

Iran and the EU: Re-assessing the European role

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Abstract

When the newly elected President Obama spoke of the US extending its hand if Iran unclenched its fist, a changing regional architecture appeared at last on the horizon that embraced previous EU policies of dialogue with Iran. Yet ironically, the EU's own stance in response to Iran's ongoing nuclear activities had by then hardened, leading to an insistence on enrichment suspension as a condition for further talks. Still, by keeping communication open, the EU could claim it contributed to the engagement between Washington and Tehran, through its insistence on milieu goals. Since 2005, however, the EU has made little progress in leading international efforts to constrain Iran's nuclear programme through diplomacy or address it in the context of Iran's role in the larger Middle East. Indeed, it is argued here that the EU's position as broker between the US and Iran has been compromised by focusing increasingly on policies to contain, rather than engage. By examining key points in the nuclear negotiations between 2003 and 2010, a shift is revealed in the EU's normative vision for the sake of closer relations with the US, and away from civilian approaches to obtain international objectives. Further, it is argued here that the EU's leadership role has been hampered by its inability to formulate an effective discourse in which to situate Iran within a larger Middle East bargain. In failing to prioritize milieu over possession goals, the EU has risked losing its normative legitimacy and downgrading its (much needed) role of arbiter in the midst of the dangerous processes increasingly poisoning US-Iranian relations.

The shift in the US position toward managing relations with Iran in the wake of the changeover from the Bush to the Obama administration, was initially marked and palpable. The willingness to address Iran as a regional player, as a possible partner in resolving the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and as a government that does not require regime change in order to be officially addressed and recognized, held the promise of a new geostrategic dialogue and brought hope of progress in the nuclear negotiations ("Obama offers Iran a 'new beginning' ", CNN 20/3/09). In effect, this

shift by the Obama administration reformulated the Iran problem as one of deterring its nuclear ambitions, rather than requiring regime change – a choice that more closely approximated the way the EU had heretofore approached Iran (Roy, 2007, 121).

However, subsequent developments in Iran as a result of the contested presidential elections, complicated Obama's position, even as the Islamic Republic's ruling regime adopted an increasingly authoritarian posture. The effect of Iran's internal clamp-down has been a radicalization of its external discourse – a typical mechanism for countering domestic disenchantment by blaming outside threats for causing internal upheaval. It is equally the case that the failure of the Obama policies toward Israel, namely, the inability to maintain the settlement freeze or restart negotiations, has convinced Iranian leaders that the US administration is weak, and can be ignored (**Citation**). Obama's initial attempts to reach out to Iran were interpreted by Tehran as lacking substance, while Iran's responses were adjudged in Washington as 'slapping away' Obama's extended hand (NPR, 19 February 2010). This opened the way for more hawkish voices, led by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, to gradually chip away at the initial Obama position of 'talks without preconditions' (*New York Times* Feb 10, 2010). As the first year of Obama's administration closed without significant breakthroughs with Iran, Washington's rhetoric became more confrontational, reflecting a re-calibration of its policy. In a news-briefing by White House spokesman Robert Gibbs on February 15, 2010, the administration's new thinking on engagement was presented as, 'not necessarily

about the two adversaries, but rather about the worldview of America' (Cooper, *New York Times*, 16 February 2010, A10).

What has been less readily recognized, but equally significant over the past eight years, has been the shift in the EU's management of relations with Iran and the subsequent change in its role vis-à-vis the tensions in US-Iran relations. As late as 2003, the EU maintained a position of active engagement with Iran, which capitalized on EU normative means and member strengths, that is, civilian, rather than military instruments: trade and banking access, diplomacy, confidence building, conflict prevention, and human rights promotion through cooperation (Tocci 2007, 5-6). The EU focus on peacefully deterring Iran from developing a nuclear weapon publicly diverged from that of the US, at times putting pressure on the trans-Atlantic relationship (Daalder, Gnesotto and Gordon 2006, 2-4).

Since 2004, however, the "Americanization" of EU non-proliferation policy', as Sauer labels it, has deeply affected its approach to Iran and the nature of the negotiations in which it has attempted to act as mediator (Sauer 2008, 290). Since 2003, when Iran's intentions to acquire nuclear weapons (or at least, a weapons capability) were officially 'discovered', and the US rebuffed a secret offer by then Iranian President Khatami to put everything on the table for negotiation, the EU's civilian approach based on milieu goals has increasingly been replaced by 'coercive diplomacy' toward Iran (History of Official Proposals on the Iranian Nuclear Issue www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Iran; Sauer 2007, 613). This has included freezing talks, time-restrictions, sanctions and other approaches indicative of a general failure to seek or find compromise. It likewise suggests a willingness to use

instruments of pressure less typical of past EU normative practices, and more in line with those of the US, despite differences in their respective goals and capabilities.

The reason and timing of this 'American' turn is rooted in the changed security environment post-9/11 and has affected not only the EU's policy stance toward Iran, but other Middle East dilemmas, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict and specifically, the legitimacy of Hamas. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the EU adopted a policy of securitizing all its external relations in order to counter what was perceived to be a globalized threat of international terrorism. This contributed to the construction of a new basis for the post-Cold War partnership, re-invigorating the trans-Atlantic Relationship as the bulwark for European defence. However, the process was hampered in 2002 and 2003 by a lack of European consensus over Iraq, and the first Bush administration's unilateral approach to foreign policy. These years saw a more independent EU approach toward Iran, as well as the Palestinians, Syrians, and the states of the southern Mediterranean. With the collapse of the Bush plan in Iraq, however, American policy developed a new interest in multilateralism, with the second Bush administration seeking European allies. Seeing a chance to re-assert common principles of securitization, the EU moved to reconstitute the trans-Atlantic relationship. The paradigm of 'constructive engagement' with Iran was gradually abandoned. In place of persuasion through confidence-building measures and negotiations, the EU increasingly sought 'confrontational containment' in parallel with US policies, a stance out of step with EU normative rhetoric (Rudolph, quoted in Bertram 2008, 18).

In the following, the first section situates the discussion within the theoretical debate regarding the EU's normative foreign policy goals, means and impacts. It considers not only the EU's shift in behaviour toward non-normative approaches in other settings within the Middle East and North Africa, but likewise, the attendant loss of influence to affect conflicts with which it is seized. The second section reviews the key points of exchange between the EU and Iran regarding both the nuclear issue as well as other bilateral political and economic initiatives: the 2003 E-3 initiative that operationalized civilian means in policy construction, opening a gap between US and EU positions; the breakdown in early 2005 that introduced conditionality into the negotiations; the shift to offers with sanctions under the management of the P5+1, engaging the EU in increasingly coercive measures; and the Turkey-Brazil nuclear fuel exchange deal, in which the EU and US acted as spoilers in the face of a substantive achievement over which they had no influence. This provides the context in which to analyze the EU's shifting role, and its loss of initiative and influence in tandem with its adoption of increasingly coercive policies, the focus of the third section. In substituting pressure for persuasion, it is argued that no further progress was achieved: Not only have Iran's capabilities risen substantially, but the EU's ability to work with it to achieve agreement rather than increasing international sanction and friction, have fallen. The fourth section argues that if the EU exercises the civilian power at its disposal, a return to direct engagement with Iran concerning its nuclear dilemma could lead to a better understanding of Iran's motivations (whether it plans on developing the bomb, or the latent capability), and a resumption of its place as mediator in a conflict of wills

that has repercussions not only for the future of the NPT, but in the shifting conflicts from the Persian Gulf to the Levant in which Iran has purchase .

The EU no longer a normative power in the Middle East?

The idea that the EU has stopped being a purely normative – or civilian – power is not new (see for example, Gnesotto 2004; Joffe 2008; Smith 2005.; Tocci et al. 2008). Although the contrary view has its supporters, the argument that ‘civilian power EU is definitely dead’ as Karen Smith puts it, has two significant aspects for our purposes here: 1) the increasing prioritization of security over milieu goals in the EU’s foreign practices in the Mediterranean, and states in the Levant and Persian Gulf – to the exclusion of other, storied, normative goals, such as human rights protection and the promotion of confidence-building measures (Joffe *ibid*); and 2) its increasing use of conditionality, both negative and positive, in negotiations and partnership structures, such that states are required to fulfill certain duties in order to enjoy favourable relations with the EU. In both cases, the emphasis is on possession goals – the pursuit of national interest, or the expression of power as the determinant of the ‘normal’ (Hill 2003, chapter 6, especially, 136-7).

This contrasts with previous EU (and EC) policy orientations toward milieu goals: the consistent pursuit of an ethical environment of international law and sustainable international development through the use of civilian means such as trade, persuasion and ‘overt diffusion’ (Manners 2002, 245; Prodi 2000, 3; Smith 2005, 5). Such goals involve the declared intent to shape ‘conditions beyond borders through normatively deployed means’ (Manners, *ibid*). As ‘a civil society of

civil societies,' in Adam Roberts' words, the EU was able to introduce the use of civilian rather than military power 'to shape conceptions of "normal" (Manners 2001 quoted in Joffe 2008, 151).

In her work on how goals, means and outcomes can be tracked separately as indicators of the kind of foreign policy actor the EU actually is in relationships with various actors (such as the Palestinians or the southern Mediterranean), Tocci argues that the EU has shifted away from using normative means within the Middle Eastern theatre over the past ten to fifteen years (Tocci et al. 2008). In the case of Syria, for example, contributing author to Tocci's study, Ruth Hanau-Santini observes how the EU diverged from a civilian approach aimed at improving the economic and political environment, to one prioritizing American policy preferences. This reduced its influence in promoting negotiations over the Golan Heights, and its room for maneuver in bringing to the negotiations between Syria and Israel (and Lebanon and Israel) 'a much needed holistic approach' (Hanau-Santini in Tocci et al. 2008, 12). Further, Hanau-Santini argues that the EU adopted non-normative means in its foreign policy approach by signing an Association Agreement with Israel (despite the non-proliferation clause and the 2003 WMD strategy designed to be inserted in all such agreements), while refusing to sign one with Damascus on suspicion it was exporting arms into Lebanon. This was despite the fact that the EU's normative impress on Syria at the time, though growing timid, nonetheless contributed to Syria's introduction of a resolution at the UN Security Council in 2003 calling for a nuclear weapons free-zone throughout the Middle East. In effect, 'this strategic choice, exemplified by the Union's freezing or severing of ties

with Damascus, represents the Union's preference to maintain close ranks with the US, irrespective of its normative agenda' (Ibid).

Joffé arrives at a similar view regarding the EU's lessening clout as a result of its reduced emphasis on 'universally accepted norms of state and communal behaviour in its relations with third countries' (Joffé 2008, 152). Joffé focuses on the EU's securitization of North African immigration as part of a larger policy of trans-national terrorism containment. Starting from a strong civilian stance of engagement and promotion of development cooperation through the Barcelona Process, the EU gradually downgraded its concerns over governance and economic development, prioritizing instead issues of counter-terrorism and the limitation of the movement of peoples across borders, specifically from the southern Mediterranean (ibid, 163). In so doing, the EU, he argues, adopted the security rhetoric of the regimes lining the Mediterranean's southern littoral – including Tunisia's and Libya's – in exchange for their cooperation. Not surprisingly, political and cultural instruments driven by the EU's focus on persuasive power were sidelined, reducing its ability to influence those regimes, or the popular uprisings that have subsequently overthrown them. 'This raises serious questions as to the real significance of the Union's norms', Joffé maintains, 'and the extent to which they are no more than a construct which camouflages the underlying concerns of both the Union and its Member States' (ibid, 167).

In sum, the EU's foreign policy goals and means, as exercised in various areas of the Middle East and North Africa region, have increasingly favoured non-normative approaches as issues of security, terrorism and the trans-Atlantic

relationship have gained importance. This has reduced the EU's use of civilian instruments to promote relationships with third parties based on 'social solidarity' (Manners 2002, 139), or political, cultural and economic engagement. The strength of the EU's leadership in mediating conflicts in the region has consequently fallen, as has its ability to take steps through its own institutionalized regimes against the violation of human rights or international law (EMHRN, 'Back to Square 1?', 2005, 19 December, 2005; Tocci 2008, 19).

It is against this background that a more detailed discussion of the EU role in negotiating with Iran is taken up in the next two sections.

E-3 negotiations with Iran – The successful normative approach in 2003

In 2002, information leaked out that Iran had launched a nuclear weapons research programme and was secretly building several sites, including ones in Natanz and Arak, to develop a nuclear fuel cycle. Leaked by the Mojaheddin-e Khalq (MEK), a group in exile on Iraqi territory and considered terrorist by both Tehran and the CIA, the Islamic Republic, not surprisingly, denied the accusations. However, a February, 2003 IAEA visit to Iran confirmed the report (www.iaea.org: 2003).

Iran's motivation for building nuclear capacity was by then already a subject of heated debate in Brussels and Washington. Iranian arguments for building nuclear power capabilities were generally dismissed in US policy circles as ludicrous for a country so rich in natural gas and oil resources, the assumption being that it masked a covert nuclear weapons programme. However, the genesis of the Iranian nuclear agenda, which began in 1967 when the Shah signed agreements with the

Nixon administration (and in 1975 with the Carter administration) for developing at least eight nuclear power reactors in Iran, had stemmed from the projected need for expanding and diversifying electricity production in a fast developing, capital-intensive, high-population country – a plan seen at the time in Washington as pragmatic (www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/Iran/Nuclear/index.html). Likewise, in 1974, contracts with the French to build two pressurized water reactors, and in 1975, with the Germans, to build six more reactors including the one in Bushehr, focused on the Shah's plans for increased nuclear power generation. Although the new Islamic Republic shut down these programmes, and the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) reduced under its anti-Westernization agenda, the severe energy shortage that followed the Revolution and plagued the early years of the Iran-Iraq War served to change the view of the clerical decision-makers (Kibaroglu 2006:215).

By early 1983, plans for a civilian nuclear power programme were restarted, and, with Ayatollah Khomeini stating unequivocally that atomic weapons were 'un-Islamic', Iran attempted to woo the Germans and French back. Kraftwerk Union and Framatome, however, proved disinclined to provide Iran with nuclear technology, and it was forced to look instead to the Chinese, Russians, and Czechs. As the Esfahan Nuclear Research Center opened in 1984 with Chinese help, and a new agreement to complete Bushehr was signed with the Russians, a revitalized AEOI presented the populace with a discourse of national pride highlighting Iran's scientific progress, technical capability, and right to close the modernization gap dividing it from the West, a discourse that has hardened over time, and which has

never included any official acknowledgement that a nuclear weapon might be part of the equation or worth debate (Farhi 2006:8).

The public focus on the civilian nuclear programme, however, did not mean that the clerical elite failed to draw important conclusions about the value of nuclear weapons as a result of Iran's experience in its war with Iraq. Their views would have significant normative impact on the ensuing negotiations. Had Iran developed a nuclear weapon, the reasoning went, Iraq might not have attacked Iran with such impunity, nor, perhaps, would the US have moved its Navy so readily into the Persian Gulf during the Tanker War (Kibaroglu 2006: 215). Equally significant was the perception that the UNSC had twice betrayed Iran, having failed to condemn Iraq's initial attack, and later, its use of chemical weapons against Iranian forces. The implication was that Iran could not rely on international organizations to protect its sovereignty or security, since, as Farhi observes, the prevailing attitude was that 'international organizations such as the IAEA were political tools of important international players, such as the United States, in their quest to deny Iran technological advancement and progress' (Farhi 2006:6). When the secret Natanz and Arak facilities were revealed, this distrust emerged in the explanations offered by Iranian officials, which included their conviction that "they had no other alternative but to build the facility secretly" because "if they had notified the IAEA that they were building a uranium enrichment facility, the US would have definitely prevented them from finalizing the project." (quote in Kibaruglu 2006:210).

In response, the IAEA, with EU and US backing, called on Iran to sign the Additional Protocol to the NPT, and provide a full report of its nuclear activities, by

October of 2003. The US, having at the time still no diplomatic relations with Iran, went further, mooted the idea that Iran should give up its enrichment activities and that its dossier be transferred from the IAEA to the UNSC (ibid: 209). Yet, in the spring of 2003, international attention was not on Iran, but on Washington's intended invasion of Iraq, and the acrimony this inspired between the US and several EU members, particularly France. In May, anticipating the changes that the Coalition's March invasion of Iraq would bring to its immediate neighbourhood, Iran's leadership, in an unusual show of consensus, sent a proposal to Washington for negotiations on a comprehensive settlement of outstanding issues. These included the nuclear programme, and offers to accept the 2002 Saudi plan regarding Israel and Palestine, and to stop supporting Hamas and Hezbollah. 'Had the proposal been taken seriously and accepted at the time,' Bertram suggests, 'many of the current reasons for concern would have been averted.' (Bertram 2008, 30).

Seeing opportunity in US silence, in October 2003, France, Germany and Britain conducted an extraordinary diplomatic demarche by sending foreign ministers Dominique de Villepin, Joschka Fischer and Jack Straw, to Tehran. The move was unusual for several reasons. Not only did it signal the re-emergence of European alliance in the wake of divisions that had roiled the Union vis-à-vis the conflict in Iraq, something Sauer argues was linked to the non-proliferation policy initiative launched that spring by the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, which provided the EU a blueprint with which to define a unified approach (Sauer 2007, 617-618). In this regard, the UK in particular was anxious to re-establish legitimacy with its European allies in the wake of the split over Iraq. The

'troika' also recognized Iran's right to peaceful use of nuclear energy, despite strong US rejection of such a position. Finally, it was an unusually concerted effort to obtain Iran's acceptance of the Additional Protocol, and thus diffuse a diplomatic crisis, an agenda publicly backed by the other members of the EU (Sciolino, 23 October 2003).

The Big 3's talks with Hassan Rohani, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator at the time, utilized various civilian instruments on the premise that pragmatic Iranian responses would be more likely to emerge if negotiations emphasized a strategic calculus of national interest. As such there was no lacing of conditionality, with the former demanding compliance from the latter. Instead, the foreign ministers offered cooperation in the form of technological transfers once Iran opened its facilities to more invasive inspections through the Additional Protocol. They likewise revisited shared political, economic and cultural plans promoted the year before by the European Commission but which had been suspended once the clandestine nuclear facilities were disclosed¹. This aspect of the talks can be understood in the context of Europe's 1998 policy of 'comprehensive dialogue' with Iran, the outgrowth of an earlier policy of 'critical dialogue', which was designed to retain EU influence (and economic opportunity) by keeping communication lines with Iran open. To critics, it reflected a certain ambiguity in the agenda, pointing up the perennial European challenge of balancing priorities between geo-strategic realities, economic cooperation and human rights.²

¹ These included the EU-Iran Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA) and the Political Dialogue Agreement (PDA), both launched in 2002.

² The author would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for making this point.

The approach of the E-3 ministers drew a welcome and pragmatic response from Tehran, which stated it would sign the Additional Protocol to the NPT, temporarily suspend conversion during further negotiations, and submit a declaration regarding the details of its programme to the IAEA. As summed up by long-time Iran watcher Elaine Sciolino on October 29, 2003, in the *New York Times*:

The Europeans understand that the way to nurture Iran's new mood is to recognize its deep pride and to avoid any perceived humiliation. In both their public statements and in the brief final agreement, the foreign ministers from France, Britain and Germany stated that Iran's "sovereignty" and "dignity" had not been compromised.

Importantly, the European demarche inspired 'a conversation' in Iran among the different factions as to how to work with the international community to develop a meaningful bargain. This temporarily defanged the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, who refrained from denouncing the agreement in favour of adopting reformist President Mohammad Khatami's plan. This was to sign the Additional Protocol and act as though it was already in place, while nonetheless stopping short of ratifying it, thus enabling the IAEA to conduct stricter inspections in undeclared facilities while the enrichment process was voluntarily and temporarily suspended (Chubin 2010). Supported by Rohani as a way to meet the international community halfway, this opened space for hardline and reformists elites to address the problem creatively, itself not an inconsequential development. Since both expressed support for the nuclear programme, the question in Iran was how to formulate the foreign

policy approach that accompanied it (R. Parsi 2009, 2). The conservative faction, in contending that the issue has simply been an excuse for the West's – and particularly, Washington's and Israel's – desire for regime change, has considered negotiations pointless and called for Iran's withdrawal from the NPT (Khaliji 2010). The reformists, by contrast, have perceived it as pointing up difficulties within the existing NPT that all parties to the agreement need to grapple with, including the challenge presented by those nuclear powers outside the NPT, particularly (from Iran's point of view, not least because of their territorial proximity), Israel and Pakistan – though also India. Based on the record, both factions remained committed to a public discourse that has never disputed the fact that Iran has no right to nuclear weapons, but only to nuclear enrichment (Sauer 2007: 624).

By approaching Tehran using the classic means of civilian power: 'the acceptance of the necessity of cooperation with others in the pursuit of international objectives; the concentration on non-military, primarily economic means to secure national goals; and a willingness to develop supranational structures to address critical issues of international engagement', the three European Ministers promoted a process of 'civilizing' international politics that encompassed 'solidarity with other societies and a sense of responsibility for the future of the world – particularly the global environment' (Hanns Maull, quoted in Smith, 65). Using persuasion, offering rewards and 'diplomacy to encourage a more sophisticated public discussion of foreign policy matters' as Hill describes the civilian model, the E-3 reaped significant influence (Hill 2003, 137). This they did without US support, even though it was

always clear that one aspect of the overall agenda was to lay the groundwork for eventual US engagement with Iran (Kuzmicheva 2007, 4).

In Europe, the visit was initially hailed a success, and the Western press dismissed, as a discourse designed only for domestic consumption, Rohani's warning that suspension would be for a limited time, and dependent on the outcome of negotiations (Sciolino 16 October 2003). Yet, when Iran twice provided the IAEA with information regarding its conversion programme that was twice found to have gaps, optimism began to fade (IAEA 2004 May). At the same time, other EU member states unrepresented in a process that seemed poised to develop into a major initiative, supported Javier Solana, High Representative of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, as a 'go-between' and overall EU negotiator, thus turning the effort into what's been called EU/E3 (Arfazadeh Roudsari 2007, 7). Solana, previously head of NATO and a strong believer in the trans-Atlantic relationship, took an increasingly prominent negotiating role just as Angela Merkel, more open to closer ties with the US than her predecessor, was elected Chancellor of Germany. This meant that with the UK, always committed to the US alliance, the groundwork was laid for an increasingly pro-American European stance, which even an initially reluctant France under Chirac, came to support, and was reflected in the negotiations with Iran.

In the course of 2004, the EU/E3 began to adopt more coercive methods of persuasion, while at the same time, retaining a soft-power stance of cooptation through the proffering of rewards and incentives. It has been argued that the EU found itself in a position of ambivalence at this point for several reasons, including,

a) a lack of a clear strategy of pragmatic outcomes that reflected attainable Iranian as well as EU objectives; b) an incomplete understanding of the differences between its own, versus Iranian, styles and intentions within the negotiation process; c) a low sensitivity to the oft expressed contradiction (not just by Iran, but by, for example, Brazil and Egypt) in the position of the UK and France as nuclear-weapons states in demanding Iranian compliance within the civilian enrichment aspect of the NPT when their own obligations for disarmament within the Treaty had gone unfulfilled (Ibid , 7-8; Sauer 2007, 628)

As such, the EU/E3 failed to develop an initial formula with Iran that set out an agreed-upon definition of the problem and solution, nor an articulation of the trade-offs necessary for a sense of justice by both sides. From the Iranian perspective, the issue was always a legal one; from the European, and more generally Western perspective, the problem has been more specifically political. This tension was never clearly established in the blueprints for negotiation upon which the EU/E-3 embarked – leading to what nuclear analyst Shahram Chubin has called ‘a stop-and-go strategy’ (Afazadeh Roudsari 2007, 14; Chubin 2006, 68).

The two sides likewise approached the table with very different audiences and responsibilities riding on the outcome. The Iranians came with a fixed set of preferences linked to national interest (attaining a fuel cycle) and to national identity contextualized by domestic political pressures. The Europeans by contrast, came as Good Samaritans for the international community, with a fixed preference against the Iranian development of a nuclear weapon. They had no need to present agreements to their respective parliaments, and no domestic political expectations

riding on the negotiations – giving them a latitude for maneuver that they never capitalized upon. Thus, when Chubin contrasts the way each side perceived the purpose of the talks, with the Iranians seeing them as ‘a contest of wills rather than an opportunity [as seen by the Europeans] to reach common ground through compromise’ – he is describing a situation in which the stakes – and the costs - were so radically different that it fundamentally affected the way the two sides could approach negotiation (Chubin 2006, 64). Since the Iranian negotiators had to return agreements to Tehran for officials there to test them for such non-negotiable issues as ‘respect’ and their claim to the legal right to conversion and enrichment, agreements that had appeared settled remained in fact open. Additionally, once proven acceptable according to Iranian norms, they had to be ratified by the parliament, and then presented to a population that associated the nuclear issue with national pride and modern scientific achievement, and, often, the onus of international victimization. This proved a significant test for EU/E-3 normative engagement that encompassed ‘solidarity with other societies’ – a test the EU/E3 found itself ill prepared for as the norms it relied on as universal (e.g. trust in international institutions) were differently interpreted within Iran’s domestic political discourse. Yet, to develop a legitimate agreement required sustaining the policy discussion inside Iran, even if that meant revisiting the negotiating table (Sauer 2007, 630). In place of seeing this as a need for adaptive diplomacy for the sake of ensuring mutual understanding, solidarity and a shared responsibility for the larger global environment, the process became laced with rhetoric that constructed Iran as ‘exploiting loopholes’, as perpetually ‘redefining the issue’ and

of leading to 'a lack of trust and reassurance on the EU's part' (Arfazadeh Roudsari 2006, 14).

Finally, the ambiguity of the EU's own position vis-à-vis the NPT's requirements regarding established nuclear states, and its quasi representation of the US as the absent, but nonetheless 'significant other' nuclear power in the negotiations, went unaddressed – despite the issue of double-standards being brought up frequently on the Iranian side (ibid, 2). Additionally, the importance of the neighbourhood as a region of volatility and increasing insecurity within the context of a nuclearized Israel and Pakistan (the former having already attacked nuclearizing states in its vicinity, the latter plagued by increasing international terrorist activity), was ignored by the EU/E3, and sufficient security guarantees failed to be included in the package of carrots offered to the Iranians (www.iaea.org/About/Policy/GC/GC48/Statements/iran.pdf, p. 6)

The record of the negotiations that took place between March 2004 and August 2005 reflected these inconsistencies in the EU normative approach. The first nine months of 2004 witnessed a series of tensions and responses: 1) Iranian threats to restart its conversion process because it was unhappy with the EU package, 2) the IEAE finding gaps in Iran's reports without, however, finding definitive evidence of any weaponization programme, 3) the Iranians restarting the conversion of uranium into uranium gas, and the EU/E3 presenting an ultimatum to Tehran to cooperate with the IAEA, which had the desired effect (<http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2004/gov2004-60.pdf>).

In November 2004, an EU-Iran agreement was signed in Paris that fit squarely within the EU remit of civilian goals and means. It constituted a high-point in the negotiations, with an emphasis on engagement, and policies designed for maximum benefit to all parties. The EU exercised the instrument of cooptation by promising broad economic benefits, support for Iran's entry into the WPO, and the delivery of light-water reactors. The IAEA Board, under Russian and Chinese pressure, formally labeled Iran's suspension voluntary rather than binding.

However, the basis of these negotiations were differently interpreted by the EU and Iran, which led to a significant breakdown in the talks by 2005, and a fundamental shift in the overall nature of the conflict. Iran's voluntary suspension of conversion was, in its view, tagged to progress on developing mutually agreed criteria for 'objective guarantees' on the civilian nature of its programme. This it interpreted as taking months, rather than years, and to this end, it presented four sequential proposals, several reflecting compromises worked out between Iranian and European engineers in Track II negotiations (T. Parsi 2008, 4; 'History of the Official Proposals on the Iranian Nuclear Issue', armscontrol.org, 2-3).

The EU/E3, by contrast, foresaw talks lasting for as long as possible, since continuing negotiations, the reasoning went, would ensure the ongoing halt of Iran's conversion process (T. Parsi 2008, 3). The EU's responses therefore sought to delay conclusive agreement on the suggestions in Iran's proposals. What is more, a concurrent US proposal began a consequential shift in the EU position. The proposal advanced the idea that non-nuclear weapons states not yet in possession of extensive civilian nuclear energy programmes be denied access to a complete fuel

cycle. This was in direct contradiction to Article 4 of the NPT, and would, if adopted, have fundamentally limited the rights of non-nuclear weapons states that were signatories to the Treaty (Sauer 2007, 623). Tehran hotly rejected the proposal (as did other countries such as Brazil) by linking it to the NPT's obligations on the nuclear weapons states to disarm (*ibid*, see also Statement of Iran to the 48th Session of the General Assembly of the IAEA, September 2004).

The counter-proposal finally offered by the EU3 in 2005 was a significant departure from previous efforts – and constituted a major turning point in the negotiations. It reflected an effort to accommodate the US initiative in that it called for ‘a commitment by Iran *not* to pursue fuel cycle technologies’ for at least ten years, and instead, and for the first time, for ‘a buffer store of nuclear fuel located in a third country’, and ‘arrangements for Iran to return spent nuclear fuel to supplier countries’ (Parsi 2008, 4; History of Official Proposals, armscontrol.com, 3, italics mine). There was no mention of any objective criteria for continuing Iran’s existing conversion/enrichment programme. In effect, the EU3 had revised its position to one of no enrichment.

The November 2004 Agreement was the last time a working compromise between the EU and Iran was reached. Thereafter, the imposition of conditionality in the form of suspension, and full compliance with IAEA requirements became a feature of all future EU proposals, whether presented by Solana, the E3 or the P5+1 (the permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany, which increasingly became the grouping of choice on the part of the international community). The implications have been threefold:

First, by switching from the civilian goal of seeking compromise in order to ensure Iran did not develop a weapon, stayed in the NPT, and did not become a military target of the US (or Israel), the EU reduced its own maneuverability and narrowed the political framework. In failing to recognize the lessons learned by Tehran in the 2004/2005 round of negotiations – that ‘suspension becomes a trap unless the West at the outset commits to solutions that recognize Iran’s right to enrichment’ – the EU betrayed its claim to focus on normative outcomes (‘policies that produce maximum benefit’), and its rhetoric of choosing appropriate means (‘just objectives with third parties’) to achieve such outcomes (T. Parsi 2008, 3, Tocci 2007,4).

Second, by adopting a policy of diplomatic pressure toward Iran rather than persuasion and attraction, the means employed by both sides became more confrontational. The more ‘imperial’ EU approach (Tocci’s word) for example, illustrated by its adoption of ‘a red line’ (suspension) as a precondition for negotiations, made it more plausible for Iran to counter with its own red line – suspension linked to a specific modality, not an open-ended commitment (Tocci 2007; T. Parsi 2008, 3; Sauer 2007, 620). Indeed, the EU’s subsequent proposals were characterized by an emphasis on time frames, threats of sanctions, and references to escalation.

Third, in shedding its focus on promoting dialogue with Iran as an appropriate objective based on the international legal regime of the NPT – a clear milieu goal in that it reflected ‘a just’ objective, the EU shifted into the more politicized US camp, in which Iran represented a threat to a specific vision of the

Middle East, one that until then the EU had not fully shared (Tocci 2008). However, in so doing, the EU donned a new hat, that of negotiating sanctions regimes and mechanisms by which to bring the issue under the auspices of the Security Council, a role that gave it prominence as a bridge-builder on the issue, though no longer with the focus on resolving disagreements between Iran and the US, but instead, between the US and Russia, and later, China.

In drifting into a position that prioritized US relations, the process has lost a significant counterweight, leading to several worrying developments: escalating polarization of the two sides, increasing capability on Iran's part (including the shift from conversion to enrichment) without significant diplomatic oversight from the international community, and a reduction in the influence of EU normative means in finding compromises within the main arena of conflict – that between Iran and the West – rather than the side-arena of great-power politics.

At the same time, the shift in the EU's position has placed international focus on the nuclear issue, when in Bertram's view, 'Iran is too important to be restricted just to the nuclear conflict' (Bertram 2008, 57). This has become increasingly salient as Iran's clout has grown as a regional power, even as proposals on the nuclear issue have been shorn of clauses that incorporate new ideas for integrating Iran into a larger Middle East bargain. Yet strangely, the dire prognostication that either an attack *on* Iran, or a nuclear or missile attack *by* Iran, could embroil the entire Middle East in war, suggests that the negative assessment of Iran's reach in the region engages the imagination of the West (Clinton speech Doha, 15 February 2010; *NYT*, A 10). Nonetheless, this has failed to inspire the EU to develop concrete proposals to

reformulate what has become conventional wisdom: that Iran cannot be incorporated into a regional framework because it is 'single-mindedly striving towards the creation of a weapon' that threatens 'Western interests in the region, the state of Israel, and even ...Europe' (R. Parsi 2009, 2).

EU Negotiations as a coercive power with Iran – a loss of influence and a rise in escalation, 2006-2010

In the five years that have followed the breakdown in concrete negotiations, the EU has been able to claim that it has drafted the majority of resolutions on the issue, committed Solana to the process, and represented the views not only of the West, but increasingly, of Russia and China. It can also claim that it has helped avoid an attack on Iran by either the US or Israel. Further, the EU has been able to claim that it has acted in a more-or-less united fashion, fulfilling one of its primary possession goals, and that its prestige has risen as a bridge-builder on the international stage. Finally, it can claim that the belligerence and threats emanating from Iran since the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, and the most recent authoritarian turn by the regime against its opposition forces, simply confirm the reasons for adopting a more US-centric approach in dealing with a state that is dangerous and too often irrational (R. Parsi 2009, 2). In this way, it has maintained its normative rhetoric, contending that it has exercised 'patience', engaged in 'study' and 'evaluation', and has remained open to developing new proposals (Chubin 2006, 18). 'We have our double track approach, which combines dialogue with firmness', states an EU paper on Iran, produced in 2009 (EU-Iran Basic Facts, 10).

Yet, by moving from a position of engagement to one of pressure, the EU's ability to attain its initial primary objective – avoiding escalation in Iran's ability to convert and enrich uranium while keeping it committed to the NPT – has been seriously reduced. As a result, its goal has changed, from promoting a holistic and consistent policy over time that is 'outside the pure expression of power as a determinant of the normal', to one of punishing Iran by constructing a united front against Tehran whenever it fails to comply with the timetables or demands set by the P5+1.

The loss of influence over the Iranian aspect of the process emerged for example, at the time that Iran resumed conversion in 2004, and again, at the beginning of 2006, when it moved on to enrichment. The EU viewed this as having crossed a 'red line', and stated categorically that it would only resume negotiations if Iran suspended enrichment. Ironically, however, this implied for the first time that the EU now had accepted (one might say, had to accept) Iran's right to conversion. Having adopted hard-line tactics that gave it no leverage when the situation on the ground shifted, it (and the rest of the international community) was forced to accept what previously had not even been on the table.

At the same time, the EU goal of becoming a mediator between the US and the other two big powers, China and Russia, became more salient as it attempted gradually to bring them to side against Iran. In February 2006, all five permanent members voted in favour of UNSC sanctions against Iran according to a resolution drafted by the EU (IAEA 2006 – 27). In response, Iran announced in March that it

had succeeded in enriching uranium to 3.5% through the use of 164 centrifuges (T. Parsi 2008, 3).

However, a new opportunity to exercise civilian instruments and return to the original goal of finding a bridge between the US and Iran was about to present itself to the EU. Although the extreme rhetoric emanating from Iran had increased in volubility with President Ahmadinejad's election and his expressed views on Israel, Ahmadinejad took the unusual step in May 2006 of communicating directly with US President Bush in the form of a letter. Though awkwardly worded, it was an attempt to re-open the door between the two states, and address outstanding differences in viewpoint. Significantly, it underlined Iran's deep suspicion of the UN because of its continued veto of all UNSC resolutions condemning Israel, and of the US Administration's use of media hype regarding WMD in Iraq to justify its intervention and regime change there (Ahmadinejad, CNN 2006).

The US administration's failure to respond to the letter enabled the EU to refocus on 'appropriate' objectives. These included, 1) persuading the US to agree to talks with Iran – the first time an official face-to-face encounter was contemplated since 1980, and, 2) to construct a new package of incentives to be presented by the P5+1 to smooth the process. However, both elements contained conditionality clauses. Multilateral talks attended by the US would not take place until Iran first suspended its enrichment programme. Further, as Solana explained in Tehran when presenting the package on June 5, if Iran failed to accommodate the P5+1 demands of transparency and suspension, the Security Council would proceed to sanctions. In this way, the means used by the EU were not those of persuasion but pressure,

and its influence within that framework proved ineffective. Iran rejected the measures, and called the subsequent UNSC resolution, voted against only by Qatar, as 'illegitimate'.

Thus, although a chance to reposition the negotiations had appeared unexpectedly in May, with Iran revealing renewed motivation to engage, not only with the EU but directly with the US, the EU was unable to capitalize on the opening. This revealed not only a disinclination to offer options that reflected the values of both sides, but it under-estimated the domestic political environment of an increasingly confident Iran in the aftermath of the war in Lebanon.

By December 2006, the UNSC unanimously passed limited sanctions against Iran. However, China and Russia had significantly watered down the agreed-upon resolution. In fact, garnering agreement had proven much more difficult than the EU might have expected, indicating that agendas toward Iran differed widely, a fact easily capitalized upon by the Iranians.

For the next three years, P5+1 incentive packages would accompany increasingly stiff UNSC sanctions resolutions. A 'freeze-for-freeze' clause was added, in which negotiations were proposed for a six-week period while Iran would freeze its enrichment programme and the six negotiating countries would freeze plans to pursue further sanctions (History of Official Proposals, armcontrol.org, 5). However, the failure of the 'refreshed' 2008 proposal, which offered no new approaches to the already unsuccessful formula presented in 2006, highlighted the ineffectualness of the tactics being repeatedly pursued. Furthermore, the process was proving unsuccessful in restraining Iran's increasing nuclear capability, as by

then its enrichment programme had moved well-beyond the 3,000 centrifuges specified as the uppermost limit in the 2006 proposal (T. Parsi 2008; 5). In addition, the initiatives were frequently accompanied by periods of extreme rhetoric escalation, which included British outrage at Iran's seizure of six British Naval personnel in the Persian Gulf; Washington's ire at Iran's meddling in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine; and the Bush decision to add Iran's Revolutionary Guard to the US list of designated terrorist organizations.

The nature of these exchanges reflected the consistent tensions between the two sides over conflicts in the region, and yet, the two issues – the nuclear and the regional – remained separated and distinct, with the nuclear dominating the relationship. The EU-Iran Basic Facts report issued in April 2009 states categorically, 'Currently, both economic and political talks are on hold. Their resumption depends on progress in resolving the outstanding issues in connection with the Iranian nuclear programme (p. 4). The rigidity of the EU in this respect reflects the growing realization that the role of broker between the Big Three has a limited shelf-life – eventually, the US would take the initiative. Ironically, it has become equally clear that a longer arc of influence attaches to the EU's inclusion of Iran's interests and values in the negotiating process, not least because there is no other international actor fulfilling that critical role; yet, it is a realization the EU continues to neglect even as its position within the process has diminished.

The one real breakthrough negotiated by the EU during this period was to bring Iran and the US to high-level talks over Iraq in 2007. It was an initiative that did not continue for long and did not produce major results, but which did reflect

the notion that engaging Iran directly in regional security issues could enable common ground to be established between US and Iranian national interests. Equally important, several EU negotiating states, particularly Merkel's Germany, specifically expressed the idea that talks on Iraq should not be limited, but should include the nuclear issue (Porter, IPS 2006). However, this tactic - of bringing regional negotiations into the nuclear issue - has not been pursued, despite it being more in tune with the civilian power approach.

The most recent round of talks, the first within the new Obama environment of officially recognizing and reaching out to Iran, means most simply that the US has at last occupied its vacant seat at the negotiating table. Yet, the negotiations themselves, in which France, Russia and the US have been hammering out, through several rounds, an EU proposal for Iran to ship purified uranium stockpiles to Russia, and then France, continues to evoke many of the same techniques and derailments of previous negotiations, and with little more success: brinkmanship, conditionality, time-frames, impatience, and a lack of regional context. What is more, after the initial period of US appeasement, its re-orientation towards policies of confrontation, in which it is attempting to lasso in the Gulf littoral, including states such as Qatar which are on record for having voted against the UNSC sanctions on Iran, indicate that under Hillary Clinton's tutelage, a regional policy that includes Iran is growing increasingly dim. Within this framework, the EU's position has continued to lose traction. In effect, despite the EU's commanding trade position with Iran, its choice to position itself within the US camp and its own

adoption of sanctions render it now a dishonest broker in the eyes of the Iranians³.

Perhaps more worrisome is that the EU's own goals within the negotiation process have so shifted that it is more willing to lose access to Iranian oil and trade markets as a result of the sanctions than in any way to compromise its US affiliation. Although not all members of the EU similarly ascribe to this stance, the need for EU unity in this regard has dampened alternative trajectories – including support for the Turkey-Brazil deal, which achieved many of the benchmarks initially set out in the EU's plans (Peteson, 'Turkey Brazil Scramble to Seal Iran Nuclear Swap Deal', *csmonitor.com* 14 May 2010).

In the same vein, willingness to compromise the EU's normative identity attaches to its prioritization of its relationship with Israel (Tocci 2008, 19). Importantly, the two positions are linked, since emphasizing American policy imperatives in the region carries with it a positive orientation toward Israel. This, again, is an area that elicits divisions within the EU, but, recently, those closely tied to Israel have attained precedence in the EU's positioning vis-à-vis Iran.

Condemnation of Iran reflects a complex outrage, therefore, within the EU, not only at its nuclear programme but at Ahmadinejad's stinging foreign policy statements. With MEP Bas Belder of the European Freedom and Democracy bloc warning that 'Iran's nuclear programme poses very serious security threats and the international community should act accordingly', while José Ignacio Salafranca of the European People's Party (the European Parliament's largest bloc) wondering how long 'Europe could keep patience with such behaviour?', the motivation to

³ A similar situation pertains in the Israel-Palestine dispute. See N. Tocci, 2007,

return to normative means so that the EU can reduce the sabre-rattling in favour of searching for a peaceful settlement, appears to be losing ground (quotes in 'Iran Debate', www.europarl.europa.eu/news, 18 January 2010, 2). All these elements lessen the EU's leverage in helping to ensure the US fist can re-extend while attempting to open Iran's hand.

Returning to Deliberation: Placing Iran in a regional context to constrain its nuclear ambitions

In the European Security Strategy, the EU's aims are linked to 'doing good' as an aspect of its structure as a 'normative, civilizing or ethical' power (Sjursen 2007, 1). The emphasis on humanitarian (or civilian) policy-making as noted earlier, implies pursuing objectives surrounding international legal norms, as well as utilizing instruments that promote common understanding, 'not just mere compromise reflecting the relative power balance between the parties involved' (ibid, 10). Yet, as noted by Sjursen, if the actors cannot trust each other to abide by the rules, it reveals a fragility that can quickly deteriorate. This in effect describes the relationship between Iran and the West – a distrust of the other's interpretation of the rules, inexorably leading to a deterioration in the political order of the Middle East.

What then can the EU do at this stage to re-orient its own membership toward a path that regains its normative legitimacy? What options exist that promise greater efficacy than the sanctions regimes and rhetoric of isolation that have so far not produced the results being sought? Finally, how can the EU re-claim its position

as an intermediary to promote such options and diffuse what has become an increasing build-up of tensions over Iran?

To address these questions, it is necessary to return to the choices facing the EU, and the underlying objectives for determining structured normative strategies in the current situation.

As noted by Roy, the West is ambivalent about the actual nature of Iran's threat. There is a consensus that it should not develop nuclear weapons, but little agreement over 'how a nuclear Iran is otherwise threatening', nor how to effectively combat it (Roy 2007, 121). The fear of Iran's nuclearization prompting a regional nuclear arms race for many lacks credibility (Khaliji 2010). On the one hand, the question arises, if the Middle East has not embarked on such an arms race in the 40 years since Israel acquired its bomb, why should it do so in response to Iran? (Bertram 2007, 22). On the other hand, it has been core Western responses that have led the way in ratcheting up Gulf capabilities. The French have established a military base in the UAE and provided Abu Dhabi with nuclear energy capacity, inserting a conversion programme into that side of the Gulf, while American anti-missile arms supplies to Saudi Arabia and several other Gulf states, designed to ward off Iran's possible aggression, have contributed to the very arms race that they have warned the Iran situation could provoke (Sanger and Schmitt, 31 January 2010, *NYT*, A1, 14 August 2020, *WSJ*).

These developments feed into the perception that a military option remains on the table, and may be instrumentalized at any time as a result of political or rhetorical buildup as much as technological. It is a card Israel holds out most

prominently as a form of pressure on the EU-managed negotiations between the US and the other two major powers – a veiled threat that if negotiations and sanctions don't sufficiently rein in Iran's programme, a repeat of Osirik in Iraq, and al-Kibar in Syria, is not only possible but likely. Yet, Israel's expressed concern that Iran's nuclear programme is being weaponised in order to target Jerusalem, belies the fact that as the only power in the region that has an atomic bomb, it has the capability of massive nuclear retaliation as a form of deterrence. Instead, the threat suggests an expansion of Israel's 'Iron Wall' policy of forcing acquiescence upon its adversaries on the premise that negotiations will never provide it ultimate security.⁴ The hesitancy of Israel to carry out an attack on Iran can be seen as due less to its confidence in the EU-led negotiation process, than to the risk of retaliation by its closest neighbours, Hamas and Hezbollah, out of solidarity with Iran.

In fact, it can be argued that it is the probability of conflict-spread throughout the Middle East that has deterred the use of the military option so far, whether by Israel or the US (Toukan and Cordesman 2009). A series of war-games conducted by the Brookings Institute Saban Center, Harvard's Belfer Center and Tel Aviv's Institute for National Security Studies at the end of 2009 all produced results indicating that increasing sanctions and an Israeli military strike would cause rifts between the US and Israel, strengthen Iran's resolve without deterring its programme, and reveal a lack of clear goals and strategies on the part of the West. Equally telling, analysis of the war games indicated that were Israel to decide to

⁴ 'Iron Wall' was a term first enunciated by Ze'ev Jabotinski in 1926. 'He proposed that since Israel would never willingly be accepted by the Arab world, it would have to develop overweening military might so as to compel the Arab world to accept the fact of its existence and thus live in peace with it.' See A. Shlaim (2000) *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (Norton: New York).

strike, it 'could be the most fateful since the state's founding' as it would incur 'an extended war on multiple fronts and deep within the homeland' (White and White 2010, 4-5; see also Rogers July, 2010).

Although White and White's recommendations include strong US support for regime change (the Hillary Clinton approach), more complete US planning for a military strike, and better Israeli preparation for the consequences of such action on its civilian population, Bertram, previously head of Berlin-based German Institute of International and Security Affairs (SWP) draws a completely different conclusion: military coercion is simply not an option. Although hitting 400 targets inside Iran is well within both US and Israeli Air Force capabilities, it would not wipe out the relevant research, and most likely encourage further secrecy on Iran's part, much as the Osirak attack did in Iraq (Bertram 2008, 24).

What is more, talk of the military option obscures the real issue: the concern that Iran will use the weapon once it has developed it. Therefore, a key objective in the definition of the threat posed by the Iranian nuclear programme is to ensure the Islamic Republic never uses an atomic bomb. This is an aim that falls squarely within the EU remit of 'doing good' and is a normative goal that not only all the EU members can ascribe to, but the US, China and Russia can as well. The question arises, then, how to definitively avoid such an occurrence? Threats by US presidents and international bodies have so far failed. But, there are several, peaceful approaches that have yet to be taken that can proscribe use.

The first choice facing the EU is whether to formally address the military threat on its own terms, rather than, by default, supporting the targeted military

option advanced by the US and Israel. To conclude that a US-Iran war would not provide benefits to the EU means it must consider pursuing an alternative, preferably norm-based plan. From the EU's perspective, at its most basic, this means devising a way to ensure the threat of possible nuclear weapons use by Iran is definitively averted, without, at the same time, undermining Iran or the region. First, the EU should advance a proposal to the P5+1 to make the tactic of deterrence a shared primary policy. This would involve the group issuing a declaratory threat, in no uncertain terms, that if Iran were to launch a nuclear warhead it would come under devastating counter-attack. Bertram maintains that this would 'eliminate any military gains to be obtained from the use of an atomic bomb', while making 'any use of the bomb so problematic as to seem less tempting, and perhaps, create uneasiness in the Iranian population' (ibid).

EU legitimacy in promoting such measures is high, not least because one of the achievements of the seven-year process of negotiating with Iran has been to raise the political cost of proliferation generally (Bertram 2008, 21). Although the NPT has its loopholes, it remains a treaty that none of its signatories have wanted to breach, including Iran and North Korea. This has meant an ongoing willingness to negotiate even in the most adverse circumstances, for not to do so, while persisting with a suspicious nuclear programme, carries the real risk of becoming an outcast, a position that Iran, for one, clearly does not relish.

In fact, one of the greatest untapped aspects of the nuclear conflict with Iran is its palpable desire to escape international isolation, and instead, be granted the respect it considers it deserves, while being recognized as a regional power within a

very dangerous neighborhood. Ineed, it can be argued that desire for recognition motivated both the 2003 and 2006 initiatives in which Iran reached out to the US, and offered options which may still be open for negotiation. Should Iran's critical role within Middle East stability be acknowledged and built-upon, but within the strict context of close cooperation with IAEA inspections – a position Iranian officials have, over the years of negotiations, always shown a willingness to accede to – the leadership, in Bertram's view, 'would suffer a loss of international credibility and respect if it were to go back on that once its demands had been addressed' (Bertram 2008, 34).

The second choice, therefore, facing the EU is whether to attempt to re-establish trust with Iran. If the deadlock in negotiations is to be broken in a manner that does not lead to war (for even stringent sanctions rarely do much besides strengthening the resolve of their targets), the EU will likely have to devise a way around the conditionality of suspension first. Unanimity in this situation, at least initially, may not be necessary. The normative purpose however needs to be clear: to establish mechanisms of social solidarity that can contribute to an international environment of regional stability, while having direct impact on the nuclear issue. That the EU ignored the Turkey-Brazil deal as 'too little too late' despite its having opened the way to a fuel swap for the first time after years of negotiation, reflects a degrading of interest in breaking the deadlock and securing regional stability. The critical element which in fact appeared in the Turkey Brazil deal was that it included an inducement for Iran to recognize that the benefits of the relationship could seriously be undermined by a posture of nuclear ambivalence (ibid, 35).

At the same time, the deal addressed key concerns that impact the EU's own security concerns, and did so through the engagement of new arrivals to the table that, given the opportunity, gladly will usurp the traditional EU role. A broad deterioration in the security situation in the Middle East, which growing rhetorical conflict with Iran can only worsen, suggests challenges that seriously exceed the securitization process so far adopted by the EU not only toward Iran, but in the Mediterranean, and in response to international terrorism. Though the EU's more confrontational line has been adopted with the intent of improving self-protection, the result has been a loss of nimbleness, and reduced trust within the region.

A retreat from normative objectives, or mobilizing them to stigmatize 'attitudes and behaviours the EU considers antithetical to its security interests', has done little to help ensure EU's security is not threatened (Joffe 2008, 154). More efficacious is to recognize and capitalize on regional linkages. To avoid al-Qaeda infiltration, for example, into conflict areas beyond Iraq, such as Palestine or Lebanon, will necessitate negotiations with some of the actors comprising the 'Tehran-Damascus-Hezbollah-Hamas axis', as Roy calls it (Roy 2008, 56). Tehran is the most obvious, as it has connections to all, but to reach cooperation will require serious and intricate confidence-building measures on military as well as civilian levels, something that will take time, and a commitment to the re-building of trust.

In this way, the concerns within the EU's own ranks over Ahmadinejad's posture toward Israel, and Iran's internal human rights abuses can be addressed through direct policy initiatives. At the moment these issues have had to be piggy-backed on compliance, which has sapped the EU of clout for moving ahead on such

normative priorities (Joffe 2008, 154). For those members committed to a close paralleling of EU and US policy, the carrot of being able to again exercise policy initiatives regarding such important issues may serve to bolster the argument for developing a new Middle East framework that integrates Iran. What is more, such an approach may be the only way to guarantee that solutions do not slip back 'into a frozen state of mutual distrust and and discomfort', and instead, can be maintained over time (R. Parsi, 3).

Conclusion

Iran, along with its greatest ideological competitor, Saudi Arabia, and its putative ally, Syria, have all at various times called for a nuclear-free Middle East, something that has been discounted by the international community because of Israel's nuclear weapon. In fact, over the years, the Iranian leadership has consistently denounced atomic weapons as fundamentally against Islamic precepts, and additionally, given pragmatic reasons why obtaining such a weapon makes neither good foreign policy sense nor a case for regional stability (Chubin 2006, note 12, 57; Slackman, 12 February 2010, *NYT*, A 4.). This makes the comprehension of Iran's nuclear strategy difficult, as many good reasons can be surmised, and are frequently presented by outside observers, for Iran to develop a bomb. Among the arguments, it lives in a dangerous region, states with bombs are more immune to outside intervention, or it is a nefarious regime. Equally, there are many arguments why those outside Iran don't want it to have such power, most particularly Israel, which currently is the only Middle East state with atomic capability, a position of power it quite naturally

does not want to share, and which enables it to manage the design of its neighborhood with some impunity. It is probably right in calling an Iranian nuclear weapon an 'existential threat', not because it is in danger of being attacked with an Iranian atomic bomb, but because its commanding position in the Middle East would be reduced by a weapons-capable Tehran, pushing it to make peace with Iran's allies on its doorstep (Cowell and Shanker, 9 February 2010, *NYT*; Seale 2010).

Whether Iran is developing the bomb or not, what is of utmost importance in terms of Europe's security, is that the relationship be managed, rather than allowed to drift. A re-assessment of options is overdue. US Secretary of State Clinton's takeover of US policy toward Iran has escalated tensions throughout the region, involving not only the Gulf producers, but giving play to Israel's fears of both Iran's nuclear intentions and its linkages to Hezbollah and Hamas. States Rouzbeh Parsi, Research Fellow at the EU Institute for Security Studies: 'It is useful for those advocating a confrontation with Iran, including war, because it obscures the nuances and complexities of the issue at hand, as well as the larger question of how to create a new framework for the region....If this were to be undertaken, Iran would need to be integrated rather than ignored or shunned' (R. Parsi 2009, 2).

If the aim is to break the nuclear deadlock in a peaceful fashion, rather than to bolster the case for military action, one tack is for the EU to re-complexify the issue, develop ways to incorporate rather than isolate Iran in regional terms, and discover ways to reopen negotiations that do not require suspension as a precondition. This would include not only incentives and compromises the EU can employ towards Iran, but reframing the role of Iran as a lynchpin in Middle East

geo-strategy along lines previously used to encourage constructive engagement with the US on Iraq. Various nations of the Arab League, for example, are joining with China to encourage further dialogue with Iran, forming a counterpoise to the Western coalition ranged behind sanctions and isolation. Although possibilities exist for other states, particularly Turkey, to step into the breach, the EU's seven-year experience as a primary negotiator on the issue, coupled with its self-identification as a normative power, makes it a strong candidate to ensure that space stays open for both sides to remain in negotiations. However, this requires unity within the EU, as well as the motivation to return to normative standards in both goals and means so as to restore its influence as an honest broker.

Also for conclusion

Although EU objectives on human rights and non-proliferation may seem to make it impossible to reverse its decision to cancel political and economic talks for as long as the enrichment issue remains outstanding, its own position in affecting those talks is being eroded as the US becomes increasingly pro-active in managing relations with Iran. For the EU to remain in the forefront of negotiations, and promote its professed milieu goals of avoiding military action, supporting the legal regime of the NPT, and ensuring that its own 2003 Security Strategy is met in regards to the Middle East, it needs to reclaim the negotiating initiative and at the same time, reduce the so far, unproductive coercive aspects of diplomacy that have more recently characterized its approach, not only toward Iran, but elsewhere in the region (Sauer 2007; Tocci et al. 2008, 12) .

In the process, Bertram has described the EU as having become a 'willing prisoner' of the previous US administration's 'non-policy' toward Iran, in that the policies of economic coercion currently being practiced have not only failed, but can even be argued to have encouraged the speeding up of Iran's enrichment capabilities. In this context, it is worth remembering that originally, the EU favoured engagement for the purpose of monitoring Iran's nuclear capabilities, and ensuring it would remain under the watch of the international community and within the NPT **(Citation)**. In adopting a demand of conditionality (suspension before talks), the EU now risks witnessing Iran's non-compliance within the NPT, its possible withdrawal from the NPT, or, in the worst case, a war involving the wider Middle East. Further, by tying negotiations to enrichment suspension, it has, in effect, isolated the IAEA as the only international organization still able to speak with Iran on this issue. Furthermore, it has handed China the role of being the only major international player insisting on negotiations as a way forward (*New York Times.....*)

It re-instated preconditions, rejected the Turkey-Brazil plan that obtained a nuclear fuel exchange as 'too little too late', supported instead more stringent sanctions and pushed forward a Bush administration plan to provide Gulf states with sophisticated weaponry to combat the perceived Iranian military threat. In so doing, the US adopted Hillary Clinton's original campaign cry of confronting rather than engaging Iran (Landler, *New York Times*, 17 February 2010, A6).

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