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*Proposing
Selective Constraint
towards Iran*

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an increasing radius by *missilaneous* means?“

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[Address of earlier statement of same content
presented on World Security Network-website
(www.worldsecuritynetwork.com / “Iran”)

Fritz W. Peter, „The Need to Constrain Iran Effectively“

http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/showArticle3.cfm?article_id=13414&topicID=44]

Proposing Selective Constraint toward Iran

Fritz W. Peter, 19.9.06

Proposing “selective constraint” goes along with a wide offer by the international community – framed by UNSC Resolution 1696 of July 31, 2006 – to give support to Iran in any constructive way thinkable; this wider context must be kept in mind when discussing necessary measures to constrain Tehran’s ambitions endangering peace in the Mideast and the World as a whole.

The offer could even be flanked (and widened in scope) by an initiative to set up a regional collective security architecture. Iran, in return, would have to abide by some limitations to its nuclear program. There is readiness on all sides to support Iran and the region substantially, yet Iran would have to compromise with regard to parts of its full-scale nuclear program. [1]

Containment vs. Selective Constraint

During the Cold War the West adopted a policy of containment and deterrence. Confronting Iran serious decision-makers will hardly be able to rely on classic containment – for deterrence might fail if Tehran chooses to act according to its threats, for instance, “to wipe Israel off the map.”

To preclude an Iranian nuclear option there is need for pointed diplomacy. Why not call it a policy of Selective Constraint. Such formula would serve as a verbal denominator – to pinpoint red lines like, primarily, an Iranian nuclear military option – and could thereby help to formulate (define, specify) a better concerted policy among allies. The formula refers inherently to *containment* but also points to a very basic difference by using the stronger term *constraint*.

The Need to Constrain Iran Effectively

The formula – Selective Constraint – points to the need to confront very specific threats, saying all efforts and measures have to be clearly focused. Containment, by comparison, would seem an indiscriminate policy. Pointing to selectivity, this formula avoids appearing vague and meaningless; rather it tends to demonstrate political resolve. It may, in a sense, even serve as a reminder to decision-makers to be effective – by being selective, i.e. focused on central threats.

[1] See references at the end outlining a proposal how to mirror Iranian power status – on UNSC regionalized level – and to balance security interests in ways compatible with other players.

The following comments and arguments will deliver on these initial, preliminary remarks to support an approach as conceptual as desirable. Let us start by looking at some of the primary, fairly obvious results if Tehran had atomic weapons at its disposal. [2]

Proliferation and proxies

There would be more danger of proliferation and also more options for terrorism as well as added potential for threat and blackmail in the Mideast, or even beyond, and an incentive – logically – for neighboring states like Turkey, Egypt and Saudi-Arabia, to go nuclear too.

Perfect protection (nuclear threat protection) could be given to proxy-wars like in Lebanon: Tehran could, and most certainly would, unfold an umbrella as large as its missiles' range. Israel and Iran would be placed at (or onto) the threshold of an atomic holocaust, en état permanent. Heightened international tensions, mounting fears, yet fewer means to intervene internationally – for fear of retaliation – would mark the general situation.

Prospects of failing diplomacy

World politics would be largely absorbed and bogged down far beyond its present (unsatisfactory) state; this again might spur efforts other than civilized diplomacy. Last not least, there would be dramatic further loss of control with regard to world energy resources (supply and management), almost certainly entailing incalculable but harsh reactions – not just economically – by numerous players.

Almost inevitably, these would seem to be the dire consequences of laissez-faire world politics: chances to run into a scenario like the one just described would be far too “good!”

Crusaders' regime

To put it cautiously or even politely, the present rulers in Tehran certainly don't shy away from confrontation or provocation and risky gambling (maybe most of all with Iran's own future). They consider themselves unstoppable while en route on their crusade! So will they shy away from nuclear devices – portable within an increasing radius by *missilaneous* means?

[2] The entire text that follows from here on has been presented under the heading “The Need to Constrain Iran Effectively”, Sept. 11, 2006, on World Security Network-Website, a platform for strategic debate: www.worldsecuritynetwork.com / “Iran”.

Will they end their fierce race for nuclearization or slow down a bit and consider alternatives and change course? Ask neighboring countries and their governments about their appreciation of Iranian hegemony, and about the likely zeal and thrust of Tehran's Machiavellism. Will they feel protected by Iranian dominance or will there be threat perception. To find out, ask them – you need not even ask Israelis, generally referred to as devils (Satans) by Tehran's good guys.

Growing unease

Europeans, too, are getting uneasy – by God, isn't that proof of real crisis! Within Western public few would bet that Tehran is merely or primarily intent on civilian uses of nuclear technology. Tehran does little to dispel speculations or uneasiness, except for distracting – red herring – and voicing aggressive propaganda. Growing unease concerning Tehran's intentions or capabilities therefore seems reasonable, at the least.

Consequences, as outlined above, of an Iranian atomic option do seem as probable as threatening! Judging from past and present performance, there can be little hope for rational dealings, moderation and readiness to accept compromise in the future. There is little reason that all of a sudden and after reaching nuclear status a change of political rationale might occur on the part of present Iran – run by an ambitious, blunt regime not in any way subject to institutional democratic checks, while prey to fanatical beliefs.

Going nuclear

I would be happy to find myself mistaken with these reflections, yet the chances aren't good. Only in the best of all worlds, a regime that doesn't want to restrain itself and can't be restrained from outside, might turn away – all by itself – from aggressive and repressive action and – just like that – adopt the kind of moderate, balanced policies most would like to see. Only in an unreal world, an entrenched, self-appointed system of rule (that can't be voted down or checked or discharged in other ways) could be expected to simply turn around and show a different face – and personality.

Perceptions

Some commentators still don't seem to be very worried – and may not be willing to face up to the issue. There is reason for fundamental disquiet, though, but how to confront the issue? Amidst complex questions, can there be straight answers at all? On the other hand – would it suffice to either recommend endless patience or, as some do, outright acceptance of an all-inclusive Iranian nuclear option?

Reaction patterns

Some (quite a few) just shrug their shoulders. Others – seemingly taking a bolder stance – tend to advocate “containment”, insinuating “deterrence”. Yet deterrence might fail! Considering the specific threat, it seems indeed apt to failure! In case, the containment advocates were the ones whose lives and nations would depend upon successful implementation of (conservative-style) deterrence strategy, they would, with high probability, quickly abandon it and recommend other concepts or adaptations or variations of classic concepts. So, there is good reason to recall the context and meaning of classic containment strategy – in order to maybe use this concept in new ways.

Looking back at Containment policy

“Containment” – rightly so – is in high repute. Looking back and giving a résumé, the concept can be called a swaying success story. It laid down the guidelines of a defensive strategic posture based on strong political resolve. The policy agreed on was conducted – importantly! – with no less resolve than the adversary’s policies. The Western stance had a clear and positive denominator, namely thwarting attack by a forceful enemy against countries outside the communist world [to summarize the situation a bit briefly, I concede].

This Western defensive strategic set persevered throughout the course of the Cold War up to the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Communist rule – based on repression – imploded after 44 years. The Western world – while upholding sufficient military effort – managed to sit out the confrontation and to finally get past it. There were lucky moments too, yet efficient political networking, technological performance, military proficiency, along with other factors, provided the basis for an ultimately successful outcome – as did the use of “Soft power”.

Soft power – effectively used

Soft power derives from political, cultural or economic aspects and characteristics of societies, in short, their attractiveness to residents or foreigners; by comparison, Western society generated much more attractiveness and also much less repulsion than any of the communist-stricken societies. Not socialist Orwellian bureaucracy took over on a global scale in 1984; rather it was ousted from history – only a few years later, and on a hollow note. Communist closed societies, in fact, were closed down and Soviets became Russians again.

1989/1990 the stage was cleared of the costly experimentum mundi of Soviet type society, proved a malinvestment of history. What came next wasn’t the “end of

history” – big surprise to some observers! Instead, *unending* clash potentials and seemingly few options to escape them replaced old threats; remaining actors – for ongoing world stage performance – were:

- Western type society (open society)
- Third-way countries (authoritarian, yet open and eager for development, like, for instance, China)
- Those countries or regional or cultural “entities”, still seeking their model, some turning back to tradition (or *pretended* tradition), others by accepting the terms of a knowledge-based secular and dynamic world.

Classic containment – merits and limits

Containment policy has been an effectual, conceptually based policy design and, thus, figured and resounded as an example or even model and case study in long-term realpolitik; its repute was established by these criteria.

It should be kept in mind, however, that its frame of reference was different from that of today’s world. The original concept of containment wasn’t designed to fit asymmetric conditions in warfare or international relations. That is to say, classic containment and deterrence strategy don’t automatically apply to a case like Iran. A regime run by mullahs and revolutionaries that puts a comprehensive break on society while at the same time hastily nuclearizing its options – only the military sector (or military related ones) as well as the repressive tools of state power are being modernized – constitutes a *sui generis*-pattern of conflict not to be equated to the one underlying the Cold War.

Extremely complex conditions in the entire region, radicalism at its extreme, and an Iranian strategy set to gain strength from incalculability, aggressiveness, arms race, prospective nuclear blackmail, proxies etc. – conditions all in all, that could set the region even more on fire, heighten instability and incalculability, and, for these reasons, make it necessary to rethink and redraw the concept of containing and deterring as a reliable means to avert all-out conflict and complete loss of control.

Understanding the difference

The concepts (or logic) of “containing” and “detering”, in their general meaning, will not suffice. For instance, to be able to *de-escalate* in case of serious conflict, at the brink of war (or after its outbreak), there has to be some degree of inside or outside control. To be able to influence the course of events in the Mideast region

some control will have to be retained. Yet, obviously, Tehran's political *rationale* is to neutralize and eventually nullify control from outside the region and to usurp inside control by establishing regional supremacy.

A “concept of containment” not actually *containing* Teheran's ambitions (except by theory or rhetoric), would be much less a “concept” than a strategy for failure, and a route to acquiescence and adjustment to Iran's political dictates and regional dominance. This – indeed – would lead to a kind of New Middle East.

Containment or *non*-containment

A concept and policy of containment not actually containing Teheran's ambitions would equate to *non-containment*. It would pave the way for possible subversion or intimidation of neighboring states or even future nuclear blackmail – most likely vis-à-vis Israel. – Sunnis and Shiites might also upgrade their feud – after attaining nuclear status.

Non-containment would pave the way to nihilism

The long-term aspirations of Tehran's “Guardians” will hardly match with reality, be it within Iranian society (development needs) or outside Iran (e.g. perspectives and interests of other regional players). To put it even more clearly, the objectives and general thrust of Tehran's policy amount to political hazard or even nihilism! To avoid arriving there, containment must be made to work – there is no need at all for containment as a placebo.

Contrary to Tehran's perception there certainly is no need for nuclear adventurism in the Mideast. The region is already in deep turmoil, and it would be in agony, at the very least, if *laisser-faire* world politics would get the upper hand.

The challenge

Iran's Guardian regime views it as legitimate to achieve its objectives by force or in any convenient way. It believes to have a “mandate” or “obligation” to enforce its views. To recall: sharply growing repression inside the country, ready use and massive support of proxies to fuel outside conflict, relentless threats to annihilate Israel (consequential moves: for instance, events that led to war in Lebanon have been part of this), unrestrained hatred, frequent vicious language (and distortions) by leading representatives. Thus, to counteract and frustrate Teheran's ambitions will require not only effective measures as part of a coherent policy but will also, most probably, not allow the world (or – to be more specific – will not allow the West) to adopt a merely *reactive* pattern of containment and deterrence.

For instance, considering the regime's objectives (and its apparent policy profile) it wouldn't be enough at all "to make it more difficult for Teheran" to pose an ultimate threat to Israel, rather it should and must be denied this option! Only to make annihilation of the Jewish state and its people "less probable," would seem an unacceptably cynical political stance. – Aside from this crucial aspect, deleting the atomic threat option from the future Iranian agenda would help avoid a nuclear arms race in the region – saving invaluable and unaffordable resources on all sides. As may be noticed, the author didn't use Iranian-type vocabulary just now, for the advice given could as well have been "to wipe off the threat option from Tehran's agenda".

Containment - upgraded!

Iran's leaders seem to have but one overriding objective – acquiring nuclear status! They consider this a key to attaining Shiite regional dominance and feel sure it will make them invulnerable to pressure or attack from the outside and will give them a free hand, lastingly, to shape Iranian society and maybe other Islamic countries too by top-down state Islamic "revolution". Yet, whatever the regime's intentions may be, nuclear status, if providing a military option, would inevitably establish a worst case scenario leaving the region on the verge of apocalypse.

Coping with threats and aggression must therefore add up to more than a seesaw-type of answer or a purely reactive pattern of diplomacy by foreign governments. To put up a stop sign threatening retaliation (even devastating retaliation) if Iran were to attack a small state like Israel obviously wouldn't seem a solution since in case of nuclear strike (after events might have escalated, even unwillingly, to a point of panic reaction) Israel would be largely destroyed and contaminated; thus its very existence as a state would end. Such outcome might please Iran's regime (or other fanatics) but must be given no chance at all to occur. In short, a classic concept of containment – based on retaliatory deterrence – would miss the point. It would not be sufficient.

Contain *and* constrain Iran

Tehran's ambitious reach must be *contained*, its most deadly ambitions will have to be *constrained* – selectively and effectively. These ambitions must be left with no chance to materialize. Any efforts by the Iranian regime to attain nuclear strike capability have to be reliably **constrained** and focused in time in order to be able to counteract them successfully. "Constrain" as a term comes closer to expressing the idea of action, strategic initiative, proactive political decision-making than the verb or term "contain".

Needed is *a policy of containment and constraint* in order to bloc the way for Iran's incalculable regime to nuclear blackmail, to potential or even actual use of weapons of mass destruction. The formula shouldn't be reduced to "containment". Stressing "constraint" as well, does express political resolve and readiness to take selective/effective action when required.

As should be understood, "to contain" or "constrain" doesn't mean to "punish" either Iran or its regime. The intention is very pointed, very rational and factual: it aims at precluding threat or devastation in the region or beyond. This, however, will require consequential action.

A policy of containment and constraint would send a clear signal saying that there is sufficient – comprehensive – understanding of the matter, adequate threat perception, and readiness to cope with the situation in a well-balanced, long-term political process. Most important, it would signalize that governments are serious about the matter at hand.

No need for an Iranian atomic weapon

There had been (since about 1980) just one single good, sensible reason why Iran might have found it advisable or even necessary to dispose of an atomic weapon – the very disquieting "neighborly" instance that Saddam (a person as ruthless and reckless as Stalin or Hitler) and the Ba'ath regime strove for regional hegemony, oil-Gulf-hegemony, and a nuclear option. The removal of Saddam by force made it unnecessary for Iran to carry on with its clumsy, clandestine program to achieve a nuclear option. Tehran, in fact, acted accordingly – halting its program and only restarting it, with quest and bravado, after the fundamentalists had been propelled to power by an undemocratic election process.

Iraq will never again be a threatening factor. So, please, what use or need is there for an Iranian nuclear military option?

Real need for rational decision-making

The build-up and welfare of Iranian society in no way requires nuclearization and militarization (this course of action has been tried out by Saddam or, for instance, the North Koreans – to the detriment of their respective countries). Instead, there is compelling demand to open up and diversify the country, intensify regional and international cooperation and act moderately and prudently. Ideology won't make up for political failure, rather it will tie down an Iranian populace hoping – and in great part even yearning – for essential economic and social progress.

The world would give a helping hand to Iran by constraining political ambitions of the present Iranian regime obviously as wrongly directed and dysfunctional as they are dangerous. In spite of vested interests, say, on the part of Russia to sell military and nuclear technology international diplomacy must come to terms and be guided by a more general perspective *committing itself and the Iranian leadership* to a strategy compatible to overriding interests as much as to Iranian developmental needs. Considering the consequences, would there be any justification for failure or inaction due to lack of political resolve?

See listed contributions for further substantiation.

Contain or Constrain Iran?

<http://www.hagalil.com/archiv/2006/08/constrain.htm>,

or else: www.wadinet.de/news/dokus/511_Contain-or-Constrain-Iran.pdf

Aug. 2006, 4 p

Iran-Konflikt: Ausblick auf die kommende Debatte

www.wadinet.de/news/dokus/474_Iran_Ausblick-auf-die-kommende-Debatte.pdf

Aug. 2006, 12 p

Libanon. Josef Joffe als Beispiel

www.wadinet.de/news/dokus/477_Iran_Libanon_Josef-Joffe-als-Beispiel.pdf

Aug. 2006, 10 p

Wo Joschka Fischer Recht hat und wo nicht

www.wadinet.de/news/dokus/174_Iran_Thesen-zur-Diplomatie_Anhang.pdf

June 2006, 18 p

Ein Vorschlag zum Umgang mit dem Iran

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May 2006, 16 p

17 Thesen zur Iran-Diplomatie

www.wadinet.de/news/dokus/169_Iran_Thesen-zur-Diplomatie_kurzgefasst.pdf

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Thesen zur Ausrichtung des Krisenmanagements im Iran-Konflikt

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Iran: Programmierter head crash? Mit Kalkül vor die Wand

www.wadinet.de/news/dokus/124_Mit-Kalkuel-vor-die-Wand--Teheran.pdf

Febr. 2006, 18 p

Iran-Sanktionen: Nur eine virtuelle Realität?

www.wadinet.de/news/dokus/127_Sanktionen-nicht-nur-virtuelle-Realitaet.pdf

Febr. 2006, 12 p

Toleranz und Rationalität

*sind Begriffe der Aufklärung, **erkämpfte** Begriffe, die zu politischen Leitbegriffen wurden. Im fundamentalistischen Verständnis sind es systemfremde und zu **bekämpfende** Begriffe. Ohne zugelassenen politischen Wettbewerb, der gesellschaftspolitische und geistig-kulturelle Auseinandersetzung im Innern einer Gesellschaft ermöglicht, und daran fehlt es in arabisch islamischen Ländern und (erst recht) in „Gottesstaaten“ wie Iran, werden alle Instrumente („Dialog“, Wirtschaftshilfe ...) letztlich ergebnislos bleiben, sodass ein **Konflikttyp** wie in Nahost, Irak, Iran, Sudan zum **Standardfall der Beziehungen** mit diesem Teil der Welt würde. Ein „Zusammenprall“ (cultural clash) wird entgegen allen Bemühungen der Politik eintreten, **wenn es im Gesellschaftsbild der islamisch geprägten Welt keine Weiterentwicklung gibt.***