

clear, however, that the white paper holds the answers to these questions, and decision-making on these matters may well be left to the future military planning law.

The final debate centres on the future structure – and size – of the French army. While this debate is being conducted primarily for economic reasons, it also raises questions about France's ambitions on the international stage. More prosaically, it might be asked whether the French army can handle another military reform plan. The last round of reforms, though never completed, included painful garrison closures that resulted in

the transfer of military personnel all over France, while the wide-ranging problems relating to the payment of salaries stemming from a bug in the Louvois software has exasperated the military to a point that, despite his good reputation, the new Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian may not be able to control the situation should further cuts to the French army be announced.

Yet despite these uncertainties, one thing seems sure, and this is that the defence budget will inevitably be reduced in the coming years simply through non-adjustment for inflation. This alone will require political and military leaders to make choices,

including what should be retained at the national level, which resources should be pooled, and which should be shared. While pooling and sharing is seen in France more as a constraint imposed upon it than an initiative pursued out of choice, the publication of the white paper will force the French authorities to become more involved in real efforts to Europeanise the country's defence, as the main question inevitably becomes that of 'what do we do and with whom?'

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Sanctioning Iran: Not a Zero-Sum Game

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To what extent is the US-led sanctions regime likely to succeed in compelling Iran to curb its nuclear programme?

The US-led sanctions regime against the Islamic Republic of Iran has been viewed by most US and European policy-makers as the only available option in constraining Iranian political behaviour and regional ambitions. Yet there is a paradox in this decades-old regime, namely its contribution to the deterioration of relations between Iran and the West, which may hinder the latter's ability to mitigate the threat posed by the Iranian nuclear programme and improve regional security.

Iran has been subject to some form of US sanctions regime ever since 1979, when Iranian Islamist students and militants held more than fifty US embassy staff hostage for 444 days during the Islamic Revolution. Following the revelation of the

existence of a hardened fuel enrichment facility at Natanz in 2002, and the growth of international concerns about a nascent Iranian nuclear programme, US sanctions have been supplemented by successive rounds of UN sanctions, aimed at pushing Iran to comply with UN Security Council demands for it to suspend uranium enrichment. In March 2006, Resolution 1696 laid the foundations for future Security Council-authorized economic and diplomatic sanctions against Iran should it fail to suspend uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities, as well as nuclear-related research and development. In December 2006, Resolution 1737 called on member states to block the import and export by Iran of sensitive nuclear material and

equipment, and to freeze the financial assets of those involved in the nuclear programme. In March 2007, Resolution 1803 called for scrutiny of Iranian banks and inspections of potentially illicit cargoes entering or leaving Iran. Finally, following the revelation of the existence of Fordow, an underground uranium-enrichment facility near the city of Qom, June 2010 saw the implementation of Resolution 1929, which prohibited Iran from acquiring military hardware, increased the intensity of sanctions on Iranian banks, and extended travel bans on individuals linked to the nuclear programme.

The US and its European allies have added to this by extending their respective unilateral sanctions and embargoes against Iran. These

include the 2006 US Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) – originally the 1996 Iran and Libya Sanctions Act – prohibiting US companies and individuals from investing in Iran’s oil and gas industry, which was supplemented in 2010 by the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions and Divestment Act targeting most other Iranian exports to the US, including caviar, carpets and pistachios. The EU, for its part, has imposed further restrictions on trade, the provision of financial and insurance services, and energy sales, including an oil embargo since July 2012.

Beyond this, the US Congress has continued to push for further punitive sanctions against Iran, including an attempt by Senators Robert Mendez and Mark Kirk to apply sanctions to shipping and other commodities (a move which the White House has nonetheless resisted, arguing that it duplicates its own plans to tighten the existing sanctions regime through the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act). Yet proponents of such extensions appear to be either unaware of the negative causality of US sanctions thus far, or see the US-Iranian relationship as a zero-sum game which the US must win in order to secure its domestic and international interests.

In fact, the application of such sanctions may not, in practice, be serving the purpose for which they were designed. One reason for this is the fact that, in response to such measures, as well as to the precipitous drop in the value of the Iranian rial and consequent economic depression and popular discontent witnessed across the country, Iran is pursuing a broad sanctions-avoidance strategy. This has involved placing greater emphasis on bilateral relations with an array of non-aligned states, pursuing regional integration in Central Asia, and reducing dependence on oil sales, which fell by 8 per cent in 2011 according to the IMF.

Furthermore, the country’s economic decline due to US and EU oil embargoes and other sanctions has been compounded by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s broader mismanagement of the economy (characterised by irregularities, corruption and a large-scale wasting of resources). This is blamed by

many Iranians as often as sanctions for the high rates of inflation and unemployment witnessed in the country. However it is also clear that Iran is losing around \$48 billion a year (equivalent to 10 per cent of its GDP) as a direct result of the sanctions, providing clear motivation for the country’s recourse to sanctions-mitigation strategies.

Iran is losing around 10 per cent of its GDP as a direct result of sanctions

Iran’s once pivotal position as an oil supplier in the global economy has proven a significant factor in this mitigation of the short-term impact of tightened sanctions, especially during a US election year and amid slow economic growth, when US and European officials have been keen to avoid an oil shock to the global economy. Iran’s trade with China, currently standing at around \$40 billion, means that China now plays a crucial role both as the country’s leading oil market and as an important supplier of consumer goods and machinery. Iran’s bilateral trade with Russia, meanwhile, despite constituting a more modest \$4 billion due to both countries’ reliance on oil exports, is nonetheless resistant to US pressure due to Russian opposition to the sanctioning of energy exports on the basis of political motivations. Furthermore, despite its sanctions, the EU maintains more than \$5 billion in residual trade with Iran. Consequently, and assuming the accuracy of reported Iranian central bank reserve estimates of more than \$100 billion, pressure on Iran remains far less comprehensive than US legislators would like.

This is demonstrated in the seemingly little influence sanctions have had in persuading the Iranian regime to curb its nuclear programme. Iran is currently enriching uranium to two levels (3.5 per cent and 20 per cent), the production of the more highly enriched uranium beginning only *after* sanctions prevented Iran from acquiring such fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) in 2010, despite attempts to

negotiate a solution. For example, the Tehran Research Reactor deal – to swap 1,200 kilograms (what was then 80 per cent) of Iran’s low-enriched uranium in exchange for fuel for the TRR – failed because it was perceived by the US administration as a delaying tactic and by hard-liners in Iran as requiring that too great an amount of low-enriched uranium be shipped abroad. The number of centrifuges in the Iranian nuclear programme has also grown in sophistication and number, to stand at 1,630 at Fordow and several thousand more at Natanz. Although this figure is far less than the 50,000 centrifuges required to enrich uranium to the 90 per cent required for weapons-grade material, it is clear that the application of sanctions to date has not contributed to any kind of slowing down or reversal of Iran’s nuclear programme.

Such US and Iranian intransigence, coupled with ongoing developments in the Iranian nuclear programme, has enabled the Israeli government to put pressure on the Obama administration. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has already outlined his country’s literal and figurative ‘red line’, in a September speech at the UN, aimed at preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, and through openly advocating a pre-emptive strike against Iranian nuclear installations, he is offering the US and EU a false choice of implementing crippling sanctions in order to avoid a military conflict. Whether Obama will mark out his own ‘red line’, beyond urging Iran to co-operate with the International Atomic Energy Agency, is yet to be determined, but US policy would certainly shift if Iran acquired a nuclear weapon, as confirmed by Obama’s declaration in March 2012 that the containment of a nuclear Iran was not an option.

Yet it seems that the further application of sanctions will not diminish the likelihood of reaching this point. This conclusion is supported by former US Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk, one of the co-architects of the ‘dual containment’ policy, who conceded in an interview with the author that ‘sanctions made no difference to [Iran’s foreign] policy’. With or without sanctions, it seems, Iran will continue to implement its

existing policies as a function of its security environment, nationalism and energy needs, and neither sanctions nor pre-emptive strikes are likely to stop it from developing its enrichment and proliferation programme further.

To the contrary, sanctions, coupled with other US containment policies aimed at de-legitimising the Iranian government, have resulted in a significant deterioration in Iranian-Western relations. This has in turn led to the adoption of a series of reactionary measures by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (responsible for protecting Iran's sovereignty during and after the Iran-Iraq War), its subsidiary the Qods Force (tasked with 'extraterritorial' operations and support roles), and proxy groups such as Hizbullah and Hamas, as displayed most recently during the eight-day conflict between Iranian-armed Hamas and Israel in November 2012.

As such, prospects for the way ahead, adhering to an approach based on sanctions, appear uncertain. The Obama administration nonetheless has a small

window of opportunity – in the form of fresh P5+1 talks originally scheduled for January – to re-engage with Iran prior to the application of harsh new sanctions and to Iranian presidential elections due to take place in June.

Despite the fact that, upon going to press, no date or venue for the talks have yet been set, such forms of active engagement through direct negotiations and attempts to formulate an abbreviated roadmap – consisting of reciprocal and incremental measures designed to achieve *détente* – could yet prove more fruitful than the historic US preference for sanctions. This would be especially true if a broad and critical dialogue proves more capable, this time around, of addressing Western concerns regarding the form of agreements on uranium-enrichment levels and quantities, the number and scope of nuclear facilities (with particular reference to Parchin), and the type of verification and monitoring regime to be employed.

Should progress in this direction appear assured, it may be time for the US

and its allies to reconsider the emphasis currently placed on the application of punitive sanctions – all the more so given that Iranian co-operation is also integral to resolving a range of other intractable challenges across the Middle East and Central Asia, from post-conflict planning in Afghanistan to negotiating a post-Assad agreement in Syria, thereby feeding directly into US strategic priorities. It therefore remains critical that, should Ayatollah Khamenei consent to serious negotiations on the nuclear programme, the US and EU reconsider the pursuit of an approach based on sanctions in favour of a more focused pursuit of broader politico-military confidence-building measures. The consequences, should they fail to do so, could be catastrophic for the security and development of the modern Middle East.

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Syria: The Analogies of History

Daniel Neep



With the Free Syrian Army still facing a number of organisational challenges as it enters 2013, what lessons can be learnt from their revolutionary counterparts of the 1920s in their fight against French occupation?

Syrians critical of defiant President Bashar Al-Assad often remark with bitterness that his regime treats its own people worse than an army of occupation would. Indeed, in its brutality, its narratives of sectarianism and its refusal to recognise the political legitimacy of the Syrian people's call for freedom, the Assad regime

bears an uncanny resemblance to its French counterpart of the 1920s, which suppressed a series of uprisings against its occupation of the country as it implemented its official mandate from the League of Nations. At first sporadic and localised, this culminated in the Great Syrian Revolt that lasted over two years and united Syrian rebels,

peasants and politicians across class, ideological and sectarian divisions. During this uprising, rebels formed a decentralised umbrella body essentially comprising units from individual villages and neighbourhoods, a structure distinctly echoed by today's Free Syrian Army (FSA), which, in consequence, shares many of the