south of Teheran, and in Arak (heavy water production). Those revelations, which lent some credit to the statement of the American President, were the starting point of the ‘Iranian nuclear crisis’, and during 2002, American pressure grew to denounce the alleged will of Iran to gain nuclear weapons.

3.1 2003 to 2005: the growth of tension

The tension grew during 2003. In February 2003, IAEA General Manager Mohamed El Baradei inspected Natanz site: it was fitted with 160 centrifuges, and owned the parts necessary to assemble another 1000 (Jolicoeur, 2003). The centrifugation process is a way to enrich uranium in much less conspicuous conditions than with more developed processes. The report issued by Mohamed El Baradei in June highlighted that ‘Iran failed to meet its duty to report on certain materials and activities’. Subsequently, he requested ‘cooperative actions’ from the country. However, this situation was not seen as a breach of the NPT, which Iran signed in 1968 and ratified two years later. As a result, a series of negotiations was initiated to set up tougher inspections: on the one hand, a group of IAEA inspectors, led by its Managing Director, went to Iran, and on the other hand, Foreign Affairs Ministers from France, the UK, and Germany, Dominique de Villepin, Jack Straw and Joschka Fischer, visited Teheran together to discuss with President Khatami Iranian cooperation with the international community on their nuclear programme, and with the IAEA, on the basis of the resolution passed one month earlier in Vienna by the IAEA Governors Council. Teheran agreed to freeze its enrichment activities. Following that visit, the IAEA reported that Iran provided a ‘comprehensive declaration’ of its nuclear programme, and the report stipulated that Iran acknowledged having produced plutonium, but ‘there is no evidence that the country is trying to build an atomic bomb’.¹⁶ Washington argued that the report cannot be believed, but the document was validated by UNO. In December, Teheran signed a protocol, additional to the NPT, authorising the IAEA to arrange for unscheduled and more in-depth inspections of nuclear facilities.

The year 2004 witnessed a new confrontation, again settled through a compromise: in June, the IAEA Governors Council passed a resolution highlighting some omissions in the Iranian declarations, and Mohammed El Baradei announced that Teheran’s cooperation

was 'less than satisfactory'. In July, Iran removed the seals put in Natanz by IAEA, and announced that the installation of centrifuges would proceed. The Agency unanimously (including Russia and China) passed a resolution calling on the country to suspend all activities related to uranium enrichment. Iran replied that although they wished to negotiate with the European troika, they would never drop their right to enrich uranium. Negotiations in November ended up in a three-month suspension of the programme, so as to enable more in-depth discussions with UE.

Similar events happened in 2005: IAEA inspection missions in Natanz in June; an unsuccessful attempt by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to oppose Mohammed El Baradei, whose positions were deemed insufficiently 'tough', to be re-elected as head of the Agency; resumption of conversion (apart from enrichment), in the Isfahan works, which resulted in the suspension of the negotiations with EU3; during a UNO summit, the new Iranian President Ahmadinejad proposed that foreign companies should take part in the Iranian nuclear programme, thus ensuring some 'control'.

3.2 Security Council resolutions

The 2006–2007 period witnessed a tension increase: the six-point Iranian proposals were turned down by Europeans. In February, the IAEA passed by 27 votes against three Iran deferral before the Security Council. Afterwards, Iran decided to lower its voluntary cooperation with the IAEA, and to resume uranium enrichment. In March, the Security Council requested Iran to meet the IAEA's demands within a deadline of 30 days. Iran having failed to fulfil this demand, the Council passed in July by 14 votes out of 15 Resolution 1696 (Qatar voted against it), which made the suspension by Iran of all enrichment and reprocessing related activities compulsory, and anticipated that, should Iran further fail to meet all their obligations, the Council would work on the adoption of steps in connection with Article 41 chapter VII of the Charter. Meetings of the EU Representative with Iranian officials in September did not produce any concrete result, and the EU3+3 Group¹⁷ decided to speed up the implementation of UNO Security Council decisions. In December 2006, the Council passed Resolution 1737 unanimously, which made compulsory the suspension of all heavy water and enrichment related activities in Iran, including research and development. During the first 2006 term, the IAEA put on hold 22 out of 55 technical assistance programmes in Iran. In March, they again passed Resolution 1747 unanimously, which stiffened the position, and anticipated new measures covering mainly two fields: armament (Iran was banned to export any weaponry, and a general call for watchfulness and limitation with regard to exportation of certain weapons towards Iran), and financial relationship between the Iranian government and other States, or with international financial establishments.

3.3 Iranian installations

As of today (July 2007), Iran has research reactors in the Isfahan and Teheran Technology Centers, power-producing reactors in the Bushehr site, an enrichment plant in Natanz, installations (heavy water producing plant and a 40 MW reactor) in the Arak site, and the fuel-producing plant in Ardankan. Besides these, the IAEA is in charge of the Bonab (agricultural applications) and the Karaj (nuclear medicine) Research Centers. Uranium deposits have been mined in Bandar Abbas, Yazd Saghband and Anarak. The Lashkar Ab'ad

isotopic separation plant has been shut down, since Iran gave up that technology. The allegations of a secret site in Chalus and of a former site in Lavizan have never been proved.

All these installations have been identified and have been under satellite watch.

4 Is Iran building a bomb?

This project, ascribed to Iran, has relied on economic ‘evidence’ (since Iran does have oil, they do not need nuclear power) and on technical ‘indications’. However, the evidence and other indications are debatable.

4.1 To manage oil

One of the arguments put forward by the American administration to ‘substantiate’ the Iranian duplicity consists in saying that a country so richly endowed with oil as Iran does not really need to build a park of nuclear plants to have power, and that the civil will therefore hides in reality dark intentions.

Iran is the fourth largest oil producer in the world (185 millions tons in 2003; Collicard, 2003), after Russia, Saudi Arabia, and the USA,¹⁸ and their reserves (18 billion tons) are second in the world, after Saudi Arabia (35 billion tons). However, the argument deserves to be looked at more closely. Even if it is true that in the past, some countries (France, Germany, Japan in particular) that began considerable nuclear power station programmes did so in order to compensate for their lack of oil resources, some other oil-rich countries (the USA and Russia) have built a large number of nuclear power stations. The will to diversify the sources as well as to anticipate the dwindling of reserves can explain such decisions. In the Iranian case, they have some value. It is also to be noted that the Iranian position within the oil market has weakened: in 1973, Iran, with a production of 293 million tons, fulfilled more than 10% of world production, whereas in 2000, its production of 186 million tons fulfilled only 5.2%.¹⁹ Besides, the present condition of Iranian oil installations is causing concern, owing to insufficient investment, and precludes undoubtedly a drop in production, estimated at 10–12% per year (Stern, 2007), particularly since the National Iranian Oil Company is in no position to retrofit alone the installations owing to a lack of technology and of sufficient resources. Furthermore, oil makes up the bulk of the external Iranian resources,²⁰ and almost half of their financial resources. Lastly, since the era of the first oil shock, demographic pressure has drastically increased, since in slightly more than 30 years the population has doubled and reached 70 million inhabitants.

In these circumstances, the prospect of saving this scarce resource for use over a longer term has some credibility: even richly endowed countries may have a true economic interest in developing alternative power sources. From that viewpoint, the fact that Iran has natural resources does not negate the hypothesis that their nuclear developments are truly aimed at setting up a civil power production.

4.2 Indications but not proof

Part of the prevailing discourse relies on technical ‘indications’ aiming at demonstrating that a secret programme does exist, following the example of what happened in Saddam

Hussein's Iraq before 1991. The discussion may even be extremely sophisticated, and the diversity of arguments, albeit none clearly convincing, has a cumulative effect, which creates the impression that there is really 'something to it'.

Furthermore, insisting on the 'hidden' features of 'underground' and 'concealed' installations does heighten the suspicion of treachery with regard to international rules, and in particular with regard to the NPT. Enrichment activity is not, from a legal point of view, literally in breach of the international rules, and, in particular, in breach of the NPT, and Iran was not even in a position to be compelled to report immediately on those activities, in particular as far as the Arak reactor is concerned, because it will not be commissioned before 2014. However, that has not prevented the USA from disseminating allegations that rely more on convictions rather than on facts, as declared, among others, by the US Ambassador, seconded to the IAEA, Gregory Schulte:

"Iran's nuclear activities do not tally with a civil energy programme, of which more and more countries are convinced. Those countries reached the same conclusion than USA: the Iranian nuclear programme, with its associated secrecy, its connections with the A.Q. Khan network and with the Iranian military authorities, is in reality a blanket on the nuclear weapons development programme." (USINFO, 2006)

It clearly appears that failing to declare may rightly raise questions, but this is not sufficient to conclude that a military programme exists, otherwise one should apply the same questioning to countries that did not accept IAEA inspections, as was the case for South Korea when that country refused in 2002 and 2003 to let plants working on a laser-based enrichment programme be inspected, a programme that enabled them to produce 78% enriched ²³⁵U, without the USA and the EU referring the matter to the Security Council (Varadarajan, 2005). In contrast, the Iranian refusal in January 2007 to let 38 AEIA inspectors enter was seen by State Department spokesman Sean McCormack as 'an example of the Iranian government's will to dictate their wishes to the International Community' (USINFO, 2007).

In reality, the only non-debatable conclusion drawn from the hundreds of inspections carried out in Iran is that there is no proof of the existence of a hidden military programme. This statement is not equivalent to stating that the military option does not exist in the Iranian leaders' minds. However, this issue is one that must be tackled separately.

5 USA and Iran: a political confrontation

5.1 Iran: another proliferator?

It is hardly enough to say that Iranian power features did not plead in their favour: the 'Ayatollahs regime',²¹ their religious fundamentalism, the discrimination of all kinds against women, create, in the Western opinion, a very negative image, to the extent that, for example, President Khatami's overtures were virtually ignored. Khatami, the then president, issued repeated calls for 'civilised' talks, and provided a valuable assistance to the USA in Afghanistan when they overthrow the Taliban regime. In May 2003, in Geneva, Teheran's leaders submitted to American representatives a three-theme global negotiation proposal: weapons of mass destruction; terrorism and security; and economic cooperation (Gresh, 2007). The Islamic Republic declared itself ready to support the Arabic peace initiative of the Beirut summit (2002), and to contribute to the conversion of

the Lebanese Hezbollah into a proper political party.

On a properly nuclear basis, in December 2003 Iran signed an additive protocol to the NPT (a protocol not signed by the USA) that strengthened the surveillance capabilities of the IAEA, and in August 2005, Ayatollah Khamenei, supreme leader of the revolution, issued a fatwa forbidding nuclear weapon production, storage and use.

Nonetheless, positions and initiatives taken by President Ahmadinejad, in particular as far as Israel is concerned, and on Jewish extermination did succeed in building up an image of Iran likely to create fear, and to make plausible a concealed move of this country to acquire nuclear weapons. More than North Korea, remote in the eyes of Westerners and too wretched to be seen as a real threat, the image of Iran did snowball as an evil figure, and of the absolute evil kind in this century: nuclear proliferation.

Yet, proliferation is not so much a novelty: there are currently more than 1100 nuclear reactors in the world: 280 are research ones, 400 propel ships or submarines, and 438 deliver electrical energy,²² and it is well known that after Anglo Saxon powers, all countries in turn that acquired the nuclear weapon were in the first instance seen as proliferators threatening worldwide stability, not only USSR, or later Maoist China, but even France, as declared Robert McNamara, US Secretary of State for Defence in his speech given in Ann Arbor in June 1962:

“In short, limited nuclear installations operated independently are dangerous, expensive, and tend to become rapidly obsolete.” (McNamara, 1962, quoted by Melandri, 1979)

Whether Israel, and more recently India and Pakistan, became nuclear powers without forming part of the NWEAC (Nuclear Weapon Endowed Countries), as defined by the NPT, one must not forget that other states did elect to give up going any further in the military nuclear technology, such as Brazil, Argentina, and Sweden, and that other states did give up their nuclear weapons, such as South Africa, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Byelorussia. The assessment of the proliferation is less frightening than what is being said, especially if one consents to separate nuclear weapons from other so-called ‘weapons of mass destruction’.²³

Besides, it is well known that nuclear proliferation is not only horizontal (the fact that new participants own the nuclear weapon), but also vertical, meaning that new nuclear weapons are developed. For example, this is the case with the American ‘mini nukes’ (low power bombs). Actually, this type of proliferation is mainly due to the great powers, and not to Iran or other countries ‘tempted’ by the nuclear adventure.

One may even add that what is really noteworthy in this field is the way events have so far invalidated Admiral Castex’s prediction: in October 1945, this great strategist wrote:

“It is hardly plausible that, in the future, the secrecy of an atomic bomb will remain the prerogative of a unique country / . . . / On the contrary, it is likely that all nations will intensely work on the issue, embarking their scientists and inventors on this track, and allocating huge funds to that research. We are thus entitled to think that everybody, or at least States mastering a fairly developed scientific, industrial, and economic potential, will know and will be able to manufacture atomic bombs, and that this manufacturing will go over to a relatively public domain.” (Castex, 1945)

5.2 *The worldwide threat according to the USA*

These observations do not justify at all a sort of ‘general right to proliferation’, in particular if it comes in breach of the NPT commitments; however they allow one to put the discourse on the issue in perspective, especially when the discourse becomes frightening.

So, again according to Gregory Schulte, the completion of the Iranian nuclear programme will constitute ‘a threat for States neighbouring Iran, and a threat for the worldwide community’.²⁴ According to First Deputy State Under Secretary of Middle East Affairs Bureau, James Jeffrey, ‘the entire world is threatened by the Iran nuclear armament programme’ (Kaufman, 2006), an affirmation repeated by Gregory Schulte, who was a very passionate US ambassador to the IAEA: ‘Should Iran be endowed with the nuclear weapon, they would make a threat to weigh upon the entire world’ (Schulte, 2007). US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated: ‘I think that everybody will understand that a growing nuclear threat emanates from Iran and that means we are required to face this problem.’ (2007)

So as to better weaken the Iranian position, American leaders highlighted that the only States to support Iran were Syria, Byelorussia, Venezuela, and Cuba, ‘a notorious bunch’ according to Political Affairs State Undersecretary Nicholas Burns (Aita, 2007a).

Eventually, the American line was obvious: to prevent Iran progressing on nuclear technologies, owing to the fact that in this field, civil and military knowledge are very close: ‘The world is not prepared to see them endowed with enrichment and reprocessing technologies, that could easily provide the capability to manufacture a nuclear weapon’, said Condoleezza Rice (Shelby, 2006).

5.3 *To compel Iran by all means*

In order to meet their goal, the USA combined a series of means. First, they mobilised international pressure through the UN Security Council. Russia and China adhered to American positions, either because they preferred to see the future power of Iran under control, or because they accepted implicitly a distribution of the influence zones: to Washington the Iranian issue, and to Beijing the Korean issue. The European troika, after a beginning that seemed to show a position distinct from that of the USA, ended up agreeing with it, to the extent that one could hardly tell what differentiated them. Thus, the European Union did not consider the Iranian proposals to set an enrichment joint venture, which was submitted as an actual way to control activities.

Also, the USA increased the economic pressures on the Teheran regime through the UNO channel and externally. Through Resolution 1737, the Security Council forbade any equipment or techniques trade related to Iranian nuclear activities, froze financial assets related to the nuclear programme, and prohibited the main leaders of nuclear activities to travel in foreign countries.

As long ago as December 2006, the American authorities highlighted through their IAEA representative’s voice:

“States, enterprises, and market driving forces already impose actual sanctions that penalize the Iranian government owing to its bad behaviour and its ill economic politics. European banks restricted their transactions with Iran. Multinational companies refrained to invest in this country. Japan restricted their investments in the operations of oil deposits.”²⁵

This will to isolate Iran, led the American Administration to apply pressure on transnational companies, so as to get them to go beyond the Security Council resolutions: 'Given the International Community reactions to Iranian actions, international companies should as from now take into account "very actual" facts when they consider investments in Iran, in particular as far as their image is concerned', declared State Department spokesman Sean McCormack.²⁶

At length, Resolution 1747 weighed down on the sanctions passed on December 2006. They were directed at setting a global embargo on Iranian weapons export. It notably urged 'all States to show vigilance and restraint as far as direct or indirect deliveries, sales, or transfers (. . .) of tanks, combat armour, big calibre artillery systems, war aircrafts, attack helicopters, warships, missiles and missile launchers²⁷ are concerned', and entreated States 'not to subscribe to new commitments aimed at financial subvention, or loan granting, accompanied by liberal conditions to the Iran Islamic Republic, except for humanitarian and development purposes'. It also required Member States 'to show vigilance and restraint as far as admission or transit passage on their territory of persons who take part, or are directly involved or support Iranian nuclear activities that constitute a proliferation or a nuclear weapon vehicle development risk.' (Aita, 2007b)

Given the Iranian state's dependency on others, those pressures did have some effect, and produced certain dissensions within the Teheran power structure.

Lastly, the USA handled military threats: the most conspicuous one was the actual deployment of strength in the zone, with the installation of batteries of Patriot missile air defence systems, and the dispatch of a second aircraft carrier to the Persian Gulf (Crawley, 2007), rather in the same way as the installation of missile defence systems in Poland and the Czech Republic. Thus, European and Asian Affairs Deputy State Secretary Daniel Fried, after having explained that the deployment of this system in Central Europe did not aim at re-questioning the cooperation relationship between Russia and the USA, clarified: 'its effectiveness against the Iranian threat and its advantages for Europe are obvious' (Porth, 2007).

Military pressure was not restricted to threats. It is known that American commandos manoeuvred from inside Iran as from summer 2004 (Gardinier, 2006). Alain Gresh restated that 'Numerous sources confirm that the United States intensified support to several armed ethnically based movements – Azeris, Balochs, Arabs, Kurds, all minorities that altogether make up some 40% of the Iranian population – in the intention to destabilize the Islamic Republic.' (Gresh, 2007) In the USA, the ABC channel maintained that President Bush authorised the CIA to carry out secret operations aimed at destabilising the regime, and the Iranian government raised on 27 May before the Swiss Ambassador, representing the American interests, a forceful protest against the 'American services interference' (Lesnes, 2007).

More globally, American authorities emphasised that Resolution 1747 put Iran under the threat of sanctions as per Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which means the possibility of military action!²⁸

6 Conclusion

Despite the American discourse, the reality of an Iranian nuclear threat is not considered as a plausible hypothesis, at least because of the small distance that separates them. Iran

could yet make the most of 'good reasons' to have such armament, as it is highlighted by Bertrand Badie: 'Inside a "nuclearized" Middle-East, the Iranian search for this type of armament, even if it is not explicit, is understandable as well as unavoidable' (Badie, 2007). However, one may think that the line followed is more subtle and does not consist in having the nuclear weapon, but to be in a position to have it, which gives in turn a certain number of advantages so as to avoid being treated like the baasist regime. Indeed, if the Iranian goal to be a local power is fairly obvious, the fear of international intervention is no doubt as important among the political choices of the country, and partly explains the Iranian 'obstinacy'. From that viewpoint, François Nicoullaud restated recently that facing the American rationale to enter into the path of force, there is a perspective shown by IAEA Managing Director and Peace Nobel Prize Mohammed El Baradei, who is in a fair position to formulate a few proposals: 'It is a question of putting between brackets, at least for some time, our pressures and sanction threats, and to accept that Iran may carry out, as they wish, centrifugation activities, yet closely supervised by a specific agreement' (2007).

If only, for this reasonable path to be taken, European countries would dare to conduct a self-sufficient policy, which is far from being the case.

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Notes

- ¹ This paper was previously published in French in *Recherches internationales*, No. 79, July/August/September, 2007.
- ² *Le Monde*, 17 July 2007.
- ³ Euro 400 millions US\$ 600 millions.
- ⁴ *Le Figaro*, 13 July, 2007.
- ⁵ *Le Monde*, 15 July 2007.
- ⁶ *Le Monde* 5 July 2007.
- ⁷ In French : Centre de Recherches Nucléaires de Téhéran (CRNT).
- ⁸ This 5 MW reactor was commissioned in 1967, and was designed to produce 600 g plutonium per year.
- ⁹ With Kraftwerk Union subsidiary.
- ¹⁰ The contract was to be declared void in 1979 after the Islamic Revolution.
- ¹¹ According to the communication given by the State representative to the 'The US and Iran, An Increasing Partnership.', as quoted by Mohammad Sahili, Payvand's Iran News, 10/02/03.
- ¹² March 1984, February 1985, March 1985, July 1986, two shellings in November 1987.
- ¹³ Which yet was paid.
- ¹⁴ UF₆ is a gaseous form of uranium that allows the enrichment process with centrifuges.
- ¹⁵ This UF₄ was mainly converted into metallic uranium, which is used neither in light water reactors nor in heavy water ones.
- ¹⁶ See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/world/middle_east/3210412.stm

- ¹⁷ France, UK, Germany plus USA, Russia and China.
- ¹⁸ Respectively 485, 417 and 285 millions tons in 2003. Source: OPEC *Annual Statistical Bulletin* 2003 and CNUCED (www.unstad.org), quoted by Collicard (2003).
- ¹⁹ See 'La production de pétrole dans le monde en 1973 et 2000' ('The worldwide petroleum production'). http://www.industrie.gouv.fr/energie/statisti/se_petmp.htm
- ²⁰ 70–80% according to Albert Légault (2007).
- ²¹ The locution went down to common language as a synonym of fanatical and reactionary fundamentalism.
- ²² Out of which 104 were in the United States, 59 in France, 53 in Japan, 29 in Russia, 19 in Germany – Mahammad Sahimi, 'Iran's nuclear program', Payvand's Iran News. <http://www.payvand.com/news/03/oct/1015.html>.
- ²³ Concerning the ambiguity and the limitation of this locution, see Hébert, 2004.
- ²⁴ Conference held in United Arab Emirates on November 13th 2006 (see Crawley, 2006).
- ²⁵ USINFO January 10 2007. Speech in Rabat on January 9 2007.
- ²⁶ USINFO 25 January 2007, January 22 declaration.
- ²⁷ It is here all about the categories of the war weaponry catalogue, as used by the UNO register with regard to standard weapon transfers.
- ²⁸ Chapter VII of the Charter grants to United Nations legitimacy to carry out coercive military actions so as to ensure international peace and security, which is why they have been created. It is stipulated that should the Security Council fail through peaceful means to prevent a situation to deteriorate, they may 'undertake through airborne, naval, or ground forces any action that they deem necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security' (UNO Charter, article 42). This disposition opens up paths to Blue Helmets deployment inside a hostile environment, where they are entitled to open fire to enforce their mandate. [<http://www.operationspaix.net/-Imposition-de-la-paix->]