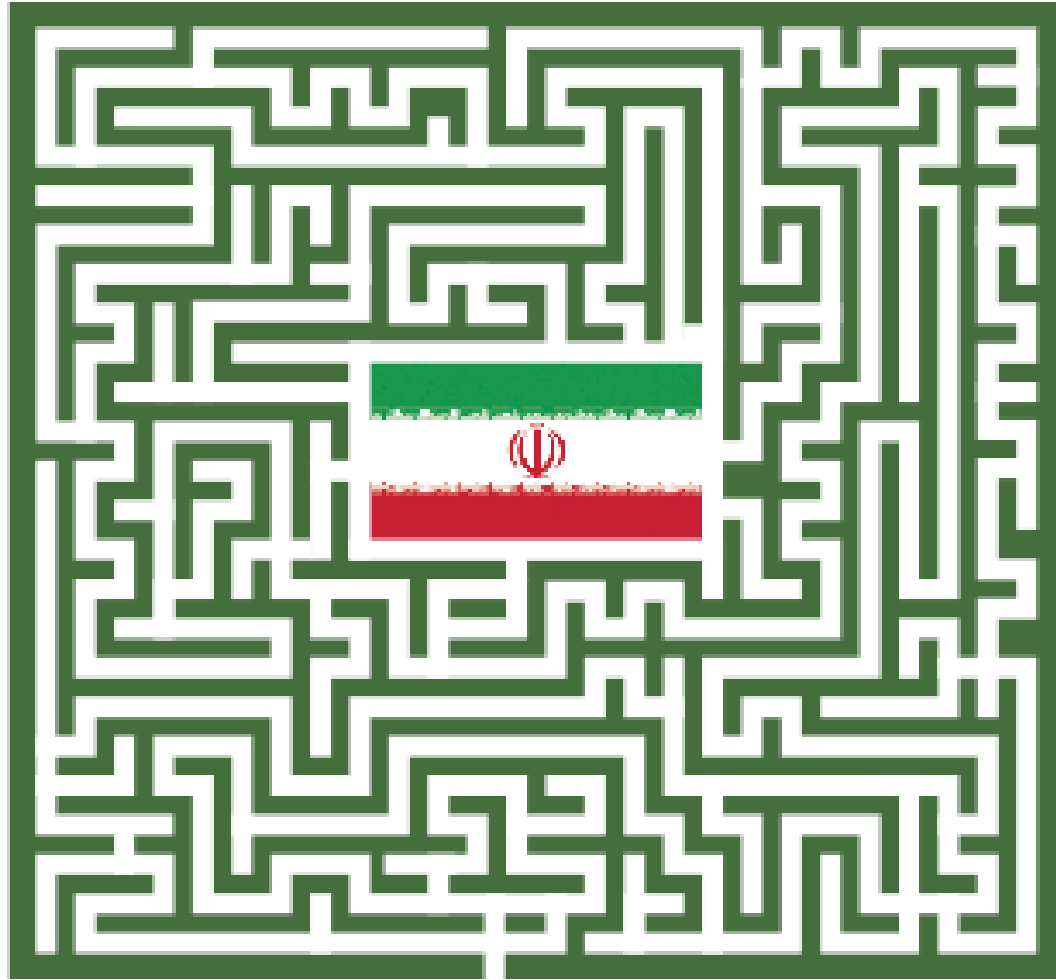# Which Path to Persia?

Options for a New American Strategy Toward Iran

Which Path To Persia: Overview

- Assess U.S. policy options toward Iran in objective fashion

- An in-depth "options memo"

- Does not advocate for any policy

- Collective work - Does not reflect authors' personal preferences

- Six authors: Pollack (lead and editor), Byman, Indyk, Maloney, O'Hanlon, Riedel

- Between us, about 120 years of experience working on Iran inside the U.S. government and out

- Comments from a wide range of experts and partisans to ensure options were treated fairly

BROOKINGS

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Purpose

- Assess the Obama Administration's current policy toward Iran

- Assess the alternatives, in particular as fallback options and contingency plans in case the current policy fails

- Describe all of the options in a way that an informed citizen could understand them

- Allow readers to compare the different options to better understand the causes of the divergences in the policy debate

A Standardized Template

- Goal
- Timeframe
- Overview of the Policy
- Requirements
- Pros and Cons

➢ All of the options had far more "cons" than "pros"

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Persuasion

- Current Obama Administration policy

- Goal: Halt nuclear program, end aggressive anti-American Iranian policies

- Timeframe: 6-36 months

- Overview: bigger carrots, bigger sticks
  - (But keep quiet about the sticks!)
  - Tactical engagement could lead to strategic engagement

- Requirements: International Support

- Pro: Widely seen as right approach, at least to start

- Con: Even if international support is forthcoming, Iran may still refuse

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Engagement

- Goal: Halt Iranian nuclear program, aggressive behavior
  - Possibly change the regime
- Timeframe: Years to decades
- Overview: Kill them with kindness
- Requirements: Enormous patience
- Pro: Avoids threatening Tehran
- Con: Hard to avoid a victory for Iranian hardliners in short-term
  - Iranian behavior may get much worse before it gets better

Invasion

- Goal: Overthrow Iranian regime, end Iranian nuclear program and aggressive behavior

- Timeframe: 6-12 months to invade, years or decades to occupy and rebuild

- Overview: OIF II, then apply lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan
  - Start with the "surge," don't try everything else first

- Requirements: American public support

- Pro: Third time is the charm!

- Con: Will any American support yet another massive military intervention in the Middle East?

U.S. Air Strikes

- Goal: Destroy the Iranian nuclear program

- Timeframe: Weeks

- Overview: Not Osiraq, Desert Fox (if not Desert Storm)
  - Hundreds or thousands of sorties over days or weeks

- Requirements: Regional support, superb intelligence

- Pros: U.S. air forces are mostly unemployed and could do a lot of damage

- Cons I: Unclear how much even successful attacks would set back Iranian nuclear threat
  - Maybe only 1-2 years, and would likely consolidate hardline control

- Cons II: Does nothing about other problematic Iranian behavior, and cannot be constantly repeated
  - But international support for sanctions would evaporate

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Enable or Encourage Israeli Air Strikes

- Goal: Destroy the Iranian nuclear program

- Timeframe: Days or weeks

- Overview: A mini-me version of U.S. strikes
  - A hundred, or maybe just dozens, of sorties

- Requirements (from the U.S.): A wink and a nod. . .

- Pros: Plausible deniability?
  - Israelis have the gumption we lack

- Cons: Even less likely to accomplish goals with all of the same costs and risks as a U.S. strike
  - Probably requires a major Lebanon operation too

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The Velvet Revolution

- Goal: Topple the regime

- Timeframe: Impossible to predict
  - A week ago?

- Overview: The people rise against the regime

- Requirements: The Right Proxy (or nothing at all)
  - Military intervention if the revolution is in danger?

- Pros: Who can argue with people power?

- Cons: Impossible to predict revolutions
  - Require the regime to lose the will or the capacity to employ violence
  - How does the "Great Satan" promote revolution in Iran?

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Insurgency

- Goal: Topple the regime
- Timeframe: Years or decades
  - Although we can start applying pressure much faster
- Overview: Support an ethnic or opposition group (the MEK?) in waging a guerrilla war against the regime
- Requirements: A capable insurgent group with widespread appeal
  - Regional support, particularly a safe-haven
- Pros: We know how to do this
- Cons: It takes a long time if it works at all
  - No insurgent or opposition group has all of the necessary ingredients

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Military Coup

- Goal: Topple the regime
- Timeframe: Impossible to predict
- Overview: Convince disgruntled military officers to oust the regime
- Requirements: Superb intelligence
  – Including the ability to meet, vet and aid would-be coup plotters
- Pros: Someone else does all the dirty work
- Cons: Iran is paranoid about its military
  – What do we do in the (likely) event of a Bay of Pigs scenario?

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Containment

- Goal: Prevent Iran from destabilizing the Middle East and otherwise threatening American interests

- Timeframe: As soon as we like

- Overview: A more robust version of what we have been doing for 30 years
  - Preferably with harsher sanctions

- Requirements: Security guarantees for our allies?
  - A more sustainable U.S. military presence in the region for decades longer

- Pros: We did it with the Soviets for 45 years. . .

- Cons: Assumes we can deter a nuclear Iran

Devising an Integrated Policy

- So many more risks and costs than benefits to each option

- Calls for a strategy that tries to integrate elements of many

- Example:

- Persuasion sets up two follow-on policies:
    - Engagement if Iran is interested
    - Containment if they are not

- Could also set up military action (what Iranians fear)

- Might include elements of regime change as a form of pressure