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DOI:

[10.1080/09557571.2012.734780](https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2012.734780)

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Ellner, A. (2013). British nuclear non-proliferation policies towards Iran and the Middle East. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2012.734780>

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**British Approaches to Nuclear Proliferation towards Iran and the
Middle East**

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Corrected, pre-proof version, please do not cite.
Published in *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26/1
(2013): 225-51

Biographical Information

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Abstract

The paper argues that British non-proliferation policies towards the Middle East have had limited success, because they are circumscribed by the dependence on alliances and constrained by other factors such as Britain's historical legacy, its status as a Nuclear Weapons State, and, especially through the EU's engagement with the region, communication of self-interest rather than credible pursuit of the declared objective of regional security-building. Despite promoting and implementing its own disarmament policies, Britain has been unable to overcome mistrust and perceptions of hypocrisy in the region in order to strengthen the non-proliferation regime. This is particularly evident in the dispute with Iran, which is examined in detail with the assistance of Adler's (2010) 'double-damned dilemma' model. The analysis argues that the 'Western' coercive approach has facilitated the stalemate with Iran, because it has encouraged Iran's provocations and allowed it to respond with a strategy of denial. The analysis suggests that Britain and its allies adopt a defusing strategy which does not reduce the dispute to a proliferation problem, but treats Iran's behaviour as a quest for recognition. Britain has little influence on Iran, but might build on its relationship with Turkey to develop this approach in conjunction with its allies.

Introduction¹

British approaches to nuclear proliferation in the Middle East have had limited, sometimes even counterproductive effects over the past decade or so. Particularly, the two principal recent interventions, one military the other diplomatic, resulted in a range of unintended consequences and a stalemate. In both cases, as in its non-proliferation policies generally, Britain has been acting through alliances and international fora. Its policies cannot be understood outside this context.

The Blair Government's justification for joining the US in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was the perceived need to force an end to Iraq's clandestine Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programmes. It turned out to be invalid (CIA, 2004). The war also failed to achieve the coalition's other declared aim of improving

¹ Disclaimer: The analysis, opinions and conclusions expressed or implied in this essay are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the JSCSC, the UK MOD or any other government agency.' - I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their kind comments and suggestions.

regional security dynamics; that task still lies ahead (Hunter, 2010). If anything, it has made these dynamics significantly more challenging. It reinforced pre-existing underlying causes of mistrust and tension, enhanced competition for influence especially between Iran and Saudi Arabia and dented Britain's and the US's standing in the region (Ellner, 2011).

In late 2003 Britain, France and Germany, the EU-3, initiated negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme partly in order to defuse calls for military action in the US and Israel (Davidson, Powers, 2005), because Iran was suspected of seeking to develop nuclear weapons thus threatening regional and global security and the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).² The EU-3 eventually became part of the P5+1, the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) plus Germany. However, despite years of negotiations and several rounds of sanctions Iran is still resisting demands for verifiable assurances that its nuclear programme is as peaceful as it claims.

Since 1995 Britain has been committed, through the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the EU, to promoting a Middle Eastern WMD Free Zone (WMDFZ), sometimes referred to as a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ).³ Apart from their regional security relevance, NWFZ are an important element of the wider NPT regime, especially if Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) ratify and support them with binding negative security assurances (Hamel-Green, 2009). In the Middle East the goal has been elusive, but the 2010 NPT Review Conference (RevCon) agreed renewed efforts and announced a regional security conference on a WMDFZ in 2012.⁴ As one of the three depositary powers of the NPT, Britain will co-convene the conference with Russia and the US, but prospects for success look bleak.

The regional popular uprisings of 2011 have complicated preparations (Penketh,

² US Embassy Cable, STATE 082013, *Subject: Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Bilaterals with UK, France, and Germany*, 6 August 2009, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/219798>> all web sources last accessed 19 April 2011

³ The 1995 aim of a WMDFZ recognises that in the Middle East biological and chemical weapons have to be included in the disarmament equation.

⁴ 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (2010 RevCon), *Final Document*, Volume I, NPT/CONF.2010/50 (Vol. I), New York, 2010, pp. 29ff.; William Hague (2010), *Hansard*, Written Ministerial Statement, Cols. 42WS f., 14 June <<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm100614/wmstext/100614m0001.htm#1006148000004>>

2011). Discussing them goes beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the host country, Finland, has been finding it difficult to persuade salient regional countries, not just Israel, Iran and Syria, to participate, because many have been prioritising their domestic concerns (Malin, 2012). Israel's nuclear weapons policy remains a major challenge. Indeed, since the official announcement of the conference repeated the long-standing call on Israel to accede to the NPT and accept full-scope IAEA safeguards, but did not mention Iran, Israel instantly declared that it would not take part (BBC, 2010a).⁵ The dispute with Iran poses a more immediate obstacle. It will be discussed in greater detail than the case of Israel, because Britain has been heavily engaged in the negotiations with Iran and has much less influence on Israel than the US.

The following analysis is not concerned with the preparations for the conference or an assessment of the likelihood of establishing a WMDFZ. Rather, it aims to explain why the non-proliferation policies of Britain and its allies have found limited resonance in the region and contributed to generating the stalemate with Iran. It thus examines the political climate current approaches are producing, which influences the prospects of the conference.

A brief survey of principal nuclear (non-)proliferation challenges in the region will identify why Britain and its allies have been seeking to strengthen the NPT since the early 1990s and discuss limits of their influence. The paper then shows how and why British governments have been promoting disarmament and non-proliferation. It demonstrates that the efforts were not welcomed by all NWS and that in the region disarmament policies failed to overcome and non-proliferation policies reinforced perceptions of hypocrisy and double-standards. At one level the dispute with Iran is rooted in, and the stalemate in the negotiations a consequence of, this underlying perceptual conflict.

The paper, however, proposes an additional explanation. Britain and its allies have approached the dispute over Iran's nuclear programme through the prism of deterrence, which is also visible in their efforts to strengthen the NPT regime and the EU's approach to a WMDFZ. Yet, it is more critical in the negotiations with Iran, which have been surrounded by calls for military strikes. The analysis argues that this has contributed substantially to the deadlock in the negotiations. It

⁵ 2010 RevCon, *Final Document*, Volume I, p. 29 para 5.

develops this argument with reference to Adler's (2010) 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' or double-damned dilemma, a 'social trap' in which actors face a no-win choice between equally undesirable consequences of retaliation or appeasement.

Adler argued that it results from approaching security challenges that seek to provoke and have qualities of performative acts, such as spectacular terrorist attacks or Iran's behaviour over its nuclear programme, through the prism of deterrence. Since they intend to elicit an aggressive response, provocateurs achieve their aim if the target retaliates, but not doing so projects weakness and neither is likely to deter further threats. Adler's proposed escape from this trap is to adopt a strategy of defusing by denial or restructuring the decision context for the provocateur. The analysis will demonstrate that Britain and its allies have approached this trap repeatedly, because they have insisted on a coercive strategy. Moreover, their narrow focus on the nuclear issue provided Iran with multiple opportunities to apply its own strategies of denial. The paper concludes with a brief outlook on how these trajectories may be changed.

Nuclear Proliferation and Limits of British Influence in the Middle East

Concerns about nuclear proliferation in the Middle East have been growing while external actors have encountered increasing difficulties imposing their policy preferences and the Iraq War further complicated the regional security dynamics. In the early 1990s the discovery of Iraq's (and North Korea's) clandestine nuclear weapons programme had triggered efforts to strengthen the NPT regime. Iran's co-operation with Russia on the Bushehr reactor and Russia's supply of a centrifuge soon increased these concerns.⁶ Following allegations from Iranian exiles in 2002, the IAEA revealed the extent of Iran's nuclear programme in 2003, including the existence of two previously undeclared facilities and a network of companies involved in clandestinely procuring nuclear technology and material (Ehteshami, 2006, 77ff.; Johnson, 2005, 1f.). Iran's missile programme enhanced suspicions that it was pursuing nuclear weapons.

Syria, whose al-Khibar site Israel attacked in 2007 to little international protest (Spector, Cohen, 2008), has also come under suspicion of proliferation intent

⁶ NTI, *Russia: Nuclear Exports to Iran: Reactors*, undated
<<http://www.nti.org/db/nisprofs/russia/exports/rusiran/react.htm>>

(NTI, 2009). Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity and refusal to join the NPT as a NNWS is the longest standing bone of contention. Sanctioned by its allies, particularly the US, it has, however, been losing credibility and recently Israel has come more widely under pressure to drop the policy (Cook, 2010). Prime Minister Ehud Olmert unofficially confirmed in 2006 that Israel possessed nuclear weapons, triggering a debate in the region in which some forecast a nuclear arms race (BBC, 2006a). The possibility of an Iranian nuclear weapons capability has raised the same fears.

The common problem is that all alleged proliferators, bar Israel, are members of the NPT and suspected of using their legitimate nuclear facilities for illegitimate purposes. The spread of nuclear energy programmes across the region thus raises further concerns (Reynolds, 2006). Britain shares the concern that the dual-use nature of the industry could facilitate a nuclear arms race.⁷ It also fears that violent non-state actors, mainly Al Qa'ida, might gain illicit access to increasingly available nuclear materials (Cabinet Office, 2009, 12). Yet, it is competing over lucrative contracts for its nuclear industry (Land, 2009). The Brown Government promoted nuclear energy in support of economic development and poverty reduction, in anticipation of the end of fossil fuels and as a means to reduce carbon emissions in response to climate change (Cabinet Office, 2009, 24). The current government is remaining on course.

Britain thus has an interest in safeguarding against proliferation for security and economic reasons, but its influence in the region is circumscribed. For decades it has depended on its historical legacy as a colonial power and relationship with the US. Although recently lacking a strategy towards the region (Hollis, 2010), it has maintained generally friendly relations with Israel, Egypt, Jordan or the Gulf States. Its relationship with Iran has gone through peaks and troughs. The 1970s novel 'My Uncle Napoleon' is often cited as a successful illustration of Iranian suspicions of British espionage, conspiracy and mistrust (Nafisi, 2006), which persist until today.

With Britain's economic and military levers of influence waning post-1945, the US became the principal 'Western' actor in the region. That both worked in close

⁷ House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (HCFAC), *Global Security: Iran, Response of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*, Fifth Report, Session 2007-08, Cm 7361 (London: HMSO, 2008), p. 8.

concert after the 1956 Suez Crisis has been a source of strength and weakness for Britain's policies. Britain sees US economic and military assets as lending weight to joint diplomacy although the Iraq War has undermined this rationale. As shown below, when Britain had diplomatic relations with Iran, they have had some, though limited, utility in supporting US engagement with Iran. For a sustainable solution to the dispute however, they have to overcome the tensions that began for many Iranians with the forceful removal of Mossadegh, a legacy the US and Britain share, and for the US with the embassy hostage crisis of 1979-81.

In the area of non-proliferation Britain, as a NWS, is furthermore vulnerable to accusations of perpetuating double-standards and hypocrisy inherent in a treaty under whose terms the 'haves' can police the 'have-nots', but are perceived as failing to deliver on the Article VI commitment to disarmament. Recent British policies have sought to address this problem.

Between Nuclear Possession and Disarmament Promotion

The 2007 decision to modernise the Trident missile and submarine system was prone to reinforce perceptions of hypocrisy; it is currently postponed but not reversed. The Blair government argued it did not believe that "the circumstances currently exist for the UK safely to choose now *unilaterally* to renounce our nuclear weapons" (Howells, 2007). Yet, Britain has been moving in the area of disarmament.⁸ Since 1990 it has reduced its arsenal to one nuclear system. Governments have consistently rejected a no-first use policy, but declared in 1998 and 2006 they would not use nuclear weapons against an NPT-compliant NNWS, including members of NWFZs, "unless it attacks us, our Allies or a state to which we have a security commitment, in association or alliance with a nuclear weapon state" (Taylor, 2010, 7). Yet, governments could strengthen negative security assurances. Britain has only ratified three of the five existing NWFZ treaties, not those for Central Asia and Southeast Asia (Hamel-Green, 369). Their ratification would further underwrite the principle of NWFZ, make explicit their exclusion from the scope of nuclear deterrence and set a precedent for other NWS.

Britain endorsed the call for the abolition of nuclear weapons, informally in 2007

⁸ 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, *Final Document*, Volume III, Part IV, NPT/CONF.2010/50 (Vol. III), pp. 150-152.

(Beckett), when it was distinctly not on the US political agenda, and formally, when President Obama launched his 'global zero' initiative (FCO, 2009). In 2007 it began work "on methodologies and technologies to verify possible future nuclear disarmament agreements", supporting Britain's Article VI commitment (MoD, 2010). This included unprecedented co-operation between Britain, Norway, a NNWS, and Vertic, a British Non-Governmental Organisation, on technologies facilitating unclassified information exchange for verification of nuclear warhead dismantlement. Verifiable nuclear disarmament of at least one NWS, Israel, must be part of the establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East. The technologies could facilitate verification between Israel and regional NNWS, thus contributing substantially to regional confidence-building.

The Brown Government explicitly acknowledged the link between nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and stressed the "vital need to revitalise multilateral nuclear disarmament".⁹ Under the Obama Administration it actively aimed to be the "US's partner of choice" in key areas of British interest, such as the Middle East,¹⁰ "harness US capabilities and influence US policy to develop a shared approach" to WMD non-proliferation and align their "positions on global nuclear disarmament".¹¹ Their consensus caused other NWS considerable anxiety.¹²

Especially France saw Britain as "eager to promote its aggressive disarmament posture", was "defensive about disarmament and concerned that US/Russian initiatives and UK unilateral measures" would increase pressure on France to join the process.¹³ New British and US rhetoric on nuclear weapons, intended to signal preparedness to move on Article VI and discourage potential proliferators, drew equal hostility from France. It considered attempts to reframe perceptions of, and discourses on, nuclear weapons away from the deterrence paradigm unacceptable, disarmament policies and language that delegitimized nuclear weapons, or

⁹ HCFAC, *Global Security: Non-Proliferation*, Fourth Report, Session 2008-09, HC 222 (London: HMSO, 2009), p. 8.

¹⁰ HFAC, Written Evidence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Global Security: UK – US Relations*, Sixth Report, Session 2009-10, HC 114 (London: HMSO, 28 March 2010), p. Ev 65-66 and 76-7.

¹¹ HCFAC, *Global Security: UK – US Relations*, HC 114, p. Ev 57-9.

¹² US Embassy Cable, London 002198, *Subject: U/S Tauscher's Meetings with FS Miliband and other*, 22 September 2009 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/226331>>

¹³ US Embassy Cable, STATE 082013, *Subject: Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Bilaterals with UK, France, and Germany*, 6 August 2009.

suggested their possession was immoral, a direct threat to its strategic interests which were "'psychologically' bound to France's deterrent", and an independent nuclear policy an "untouchable red line".¹⁴ Although these differences were resolved before the RevCon, progress on Article VI will founder without more consensus-building between the NWS.

The Coalition Government has maintained some of the momentum. It mirrored President Obama's announcement of the US stockpile on May 2010 (Miles, 2010) with its own transparency initiative. On 28 May 2010 Foreign Secretary William Hague revealed for the first time the total size of the British nuclear stockpile, 225 warheads, which would remain the upper limit.¹⁵ The government also introduced structural changes intended to co-ordinate non-proliferation policy better across departments through the newly established National Security Council's Official Committee for Counter Proliferation (NSC(O)CP), where the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is represented.¹⁶ The Ministry of Defence will co-ordinate technical expertise in and outside of government (House of Commons Research Library. 2011, 77); a Nuclear Centre of Excellence for developing proliferation-resistant technologies had been created in 2009 (Cabinet Office, 2009, 7). It remains to be seen whether these developments will produce policies with greater impact on the region than those of the recent past.

Regional Reception of British Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Policies

Iran still challenges the legitimacy of the negotiating positions of Britain and the other P5. It "shares the widely held view - in the Arab and Muslim worlds, among developing countries and in the Non-Aligned Movement - that only [NNWS] should be entitled to ask Iran to abjure nuclear weapons", not NWS (Shenna 2010, 356). In September 2010, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, Chair of the Majlis Committee on National Security and Foreign Policy, demanded that the US and Europeans ~~should~~ "take practical measures for establishing a nuclear-free Middle

¹⁴ US Embassy Cable, Paris, 001039, *Subject: France's Position in Nuclear Issues in the Run-Up to the NPT RevCon*, 31 July 2009 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/218931>>

¹⁵ William Hague, House of Commons, Debate, *Hansard*, 26 May 2010, Col. 181.

¹⁶ HCFAC, *The Role of the FCO in Government*, Written Evidence from Sir Peter Ricketts, 14 January, Session 2010-11, A 10 <<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmfaaff/writev/fcogov/m21.htm>>

East and pursuing global nuclear disarmament", if they have "serious concerns about nuclear weapons" (Ettela'at, 2010). Unsurprisingly, he defined Israel as the principal obstacle to a regional NWFZ.

Perceptions of double-standards are neither Iran's alone, nor do they only concern nuclear weapons. New non-proliferation measures have encountered considerable mistrust in the region. Although several regional countries are suspicious of Iran's intentions, some, and not necessarily its allies, share its objections to what they perceive as discrimination against the rights of NNWS to the peaceful use of the complete fuel cycle enshrined in the NPT, which includes uranium enrichment. Advocates of new measures, such as Britain, argue that they seek to reconcile the need for, and rights to, peaceful uses of nuclear energy with safeguarding against increasing proliferation risks.

Britain has long supported the adoption of the Additional Protocol, developed in the mid-1990s to enhance the IAEA's inspection and safeguards system, by all NNWS members of the NPT. Its demand that Iran ratify the Protocol, which it has signed, is in principle just an extension of this policy. Britain also supported Russia's fuel supply and take-back arrangement with Iran for the Bushehr reactor. Fuel take-back allows monitoring the isotope composition of spent fuels and is intended to discourage uranium enrichment and reprocessing to access plutonium.

Iran rejects the idea that external fuel supplies obviate the need for its enrichment plants (IISS, 2010). Yet, similar policies are being promoted elsewhere to the same end, but with the support of regional partners. The US, partly in response to Israel's fears about proliferation, has sought bilateral fuel supply agreements with Jordan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (al-Khalidi, 2010, BBC, 2010b). Britain and the US support the multilateralisation of the fuel cycle, an idea the IAEA revived in 2003 (IAEA Bulletin, 2008). The EU, together with the US, UAE, Kuwait and Norway, has pledged substantial contributions to an International Nuclear Fuel Bank under IAEA safeguards (European Parliament, 2009).

Shenna, a 'serving European diplomat' writing under a pseudonym, has argued that Iran's objections to the demands of the P5+1 as unjust and driven by Western double-standards are not entirely without justification, since they insist that Iran cease uranium enrichment whilst several NNWS maintain enrichment plants without their objections (Shenna, 2010, 356). Iran is not alone. In 2009 Egypt's

Ambassador to the UN, Maged Abdelaziz, raised regional objections to "attempts to impose restrictions on civil nuclear technology". He considered "the idea of responsible vs. irresponsible states [as] very dangerous", thought the "best way to handle the growing interest in this technology was to strengthen the IAEA" and, whilst accepting that "NPT Parties have both rights and responsibilities", "warned against discriminatory approaches to civil nuclear technology".¹⁷ In short, 'Western' efforts to strengthen legal and technical non-proliferation measures are communicating blanket suspicion, hypocrisy and self-interest.

The EU-3 were wary of Egypt's position before the RevCon. One British official warned of its "efforts to create major momentum for demands" on nuclear issues in the Middle East, whilst a French official accused it of lobbying amongst Arab states against the Additional Protocol,¹⁸ although this contradicts Abdulaziz's declared preference for strengthening the IAEA. Britain and the US agreed that "efforts on multilateral fuel cycle arrangements [needed] to get beyond have/have not tensions", that "mistrust [was] high" and increasing and that the "Middle East aspect of the NPT" was especially difficult. The Obama Administration thus argued that it was necessary to consider the problem in the wider regional security context.¹⁹ Ostensibly Britain and the EU have been pursuing this approach for some time, but with little success not least because the process became a vehicle aimed at serving EU security interests more than those of the region.

EU and British Approaches to a WMDFZ

At the 1995 RevCon Britain cosponsored with the UN Secretary General, US and Russia the resolution for the establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East, an idea Iran had first proposed in 1974. The Resolution defined the parameters that still guide declared British non-proliferation policies towards the region as a whole: accession of all regional states to the NPT under full-scope IAEA safeguards, endorsement of the aims and objectives of the Middle East peace process, and encouragement of regional states "to take practical steps in

¹⁷ US Embassy Cable, USUN New York 000497, *Subject: A/S Gottemoeller, 5 and 7 May Bilateral Meetings on the Margins of the NPT Preparatory Committee*, 13 May 2009 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/206843>>

¹⁸ US Embassy Cable, STATE 082013, *Subject: Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Bilaterals with UK, France, and Germany*, 6 August 2009.

¹⁹ Ibid.

appropriate forums towards" a zone free of WMD "and their delivery systems"; Britain and allies, however, rejected an attempt by the Arab League to mention Israel specifically (Andemicael, Opelz, Priest, 1996).

The EU affirmed its commitment to the resolution in the declaration that started the Barcelona Process or Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) in 1995, which included the Arab League as observers. The EMP intended to promote core principles of the EU's approach to security, governance and development, create an "area of peace and stability in the Mediterranean" and ultimately "a Euro-Mediterranean pact" (Joint Declaration, 2008, 10). After little progress, the EU and Mediterranean countries declared at the 2008 Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, presided over by the EU under French Presidency and Egypt, that they would establish a Union for the Mediterranean. The final declaration reconfirmed the 1995 aims, but highlighted the complexities of regional security-building too (Joint Declaration, 2008, 9f.).

It supported regional Confidence Building Measures (CBM) and called for restraint in conventional arms procurement, non-acquisition of WMD, practical steps in support of existing WMD non-proliferation regimes and intra-regional co-operation (Joint Declaration, 9f.). It noted the centrality of, and obstacles to, the Arab-Israeli Peace Process for the prospects of an area of peace and stability and put much store in Turkey's assistance in Israeli-Syrian peace talks. The 43 participants agreed to "pursue a mutually and effectively verifiable" WMDFZ. A seminar was to prepare a future conference on the zone.²⁰

Described as "packaging without content" (von Randow, 2011), the process stalled almost immediately. Egypt insisted that the seminar be held after the RevCon.²¹ Ambassador Abdelaziz demanded an alternative approach to the WMDFZ and Peace Process, argued the Iranian nuclear question should not prevent progress on a WMDFZ and warned that "statements from Israel's Prime Minister that his state possesses nuclear weapons [did] not contribute to security

²⁰ HFAC, *Global Security: Nuclear Proliferation*, Fourth Report, Session 2008-09, *Response of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*, August 2009, Cm. 7692, p. 10

²¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmffaff/222/response.pdf>
US Embassy Cable, STATE 082013, *Subject: Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Bilaterals with UK, France, and Germany*, 6 August 2009.

or stability".²² Turkish-Israeli relations have since deteriorated markedly and core aims of the Barcelona Process are still a remote prospect.

The EU failed to make progress partly due to diverging foreign policy rationales of salient members (Behr, 2008). More importantly, Kausch and Youngs (2009) have demonstrated that the EMP shifted towards "controlled surveillance". Projects of a defensive nature, such as counter-terrorism, distorted or received support at the expense of constructive policies aimed at true partnership, such as the 'Engaging with the Islamic World' initiative or democratic governance promotion. The EU had thus moved even further away from its declared aim of supporting the Peace Process, regional security and a WMDFZ; a shift which in Kausch and Youngs's view Britain had done little to prevent. In essence, the EMP became more about deterring external threats to the EU than building common security.

The importance of Israel's nuclear weapons policy for regional security and a WMDFZ is widely accepted in Britain.²³ In the Government's account it has, through official and private diplomacy, sought to persuade all non-NPT members in the region, including Israel, to join the treaty and accept full-scope safeguards and always supported relevant UN and IAEA resolutions.²⁴ The FCO recognised the interdependence of a Middle East peace settlement with prospects for a WMDFZ and the importance of CBM.²⁵ Yet, prospects for an Arab-Israeli settlement have, if anything, deteriorated despite the Obama Administration's early efforts which the Brown and Cameron Governments supported actively and occasionally more forcefully (Watt, Sherwood, 2010).²⁶

Iran has been separated from these processes. The FCO considered it "essential" that Iran allay concerns over its nuclear programme by complying with all UNSCR, which include demands for the cessation of enrichment, but declared it was seeking to progress on this matter "in parallel" to the peace process and

²² US Embassy Cable, USUN New York 000497, *Subject: A/S Gottemoeller, 5 and 7 May Bilateral Meetings on the Margins of the NPT Preparatory Committee*, 13 May 2009.

²³ HFAC, *Global Security: Non-Proliferation*, HC 222, p. 87.

²⁴ HFAC, CM. 7692, p. 8.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ HFAC, *Developments in UK Foreign Policy*, HC 438-I, Minutes of Evidence, 8 September 2010, answer to Q 37

<<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmfaif/438/10090802.htm>>; HFAC, *Global Security: UK – US Relations*, HC 114, p. Ev 61-2.

WMDFZ.²⁷ This suggests some congruence with Egypt's position, but excluding Iran will not encourage Israel to support a WMDFZ. The Brown Government also shared the view of the US National Security Advisor that "proliferation problems posed by Iran and North Korea should be addressed together, not as separate, unrelated issues".²⁸ Whilst recognising that each country is observing the negotiation process of the other is useful, overemphasising the communality of the proliferation challenge risks neglecting their distinct regional and domestic contexts. This, combined with the focus on coercion, is a central weakness in the approach to Iran.

The Need to Defuse Iran's Provocations

The negotiations with Iran have been surrounded by repeated calls for military strikes. The US and Britain are keeping the military option on the table, but have refrained from making official, concrete threats. Yet, the longer the stalemate continues the more these implicit threats of force are losing the power they may have as a negotiating tool. Under the deterrence paradigm, this should increase the likelihood of such threats having to materialise in order to restore the allies' credibility. Opponents argue that military strikes would wreak havoc in the region and elsewhere (McGlinchev, 2010, Zakheim, 2010) or would not be viable (Ha'aretz, 2009). These arguments have resonated with governments, but their reluctance explicitly to threaten military strikes risks creating perceptions of weakness. Iran is aware of, and exploiting, this weakness, as its reticence in the negotiation process has demonstrated. Depending on its assumed ultimate aim, this may leave it with either nuclear weapons or a break-out capability, that is, the capacity to produce nuclear weapon within a few months.

The dispute with Iran is a prime example for Adler's model of the double-damned dilemma. Adler developed it from the perspective of the provoked, but in the dispute with Iran it sheds light on the behaviour of both sides, because, as will be shown below, Iran responded to the deterrence approach of Britain and its allies with a defusing strategy. Adler distinguished between defusing by denial and

²⁷ HFAC, *Global Security: Nuclear Proliferation, Response of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*, Cm. 7692, p. 9.

²⁸ US Embassy Cable, Section 01 of 05 London 002198, Subject: U/S Tauscher's Meetings with FS Miliband and other, 22 September 2009.

defusing by restructuration, that is changing "the structural conditions that constitute the no-win choice" of the double-damned dilemma (Adler, 2010, 219). His notion of defusing by denial fundamentally differs from the concept of denial Britain and its allies apply. They seek to deny Iran the material outcome not only of nuclear weapons to which it is not legally entitled, but also enrichment to which it is formally entitled.

For both sides enrichment has become almost totemic and a major obstacle to an agreement. The P5+1's attempts to force Iran to cease all enrichment have enhanced its determination to deny Britain and its allies success repeatedly with the cumulative effect that they are losing the diplomatic initiative. If the series of escalating moves, from the EU-3's negotiations without, over offers of talks with, preconditions to progressively harsher sanctions aimed to increase coercive pressure, results in a stalemate which cannot be broken by further non-military pressure, the use of force becomes the last resort for preserving their credibility, a cornerstone of deterrence, as representatives of the international community and Israel's allies. Defusing by denial seeks to prevent this. It means not to respond to provocations in a manner desired by the other in order to both avoid getting trapped and enable a more constructive approach. Applying such a defusing strategy requires understanding the other's motivations and recognising that they have not only material, but also ideational components, such as a desire for recognition or acknowledgement.

For Iran the dispute is over its aspirations for regional influence (Halliday, 2009). It seeks recognition, especially by the US (Zakaria, 2009) and as a preeminent regional actor. It uses the nuclear question, or better the *fear* of its neighbours, the P5+1 and others that it might build nuclear weapons, as a vehicle to assert itself and to provoke. This negative form of attention seeking substitutes for the desired acknowledgement. Hostile rhetoric against Israel and uncertainty about the nuclear programme are ideal vehicles for such provocations. They strike at the core of deeply held beliefs of Britain and its allies in the power and significance of nuclear weapons and commitment to Israel's security. Iran's public approach to the dispute over its nuclear programme thus has qualities of performative acts. It is therefore in the Iranian leadership's interest not to acquire nuclear weapons, but to maintain uncertainty over its intentions which could be sustained with a break-out capability.

A compartmentalised approach to Iran, which separates the nuclear negotiations from its de facto role in the region or treats that role as predominantly disruptive, ignores that Iran may be partly motivated by a sense of "strategic loneliness" (Rezaei, 2008). It is also unrealistic. Britain and its allies have been exposed to and in the past even made use of its influence. Britain and the US sought Iran's support in Afghanistan, which Britain facilitated. In contrast to the US, which had been limited to track II diplomacy (Di Maggio, 2010), Britain had re-established full diplomatic relations in 1997, when the reformist Mohammed Khatemi was elected President. It participated in the 'comprehensive dialogue', a process that restarted the 'critical dialogue' the EU had begun with Iran in 1992 but interrupted in 1997 when Iranian officials were convicted of conducting terrorist activities in Germany; both processes included talks about nuclear issues (Posch, 2010; Sabet-Saeidi, 2008). In 2001 it was therefore possible, for the first time since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, for a British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, to visit Iran "as part of efforts to forge a coalition against the Taleban in Afghanistan" (BBC, 2007a). Iran responded positively.

Given its assistance in Afghanistan, the Khatemi government felt insulted to find Iran on the list of 'Axis of Evil' powers in President George W. Bush's State of the Union Speech in 2002. Iran not only failed to be acknowledged, but was cast as a "rogue" state, when, as Halliday (2009) has argued, others "have done more harm to regional stability - by reckless funding of extreme Islamist groups, or by selling nuclear technology to anyone willing to pay". In his view Iran had to be "understood as a revolutionary state", unlikely to cease soon and with many power centres, which would "continue to speak with two voices: those of diplomacy and of revolution". Iranians, neighbours and the world would have to live with this for some time.

Shenna illustrated this further. He identified a range of conflicting discourses - nationalist, anti-imperialist or Third World and exceptionalist - in the Iranian polity (Shenna, 2010), but social groups do not have fixed allegiances to specific discourses. For example, opposition groups within Iran are sometimes seen as predominantly pro-Western. However, whilst the urban, educated middle class may be influenced by Western ideas, they may simultaneously perceive the West through the lens of the imperialist/Third World paradigm. This became clear when Achmedinejad almost agreed to the US proposed fuel swap deal in 2009

and Mir Hossein Moussavi joined the conservative opponents of the deal on the grounds that he would otherwise be perceived as selling out to the West (Roberts, 2009). Likewise, the clerics are not fully supportive of nuclear weapons, whose possession or use they have repeatedly declared unislamic (Zakaria, 2009).

The current approach of Britain and its allies is also counterproductive. If the hypothesis is correct that the Iranian government uses fear as a means to enforce recognition, then trying to coerce Iran over the nuclear issue is an invitation for further provocation, because it denies Iran the opportunity to save face. Shenna (2010) and Slaughter (2012) have argued along similar lines that allowing the Iranian leadership to change course without losing face is essential. History has shown that this can be a salient factor in resolving, or exacerbating, conflicts or crises, but Western approaches have so far paid little heed to this.

Kennedy's offer to withdraw the obsolete Thor missiles from Turkey allowed Khrushchev an opportunity to step back from the brink with honour, which deescalated the Cuban missile crisis. Nixon sought 'peace with honour' in Vietnam; the trauma of the retreat lingers until today. Propaganda in Germany over the 'humiliating' Treaty of Versailles contributed to the outbreak of World War II. Today, a recurring theme in Iran's statements on how negotiations with the P5+1 might progress is its insistence on being treated with respect or as an equal, particularly by the US, and that talks should begin without preconditions or restrictions on their scope (Mirak-Weissbach, 2011).

In its external relations the shift between diplomatic and revolutionary voices is particularly pronounced in Iran's relationship with not only the US, but also Israel. Despite deep ideological tensions since the Islamic Revolution, Iran and Israel maintained a strategic relationship which was based on common self-perceptions of alienation from neighbours and national interest calculations; notably, Turkey was an important facilitator of their low-key contacts (Parsi, 2007). With the removal of Saddam Hussein Iran's strategic calculus changed. It began to shape its regional security environment more actively and independently.

When Mahmood Achmedinejad was elected President in 2005, he developed a narrative on the nuclear programme which made independent mastery of nuclear technology a matter of national pride and associated it with aspirations to a preeminent regional status. Achmedinejad thus connected the nuclear programme with discourses on independence or self-sufficiency, development, modernity and

nationalism, which have a venerable tradition in Iranian society (Ansari, 2003, 14-17). Indeed a civilian nuclear programme is widely supported in Iran (Zakaria, 2009). Achmedinejad's threatening rhetoric aggravated tensions with Israel and provoked Israel's allies. Whether Iran constitutes an existential threat is disputed in Israel, but that it might be motivates demands for military strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities. Both factors have increased pressure on Britain or the EU-3 and the US to reinforce their commitment to Israel's security and prevent unilateral Israeli military action.

As the following section shows, speculation about, or advocacy of, military action especially in Israel and the US, but occasionally also in Britain, became louder when Iran resisted or actively undermined their policy objectives. This was often accompanied by more pessimistic predictions when Iran would acquire nuclear weapons. Rather than moving the negotiating process closer to a resolution, this has repeatedly brought Britain and its allies close to the social trap of the double-damned dilemma.

Hovering on the Edge of the Social Trap

When the EU-3 started the series of diplomatic initiatives and negotiations with Iran in 2003 the US Administration tolerated, but did not actively support their efforts. When their apparent progress was stalling in 2005, the US agreed to consent to Iran joining the World Trade Organisation and potentially licensing civilian aircraft parts, if it ceased enrichment (Hadley, 2010, 143). This combination of preconditions and material incentives was ineffective, because for Iran exercising its right to enrich uranium is non-negotiable. For the P5+1 it became a core measure of success. The two sides were thus caught in a no-deal situation. The UNSC imposed sanctions in September and December 2006. Media speculation in the US about the Administration's plans for military action increased (Hersh, 2006). Jack Straw dismissed a military option as "completely nuts" (BBC, 2006b). Essentially identifying that the allies were approaching the double-damned dilemma, the Iranian Foreign Ministry interpreted the reports as intimidation "stemming from America's anger and helplessness" (BBC, 2006b). Britain used its diplomatic presence in Tehran to inform "regular exchanges" and closely co-ordinated policy with the US. They agreed on the threat the nuclear programme posed and defined Iran's influence on the region as "destabilising".

With a "'dual-track strategy' of pressure and engagement" they aimed to coerce Iran into taking "urgent steps to assure the international community" that the programme was peaceful, coordinated the preparation and implementation of UNSC Resolutions (UNSCR) and sanctions. An EU3+3 package of incentives was "to encourage Iran to halt its programme and enter negotiations". Offered in June 2006 and again in June 2008, the package was said to provide "Iran with everything it needs for a modern civil nuclear programme, as well as many other benefits".²⁹ Neither material incentives nor the conditional offer of negotiations communicated recognition of Iran.

In 2007 British-Iranian tensions intensified. Britain accused Iran of increasingly interfering in Iraq and sponsoring attacks on British forces in Basra (BBC, 2007b). In January then Opposition Leader David Cameron argued that, whilst peaceful resolution of the nuclear dispute was "obviously" preferable, it was "not right to take things [a military option, AE] entirely off the table" (Reece, 2007). A new round of sanctions followed on 24 March 2007 (Starr, 2010). A day earlier Iranian Revolutionary Guards had captured fifteen Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel (BBC, 2007b), who were later paraded on television (BBC, 2007c). Both sides had cause to feel provoked. Britain initially claimed that its military personnel had been in Iraqi waters, but it later emerged that the claim was based on the Anglo-American coalition's unilateral definition of a maritime border (Kennedy, 2008). The incident embarrassed the British and increased tensions with Iran considerably. The dynamics of the crisis also reinforce the point that the Iranian leadership does not respond well to public attempts at coercion.

Diplomatic efforts were initially delayed by the Nowruz celebrations. After five days the British government openly increased the pressure, lobbied allies to do the same and issued an ultimatum for an Iranian response. In return President Achmedinejad retracted his earlier offer to release the only female sailor. Events in Iran then unfolded without much British influence; British diplomats were reportedly greatly surprised when Achmedinejad announced on 4 April 2007 that he had pardoned and would release the captured personnel (Kendall, 2007).

Despite the resolution of the crisis tensions continued to mount and by October

²⁹ HCFAC, *Global Security: UK – US Relations*, HC 114, p. Ev 61.

the British Government publicly supported limited strikes against Iran in a counter-terrorism operation, although some military and intelligence officials feared such support would "embolden the White House faction, led by Vice-President Dick Cheney, which wants major bombing of Iran's nuclear facilities" (Shipman, 2007).

In 2008 the atmosphere calmed down in Britain and the US. In November 2007 the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran had concluded that international pressure had stopped Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons after 2003, although it was keeping the option open (NIC, 2007). The British government assumed that Iran was aiming for a break-out capability, which it thought achievable by 2015.³⁰ Israel strongly disagreed with the NIE and signalled heavily that it was contemplating military strikes. Pointedly highlighting the complexities of the situation, Anatol Lieven (2008) argued that Britain would have to prevent Israel's resort of force, because it would not only put Israel's survival at greater risk in long term, but also expose US and coalition soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan to Iranian reprisals. As argued above, separating the nuclear issue from Iran's de facto regional role is counterproductive and unrealistic.

The Obama Administration's offer of direct engagement with Iran "on matters of shared concern", which Britain fully supported, allowed the EU to re-issue an offer of negotiations in April 2009.³¹ The US did not take a military option off the table, but doubts about its effectiveness and concerns about possible consequences continued to be voiced in political and military quarters, most importantly by Defense Secretary Gates. Iran meanwhile outmanoeuvred Britain and its allies again on the nuclear issue. In September 2009 Britain, France and the US made public the allegedly concealed construction of the Qom enrichment facility. Its purpose was unclear, but it increased suspicions and especially US-Iranian tensions (Barzashka, 2009). Yet, Joyner (2010) argued that strictly speaking Iran had not concealed the facility. It had notified the IAEA just within the legally required period.

After President Achmedinejad's problematic re-election in June 2009 British foreign policy officials expected the Iranian government, which was in "a state of

³⁰ HFAC, *Global Security: Iran*, Response of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, p. 3.

³¹ HCFAC, *Global Security: UK – US Relations*, HC 114, p. Ev 61.

flux", to be unable to respond or make concessions.³² They welcomed the Obama Administration's efforts of "trying to overcome a deficit of prejudice and mistrust in a relatively short time", but advised that, unless there was a timely response, pressure on Iran would have to be increased through further sanctions. Britain was not alone in demanding that diplomatic initiatives be tied to a tight timeline. Israel demanded that any new approach the Obama Administration might pursue produce results, primarily cessation of enrichment, within months. If it did not, increasingly harsh sanctions would have to follow; the entire process needed to take place "under the 'stick of military pressure'" (Parsi, 2012, 51).

In the same year Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, joined Israel's demands to use force against Iran (Sanger, 2010). Amidst increasing tensions British-Iranian relations were tested yet again, when the Iranian Navy seized a racing yacht and detained its five-strong crew of British civilians in November 2009 for entering Iranian waters (Meikle, 2009). In contrast to the 2007 incident their release was negotiated quietly behind the scenes which, for Foreign Secretary David Miliband, demonstrated that "diplomacy can work" (Gabbat, Meikle, 2009).

On nuclear matters, however, speculations about, or demands for, a US (Pilkington, 2010) or Israeli military strike (Goldberg, 2010) continued in 2010. In 2010 and 2011 new attempts at negotiations resulted in two further rounds of sanctions. On 8 September 2010 Foreign Secretary William Hague declared he personally had "put a lot of effort" into developing and generating political support for the sanctions package the EU agreed in late July. He emphasised that it "went beyond" UNSCR 1929, created "quite an impact", had surprised the Iranian leadership and "certainly delighted our allies around the world that Europe was able to agree [...] a really meaningful sanctions package".³³

The September sanctions coincided with former Prime Minister Blair calling for an attack on Iran, as Iranian nuclear weapons were "wholly unacceptable" (Tran, 2010). Others (Streithorst, 2010; Lynch, 2010), including Russian President

³² US Embassy Cable, Section 01 of 05 London 002198, *Subject: U/S Tauscher's Meetings with FS Miliband and other*, 22 September 2009.

³³ HFAC, *Developments in UK Foreign Policy*, HC 438-I, Minutes of Evidence, 8 September 2010, answer to Q 33
<<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmfaif/438/10090802.htm>>

Medvedev (Jerusalem Post, 2010), argued that military strikes would be disastrous for regional and global security. The effect of the targeted sabotage of Iranian centrifuges with the Stuxnet malware only temporarily silenced calls for military action. Suspicion had also fallen on Russia and China (Leyden, 2010; Carr, 2010) until David Sanger (2012) reported that the malware was a US-Israeli development initiated in 2004; the Obama Administration accelerated the cyber attacks in 2009-10.

After the failed talks with Iran in Istanbul in January 2011, for which Turkey only provided the venue, Blair again advocated military strikes in a second appearance before the Chilcot Inquiry on Iraq. Defence Secretary Liam Fox seemed to imply the same, when he told the House of Commons on 31 January 2011 that it was necessary "to act in accordance with [the] warning" that Iran may have nuclear weapons in 2012, citing agreement with Leon Panetta, Head of the CIA (Kirkup, 2011b). Other members of the British government were less alarmist and hawkish. Again, contemplation of the military option was associated with more pessimistic threat assessments and calls, such as David Cameron's, for sanctions outside the UN or EU (Kirkup, 2011a).

Public discussions of military options were reaching a new crescendo. Israel added to the urgency by warning that the use of force would soon cease to be a viable option, as Iran was relocating its centrifuges and other activities deemed sensitive to underground facilities to protect them from military strikes (Mitchell, 2011). Israel and the US were suspected of having waged a campaign of physical sabotage against Iranian nuclear installations and targeted assassinations of nuclear scientists for two years (Birch, 2011; Putz, 2011).

When the IAEA published its report on Iran in November, British government officials and others speculated about a unilateral Israeli attack, which would force the US into providing support, by Christmas or early 2012 (Blomfield, 2011; Bergman, 2012). At the same time Israel was lobbying the US, Britain, France and Germany to impose sanctions targeting Iran's central bank, oil exports, airlines and shipping on the back of the report, but outside the UN context (Ravid, 2011).

Anglo-Iranian relations had been deteriorating markedly (Turkish Weekly, 2011), hitting their lowest point in decades in November. Days before publication of the IAEA report, *The Guardian* reported that Whitehall and the MoD were

accelerating contingency planning for joint missile strikes with the US as they expected that the US Administration might use force earlier than previously anticipated (Hopkins, 2011). It cited British government officials portraying the forthcoming report as a potential "'game changer' which [would] provide unprecedented details of the research and experiments being undertaken by the regime" as well as "fresh evidence of a possible nuclear weapons programme in Iran" (Hopkins, 2011).

William Hague warned that the dispute was "entering a dangerous phase" and that "the longer Iran [went] on pursuing a nuclear weapons programme without responding adequately to calls for negotiations from the rest of us, the greater the risk of a conflict as a result" (Spillius, McElroy, 2011). The British government spearheaded a set of "punitive measures, cutting all ties to the Iranian banking system and parliament, the Majlis, which retaliated" by demanding that the British ambassador, Dominick Chilcott, be expelled and diplomatic relations substantially reduced (Borger, Dehghan, 2011).

It is against this background that crowds, allegedly including members of the Basiji, stormed the British embassy in Tehran on 29 November, the first anniversary of the assassination of nuclear scientist Majid Shahriari. (Borger, Dehghan, 2011). After the riot, which the Iranian police eventually stopped, Britain closed the embassy and expelled all Iranian diplomats from London. The first high level meeting since occurred at the fringes of a conference in Kabul in June 2012 between Hague and his Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Salehi to discuss arrangements for third party representation of their diplomatic interests and for Hague to prepare the field for diplomacy for talks in Moscow in June, a third round after Istanbul in April and Baghdad in May 2012 (Miglani, 2012).

Since November 2011 the dynamics that have led to the stalemate between Iran and 'the West' have, if anything, been reinforced. Mutual threats and provocative rhetoric gathered pace in the first half of 2012. Iran repeatedly threatened to close the Straits of Hormuz, the US increased its military presence in the region, the US and EU imposed further sanctions on Iranian oil imports and the EU on Iranian insurance for oil-related shipping (BBC, 2011; Borger, 2012; Herron, 2012).

The underlying dynamics too have changed little, but it is here, as the next section will explore, that a more constructive approach may be found. This is becoming increasingly important because, as the US and its allies are continuing to approach

Iran through the deterrence paradigm, the pressure to use force has been growing although no government has yet found a unified position. Two observations provide particular cause for concern that relations with Iran remain caught in the double-damned dilemma.

After the November 2011 report Iran charged the IAEA with making "false accusations dictated from New York and Washington" (Spillius, McElroy, 2011). Robert Kelley, former IAEA Chief Inspector in Iraq and Hans Blix, former IAEA Director General, considered this complaint justified. Moreover, concerned that the intelligence picture on Iran may be as skewed and politicised as it was before the 2003 Iraq War and that it may be used to serve the same purpose, both have argued that there was no new evidence Iran had resumed nuclear weapons related work after 2003, questioned the reliability of the sources for and validity of the intelligence information on which the IAEA report was based and argued there was thus no need for war against Iran (Kelley, 2012; Steinberg, 2012).

Two, on the initiative of the EU the talks in Istanbul were held on the basis on the NPT in an effort to generate a modicum of trust, but in the subsequent round in Baghdad the P5+1 returned to their approach of making maximum demands for "minimal concessions"; the Iranian delegation considered the proposed deal an insult (Mousavian, Shabani, 2012). Yet, there are indications that in Moscow Iran was prepared to discuss halting enrichment to twenty per cent. The US had earlier signalled some flexibility, but now insisted that any agreement on enrichment could only be made in conjunction with Iran handing over 110 kg of uranium enriched to that level and a commitment to close Qom facility (Global Security Newswire, 2012). There has been no movement on sanctions, the most recent of which came into force in July 2012. Discussions with Iran are continuing, but it is there is a serious risk that they will remain caught in the unless

From Failing Coercion to Engagement?

In November 2010 US Vice President Gates had declared that sanctions were working and a military strike would not achieve the desired objective. It would bring the Iranian nation together and "make them absolutely committed to obtaining nuclear weapons" (Stewart, 2010). Avner Cohen agreed. He cautiously predicted Iran would not ultimately acquire nuclear weapons and "avoid

confrontation with the world", but be determined to achieve a break-out capability, stay within the NPT and insist on its "right to a fuel cycle"; he was unsure whether "the west and Israel would be able to live with that" (McAskill, 2011). Avner's assessment further supports both the point that for Iran the right to enrichment is non-negotiable and the initial hypothesis that it is not in Iran's interest to acquire nuclear weapons. Fear of Iranian nuclear weapons is a more powerful negotiating tool. It guarantees attention.

Adler (2011) explained the failure of the Istanbul talks with Iran's insistence that "the world recognize Iran's right to enrich uranium" and the UN "drop its punitive economic sanctions", two unacceptable preconditions for the P5+1, who insist that Iran agree to "ship out most of its enriched uranium" and provide "more information to UN inspectors". For years negotiations have failed, because neither side recognises the other's aims as legitimate and both insist on preconditions that are unacceptable to the other, but only Iran developed a quite successful strategy of denial by defusing and restructuring.

Iran defused the demands of the P5+1 by denying their right to make them, knowing it had support from other non-aligned countries, thus invoking the anti-imperialist discourse. Alluding to the topoi of self-sufficiency and nationalism, Achmedinejad made a virtue of being under sanctions, when he claimed that they increased Iran's independence. His government facilitated this through extensive alliance building, first and foremost with China and Russia, but also in Africa and Latin America (Park, 2010, Katz, 2010, Heydeman, 2010). This combines defusing by denial - reducing the domestic impact of sanctions - with defusing by restructuring through building alliances with countries which the transatlantic allies cannot influence that easily. It made the decision-context more difficult for them, especially Britain.

Anglo-Russian relations have been exceedingly difficult for years.³⁴ Britain's and the EU's ability to influence China's foreign policy is likewise limited, although some FCO officials did see potential for co-operation with China and engagement in multi-lateral nuclear arms control.³⁵ The US has been co-operating on Iran with China for some time and agreed on the aim of seeking to dissuade Iran from

³⁴ US Embassy Cable, Section 01 of 05 London 002198, *Subject: US Tauscher's Meetings with FS Miliband and other*, 22 September 2009.

³⁵ Ibid.

acquiring nuclear weapons.³⁶ That the US administration persuaded Saudi Arabia to guarantee oil supplies for China, should Iran stop its deliveries (Sanger, 2010), indicates that it has begun to undermine Iran's approach of denial by restructuring. Moreover, Dilma Rousseff's Brazilian government has distanced itself from Iran (Tait, 2012). Iran's alliance-building is thus not a panacea.

China and Russia supported the more coercive UNSC sanctions of September 2010 (Sanger, 2010). In their wake former Iranian President Rafsanjani illustrated that Iran is not immune to sanctions, when he warned that "throughout the revolution, we never had so many sanctions (imposed on Iran) and I am calling on you and all officials to take the sanctions seriously and not as jokes" (Cumhuriyet, 2010). Not necessarily only as a result of the sanctions, but also due to economic mismanagement, the government had to cut subsidies for food and fuel in late 2010, which may in the long term undermine support for President Achmedinejad from his traditional electoral base. A former US diplomat, however, argued that sanctions were not working and needed to be significantly tougher (Katz, 2011).

Yet, coercion alone will not achieve the desired aim of forcing Iran to give up enrichment or providing assurances that its nuclear programme is peaceful. If the hypothesis of this analysis is correct, that Iran uses the nuclear dispute as a means of extracting recognition, then assurances of Iran's peaceful intentions do not lie primarily in legal or technical safeguards, but rather in a diplomatic approach which acknowledges credibly this desire for recognition. In the nuclear field a potent symbol of such recognition would be to drop or modify the demand that Iran cease enrichment.

Indeed in 2009 the Obama Administration considered moving on this point and treating Iran "no differently than any other" NNWS NPT member, but projected "the possibility of enrichment on Iranian soil" only after Iran had "restored the international community's confidence" (Parsi, 2012, 59). This conditional offer might or might not have been successful. It was never made because US allies objected strongly and the Administration balked at handing Iran "a major victory" (Parsi, 2012, 59).

³⁶ US Embassy Cable, Section 01 of 02, Beijing, 001141, *Subject: STAFFDEL Januzzi Discusses Nonproliferation, Iran, and DPRK with MFA Arms Control Director General*, Wednesday, 26 March 2008 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/147273>>

Clearly, to make an approach based on recognition of Iran acceptable to Israel and parts of the domestic audience in the US and Britain, public expressions of this recognition will require careful preparation, lest it be branded as appeasement. It will also be difficult to communicate it to those centres of power in Iran which have the authority domestically to utilise offers of changing course without losing face. Within the scope of this article it is not possible to develop an alternative strategy, but one episode may serve as a pointer.

Turkey has consistently sought to engage Iran. It has even more cause for concern about potential Iranian nuclear weapons than its western allies, but especially the US has met Turkey's efforts with suspicion and failed to see the potential. This became obvious, when Foreign Minister Davutoglu briefed the US Assistant Secretary of State about a visit to Iran following agreement on the US-proposed fuel-swap deal with Russia in 2009.

Davutoglu reported that Achmedinejad was inclined towards, but under enormous pressure from conservative opponents to, the deal. Remarkably, he reported that "despite all the bad blood" Iran preferred the US to supply the fuel; it trusted Britain less than the US. He had also asked whether the core problem was "psychological rather than substance". Ahmadinejad confirmed it was "basically a matter of public perception" (Sick, 2010). Sick criticised the US administration for missing the opportunity to engage, reverting to the "default position of calling for more pressure" and, when Turkey attempted with Brazil to negotiate a deal again in 2010, chiding them and proceeding with more sanctions.

In 2010, after 18 hours of negotiations, Turkey and Brazil had persuaded Iran to accept the fuel swap deal. Iran had agreed to ship the 1,200 kg of Low Enriched Uranium (LEU) to Turkey in return for 120 kg of more highly enriched uranium for medical use (BBC, 2010d). However, most of the P5+1, including Foreign Secretary Hague, dismissed the agreement as another incident of Iranian delaying tactics aimed at evading new sanctions under discussion at the time (Sanger, Slackman, 2010; Borger, 2010).

Sick (2010) concluded, when given a "choice between negotiations and coercion, Washington refuses to take yes for an answer". Particularly the US media treated Turkey as an irritant. *The Christian Science Monitor* for example headlined an article on the issue 'How Turkey is Complicating US Aims', but quoted Charles Kupchan's acknowledgement that "Iran finds it much easier to strike a bargain

with two powers that are not perceived as being part of the reigning order [or] doing the bidding of the US and its Western partners” (LaFranchi, 2010).

Since the cessation of official diplomatic relations, Britain has even less leverage over Iran, but considering its policy to consult closely with the US it could capitalise on its relationship with Turkey. On his visit in July 2010 Prime Minister Cameron reconfirmed a bi-lateral co-operation agreement and stressed Turkey's "crucial diplomatic role", stating "the world [needed] Turkey's help in pressing Iran" on the nuclear issue (Hürriyet, 2010). Davutoglu had described his meetings with Iranian officials in 2009 as "harsh" (Sick, 2010), but in public Prime Minister Erdogan did the opposite of pressing Iran. In 2010 he told the BBC (2010c) he believed "Iran [had] no intentions of developing nuclear weapons", adding that he had also made it clear that "he did not want to see nuclear weapons in the region".

Rather than pressing Iran, he conveyed his opposition to nuclear weapons in the region, which sent a non-proliferation signal to Iran but would include Israel, and did so by ascribing honourable intentions to Iran. It is unsurprising that Turkey could play this potentially productive role. Turkish-Iranian relations have not been free of friction, but they have a long history of diplomatic engagement (Kinzer, 2010). As a NNWS Iran accepts Turkey as a conduit for a non-proliferation message. Its publicly non-coercive approach does not provoke Iran into counter-provocation. Turkey has demonstrated that it can shape Iran's decision context in a way that opens up opportunities for a change of course whilst saving face. Davutoglu confirmed the importance of this psychological factor. However, if Britain and its allies intend to avail themselves of these assets, they need develop truly joint approaches with Turkey and learn from the Turkish government's methodology, rather than sidelining it and seeking to persuade it to join their coercive policies which have so far been unsuccessful.

Conclusions

Although there is a clear need to address nuclear proliferation risks in the region, British policies have failed to produce tangible results for several reasons. One, movement on Article VI and the declared commitment to 'global zero' has not been producing results swiftly enough to have an impact on the processes in the Middle East. Two, in the pursuit of declared non-proliferation aims insufficient

attention has been paid to the wider regional security context. Three, although its neighbours are suspicious of Iran's nuclear intentions, some share its perceptions of hypocrisy in the approach of Britain and its allies, including their attempts to impose new restrictions on the use of the full fuel cycle. For countries such as Egypt and Iran this communicates mistrust, is discriminatory and provocative. Four, the EU's declared commitment to common security and a WMDFZ have failed to produce tangible results, because the EMP became more about deterring threats from the EU. Five, British influence in the region depends on its historical legacy and alliances and has limitations.

The common problem underlying western approaches to proliferation problems in region is their focus on their own security interests rather than those of the region, which does not encourage hope for the 2012 conference. Their approach to Iran demonstrates this particularly well. Britain and its allies facilitate Iran's resistance with the narrow focus on the nuclear programme and the prevailing assumption that Iran intends to acquire nuclear weapons. Their coercive approach provokes Iran into counter-provocation and allows it to play several cards which resonate with its domestic audience, sympathisers further afield and some neighbours. A civilian programme has wide support amongst the Iranian public. The demands of the P5+1 therefore meet with strong domestic opposition.

By applying Adler's model of the double-damned dilemma the analysis has shown that the coercive diplomacy of Britain and its allies has produced the social trap he predicted, if a security challenge that has characteristics of a performative act is met through the prism of deterrence. Their room for manoeuvre is clearly also circumscribed by their commitment to Israel's security and the need to prevent it from attacking Iran. However, the escalation of coercive moves combined with progressively less veiled threats of military attacks has produced the current stalemate with Iran for several principal reasons. They treat the issue as a nuclear proliferation problem and deny Iran the recognition it seeks. Iran responds by demanding attention through inducing fear of its potential intentions. Maintaining uncertainty is more in Iran's interest than acquiring nuclear weapons. It has perpetuated the stalemate with a quite successful defusing strategy. This interpretation is not shared by those calling for attacks, but they risk backing Britain and its allies into a corner of having to act on them to retain credibility.

Assurances that Iran's intentions are peaceful lie only secondarily in technical and

legal solutions directed at the nuclear programme and primarily in communicating credibly that it is seen as an important regional actor with a constructive role to play and engaging with it accordingly. If it is publicly acknowledged in this role, Iran is more likely to consent to nuclear safeguards and related assurances. Herein lies the potential of Turkey's approach. It had been treating Iran as a regional partner. It has privately communicated its objections to nuclear weapons in the region and publicly declared trust in Iran's nuclear intentions. It has thus laid out options for Iran to change course without losing face. Britain and its allies could do worse than co-operate closely with Turkey.

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