Although controversial, one conclusion from the December 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) was that Iran controlled the “scientific, technical, and industrial capacity eventually to produce nuclear weapons” (National Intelligence Estimate 2007, p. 7). The drive for Iran to pursue nuclear arms capabilities was and is anchored in several varied factors.

Iran desires to secure its borders. Over the course of history, Iran has experienced involvement by foreign nations such as the United States, Russia and Great Britain into its domestic affairs. Since the turn of the century, Iraq invaded and America encircled Iran (Bowman 2008, pp. 631-633).

In addition to the craving for national security, Iran boasts considerable national pride and aspires to a position of global prestige. These issues have traditionally played roles in nuclear “roll forward” decisions. For example, Intelligence Community (IC) members analyzing situations in France, India, Argentina, Romania and Libya acknowledge that having nuclear weapons were and are connected to the status of a country in the league tables of great powers (Bahgat 2007, p. 409).

Israel’s former Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami summed up the imminence and reality of the threat Iran posed and continues to pose with respect to nuclear weapons quite accurately this way:

“The question today is not when Iran will have nuclear power, but how to integrate it…Iran is not driven…but by its determination to preserve its regime and establish itself as a strategic regional power, vis-a-vis both Israel and the Sunni Arab States” (Parsi 2008, p. 240).

As the NIE draft in 2007 itself recognized, the crisis was real, substantial and preeminent: “In our judgment, only an Iranian political decision to abandon a nuclear weapons objective would plausibly keep Iran from eventually producing nuclear weapons” (National Intelligence Estimate 2007, p. 6). Hence to ensure national security, the US rightly moved forward positively addressing the Iranian weapons crisis requiring a coordinated effort on the various constituencies of the IC process.

The characteristics of US and Iranian relations in the last thirty years does not seem very promising for a resolution of the issue and thus perked the need for effective policy management. The successful grand strategy toward Iran and in particular the potentially destructive nuclear weapons development adopted by the US addressed the supply of nuclear technology and materials as well as deterrents. One of the most pressing needs was an alteration in IC of the decision support process.

The largest challenges to implementing much needed shifts was adjusting process and the culture that governed, and did for decades, the relationship between intelligence officials and senior leaders. IC began morphing from a static model of serving mostly a finished analytic deliverables — through well-orchestrated stages, through highly controlled interactions — to a novel dynamic model of encouraging vibrant relationships between intelligence officers and makers of policy. Such an innovative model inclusive of many more voices from the IC, served
to deliver continuously updated insights and provide more a responsive comprehensive feedback loop; changes that were necessary for mounting the challenge which Iran’s nuclear arsenal threat presented and continues to present to US National Security.

Additionally, the US IC stepped up its deployment of influence strategy. Influencers, such as the threat of military use, are obvious measures to leverage in Iran. Also, the economic pressure exerted by restricting financial activity in country was a policy that was continued, accelerated and in some measure even expanded so that the flow of other goods and services was altered and curtailed. Diplomatic influence on Iran was stepped up via the use of rhetoric designed to tip the balance of perspectives in the international community to favor US policy; an effort only made more congenial by the radicalization of Islamic forces active elsewhere in the world. In sum, there were direct and indirect measures analysts in the IC accessed to help form, frame and facilitate policy in Iran to protect US national security. In response to real threats recognized and articulated in 2007, it required and received cooperation among people and agencies through which the IC operated in order to stabilize and influence outcomes.
Bibliography


