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ABSTRACT

The European Union has been the main international actor trying to contain the Iranian nuclear programme. In 2003, for the first time ever, the EU-3 adopted a coercive diplomatic approach vis-à-vis Iran. The current paper begins with an analysis of the concept of coercive diplomacy before applying it to the Iranian case. In so doing, the paper aims to make an interim assessment of the European (EU-3) effort.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Before joining the Department of Politics at the University of Antwerp (Belgium) as lecturer in 2004, Tom Sauer was a Post-Doctoral research fellow at the Institute for International and European Policy at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium). His major research focus is International Security, and in particular (nuclear) arms control, proliferation, and disarmament.

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COERCIVE DIPLOMACY BY THE EU: THE CASE OF IRAN¹

Tom Sauer

The EU desires to become a global player. The year 2003 can be regarded as a substantial step in that direction. Not only did the EU set up its first military intervention, it also wrote for the first time ever a Security Strategy and, in a separate document, a Non-Proliferation Strategy.² But the event that year that probably received most media attention and that raised most expectations was the common diplomatic “démarche” to Teheran by Dominique de Villepin, Jack Straw and Joschka Fischer, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the ‘big Three’, on 21 October 2003. The EU-3 made abundantly clear that they would do everything they could to prevent Iran becoming a nuclear weapon state.

The objective of this paper is to make an interim-assessment of the European effort to block the Iranian attempt to “go nuclear”. In so doing it asks who took the lead inside the EU; whether the EU succeeded in its coercive diplomacy efforts, and whether it remained united. It also uncovers the difficulties associated with the exercise of coercive diplomacy, and what lessons might be drawn from it.

In the first section, the concept of coercive diplomacy is explained. What are its key characteristics? Which factors determine whether coercive diplomacy in general succeeds or fails? In the second part, the theory is applied to the Iranian nuclear crisis. After a chronological overview of the major events, the following questions are considered: Can the EU attempt be regarded as an example of coercive diplomacy? Were the conditions fulfilled for successful coercive diplomacy in this specific case?

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- 1) The text has been presented as a paper at the ECPR Standing Group on the EU: Third Pan-European Conference on EU Politics in Istanbul (Turkey) on 21-23 September 2006.
 - 2) *Basic Principles for an EU Strategy Against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction*, Brussels, June 2003, <http://ue.eu.int/pressdata/EN/reports/76328.pdf>; *Strategy Against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction*, Brussels, December 2003, <http://ue.eu.int/pressData/en/misc/78340.pdf>; *European Security Strategy*, “A Secure Europe in a Better World” Brussels, December 2003, <http://www.iss-eu.org/solana/solanae.pdf>.

COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

Diplomacy is the main instrument of state interaction. Even if the positions seem diametrically opposed to one another and the conflict unsolvable, states most of the time do have common interests and may end up reaching a compromise. Although it may take some time, discovering each other's underlying interests is worthwhile. The alternative is the lingering on of the conflict with the risk of large-scale violence over time, or even a sudden preventive violent attack by one of the actors. Recent examples in international politics illustrate the point, for example in the Balkans and Rwanda.

Sometimes decision-makers do not perceive it in their personal interest to make compromises. States may be very stubborn. This makes the conflict even more difficult to resolve. Positions become hardened. Public opinion becomes agitated. The stakes are raised even more. In such circumstances, diplomats may adopt a tougher approach such as using threats. If negotiations by themselves do not help, a state can threaten to use economic sanctions or even military action in order to convince the opponent. This approach is called "coercive diplomacy".³

CHARACTERISTICS OF COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

Three elements characterize coercive diplomacy: 1) a demand; 2) a threat; and 3) time pressure.⁴ First, a specific demand has to be formulated vis-à-vis the opponent. The objective of the demand is to stop or to reverse an action that the opponent has started. As this demand is supplemented with a threat, the demand should be understood as a requirement. There should be no ambiguity about what exactly is required. Success or failure of coercive diplomacy depends on whether the demand will be fulfilled.

Second, the demand has to be supported by a threat. 'If you do not agree with this demand, I will punish you by doing X or Y'. As Alexander George pointed out: 'the general idea of coercive diplomacy is to back one's demand on an adversary with a threat of punishment for non-compliance that he will consider credible and potent enough to persuade him to comply with the demand', or, in other words, 'to create in the opponent the expectation of

3) Alexander George, *Forceful Persuasion. Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War*, US Institute of Peace, Washington DC, 1997; Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, Yale University Press, 1966.

4) Alexander George, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

costs of sufficient magnitude to erode his motivation to continue what he is doing'.⁵ Most of the time the threat has to be made explicit. The latter can be further supported by action. Organizing military exercises before the coast of the opponent, such as for instance by the US Navy off the coast of North Korea and Taiwan, may help in convincing the opponent that the threat is real. Occasionally, it may suffice to back up the demand with an implicit threat.

Third, it is not sufficient to have a demand combined with a threat. Coercive diplomacy also requires some kind of time pressure. Peter Jakobsen suggests that: 'Opponents will simply not perceive a threat of force as credible unless it is accompanied by a deadline for compliance'.⁶ George makes a distinction between four categories of time pressure: a) an (explicit) ultimatum that sets a deadline; b) a tacit ultimatum that stresses a sense of urgency; c) a "gradual turning-on-the-screws" approach; and d) a try-and-see approach that does not even mention that escalation is possible.⁷ It is possible to move from one category to another during the conflict, if necessary.

FACTORS THAT DETERMINE THE SUCCESS RATE OF COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

In theory, coercive diplomacy appears an efficient approach to persuade opponents. In reality, many factors have to be present in order to enable coercive diplomacy to succeed. Ten factors, which may be clustered around five basic questions, can be distinguished: 1) is the demand legitimate?; 2) does the opponent believe that there will be more demands in the future?; 3) is the threat credible?; 4) is the time pressure credible?; 5) which actor is mostly motivated to win the game?⁸ In addition, positive incentives may help to persuade the opponent.

1. Is the demand legitimate? Here a distinction can be made between the underlying objective and the specific demand: (a) First, is the underlying

5) *Op.cit.*, p. 4, 11.

6) Peter Jakobsen, *Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy after the Cold War. A Challenge for Theory and Practice*, Macmillan, London, 1998, p. 29.

7) Alexander George, *op.cit.*, pp. 7-9.

8) Alexander George distinguishes seven conditions. See Alexander George, *op.cit.*, pp. 75-81. See also Peter Jakobsen, *op.cit.*; Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, Yale University Press, 1966; Bruce Jentleson and Christopher Whytock, 'Who "Won" Libya? The Force-Diplomacy Debate and its Implications for Theory and Policy', *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 3, Winter 2005/06, pp. 47-86.

objective legitimate? The objective of the threatening state may be in accordance with international law. But if - at the same time - other states are not pressured to comply with international law, let alone the same law, then critics can easily point to the double standards used by the threatening state(s). Therefore, legitimacy is a broader and more useful concept than legality. If public opinion in the threatening state(s) supports the view that the final goal is not legitimate, then it will be hard for decision-makers in the threatening state to maintain this policy of coercive diplomacy for a very long time, especially in democratic states.⁹ *Mutatis mutandis*, if public opinion in the threatened state does not find the underlying objective legitimate, it will support its government in resisting the external pressure. The result will be that the threatened government will become more self-confident and even harder to convince. (b) Second, even if the underlying objective seems legitimate, the specific demand may be (perceived as) excessive. If the demand is not in proportion with the objective, then it will not be regarded as legitimate. Demands should to a certain extent always be limited.¹⁰

2. Does the opponent believe that there will be more demands in the future? If the opponent believes that more demands will turn up in the future, he will not be eager to give in in the first place. The threatening state should make clear from the beginning what the overall goals are and what the definitive solution will look like.

3. Is the threat credible? The credibility of the threat is a major factor that determines the success rate of coercive diplomacy. As Thomas Schelling suggests: 'Hardly anything epitomizes strategic behaviour in the mixed motive game so much as the advantage of being able to adopt a mode of behaviour that the other party will take for granted'.¹¹ In *Arms and Influence*, Schelling called this "competition in risk-taking".¹²

The credibility of a threat depends in its turn on four factors: (a) First, is the threat proportional to the demand? If not, then the threat will not be perceived as credible. The threat should be proportional to the specific

9) Kenneth Schultz, *Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001. For a broader theory that emphasizes the role of domestic politics, see Andrew Moravcsik, 'Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics', *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 4, Autumn 1997, pp. 513-553.

10) Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, Harvard University Press, 1960; Morton Halperin, *Limited War in the Nuclear Age*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1963.

11) Thomas Schelling, *op.cit.*, p. 160.

12) Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, p. 91.

demand, the underlying objective and the available means. On the other hand, Schelling also warns that in making threats it is not always advantageous to look too rational either.¹³ In case of threatening with military action, Jakobsen recommends never to exclude the use of ground troops.¹⁴ (b) Second, does public opinion support the threat and its potential consequences? Sanctions, for instance, may also hurt the economy of the threatening state, which may prevent the use of coercive diplomacy in the first place. On the other hand, a divided public opinion also offers some bargaining advantages. In such a case, one can always refer to that part of public opinion that opposes the decision. Treaty negotiators (from the executive branch), for instance, sometimes refer to their parliaments, which have to ratify treaties. This is a classic example of Robert Putnam's two-level game.¹⁵ (c) Third, does the threatened state fears some kind of escalation? If that is the case, then coercive diplomacy becomes easier. (d) Fourth, what is the reputation of the threatening state? If the threatening state has a reputation of making credible threats, then it will be easier to persuade the opponent.

4. Is the time pressure credible? The demand may be legitimate and the threat credible, but if the time pressure is too tight or, in contrast, not tight enough, then the odds are that the threatened state will not give in.

5. Which actor is mostly motivated to win the negotiation game?

Motivation can be seen in absolute or relative terms, leading to several questions. (a) Which actor is mostly motivated in absolute terms? Motivation basically depends on the size of the national interests involved. If there are vital interests at stake, the odds are that the country will be extremely motivated to win the game. (b) Which actor is mostly motivated in relative terms? Even if there are substantial interests involved for both states, it is likely that one of them will be more motivated than the other in relative terms.

To conclude this section, coercive diplomacy may seem, and sometimes is, an attractive alternative for both doing nothing and for going to war. On the other hand, as Robert Art and Patrick Cronin state: 'coercive diplomacy is

13) Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, pp. 187-204.

14) Peter Jakobsen, *op.cit.*

15) Robert Putnam, 'Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games', *International Organization*, Vol. 42, No.3, Summer 1988, pp. 427-460.

difficult and has a relatively low success rate'.¹⁶ It is not by chance that the title of Alexander George's book is *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*.

Regardless of the final outcome, coercive diplomacy diminishes the "marge de manoeuvre" of the threatening state. It restrains its freedom of action. More fundamentally, the strategy of coercive diplomacy can also fail. In that case, there are two basic scenarios remaining for the threatening state. The threat can be carried out. This may have negative consequences for the threatening state as well. That is why Art and Cronin recommend: 'Do not resort to coercive diplomacy unless, should it fail, you are prepared to go down the path of war or you have prepared a suitable escape hatch'.¹⁷ The risk exists that the outcome of a war is not advantageous for the threatening state.

The alternative approach consists of doing nothing or in trying to find another diplomatic solution. In both cases, the credibility and reputation of the threatening state is undermined, which may have further negative consequences in case of future threats. As Jakobsen concludes: 'While coercive diplomacy is a low-cost strategy when it succeeds, failure is unfortunately very costly as the coercer then faces the grim choice of backing down or executing his threat'.¹⁸

Lastly, it may be that the threatened state only partially agrees with the demand or that he sets conditions. In that case, the strategy may be regarded either as a partial success or a partial failure, depending on where you sit.

CASE-STUDY: IRAN

Before turning to an assessment of the EU's attempt at coercive diplomacy vis-à-vis Iran, let us describe the evolution of the Iranian nuclear programme and the reaction by the international community, and in particular the EU.

EU'S POLICY VIS-À-VIS IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME

For heuristic purposes, the four-year period is divided into four sections: 1) the initial phase starting in the summer of 2002; 2) a second phase that starts with the first EU-Iran agreement in October 2003 until the break-up of the negotiations in August 2005; 3) the escalation phase inside the International

16) Robert Art and Patrick Cronin, *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy*, US Institute of Peace Press, Washington DC, 2003, pp. 402-405.

17) *Op.cit.*, pp. 408-410.

18) Peter Jakobsen, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) until the beginning of February 2006; and 4) the involvement of the UN Security Council since February 2006.

The initial phase (summer 2002-October 2003)

While Iran is a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and is therefore legally bound not to acquire nuclear weapons, rumours circulated in the summer of 2002 that Iran was working on a nuclear weapons programme. That information reportedly came from the National Council of Resistance, an Iranian opposition movement that, surprisingly, also figures on the terrorist list of the US State Department. It is more than likely that Western intelligence agencies already had access to the same kind of information.

Core elements of these rumours were confirmed when the IAEA visited Iran in the second half of February 2003.¹⁹ Since then, the Iranian nuclear programme has been a regular global news item. And most observers believe that Iran is trying to acquire nuclear weapons in secret, or at least trying to build up the capabilities that are needed to build nuclear weapons.²⁰

While Iran has the right under the NPT to build a nuclear programme for civilian purposes, it also has the obligation to declare most of its activities to the IAEA. The problem was that Iran had not declared everything that should have been declared to the IAEA. Teheran, for instance, admitted in the summer of 2003 to have experimented in the past with uranium conversion, which is the first step towards uranium enrichment. Since the second half of the 1980's, Iran had secretly expanded its nuclear programme. This may indeed be an indication that Iran was (and probably still is) working on a military nuclear programme.

While the EU in the past may have reacted in the form of a non-binding statement or would not have reacted at all because of internal divisions, the EU now reacted promptly.²¹ A couple of weeks after IAEA Director-General Mohammed El Baradei visited Iran and confirmed the existing rumours in February 2003, the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, the late Anna Lindh,

19) [Http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2003/gov2003-40.pdf](http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2003/gov2003-40.pdf).

20) Mark Fitzpatrick, 'Assessing Iran's Nuclear Programme', *Survival*, Vol. 48, No. 3, Autumn 2006, pp. 5-26.

21) For previous EU non-proliferation efforts, see Paul Cornish (and others)(eds), 'Europe and the Challenge of Proliferation', *Chaillot Papers*, No. 24, 1996; Harald Müller and Lars van Dassen, 'From Cacophony to Joint Action: Successes and Shortcomings of the European Nuclear Non-Proliferation Policy', in Martin Holland, *Common Foreign and Security Policy*, 1997.

proposed in the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) in March to come up with a new EU non-proliferation policy. While most observers link this initiative, which later on was complemented by the European Security Strategy, to the conflict in Iraq and in particular the divisions within the EU and the absence of a constructive alternative to the belligerent plans of the neo-conservative administration in the US, it cannot be denied that the Iranian and North Korean²² programmes also played a crucial role.²³

The same day that the Iraq war started, the EU Political and Security Committee (PSC) held a seminar about weapons of mass destruction in cooperation with the Swedish International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). In mid-April, the GAERC formally launched the Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction initiative. The draft text of this first EU Non-Proliferation Strategy was already approved at the Thessaloniki Summit in June 2003, while the final draft was agreed upon in December 2003, in parallel with the overall EU Security Strategy.

In the meantime, Iran had secretly proposed a deal with the US in May 2003. While the State Department showed some interest, neo-conservatives inside the White House immediately rejected the proposal.²⁴ Since the Iranian revolution and the subsequent hostage crisis in 1979, the US had refused to have diplomatic contacts, let alone negotiations, with Iran. The US was still

22) The North Korean nuclear programme became again a hot item in the Fall of 2002 when the US stated that North Korea had admitted that it also pursued enrichment, something which was later on publicly denied by North Korea.

23) Clara Portela, 'The Role of the EU in the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons', *PRIF Report*, No.65, Fall 2003; Joanna Spear, 'The Emergence of a European "Strategic Personality"', *Arms Control Today*, November 2003; Stephen Pullinger and Gerrard Quille, 'The EU: Seeking Common Ground for Tackling Weapons of Mass Destruction', *Disarmament Diplomacy*, No.74, December 2003; Mark Smith (and others), 'Fighting Proliferation – European Perspectives', *Chaillot Papers*, No. 66, December 2003; Tom Sauer, 'The "Americanization" of EU Nuclear Non-proliferation Policy', *Defense and Security Analysis*, Vol. 20, No. 2, June 2004, pp. 113-131; Oliver Meier and Gerrard Quille, 'Testing Time for Europe's Nonproliferation Strategy', *Arms Control Today*, May 2005; Eileen Denza, 'Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; the EU and Iran', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 10, 2005, pp. 289-311; Milagros Alvarez-Verdugo, 'Mixing Tools Against Proliferation: the EU's Strategy for Dealing with Weapons of Mass Destruction', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 11, 2006, pp. 417-438.

24) Gareth Porter, 'Neo-con cabal blocked 2003 nuclear talks', *Asia Times online*, 30 March 2006, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_east/HC30Ak01.html; Gareth Porter, 'Iranian crisis in the wilderness', *Asia Times online*, 2 May 2006, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HE02Ak04.html.

not ready to change its policy. As a result, the EU had a clear opportunity to step in as the main negotiator with Iran.

The EU was already negotiating with Iran on other issues. In December 2002, the EU had initiated negotiations with Iran for a Trade and Association Agreement. Because of the nuclear programme, there were voices raised in the EU to halt these negotiations.²⁵ At the same time, states like France (and earlier the US) asked Iran to sign the Additional Protocol of the IAEA. The latter, which had been introduced in the 1990's on a voluntary basis, provides the IAEA with more rights in finding undeclared materials and possible violations. Iran, however, declined the offer to sign the Additional Protocol, and the EU (despite some protests inside the European Commission) took action against Iran by suspending the bilateral negotiations for a Trade and Association Agreement in June 2003.

The IAEA Board Statement of 19 June 2003 confirmed that Iran failed to report certain nuclear materials and activities, but did not declare that Iran was in non-compliance with the IAEA Statute or the NPT.²⁶ The Board also asked Iran to sign the Additional Protocol. Two weeks later, the UK put more pressure on Iran by setting the end of September 2003 as a deadline for signing the Protocol. In August, and in contrast with earlier statements, Iran admitted having received technological support from abroad. The IAEA Board Resolution of 12 September 2003 set another ultimatum: Iran had to provide full information about its programme before the end of October 2003.²⁷

The second phase: EU-Iranian negotiations and agreements (October 2003-August 2005)

On 21 October 2003, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU-3 – France, the UK and Germany – flew to Teheran to negotiate directly with the regime in Teheran. Dominique de Villepin, Jack Straw and Joschka Fisher succeeded in signing an agreement with Iran. In exchange for further negotiations, Iran agreed to suspend its enrichment programme, to sign the Additional Protocol and to adhere to the Protocol in the meantime.²⁸ This was perceived as a major breakthrough. Not only did the EU-3 act in unity (in contrast with the

25) Steven Everts, 'Iran Will Be the Test for European Foreign Policy', *Financial Times*, 1 June 2003.

26) <http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/MediaAdvisory/2003/medadvise200372.html>.

27) <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2003/gov2003-69.pdf>.

28) Iran signed the Additional Protocol of the IAEA on 18 December 2003.

Iraq crisis), their action was – at least publicly – backed by the other EU member states. Most fundamentally, the EU-3 succeeded in signing an agreement with Teheran. A couple of days later, Iran submitted a “full” declaration about its nuclear program to the IAEA. As a result, the IAEA resolution of 26 November 2003, although it strongly deplored Iran’s past failures and breaches, did not declare that Iran was “in non-compliance”.²⁹

This outcome was basically the result of European diplomacy, which had to find a compromise between the positions of Iran and the US. This bridge-building exercise would be repeated over and over again in the coming years. In December 2003, the High Representative for CFSP Javier Solana was added to the European negotiating team. The other EU member states felt to a certain extent out of the loop and had asked Solana to play the role of go-between.³⁰

The first setback for the EU happened in the beginning of 2004. After the US had made clear that Iran was violating the October 2003 agreement, an IAEA report also warned in March 2004 that there were missing parts in the Iranian declarations.³¹ Iran in its turn felt unhappy with the “carrots” obtained from the EU and threatened to resume uranium conversion and to build a heavy water plant. El Baradei, the Director-General of the IAEA, visited Teheran in the beginning of April and convinced the Iranians to hand over a second “full” declaration on 20 May 2004. Another IAEA report a couple of weeks later, however, talked again about contradictory information provided by Iran. The IAEA Board Resolution deplored the fact ‘that Iran’s cooperation has not been as full, timely and proactive as it should have been’³². In reaction, Iran announced that it would start to produce centrifuges again.

In the beginning of September 2004, Iran started to convert uranium into uranium gas. The EU raised the stakes: Iran had to cooperate with the IAEA before the end of October 2004. It appears that this ultimatum had an effect. Four days later, Iran agreed to continue the suspension for a couple of months. It would not be the last time that Iran tried to please the IAEA right before the Board of Governor’s meeting. The Board agreed that Iran had to provide all the necessary information before the next meeting at the end of November 2004, but without an automatic trigger to send the file to the UN Security Council in case of non-compliance.³³

29) <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2003/gov2003-81.pdf>.

30) Interview EU official.

31) <http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Statements/2004/ebsp2004n002.html#iran>.

32) <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2004/gov2004-49.pdf>.

33) <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2004/gov2004-79.pdf>.

The EU-3 proposed a new overall deal with Iran on 21 October 2004 that would include the start of broader negotiations, economic benefits and the delivery of light water reactors.³⁴ This second EU-Iran agreement was formally signed in Paris on 14 November 2004, and included a renewal of the suspension of the Iranian programme.³⁵ Under pressure from Russia and China, the IAEA Board ten days later even agreed that Iran's suspension was voluntarily instead of legally binding.³⁶

In December 2004, three EU-Iran working groups were established for negotiating the following items: 1) the transfer of nuclear technology; 2) trade and cooperation; and 3) security. Already in January 2005, however, differences emerged with respect to the timing. While Iran expected the conclusion of the negotiations within weeks or months, the EU did not expect these talks to be finished for one or two years. Teheran even warned in February that the talks had to be concluded by mid-March 2005. At the end of February, the EU succeeded in convincing the US to come up with new "carrots": membership of the World Trade Organization and spare parts for airplanes. But it failed to convince the US to offer security guarantees. In the meantime Iran launched different proposals in the working groups. The Iranian leadership became frustrated because of lack of cooperation on behalf of the EU. Consequently, Iran threatened to halt its suspension again. In response, the EU threatened to halt the negotiation process in case Iran would start again with uranium conversion.

The shadow of the Iranian presidential elections in June also had a major influence on the negotiations. The EU and the US expected that former President Rafsanjani, who was regarded as a stronger figure than President Khatami, would win the elections and be able to take a more moderate view on the nuclear issue. The EU promised to launch a new proposal in the beginning of August 2005. Instead of Rafsanjani, and to the surprise of the rest of the world, it was the conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who won the elections. Right from the beginning, he made clear that Iran had the right to have its own nuclear fuel cycle, including enrichment and reprocessing. It was therefore not surprising that Iran rejected the European proposal of 5 August 2004. Iran also started to convert uranium. The EU consequently broke off the negotiations.

34) Light water reactors are more proliferation resistant than HEU reactors.

35) <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Infocircs/2004/infocirc637.pdf>.

36) <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2004/gov2004-90.pdf>.

The third phase: escalation within the IAEA (August 2005-February 2006)

The recommencement of uranium conversion by Iran was regarded by the EU as the crossing of a “red line”. For the first time ever, the EU succeeded in convincing Russia and China not to use their veto against an IAEA resolution that would formally state that Iran was in non-compliance with the IAEA Statute. The 24 September 2005 IAEA Board Resolution was supported by the EU, the US and most other members; Russia and China abstained; only Venezuela voted against. The resolution also warned Iran that if it did not comply before the next meeting, its file would be sent to the UN Security Council.³⁷

The EU made clear that it would only negotiate again if Iran suspended its enrichment programme. The latter meant an implicit acceptance of Iran’s uranium conversion, something the EU had never accepted before. Thanks to new documents provided by Iran to the IAEA in October 2005 and despite the extremist declarations of President Ahmadinejad with respect to Israel around the same time, the IAEA Board of Governors did not yet send the Iranian file to the Security Council in November 2005.³⁸ Again, the EU member states found a compromise between the American position on the one hand and Russian and Chinese views on the other.

In December 2005, a new round of negotiations between the EU-3 and Iran made no progress. Iran even threatened to resume uranium enrichment. When Iran actually carried out its threat on 9 January 2006, a new “red line” was crossed in the eyes of the EU and the US. This time, they were determined to send the Iranian file to the UN Security Council. In reaction, Iran threatened to halt its voluntarily cooperation with the IAEA and to accelerate its programme from the level of R&D to an industrial scale.

The fourth phase: UN Security Council engagement (since February 2006)

After three years, the IAEA sent the Iran file to the UN Security Council during a special meeting of the Board on 2-3 February 2006.³⁹ It was again the EU that had drafted the resolution. This time not only Venezuela, but also Syria and Cuba voted against. Russia and China voted in favour. The

37) <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2005/gov2005-77.pdf>.

38) <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2005/gov2005-87.pdf>.

39) <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2006/gov2006-14.pdf>.

actual discussions inside the Security Council would only start at the beginning of March 2006. Nevertheless, Iran did do what it had threatened: it suspended its voluntarily cooperation with the IAEA and it accelerated its enrichment programme.

In the meantime, Germany was prepared to consider a Russian proposal that included limited enrichment in Iran under international – read IAEA – supervision.⁴⁰ The latter led to public frictions with the UK and France.

On 29 March 2006, after weeks of negotiations, the Security Council adopted a so-called Declaration of the Chairman, which is not legally binding. This unanimously adopted document gave Iran another month to come clean.⁴¹ But Iran was not impressed. On the contrary, on 11 April 2006 Iran proudly announced that it had succeeded in enriching uranium up to 3.5 per cent thanks to a cascade of 164 centrifuges. The next IAEA Report recommended the Security Council to agree on a formal resolution in order to increase the pressure on the government of Iran.⁴²

On 8 May President Ahmadinejad made a significant move by writing a letter to President Bush, which was later published in the media.⁴³ While its content could be easily criticised, the lack of a direct response by the US further encouraged internal frictions inside the EU. This criticism, however, faded away because of two successes of the EU-3.⁴⁴ First, at the end of May, the EU-3 succeeded in convincing the US to negotiate with Iran, something it had refused to do since 1979. The US, however, set as a condition for multilateral talks that Iran first had to suspend its enrichment programme. Second, the EU-3 also succeeded in convincing the US, Russia and China to agree on a new common package for Iran, which was offered by Solana to the decision-makers in Teheran on 5 June 2006. Orally, he also explained what the sanctions would be if Iran did not agree. The latter would include a UN Security Council Resolution that would open the door for sanctions. While there was no formal deadline, the international community hoped to get an answer from Iran before the G-8 summit in St Petersburg in mid-July 2006. Iran, however, immediately made clear that it would only respond in August.

At the end of June, Germany appeared again in favour of a proposal that would allow limited enrichment. The US, however, immediately blocked

40) Mark Beundermann, 'Russian Move on Iran Challenges EU Unity', *EU Observer*, 7 March 2006. [Http:// euobserver.com/9/21062](http://euobserver.com/9/21062).

41) <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8679.doc.htm>.

42) <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2006/gov2006-27.pdf>.

43) <http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/world/0605/transcript.lemonde.letter/>.

44) Interview EU official.

further attempts in that direction.⁴⁵ When it became clear that Iran was not interested in the latest proposal by the international community, the UN Security Council started to draft a resolution. After two weeks of negotiations, the first (formal) UN Security Council resolution was agreed upon on 31 July 2006.⁴⁶ It required - under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter - that Iran suspend its enrichment programme before 31 August 2006. It also threatened to vote a new resolution that would open the door to “appropriate measures” - read sanctions - in case Iran did not comply. Only Qatar voted against. Iran immediately rejected the resolution as “illegitimate”.

On 22 August, Iran also sent a 21-page answer to the proposal made by Solana at the beginning of June.⁴⁷ One week later, the non-EU-3 members complained at the “Gymnich” in Finland that they had not yet seen that document. In particular, Italy, Spain, Greece and the Netherlands were mentioned in the press as being dissatisfied with the EU-3 approach.⁴⁸

As everybody expected, Iran did not comply with the UN Security Council Resolution’s deadline.

While the US immediately wanted to draft a new UN Security Council resolution that included sanctions, it became clear that not only Russia and China but also the EU were not yet ready. France, for instance, noted on 7 September that the condition to start up new negotiations for Iran, namely to suspend uranium enrichment, was not fair.⁴⁹

New talks between Solana and Ali Larijani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, on 10 September raised the possibility of a new deal. Iran would be prepared to suspend its programme on a voluntary basis for one or two months, as it had earlier suggested in its written answer on 22 August.⁵⁰ The French President Chirac went even as far as saying that formal negotiations could be set up, and that Iran could then take a reciprocal step by suspending its enrichment programme.⁵¹

45) ‘EU, Iran to Meet on Nuclear Offer Next Week’, NTI Global Security Newswire, 29 June 2006.

46) <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2006/sc8792.doc.htm>.

47) <http://www.isis-online.org/publications/iran/iranresponse.pdf>.

48) Mark Beundermann, ‘EU Members Want More Openness from Solana on Iran’, *EU Observer*, 2 September 2006. [Http://euobserver.com/9/22322](http://euobserver.com/9/22322).

49) ‘U.S. to Push for Iran Sanctions Next Week’, NTI Global Security Newswire, 8 September 2006.

50) Ian Traynor, ‘Iran Offers to Freeze Uranium Enrichment for Eight Weeks’, *The Guardian*, 11 September 2006.

51) Elaine Sciolino, ‘Iran’s Freeze on Enrichment Could Wair, France suggests’, *The New York Times*, 19 September 2006; Seymour Hersh, ‘The Next Act’, *The New Yorker*, 20 November 2006.

But also this effort by Solana failed. The North Korean test on 9 October 2006 moved the spotlights, especially in the UN Security Council, from Iran to North Korea, but only temporarily. The EU-25 Ministers of Foreign Affairs agreed on 16 October 2006 to continue the talks inside the UN Security Council about sanctions against Iran. Nevertheless, these talks appeared more difficult than expected. Not only did Russia and China continue to oppose (large-scale) economic sanctions, let alone military action, there was also friction between the US and the EU with respect to the Russian support for the Iranian Bushehr reactor, with the US taking the hardest position.⁵² Again, the EU found itself in the difficult position to mediate not only between Iran and the US, but also between the US and Russia.

At the end of November 2006, the Board of the IAEA rejected the request by Iran for support in development of a heavy-water nuclear reactor at Arak.

Despite the victory of the Democrats in the US elections in November and the victory of the moderates in the Iranian elections in December 2006, and despite the recommendation of the Iraqi Study Group to negotiate with Iran (about Iraq), there are no indications – at least for the moment – that President Bush is willing to change its policy vis-à-vis Iran. On the contrary, the US will send a second aircraft carrier to the Persian Gulf in January 2007.⁵³

Exactly two months after Britain, France and Germany had introduced a draft resolution, the UN Security Council was finally able to agree – unanimously – on a (second) resolution against Iran on 23 December 2006. It contained for the first time limited economic sanctions, including a ban on import and export of nuclear-related material, and the assets of ten Iranian companies and twelve individuals were frozen. The draft had been watered down under pressure from Russia and China. Iran immediately rejected the resolution.

COERCIVE DIPLOMACY BY THE EU IN IRAN

Before matching the theoretical conditions for effective coercive diplomacy with our case-study, let us verify whether the EU approach towards Iran can indeed be categorized as an example of coercive diplomacy.

52) Colum Lynch and Glenn Kessler, 'U.S., European Allies at Odds on Terms of Iran Resolution', *The Washington Post*, 26 October 2006.

53) 'Report: US to boost Persian Gulf force', *Jerusalem Post*, 19 December 2006.

IS THE EU APPROACH TOWARDS IRAN AN EXAMPLE OF COERCIVE DIPLOMACY?

As explained above, coercive diplomacy is characterized by the combination of a demand, a threat and time pressure. First, the EU has made many demands. The underlying goal of the EU is very clear: Iran should not be allowed to acquire nuclear weapons. As Iran claims that it does not want nuclear weapons, the focus is on the capacity to build nuclear weapons. The EU wants to prevent Iran completing a large-scale nuclear fuel cycle, including enrichment and reprocessing facilities. The specific goalposts, however, have already been moved forward due to technological progress by Iran. From the beginning, the EU disapproved of Iran's uranium conversion. When Iran did convert, the EU implicitly agreed and asked it not to enrich. It remains to be seen whether the EU will move the current goalpost from not allowing any enrichment at all to allowing Iran to conduct some enrichment.

Second, these demands have been combined with threats. The EU, for instance, threatened to halt the bilateral negotiations in case Iran started to convert. The EU carried out this threat in August 2005 after Iran started to convert. The EU also threatened to send the Iranian file to the Security Council if Iran started to enrich uranium. The EU also implemented this threat because of Iran's enrichment starting in January 2006. The UN Security Council resolution in July 2006, drafted mainly by the EU-3, included the threat of sanctions in case Iran did not suspend its enrichment programme.

Third, some of these threats have been accompanied by time pressure. The best example is the UN Security Council resolution of 31 July 2006, which gave Iran until 31 August 2006 to comply. To conclude, the EU approach towards Iran can clearly be regarded as an example of coercive diplomacy.

WERE THE CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE COERCIVE DIPLOMACY FULFILLED IN THE CASE OF IRAN?

Our objective is to make an interim-assessment of the European attempt to convince Iran, using the instrument of coercive diplomacy. Our hypothesis is that the EU was not completely aware of the difficulties of such an approach. To verify whether this hypothesis is correct, the theoretical conditions mentioned above should be compared with the actual situation at the start of the attempt in 2003. As the attempt could in theory have been cancelled at

any given time, and as it is a moving target, one can in principle repeat this exercise for each moment during the conflict.

According to our analysis, there are ten conditions for effective coercive diplomacy: a legitimate underlying objective; a legitimate demand; no fear of a 'slippery slope'; a proportional threat; a threat supported by public opinion; fear of escalation; reputation; credible time pressure; absolute motivation; and relative motivation.

1. A legitimate underlying objective: Is preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear weapon state a legitimate objective? On first sight, this seems a reasonable and legitimate objective. The spread of nuclear weapons over more countries should indeed be prevented. There is however a caveat. The cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), consisted of a deal between the nuclear weapon states and the non-nuclear weapon states. The former were defined as those states that had exploded a nuclear device before 1 January 1967.⁵⁴ All other signatory states agreed to remain non-nuclear weapon states. The IAEA is responsible for verifying the civilian nuclear installations inside the non-nuclear weapon states. Two things, however, were promised in return to the non-nuclear weapon states: first, the non-nuclear weapon states would get support in establishing civilian nuclear programmes (art.4); second, the discriminatory nature of the regime was only meant to be a temporary measure as the nuclear weapons states had promised to get rid of their nuclear weapons over time (art.6).

Iran signed the NPT in 1970. It therefore promised never to acquire nuclear weapons. If Iran nowadays is trying to acquire nuclear weapons in secret, which the IAEA has still not been able to confirm, that would be illegal. For many observers, to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear weapon state would therefore be legitimate. A counterargument that cannot easily be dismissed, however, is that *each* signatory state of the NPT should fulfil its obligations. If not, the regime can easily be criticised of double standards, which would rapidly undermine the regime as such.⁵⁵

The question that is immediately raised is the following: are the nuclear weapon states in compliance with the NPT and, in particular, with respect to nuclear disarmament (art.6)? Is it normal that there are still 27,000 nuclear

54) The US, the former USSR, the UK, France and China are the formal nuclear weapon states.

55) Mohamed El Baradei, Nobel Lecture, 10 December 2005, http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2005/elbaradei-lecture-en.html; Tom Sauer, 'The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime in Crisis', *Peace Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3, Fall 2006, <http://soc.kuleuven.be/iieb/docs/06-TS-peacereview.pdf>.

weapons on earth 36 years after the entry into force of the NPT? More fundamentally, are the nuclear weapon states willing to get rid of their nuclear weapons? If that is not the case, which seems to correspond with reality, then one could question how legitimate it is to pressure the non-nuclear weapon state to fulfil their obligations.⁵⁶ If France believes that nuclear weapons are vital to protect its national interests (and apparently more important than the legal obligation to get rid of them), how could one credibly convince a state like Iran - that is situated in a much more volatile region, surrounded by the US in the West (Iraq, Turkey), in the East (Afghanistan, Pakistan) and in the South (Persian Gulf, Gulf states), and situated between two “de facto” nuclear weapon states (Israel and Pakistan) that are apparently allowed to keep their nuclear weapons - not to acquire nuclear weapons?⁵⁷

This “double-standards” critique was already well understood by 2003. The fact that the EU in its talks with Iran was primarily represented by nuclear weapon states - France and the UK - may explain the low level of sensitivity for this kind of criticism. One can even argue that the demand vis-à-vis Iran became even more illegitimate over time. As a result of the Iranian crisis, the Bush administration proposed in 2004 to deny access to a complete nuclear fuel cycle for non-nuclear weapon states that did not yet possess such far-reaching civilian programmes. As it is rather easy for states with extensive civilian nuclear programmes to convert them to a military programme, such proposals do make sense. The NPT, indeed, contains a loophole in this regard. On the other hand, while this proposal may seem opportune from a non-proliferation point of view, it is in contradiction with article 4 of the NPT that states that non-nuclear weapon states have the right to obtain support for their civilian nuclear programmes. The adoption of this American proposal therefore would mean a fundamental limitation of the rights of the non-nuclear weapon states under article 4. States like Brazil therefore oppose these proposals and link it with the obligations of the nuclear weapon states to disarm. In short, it would not be legitimate to strengthen article 4 in the absence of similar measures with respect to nuclear disarmament. Nuclear proliferation and nuclear disarmament are both sides of the same coin. It is not by chance that the NPT is both a nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament treaty.

56) For the case of the US, see Tom Sauer, *Nuclear Inertia. US Nuclear Weapons Policy after the Cold War*, I.B.Tauris, London, 2005.

57) While both Israel and Pakistan have never signed the NPT, they acquired nuclear weapons in an obscure and probably illegal way.

The counterargument is that Iran is not in good standing with the NPT.⁵⁸ This argument is correct, but it is neutralized by the fact that also the nuclear weapon states are not in good standing either (as discussed above). Worse, India, which has never signed the NPT and therefore has in theory no right to receive support for its civilian nuclear programme is now being helped by the US.⁵⁹ This is turning logic upside down. It further highlights the double standards of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

While this criticism was not problematic in the first stages of escalation with Iran, it will probably be of crucial importance in the future when the rest of the world may be asked to impose sanctions or to use military force against Iran. While many states in the world would prefer to see a nuclear-weapons-free Iran, they also regard the existence of two standards as highly problematic. Many of them have criticized the nuclear weapons states in the past, in particular within the framework of the NPT Review Conferences. The latest NPT Review Conference in 2005 was a fiasco due to the opposition of the non-nuclear weapon states (with Egypt as their spokesman) vis-à-vis the nuclear weapon states. Also the creation of the New Agenda Coalition in 1998 should be regarded in this light.⁶⁰ It is therefore highly unlikely that many of the non-nuclear weapon states will support the nuclear weapon states in their demand for harsh measures against countries like Iran. It is also not by chance that Germany, the only non-nuclear weapon state in the EU-3, takes the softest approach.

The criticism that the EU's demand is not legitimate is of course used or misused by Iran. President Ahmadinejad for instance stated in an interview with *Der Spiegel* in May 2006: 'The IAEA was also established to promote the disarmament of those powers that already possessed nuclear weapons'.⁶¹ But even if this discourse is misused by Iran, there is a lot of truth in this reasoning, which makes it very hard for the rest of the world to enforce counterproliferation, not only in Iran but also in general.⁶²

2. A legitimate demand: Iran never disputed the fact that it is not allowed to have nuclear weapons. What Iran disputes is the fact that it is not allowed

58) Robert Cooper, Letter to the Editor, *The Financial Times*, 7 September 2005.

59) 'America's Nuclear Deal with India. From Bad to Worse', *The Economist*, 20 July 2006, http://www.economist.com/opinion/PrinterFriendly.cfm?story_id=7193934.

60) Celso Amorim (et al), 'What Does Not Exist Cannot Proliferate', *International Herald Tribune*, 2 May 2005.

61) Stefan Aust (et al), '"We Are Determined"', *Der Spiegel*, 30 May 2006. [Http://service.spiegel.de/cache/international/spiegel/0,1518,418660,00.html](http://service.spiegel.de/cache/international/spiegel/0,1518,418660,00.html).

62) Selig Harrison, 'It is Time to Put Security Issues on the Table with Iran', *The Financial Times*, 18 January 2006.

to enrich uranium. The latter is the right of each non-nuclear weapon state. Even more, Iran is allowed to get technological support for these activities according to article 4 of the NPT. One could therefore question whether it is a reasonable demand to ask Iran not to enrich uranium. The counterargument is that the NPT leaves a dangerous loophole that may be exploited by malicious states. States that have the intention to secretly produce nuclear weapons may try to acquire a very sophisticated civilian programme under the guise of article 4 of the NPT, and at a certain time simply withdraw from the treaty, something that is allowed under the treaty. This scenario has been followed by North Korea. Pyongyang withdrew from the NPT in 2003 and announced two years later that it possessed nuclear weapons. Iran may in principle do the same as North Korea. The crucial problem in this regard is to understand Iranian intentions. Based on the capabilities that the IAEA has seen, it can still not determine whether Iran is building nuclear weapons. Even the American intelligence agencies shrink from making such statements.⁶³ On the other hand, the IAEA did confirm that Iran has not always complied with the IAEA Statute.

In addition, the same question – do the nuclear weapon states intend to get rid of their nuclear weapons, as they are legally supposed to do? – pops up again. If that is not the case, how reasonable or legitimate is it to demand Iran not to enrich uranium? Of course, Iran uses or misuses these contradictions to defend its position. Iranian chief negotiator Larijani, for instance, stated in the beginning of May 2006: ‘There must be a balance between the rights and the obligations stemming from the NPT. It is not fair that we should have all the obligations but not enjoy the rights’.⁶⁴ President Ahmadinejad pointed out in August 2006: ‘How can the Iranian nation give up its obvious right to peaceful nuclear technology, when America and some other countries test new atomic bombs each year?’⁶⁵

A further distinction can be made with respect to the size of the civilian nuclear programme that Iran should be allowed to possess. On this point there exists a lot of debate. The US takes the most extreme position: no enrichment at all. Remarkably, the US has been able to convince the European negotiators to follow this line since November 2004.⁶⁶ In theory, one could envisage that Iran would be allowed to have a limited (and delayed)

63) Dafna Linzer, ‘US Spy Agencies Criticized on Iran’, *The Washington Post*, 24 August 2006, p. A01.

64) ‘Iran to Remain in Nuclear Treaty, Chief Negotiator Says’, NTI Global Security Newswire, 9 May 2006.

65) ‘Iran Says Ready to Discuss Suspending Enrichment’, NTI Global Security Newswire, 17 August 2006.

66) Interview EU official.

enrichment programme as the latter would not allow Iran to produce nuclear weapons. This has been proposed by, for instance, the International Crisis Group at the beginning of 2006.⁶⁷ This idea has been repeated by Russia, and also Germany considered this proposal in the beginning of March 2006. But again, the US, the UK and France were able to persuade Germany and also Russia to withdraw this proposal. One of the American counterarguments is that “you cannot be a little bit pregnant”. In the end, it will be a political decision, based on trust in Iran that will allow or not allow this proposal to be further considered.

The same applies to another proposal by scientists, this time from MIT, to build a multinational or even supranational enterprise in Iran that would allow Iran to build even a rather large-scale enrichment programme on the condition that it would be surveyed by international monitors 24 hours a day. The enterprise would consist both of Iranian and international engineers and employees. Self-destruction mechanisms would be installed to prevent break-out in case Iran cheats.⁶⁸

The point is that it will be hard to keep the demand of “no enrichment at all” forever. This demand seems excessive and therefore not very legitimate. It is normal that the US and possibly others adopt it as their opening position in the negotiations, but it is also normal to relax this condition over time. The EU and the US have already made similar moves before. In the beginning of the negotiations, the Western view was “no conversion”. However, when Iran did convert in 2005, the EU and the US had to come back to their earlier position. In principle, the same can happen again with respect to enrichment. As a diplomat in Vienna stated: ‘The US will push very hard until the last minute in the hope of getting the Iranians to give in but at the end of the day they will accept some form of enrichment activity’.⁶⁹

3. Iranian fear of a ‘slippery slope’: It is very likely that Iran is afraid that once it agrees with the demands of the EU (and the US) then demands with respect to other domains will follow, including in the domain of human rights, the support of terrorist groups, the recognition of Israel, and possibly regime change. If that fear is really present, which seems likely, then it may have a negative effect on the negotiations with regard to the nuclear programme.

67) International Crisis Group, ‘Iran: Is there a Way Out of the Nuclear Impasse?’ *ICG Middle East Report*, No. 51, 23 February 2006.

68) Geoffrey Forden and John Thomson, ‘Iran as a Pioneer Case for Multilateral Nuclear Arrangements’, MIT Science, Technology and Global Security Working Group, 16 June 2006.

69) Michael Adler, ‘IAEA Studies Enrichment Compromise but US Remains Unimpressed’, *AFP*, 25 June 2006, <http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20060625>.

More particularly, Iran will try to postpone possible concessions in the nuclear domain as long as possible. President Ahmadinejad put it this way: 'If you give in on nuclear weapons program, they'll ask about human rights. If you give in on human rights, they'll ask about animal rights'.⁷⁰ The only solution to prevent that logic from coming to dominate inside Iran is to start negotiations on all these topics, except of course on regime change. The latter will also have to include some sort of security guarantees on behalf of the US.⁷¹ As the US even refused to talk to Iran until May 2006, the EU was (and still is) basically taken hostage by the American unwillingness to talk, let alone to provide security guarantees.

4. A proportional threat: The problem is that the threat that will impress the Iranian decision-makers most is a military strike by the US.⁷² At the same time, however, such attacks are generally regarded as disproportionate and therefore not credible. Such attacks are perceived as disproportionate because the underlying objective is not regarded as legitimate by most people around the world, especially in the Middle East. A military action by the US against Iran will provoke violent reactions by Iran and Muslims in the Middle East.⁷³ Iran can retaliate in different ways. Iran possesses intermediate ballistic missiles, possibly laden with chemical weapons, which can be fired against Israel. Iran can further destabilize the situation in Iraq. It can ask organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah to react. Iran can also destabilize the export of oil from the Persian Gulf towards the rest of the world by trying to close the Strait of Hormuz. Muslim terrorists around the world may react as well. These risks do not seem in proportion to the possible threat of a nuclear Iran. The major point, however, is that Iranian decision-makers also make this calculation and therefore seem not afraid of such an attack. The end result is a self-confident Iran that will not make (big) concessions at the negotiating table.

5. A threat supported by public opinion: Another threat that might be regarded as rather effective by the Iranian decision-makers would be large-scale economic sanctions. The problem, however, with large-scale economic

70) Quoted by Ray Takeyh who was interviewed by Bernard Gwertzman on 31 January 2006, Council on Foreign Relations. [Http://www.cfr.org/publication/9718](http://www.cfr.org/publication/9718).

71) Selig Harrison, *op.cit.*; Scott Sagan, 'How to Keep the Bomb from Iran', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 5, September/October 2006, pp. 45-59.

72) Although the real effect on the ground may be limited as not all the "secret" facilities are known and as Iran can easily start up the programme again later on.

73) Paul Rogers, 'Iran: Consequences of War', *Oxford Research Group Briefing Paper*, February 2006.

sanctions is not so much that they will be regarded as disproportionate by world public opinion, but as not being credible because of the simple fact that large-scale economic sanctions will hurt the rest of the world as well. As Iran produces 4.2 million barrels oil a day (out of 84 million worldwide), it is very likely that the oil price in the world will further increase, much more than already is the case today.⁷⁴ This may have substantial negative effects on the world economy. In addition, some regional powers like China depend a lot on oil and gas imports from Iran. China imports 14 per cent of its oil from Iran; Italy 9 per cent, and France 6 per cent. Many major states, except the US, also have substantial non-energy trade relations with Iran. Exporters in states like Italy, Germany, and Austria will be substantially hurt. Russia, on the other hand, has been promised a lot of money by Iran for constructing nuclear power reactors (like the Bushehr reactor near the Persian Gulf) and sells a lot of conventional weapons to Teheran. In short, public opinion in the developed world is not eager to see governments impose large-scale economic sanctions on Iran. The major point, however, is that Iranian decision-makers are very much aware of the weaknesses in the Western approach. Again, the result is a self-confident Iran that will not make (big) concessions at the negotiating table.

Advocates of large-scale economic sanctions argue that there is a chance that the benefits outweigh the costs, in the sense that the Iranian people will start to grumble before public opinion in the rest of the world will be fed up with the negative consequences of sanctions. While the latter is highly debatable, an additional problem is that Iran is not a country that has a good reputation with respect to human rights and respect for political opposition. As a result, grumbling by the Iranian public - at least in the first stages - may be easily suppressed by the Iranian security forces. The chances that massive protests will lead to regime change are not regarded as extremely likely by most experts (although one cannot rule it completely out either).⁷⁵ The cases of China and Belarus are probably more relevant than those of Georgia and Ukraine. The former can be regarded as 'stronger' states than the latter. Iran also belongs to the former category.

To conclude this section, neither large-scale economic sanctions or military action are regarded as credible threats in Teheran. Small-scale

74) Charles Krauthammer, 'The Iran Charade: Part II', *The Washington Post*, 18 January 2006, p. A17.

75) Sam Gardiner, 'The End of the "Summer of Diplomacy": Assessing US Military Options on Iran', *A Century Foundation Report*, The Century Foundation, New York, Summer 2006.

economic sanctions, in contrast, are not effective. In short, it is unclear how one can threaten Iran in both an effective and credible way.

6. Fear of escalation: As explained above, Iran does not fear escalation. *Mutatis mutandis*, the fear of escalation will certainly exist in Iran's neighbouring countries, which may have further restraining effects on possible military actions against Iran.

7. Reputation: The EU has basically no reputation of threatening with sanctions, let alone military action. And the only international actor that has such a reputation, the US, is already stretched to its limits due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. That is an additional reason why Iran has not much to fear from the US.

8. Credible time pressure: The international community set a lot of deadlines such as the end of October 2003, the end of October 2004, the beginning of March 2006, the end of April 2006, mid-July 2006, and the end of August 2006. It has therefore given enough time to Iran to change its position if it had wanted to do so.

9. Absolute motivation: The odds are that Iran's motivation for acquiring nuclear weapons is very high. In general, there are three reasons why nations obtain nuclear weapons: security, prestige, and domestic interests.⁷⁶ For Iran, the security situation is certainly part of the calculation. Iran is located in a geo-strategically important region due to scarce resources like oil and gas. If it wants to limit pressure from external states, nuclear weapons may help, or at least that may be the perception. To blackmail a nuclear weapon state may be more difficult than to blackmail a non-nuclear weapon state. Ayatollah Khomeiny only revived the nuclear programme in the second half of the 1980s, very much influenced by the Iraqi attack against Iran in 1980 and the lack of international condemnation of the latter. It was also common knowledge that Israel has possessed nuclear weapons since the end of the 1960s and that Iraq was involved in a similar programme in the 1970s and 1980s. The pre-emptive attack by Israel against the Iraqi Osiraq reactor in 1981 further accelerated the programme under Saddam Hussein. The Gulf War in 1991 in its turn increased the American military presence in the region, including in Saudi-Arabia.

76) Scott Sagan, 'Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?', *International Security*, Vol. 21, 1996-1997, pp. 54-86.

The end of the Cold War diminished the support of states like Russia and China for states like Iran. After 9/11 Iran was categorized by the Bush administration as part of the “axis of evil”. It further deepened Iranian suspicions vis-à-vis the US. All these factors stimulated Iran in its quest for nuclear weapons. One could, in theory, argue that the US released Iran from two malicious neighbours, namely the Taliban and Saddam Hussein. While this is true, it misses the point that Iran felt even more encircled by the US thereafter. In short, if one state feels insecure, it is Iran. Last but not least, Iranian decision-makers did notice that Iraq (without nuclear weapons) was attacked by the US, while North Korea (with nuclear weapons) was not. This may have further strengthened the position of the advocates of a nuclear weapons programme in Iran.

Second, Iran also has the ambition to become a regional power in the Middle East, even more than it is already today. Iran is one of the biggest countries in the Middle East with nearly 70 million inhabitants, and proud of a rich culture. Being the only nuclear weapon state in the region - beside Israel - will further strengthen its power base. Also internally, like in India, the nuclear programme is regarded as a prestigious project by the public. This is true to such an extent that even if Iran becomes a democratic state, the odds are that it will continue its nuclear programme.

Third, just as in Pakistan, there are also groups and individuals inside Iran that have a special – parochial – interest in acquiring nuclear weapons: including scientists, universities, and the military. To conclude, Iran is highly motivated to obtain nuclear weapons.

10. Relative motivation: While the EU and the US are also very much determined to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, it is unlikely that they are as determined as Iran to possess them. Iran wants to possess nuclear weapons and is willing to take many risks in this regard. The international community, in contrast, does not like the idea of a nuclear Iran, but it is probably unable to pressure Iran very hard to give up its programme. This is a classic example of asymmetrical motivation. History shows that smaller players can win in case of asymmetrical motivation, as for instance the Vietnam war and the recent Lebanon war show.⁷⁷ With respect to “hard” proliferation cases, the international community (including the US) does not have a very good reputation either. Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea became nuclear weapon states, while the West made every effort to prevent it. Israel and Pakistan even became close allies of the US. As mentioned above,

77) Ivan Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars. A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005.

the US is currently also proposing a new agreement with India, which not only goes against the spirit but also the letter of the rules of the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the nuclear non-proliferation regime in general. The message for Iran is clear: once nuclear weapons have been acquired, it will sooner or later be accepted, and perhaps even rewarded. That is at least what proponents of such a programme inside Iran may use as arguments to convince more sceptical voices.

THE OPTION OF COERCIVE DIPLOMACY REVISITED: 2006

If all factors that are necessary for coercive diplomacy to succeed are carefully considered, one might have already suggested in 2003 that it would be extremely difficult to convince Iran to give up its enrichment programme. The underlying goal of the international community can be countered as being illegitimate. The demand to halt enrichment can be criticized as being disproportionate. For different reasons, the threat is not regarded as credible. Iran was and still is highly motivated, and probably much more than most international actors, including the EU. In short, none of the factors, except one - namely credible time pressure - were useful for effective coercive diplomacy. Last but not least, the international community did not offer Iran a substantial package of "carrots", including some kind of security guarantees by the US. Critics may argue that positive incentives may not convince Iran to give up its programme. That may well be the case. However, unless one tries, one does not know for sure. The consequences of the alternative road, however, can rather easily be predicted. Any further escalation in the direction of large-scale economic sanctions, let alone military action, will certainly be regarded as illegitimate, not only in Iran and the wider Middle East (apart maybe from the Sunni elites), but in much of the rest of the world also. That may explain the new diplomatic initiative by the EU in the second week of September 2006.

It is difficult not to conclude that the EU took the initiative in 2003 unaware of the difficulties. The political circumstances in 2003 may also have blinded the EU to a certain extent. First of all, since the Treaty of Maastricht (1991) and especially since the Summit of Saint-Malo (1998), the EU wanted to build a profile for itself in the realm of foreign, security and even defence policy. Secondly, in the run-up to the Iraq crisis in 2002-2003, the EU was perceived as divided and lacking influence. Thirdly, there was a consensus in the EU that it would not be that difficult to provide a more constructive alternative to major problems in the world than the neo-conservative solutions

envisaged in the US since the arrival of the Bush administration in 2001.⁷⁸

After the Iraq war, the EU tried very hard to counterbalance its former behaviour.⁷⁹ In 2003, for the first time ever, the EU member states not only agreed to write a Security Strategy but a Non-proliferation Strategy as well. As already mentioned above, they also succeeded in agreeing a basic text and editing it in just a few months. The decision to “fight” Iran was taken on the basis of the combination of a kind of euphoria, and rash and naive ambition in capitals like London, Paris and Berlin.⁸⁰ When Libya also agreed to halt its weapons of mass destruction programmes in December 2003, the EU was even more convinced that it was on the right track. In short, it seems that the EU has overestimated its own capabilities.

At the same time, and for partially the same reasons, the EU underestimated Iran’s motivation and willingness to maintain its nuclear programme. The EU still does not have a very good understanding of what is going on inside elite circles in Iran with respect to the nuclear weapons issue. In addition, the few decision-makers and EU officials involved were probably unaware of the theoretical difficulties of coercive diplomacy. A last criticism that can be made is that the European approach was probably too Eurocentric as well. The EU thought, and it still thinks, that it could easily convince or persuade Iran with “reasonable” arguments, and, if necessary, some “carrots and sticks”. In this regard, the EU looks very much like the US. There seems to be a lack of empathy for feelings of prestige, respect and other non-quantifiable values that exist in other parts of the world.⁸¹

Once the negotiations started, the EU had the additional problem of being the spokesman for the rest of the world, including the US, and sometimes Russia and China as well. To keep this alliance together was, and still is, a very difficult task.⁸² The EU had to make too many compromises with the US, which complicated the negotiations with Iran. The best example is the November 2004 agreement when the US required that Iran not be allowed any level of enrichment, while the Europeans would have preferred to be more flexible.

78) Judy Dempsey, ‘EU Foreign Ministers Agree WMD Policy’, *The Financial Times*, 17 June 2003, p. 9.

79) Interview EU officials.

80) For a different view, see Eileen Denza, ‘Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: The European Union and Iran’, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 10, pp. 289-311.

81) For the role of anthropology in strategy, see: Ken Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism*, Holmes and Meier, 1979.

82) Interview EU officials.

CONCLUSION

For more than three years the EU took the lead in trying to convince Iran to give up its efforts to acquire a large-scale civilian nuclear programme. It did not succeed. While the EU can in theory still convince Iran to give up the bulk of its nuclear programme, the odds are that Iran will not concede. While Iran may suspend its enrichment programme for another (short) period, it is unlikely that it will give up its right to enrich uranium. The most likely scenario therefore consists of “muddling through” until Iran reaches its technological objectives. The world will then have to get used to living with another nuclear weapon state in the Middle East. Some observers already make the case that the latter does not automatically correspond to a doomsday scenario.⁸³ Another scenario is a military action – more likely by the US than by Israel – to prevent Iran acquiring the necessary technology, or at least to buy time. While most observers do regard it as the least likely scenario, it cannot be completely dismissed either, taking into account the nature of the current US administration. The argument, espoused by the likes of US Senator McCain, is that everything is better than a nuclear Iran.⁸⁴

The Iranian case supports the theoretical evidence that making threats does not always help. Coercive diplomacy in practice is more complicated than it seems. On the basis of our analysis, we come to the conclusion that the EU took the initiative in 2003 without being fully aware of the fact that its efforts could also fail, and what the consequences of such a failure would be for the reputation of the EU.

On the other hand, the European efforts cannot be dismissed as having been a complete failure. The EU, first of all, took the lead. It even acted in accordance with the US, and tried to accommodate the wishes of Russia and China as well. It is very unlikely that any other regional power could have played this role. This certainly enhanced its prestige in the world. Secondly, the EU acted in a more or less united fashion, which also enhanced its image in the rest of the world. Internally, a new kind of decision-making model saw the daylight with the EU-3 taking the lead, and Solana as the interlocutor between the EU-3 and the other EU member states. That said, the EU-3 also took a major gamble. The longer it takes to succeed, the louder internal criticism within the EU will become, as is happening already. The longer it

83) William Pfaff, ‘Iran’s Nukes Are a Non-Issue’, *International Herald Tribune*, 27 January 2006; Barry Posen, ‘We Can Live With a Nuclear Iran’, *The New York Times*, 27 February 2006.

84) Quoted by Jackson Diehl, ‘Bush’s Choice on Iran’, *The Washington Post*, 30 January 2006.

takes, the more chance that the EU-3 will try to blame the US for its lack of flexibility. If its efforts fail completely, the EU will be blamed and its reputation will be further damaged.

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- 1 Jan Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005) pp. 16-25.
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 - 3 H. Butterfield, 'Diplomacy New and Historical', in H. Butterfield and M. Wight, *Diplomatic Investigations*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966) pp. 150-2.
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 - 5 Dominic Kelly, 'Rice, Oil and the Atom: A Study of the Role of Key Material Resources in the Security and Development of Japan', *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 40, No 2 (2005), pp. 278-327.
- Discussion Papers in Diplomacy should be cited as follows: Brian Hocking and David Spence, Towards a European Diplomatic System?, *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy*, No. 98 (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', 2005).
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