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Two alternative nonproliferation precedents were set in 2003: in Iraq, a change *of* regime; in Libya, a change *in* a regime. In March, U.S. and British military forces invaded Iraq to coercively disarm that country of its presumed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) stockpiles. In December, only eight months after the fall of Baghdad, the British and U.S. governments jointly announced the startling revelation that secret negotiations had yielded a commitment by Libyan leader Mohammar Qaddafi to verifiably relinquish his country's covert WMD capabilities. President Bush stated that by this commitment to conform to international nonproliferation norms, Libya had "begun the process of rejoining the community of nations."[1] Administration officials were quick to link the Libyan development to the Iraq war, arguing that the decisive use of force to topple the Saddam Hussein regime had precipitated Qaddafi's decision, while former Clinton administration officials claimed that it was the culmination of a decade-long process.

The current nuclear crisis with Iran is playing out against the backdrop of these twin precedents. What are the lessons and implications of these precedent-setting experiences for the development of effective nonproliferation strategies? The stakes are high as experts now posit that the international system now faces the specter of a "tipping point" in which the acquisition of nuclear weapons by one additional state, such as Iran, could trigger a "proliferation epidemic" as other states reconsider their nuclear restraint.[2]

Proliferation Motivations and Regime Type

In undertaking the Iraq war after a bitterly contentious UN Security Council showdown, the Bush administration made the explicit argument that nothing short of complete *regime change* could achieve this objective because of the Saddam Hussein's unrelenting intention to acquire these unconventional capabilities. The Iraq war was the first historical instance in which regime change was employed as the means to achieve nonproliferation ends. In the immediate aftermath of "major combat operations" in Iraq, administration statements augured the possible continuation of this muscular approach in dealing with Iran and other "rogue states."

The link between the issues of regime change and proliferation raises a fundamental question. Is the *character* of a rogue state regime the key determinant of proliferation? In the case of Iraq, the Bush administration made the explicit argument that the achievement of durable nonproliferation was contingent on the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime. But the

proposition that proliferation is linked to the character or type of the target state's regime is refuted by history.

Proliferation is not unique to a particular type of regime – democratic, authoritarian or military. The current roster of nuclear weapon states, as well as those seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, represents the full range of regime type. Democratization, which some have argued is a constraint on proliferation, can increase political transparency and accountability, as well as facilitating open debate and scrutiny of motivations, but will not, of itself, restrain proliferation. Indeed, a majority of the states in the nuclear club are established democracies. Proliferation arises not from regime character but from a range of domestic and international or systemic factors, which affect a regime's motivations and, thus, its intentions.

Regime intention, not regime type, is the lead proliferation indicator. In devising nonproliferation strategies, we must distinguish between factors unique to the particular regime in power and those generic forces that would affect the decision-making of any regime in power in that particular target state.

The Iraq War: Nonproliferation through a Change *of* Regime

Were Iraq's WMD programs purely the manifestation of the megalomania of one man who exercised total control over Iraqi society for a generation? Or were their sources rooted deeper in the country's "strategic personality" – the long-term geographical, historical, and cultural forces that uniquely shape each state's worldview and calculus of decision-making – such that a successor regime to that of Saddam Hussein might be similarly motivated in the future?[3] The answers bear centrally on the vital post-war challenge of ensuring Iraq's long-term WMD disarmament.

In the aftermath of the first war waged to achieve nonproliferation ends, a major goal is to ensure Iraq's successful long-term WMD disarmament. The achievement of that goal will require a targeted strategy that distinguishes between proliferation motivations unique to Saddam Hussein and factors non-specific to his regime -- deriving from "Iraq's "strategic personality" -- that might influence a successor. Saddam Hussein's megalomania, manifested in a pervasive cult of personality and his depiction as a latter-day Saladin, no doubt helped to drive his effort to acquire WMD. His removal is therefore a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for a durable nonproliferation outcome. A range of policy instruments, which have contributed effectively to nuclear restraint in other cases, are available to ensure that an Iraqi interest in unconventional weapons, abandoned with the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, is not reactivated. Foremost among these instruments would be a direct U.S. security assurance, some form of which is a certainty once a post-Saddam government is fully constituted, as well as an appropriate reconstitution of Iraqi conventional military forces. But beyond such moves, the long-term nonproliferation challenge in Iraq must be addressed in its broader regional context. The acquisition of nuclear weapons by another major regional actor, Iran being the obvious candidate, would create "a regional prisoners' dilemma" to which an Iraqi successor regime of whatever political character would be compelled to respond.[4] Forestalling this possibility over the long-term will require a new regional security framework. The overthrow of Saddam Hussein, who was a proximate threat to Iran, created an opening for such a security dialogue, but it has not been exploited

because of the intractable state of relations between the United States and Iran. Instead, as discussed below, Washington sees in Iran's actions confirmation of its status as an "axis of evil" country, while for the Tehran regime, the combination of U.S. military encirclement and strident rhetoric provides an incentive to accelerate its covert nuclear weapons program.

The war for regime change in Iraq was regarded by some Bush administration official as a demonstration conflict exemplifying the new National Security Strategy. That attitude was reflected in one official's assertion that "Iraq is not just about Iraq…. It is of a type." But that begged the question as to what lessons others should draw from the conflict in Iraq.

The administration's message has been mixed because of the persisting internal policy divide over whether the U.S. objective toward "rogue states" should be regime change or behavior change. Hard-liners regarded the Iraq war as a stark example that could compel other "axis of evil" members to give up their WMD capabilities to avoid Saddam's fate. By contrast, administration pragmatists viewed this preventive war not as an application of the new National Security Strategy's preemption doctrine, but as an extraordinary remedy for a unique case. Their concern was the characterization of the Iraq war as "of a type" could create an incentive in Iran and North Korea to continue, and even accelerate, nuclear weapons production in order to deter an U.S. attack to achieve regime change.

Libya: Nonproliferation through change *in* a Regime

Why did Muammar Qaddafi make a strategic decision to terminate Libya's weapons of mass destruction programs? This proliferation turnabout came in December 2003, just eight months after the fall of Baghdad, and the ensuing debate over the precipitant of Qaddafi's surprise move played out against the political backdrop of the Iraq war. Indeed, the two competing explanations for the Libyan breakthrough essentially derive from contending assessments of that regime-change precedent's influence on Qaddafi's calculus of decision: In short, was Libya's WMD disarmament a dividend of the Iraq war?

In greeting the Libyan decision, the Bush administration was quick to claim the breakthrough as a vindication of its muscular nonproliferation strategy, including a demonstrable willingness to go to war to counter emerging WMD threats. "Libya's announcement," a White House "fact sheet" declared, "is a product of the President's strategy which gives regimes *a choice*. They can choose to pursue WMD at great peril, cost and international isolation. Or they can choose to renounce these weapons, take steps to rejoin the international community, and have our help in creating a better future for their citizens."[5] President Bush's address to the nation announcing the Libyan move echoed this theme with an oblique, if unmistakable, reference to the Iraq war: "… [A]ctions by the United States and our allies have sent an unmistakable message to regimes that seek or possess weapons of mass destruction: Those weapons do not bring influence or prestige. They bring isolation or otherwise *unwelcome consequences*."[6] In his 2004 State of the Union address, the President explicitly linked the demonstration effect of the Iraq war to Qaddafi's disarmament decision: "Nine months of intense negotiations involving the United States and Great Britain succeeded with Libya, while 12 months of diplomacy with Iraq did not. And one reason is clear: For diplomacy to be effective, words must be credible, and no one can now doubt the word of America."[7] Conservative

commentator Charles Krauthammer baldly credited what he termed "the Libyan surrender" to "a clearly enunciated policy — now known as the Bush Doctrine — of targeting, by preemptive war if necessary, hostile regimes engaged in terror and/or refusing to come clean on WMDs…. Saddam Hussein did not get the message and ended up in a hole. Gaddafi got the message."[8]

Challenging this assertion of a causal link to the Iraq war, a contending explanation of Libyan decision-making emphasized the primacy of domestic factors. Qaddafi's move was characterized as the culmination of his decade-long campaign to end Libya's pariah status and to gain economic relief from the stringent multilateral sanctions imposed by the United Nations for Libyan complicity in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am 103. Indeed, former Clinton administration officials revealed that Libyan officials first raised WMD disarmament during secret negotiations in 1999 as part of that broader diplomatic rehabilitation process.[9] The December 2003 announcement came amidst rising criticism of the Bush administration over the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Those advancing this interpretation of Qaddafi's motivations rejected the administration's invocation of the Libyan breakthrough as a post facto justification for a preventive war against a country where no WMD stockpiles existed.

The two alternative explanations differ over timing and causality: Was the Iraq war the *occasion* or the *cause* of Qaddafi's decision? The opaque nature of Libya's political system and its preeminent leader's role preclude a definitive determination. The analytical challenge is to employ the qualitative methods of target state analysis to gain a more thorough understanding of Libya's "strategic personality." An assessment of the relative importance of specific external and internal factors, as well as their complex interaction, can shed light on Libyan decision-making. With respect to Qaddafi's WMD disarmament decision, the central question is what led to the profound change in Libyan *intention*. As argued above, regime intention rather than regime type is the lead proliferation indicator. The two competing interpretations address motivation but not intent. Those external and internal pressures (the relative influence of which can be debated) created the necessary but not sufficient condition for the change in Libya's proliferation intention.

Since the December 2003 announcement, the Bush administration has steadfastly maintained that no carrots, concessions, or quid pro quo had been offered the Qaddafi regime to achieve WMD disarmament. Libya indeed made "a choice," as the White House proclaimed. But so did the United States. That decision resolved the longstanding tension in American policy toward Libya, as with the other rogue states, over whether the U.S. objective was regime change or behavior change. When Qaddafi pledged to change Libyan *behavior* in Washington's primary areas of concern after 9/11 – terrorism and proliferation -- the Bush administration signaled a tacit assurance of regime survival through reference to Libya's "steps to rejoin the international community." Key to the Libyan breakthrough was the administration's decision, in the words of a former U.S. official, "to take yes for an answer" – that is, to embrace Qaddafi's behavior change and forgo the more expansive goal of regime change. If the Bush administration had not made that U.S. intention clear (instead arguing that the Libyan regime was beyond the pale regardless of any behavior change), Qaddafi would have had no incentive to give up his WMD option. Indeed, regime-change rhetoric and policies toward Libya in the wake of Iraq would have created a strong counter-incentive for Qaddafi to accelerate development of his unconventional weapons arsenal to deter the United States.

Libya offered a contrasting nonproliferation model to that of Iraq in 2003 – a change *in* a regime, rather than a change *of* regime. Beyond the issue of WMD disarmament, Libya could set an important precedent in which a "rogue state" is successfully reintegrated into the international system through acceptance of its norms – a process termed "resocialization" by political scientist Alexander George. An understanding of the conditions for success that led to the December 2003 breakthrough could illuminate whether the Libyan case has relevance for addressing the ongoing proliferation challenges in Iran and North Korea – the two remaining members of President Bush's "axis of evil."

The Iranian Nuclear Crisis

For U.S. policymakers, the issue of Iran's nuclear programs is embedded in the broader one of the future evolution of that country. Just as Kennan's containment strategy took for its premise a concept of political change in the Soviet Union, so too must U.S. strategies in the current crises be informed by realistic assessments of both the alternative political trajectories that Iran might take and the probabilities of those trajectories. Is regime collapse imminent? Can't it be externally induced (as some Bush administration officials reportedly believe)? Is a "soft landing" to reintegrate either nation into the international system possible? These various concepts of societal change create a critical threshold assumption for strategy development and implementation. With Iran (as well as North Korea), the near-term imperative of addressing the states' proliferation threats and the long-term American interest in the transformation of their regimes create a policy tension between objectives on different timelines. This tension can be managed, but not totally resolved, through effective policy coordination to ensure that the nonproliferation component is consistent with the broader strategy to promote regime change (or radical regime evolution).

The Bush administration has reportedly been unable to complete a presidential directive on Iran since 2002 because of a persisting interagency policy cleavage over whether the U.S. objective should be regime change or behavior change.[10] Meanwhile, the IAEA's June 2003 report suggesting that Iran's civilian nuclear energy infrastructure masks a covert weapons program triggered an international crisis that commands Washington's attention.

Since the 1979 revolution, American administrations have periodically sought to engage "moderates" inside the Iranian regime who purportedly desire to normalize relations with the external world. In the May 1997 election of a popular reformist president, Mohammed Khatami, the Clinton administration perceived an opportunity, which led to its proposal for "a road map leading to normal relations."[11] The failure of Khatami, after eight years in power, to deliver on the reformist agenda in the face of staunch hard-liner opposition has generated an internal political backlash from disappointed former supporters. Debate centers on whether he has been unable to implement meaningful reform because he lacks the power, since the Supreme Leader controls the regime's key institutions, or because, as an integral member of the regime, he lacks the will to do so. The Bush administration does not consider Khatami an agent of political change; no longer is he called Iran's Gorbachev.

Current views of political change in Iran divide into two competing schools – one positing a hard landing leading to *regime change*, the other projecting a soft landing through *regime evolution*. The key determinant in these contending concepts of change is the new reality of Iranian politics – a politically energized civil society. Proponents of the hard landing school regard Iran as being in a pre-revolutionary situation, such as Eastern Europe was in 1989, or Iran itself was in 1979. Soft-landing adherents believe that regime evolution is possible either through the reformists' finally gaining political ascendancy or through pragmatic hard-liners' willingness to cut internal and external deals to ensure political survival. The Bush administration has sent mixed signals on which concept of political change is at the heart of its policy. It has not moved toward a Reagan Doctrine-type policy of supporting external insurgents (though some outside the administration do favor support of the Iranian exile group, Mujaheddin-e Khalq, to pressure the Tehran regime). But in its support of Iranian civil society as the agent of change, the administration is conflicted on whether a politically energized population could bring down the theocratic regime or, alternatively, put pressure on the regime to implement the reformist agenda.

The nuclear crisis is playing out against the backdrop of this broader political struggle in Iran. The challenge for the administration is that the nonproliferation timeline, which is immediate because of the IAEA's recent revelations about Iran's undeclared uranium enrichment facilities, is at odds with the timeline for internal political change. Even among fervent proponents of the hard-landing school, few would argue that the theocratic regime is on the verge of being toppled through a civil society uprising. With regime change not an imminent prospect, and certainly not a threshold assumption upon which prudent policy can be based, the U.S. administration is left with two policy options for addressing Iran's nuclear program: military preemption or negotiation. Successful preemptive action would face formidable military and intelligence hurdles in light of Iran's multiple and redundant nuclear facilities. Moreover, a military strike would likely have serious negative political ramifications, triggering an anti-American backlash that could set back the prospects for domestic political reform in Iran by seemingly confirming the hard-liners' image of a predatory United States.[12]

The Bush administration has maintained its unwillingness to engage in direct bilateral or multilateral negotiations with the Tehran regime. Instead, for the time being, the Bush administration is prepared to work through the IAEA and the so-called EU-3 (the foreign ministers of Britain, France, and Germany) to negotiate limits on Iran's nuclear program. It prefers to allow the IAEA and the threat of referring the matter to the UN Security Council to pressure Iran into complying with its NPT obligations. This strategy led the Tehran regime in October 2003 to agree to sign the IAEA's additional protocol for inspections and temporarily freeze its enrichment activities in the face of a hard IAEA deadline and EU-3 pressure. However, the implementation and durability of this arrangement remain open questions because it does not address the underlying motivations of Iran's covert nuclear weapons program.

After the end of "major combat operations" in Iraq, the United States, having eliminated *the* major threat to Iran's security, had an opening for strategic dialogue with the Tehran regime. Instead, the strident regime-change rhetoric from some U.S. officials gave Iran an incentive to accelerate its nuclear program as a deterrent. And yet, it's only Iran's quest for nuclear weapons that gives rise to the possibility of an American preemptive military strike on the country. The imperative of addressing Iran's long-term proliferation motivations was underscored by CIA

Director George Tenet, who strikingly acknowledged in February 2003 congressional testimony that those motivations are not regime-specific: "No Iranian government, regardless of its ideological leanings, is likely to willingly abandon WMD programs that are seen as guaranteeing Iran's security."[13] Thus, even if regime change, which no one believes is imminent, were to occur, this development in itself would not necessarily produce long-term nuclear restraint.

Some have proposed that the United States should engage the current Iranian regime in a "grand bargain": U.S. security reassurances, a pledge of nonaggression and noninterference, would be exchanged for major, verifiable shifts in Iranian behavior related to WMD and terrorism.[14] Such an arrangement, which faces formidable political obstacles in Washington and Tehran, would require a complementary regional security forum to address legitimate Iranian concerns that go beyond the United States. These proposals are necessary, but not sufficient: ultimately, an additional prerequisite to induce long-term nuclear restraint is a change in the terms of debate within Iran itself. The nuclear issue has hitherto been monopolized by the hard-liners and characterized as a discriminatory effort by the United States to deny Iran advanced technology permissible under the NPT. Increased political transparency, advocated by the pro-democracy movement, would subject the putative energy and security rationales of the Iranian program to scrutiny and promote nuclear restraint in the most durable and legitimate way – indigenously.[15]

Intelligence and Ambiguity

The report of the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons concluded, "the Intelligence Community was dead wrong in almost all of its pre-war judgments about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction." It cited shortcomings in collection and analysis, as well as "a failure to make clear just how much of its analysis was based on assumptions, rather than good evidence."[16] But in addressing this intelligence failure and assessing its implications for future proliferation challenges, one must grapple with the WMD conundrum of the Iraq War. Why did Saddam Hussein simply not "come clean" and fully comply with the UN weapons inspection requirements when his regime, in fact, did not possess stockpiles of chemical and other unconventional weapons?

The answer may lie in the conclusion that Saddam Hussein drew from the 1991 Gulf War. According to the Iraq Survey Group's final report (based on the regime's archives and extensive interviews with senior Iraqi officials), Saddam Hussein believed that the threatened use of Iraqi chemical weapons had deterred a U.S. march on Baghdad.[17] In the 2003 crisis, when it was clear that the United States would continue to seek a regime change in Baghdad even if Saddam Hussein complied with the UN disarmament resolutions, the Iraqi leader plausibly concluded that maintaining ambiguity about his WMD arsenal could have strategic utility to deter a U.S attack.

In the current crisis with Iran, the Tehran regime's theocratic leadership may similarly seek to cultivate ambiguity about the state of Iran's nuclear capabilities given the ambiguity in Washington over whether the U.S. objective is regime change or behavior change. With Iran, the United States faces a dilemma. Because of major constraints on the use of force and the U.S. ability to bring about regime change, the Iraq option is not available. And given Washington's

strong regime-change rhetoric, the Iranian regime has plausibly concluded that Washington will not offer it the Libya option with its core provision of an assurance of regime survival. In this context, Iran will likely seek to maintain and cultivate ambiguity about its nuclear capabilities. Such ambiguity would make it much harder for the United States to develop a multilateral response to Iran's nuclear challenge in the United Nations Security Council. It will be more difficult to forge collective action when ambiguity frustrates the U.S. ability to create a consensus among the P-5 on Iran's nuclear capabilities and intentions. The question for U.S. administration is: how much ambiguity it is prepared to live with?

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[1] "Remarks on the Decision by Colonel Muammar Abu Minyar al-Qadhafi of Libya to Disclose and Dismantle Weapons of Mass Destruction," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 39, no. 52, p. 1835.

[2] Kurt M. Campbell, Robert J. Einhorn, and Mitchell B. Reiss, eds., *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).

[3] According to Caroline F. Ziemke, Philippe Loustaunau, and Amy Alrich, strategic personality "focuses on broad historical and cultural patterns that evolve over the whole course of a state's history (its historical plot) and identifies the fundamental consistencies in its long-term strategic conduct in order to shed light on how they might shape its current and future strategic decisions. The methodology is not deterministic and, hence, not precisely predictive." See *Strategic Personality and the Effectiveness of Nuclear Deterrence* (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, November 2000), p. ES-1.

[4] Tim Trevan, summary of remarks in "Proliferation Challenges after Iraq," conference report on a U.S. Army Eisenhower National Security Series workshop co-organized by the Division of International Studies, Woodrow Wilson Center and the Reves Center for International Studies, The College of William and Mary, June 24, 2003; online at https://www.eisenhowerseries.com.

[5] White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Fact Sheet: The President's National Security Strategy to Combat WMD – Libya's Announcement," December 19, 2004 (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/12/20031219-8.html), emphasis added.

[6] White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "President Bush: Libya Pledges to Dismantle WMD Programs," December 19, 2004 (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/12/20031219-9.html).

[7] White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "State of the Union Address," January 20, 2004 (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/01/20040120-7.html).

[8] Charles Krauthammer, "The Doggedness of War," *Washington Post*, December 26, 2003, p. A35.

[9] Martin Indyk, "The Iraq War did not Force Gadaffi's Hand," *Financial Times*, March 9, 2004 (http://www.brookings.edu/views/op-ed/indyk/20040309.htm).

[10] Michael Dobbs, "Pressure Builds for President to Declare Strategy on Iran," *Washington Post*, June 15, 2003, p. A20.

[11] Barbara Crossette, "Albright in Overture to Iran, Seeks a 'Road Map' to Amity," *New York Times*, June 18, 1998, p. A1.

[12] Micahel Eisenstadt, "Iranian Nuclear Weapons, Part I: The Challenge of Preventive Action," *Policywatch*, no. 760 (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 27, 2003).

[13] Central Intelligence Agency, Director of Central Intelligence's Worldwide Threat Briefing, "The Worldwide Threat in 2003: Evolving Dangers in a Complex World," 11 February 2003, http://www.cia.gov/cia/public_affairs/speeches/2003/dci_speech_02112003.html.

[14] See Geoffrey Kemp, "How to Stop the Iranian Bomb," *National Interest*, no. 72 (spring 2003). Kemp characterizes this approach as "constructive containment."

[15] Shahram Chubin and Robert S. Litwak, "Debating Iran's Nuclear Aspirations," *Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (Autumn 2003), pp. 99-114.

[16] Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons, Report to the President, March 31, 2005, transmittal letter; online at http://www.wmd.gov/report/

[17] Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD, September 30, 2004, p. 8; online at http://www.cia.gov/cia/reports/iraq_wmd_2004/