

A TIME TO



ATTACK

THE LOOMING IRANIAN NUCLEAR THREAT

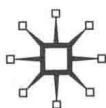
MATTHEW KROENIG

**A TIME
TO
ATTACK**

**THE LOOMING IRANIAN
NUCLEAR THREAT**

MATTHEW KROENIG

palgrave
macmillan



A TIME TO ATTACK

Copyright © Matthew Kroenig, 2014.

All rights reserved.

First published in 2014 by PALGRAVE MACMILLAN® in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-137-27953-8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Letra Libre, Inc.

First edition: May 2014

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America.

*The views expressed in this book are those of the author
and do not reflect the official policy or position of the
Department of Defense or the US Government*

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AEOI	Atomic Energy Organization of Iran	DoD	Department of Defense (United States)
AIPAC	American Israel Public Affairs Committee	EU	European Union
AUMF	authorization for the use of military force	FA	<i>Foreign Affairs</i> magazine (United States)
BOG	Board of Governors (International Atomic Energy Agency)	GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations	HEU	highly enriched uranium
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (United States)	IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency (United States)	IAEA AP	International Atomic Energy Agency Additional Protocol
DNI	Director of National Intelligence (United States)	IC	intelligence community (United States)

ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile	PNE	peaceful nuclear explosion
IDF	Israel Defense Forces	PSI	Proliferation Security Initiative
IRGC	Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps	SAM	surface-to-air missile
LEU	low-enriched uranium	SLBM	submarine-launched ballistic missile
MAD	Mutually Assured Destruction	SPR	Strategic Petroleum Reserve (United States)
MOP	Massive Ordnance Penetrator	SRBM	short-range ballistic missile
MRBM	medium-range ballistic missile	TRR	Tehran Research Reactor
MW	megawatt		
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization	UAE	United Arab Emirates
		UN	United Nations
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate (United States)	UNSC	United Nations Security Council
NNWS	non-nuclear-weapon state	UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
NPT	Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons	USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
NSG	Nuclear Suppliers Group	WGU	weapons-grade uranium
NWS	nuclear weapon state	WMD	weapons of mass destruction
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries		

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

FOR MUCH OF THE PAST DECADE, I HAVE WORKED AS a researcher and teacher in various universities in the United States. While I was more engaged in US national security policy than many in the so-called ivory tower, I still spent much of the past ten years conducting scholarly research and publishing in peer-reviewed academic journals. As a nuclear nonproliferation specialist, I was, of course, very interested in the Iran nuclear issue and read the analysis of people who followed the issue closely on a day-to-day basis, but I did not myself devote much time to studying or writing on Iran. By 2010, a strong consensus had developed among experts focusing on Iran that went something like this: the United States lacked the ability to destroy Iran's deeply buried and hardened nuclear facilities; any attempt to attack Iran would result in devastating military retaliation and a region-wide war; a strike would be futile if not counterproductive because Iran would simply redouble its efforts to build nuclear weapons after a strike; even if Iran acquired nuclear weapons, it wouldn't be that bad because we could simply deter and contain Iran much as we deterred and contained the Soviet Union during the Cold War; and, finally, when all was said and done, deterring and containing a nuclear-armed Iran, while difficult, would be vastly preferable

to a military strike. Not following the issue closely myself, I was largely convinced by these claims.

Then, in May 2010, I accepted a Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) International Affairs Fellowship that took me to the Pentagon as an adviser on Iran policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Due to my academic expertise in the area of nuclear weapons proliferation and nuclear deterrence, this placement made a lot of sense. Shortly after arriving in the office and getting up to speed on the myriad defense issues related to Iran and its nuclear program, however, I was surprised to realize that many of the claims undergirding the conventional wisdom about Iran policy were way out of line. Of course, some of the most important disagreements about Iran boil down to judgment calls, but many of the judgment calls were strongly biased against military action. I was amazed at how many smart people took an incredibly nuanced issue and reduced it to an open-and-shut case: a nuclear-armed Iran would not be that bad, but attacking Iran would be an unmitigated disaster. As you will see in this book, the reality is much more complicated.

Moreover, many of the most important issues are not about judgment calls at all, but about basic facts, and I was shocked at the degree to which the public debate on this issue was being dominated by people who simply had their facts wrong. I was determined to set the record straight.

Shortly after leaving the Pentagon, I published an article in the January/February 2012 issue of the venerable magazine *Foreign Affairs*, entitled "Time to Attack Iran: Why a Strike Is the Least Bad Option."¹ In the piece I argued that, if forced to choose, a limited US military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities would be less bad than attempting to deter and contain a nuclear-armed Iran. It is not easy to be among the first people to make a controversial

argument on matters of war and peace—even if one's position is correct—and the article generated much controversy, leading many of my colleagues to disagree strongly with me in response pieces published in policy journals, newspaper columns, and online blogs, and in debates at various public events and on radio and television programs in the weeks that followed.

Then, only two months later, in an interview with Jeffrey Goldberg of *The Atlantic*, President Barack Obama staked out a position that was similar to mine. He said that a nuclear-armed Iran was unacceptable and that the United States would do everything in its power, including using military force if necessary, to keep Iran from the bomb. Over the course of the subsequent two years, I have spent countless hours presenting my analysis of the Iran nuclear problem to officials in the executive branch and Congress, at think tanks and universities around the world, and on radio and television. During that time, the politically relevant discourse in Washington has done a near 180-degree turn. There is now a widespread bipartisan consensus that a policy of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons using all necessary means is preferable to containing a nuclear-armed Iran; I hope I played at least some small part in contributing to a more informed debate about our options for dealing with Iran's nuclear program.

The Iran nuclear issue, however, is an intricate subject, and I had only a few thousand words to address it in the FA piece. This book allows me the opportunity to present my complete understanding of the issue in its full complexity. More importantly, I believe this book is the most comprehensive and authoritative source available anywhere on the Iranian nuclear challenge.

Writing a book is always an enormous undertaking, and it is not something that I could have done alone. I would like to thank my wonderful

colleagues in the Department of Government at Georgetown University in Washington, DC.

I would also like to recognize the Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security at the Atlantic Council, where I recently took up a position as a nonresident senior fellow. I'm particularly grateful to Frederick Kempe, Damon Wilson, Barry Pavel, and Jeffrey Lightfoot for bringing me on board the strong and increasingly vibrant think tank they are building. This book would not have been possible were it not for the Council on Foreign Relations, which provided me with not one, but two unique fellowship experiences that helped to bring this project together. First, I was a recipient of the CFR International Affairs Fellowship, which allowed me to spend a year working on Iran policy at the Department of Defense. I would like to thank Michèle Flournoy, James Miller, Alexander Vershbow, Colin Kahl, Mike Holmes, and Pat Antonelli, the senior leadership in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (Policy) at the time, who graciously allowed me to spend my fellowship year in the Middle East office. In addition, I would also like to recognize my talented colleagues on the Iran desk at DoD: Ylber Bajraktari, Ilan Goldenberg, Jana Kay, and Bill Van Atten. The debates we had in our cubicles about how best to resolve the Iranian nuclear challenge were as exhaustive, entertaining, and heated as anything I have encountered before or since.

After leaving DoD, I spent a year as a Stanton Nuclear Security Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. There I spent my time thinking, writing, briefing, and doing media appearances on Iran. I am grateful to CFR's leadership, including Richard Haass and James Lindsay, for the opportunity to have been part of CFR's studies program. CFR's fellowship programs would not be such a success were it not for the tireless work of Janine Hill and Victoria Alekhine. Kate Collins provided deft research and

administrative support. I would also like to thank the other fellows who helped to challenge and advance my thinking on Iran, including Elliott Abrams, Robert Blackwill, Steve Biddle, Robert Danin, Richard Falkenrath, Michael Levi, Meghan O'Sullivan, and Ray Takeyh.

I have previously written on Iran in articles in *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy* online, the *Washington Post*, *The American Interest*, and *USA Today* and in a book chapter published by CFR.² I thank the editors of these outlets for permission to reprise some of the themes from these articles in this book and my co-authors of the pieces in the *Post* and *The American Interest*, Jamie Fly and Robert McNally, respectively.

I've also received incisive comments and criticisms that have sharpened my thinking on this issue in lectures at think tanks and universities around the world. I would like to thank the Alexander Hamilton Society; Carnegie-Tsinghua Center; Cato Institute; Center for National Policy; Center for Strategic and International Studies; Council on Foreign Relations; Georgetown University; Foreign Policy Initiative; Henry Jackson Society; Körber Foundation; World Affairs Council of Washington, DC; University of California at Berkeley; and Yale University.

While writing up the draft manuscript, I benefited from the research assistance of Christian Chung. He is one of my most capable colleagues and he is only twenty years old. Needless to say, he has a very bright future ahead of him.

When I began searching for a literary agent to work with me on this project, two words were frequently used to describe Will Lippincott: the best. I feel fortunate to be included in his stable of authors. I would also like to thank Lippincott Massie McQuilkin's skilled agency assistants, Derek Parsons and Amanda Panitch.

Karen Wolny, editorial director of Trade at Palgrave Macmillan, immediately recognized the value of this book and shared my vision for it. It has been a delight to work with Karen and her team, including Donna Cherry, Lauren Janiec, and Lauren LoPinto, to bring this book to press.

I am fortunate to have supportive friends who were always willing to provide a distraction when I wanted something to do other than talk about Iran—although we often did that too. Thanks to Nitin Chadda, Kevin Chaffee, Guido Licciardi, Mike Mosettig, and David Stein.

Finally, I owe everything to my warm and loving family: Dale and Martha Burns, Mark and Barb Kroenig, Brad Kroenig, and Julie Kroenig Forbes. Each and every one of you is incredibly accomplished in your own way, and you inspire me to do better each and every day. Thank you.

CONTENTS

<i>List of Abbreviations and Acronyms</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
 Introduction	 1
1 From Atoms for Peace to Atoms for War	7
2 What Does Iran Want?	19
3 The Nonstarters: Covert Ops, Japanese Models, and Persian Springs	41
4 A Deal with the Devil: Diplomacy and Sanctions	59
5 Iran with the Bomb	113
6 Bombing Iran	169
7 Which Is Worse?	213
8 Conclusion	225
 <i>Notes</i>	 235
<i>Index</i>	251

INTRODUCTION

IT WAS A MUGGY JULY AFTERNOON WHEN PRESIDENT Barack Obama strode to the microphone in the Rose Garden to face the sea of reporters that had gathered to hear this momentous announcement. Even the famously cool president appeared to be shaken. Maybe it was the Washington, DC heat, or perhaps it was the gravity of what was about to be said. This was a speech he had hoped to avoid.

He began slowly, recounting the history of the long-running crisis over Iran's nuclear program. He explained how a nuclear-armed Iran would pose a grave threat to international peace and security. Channeling the language of previous US presidents, he stated that a nuclear-armed Iran would be "unacceptable" and that he had pursued many avenues in an attempt to stop Iran's nuclear progress. He explained how he had built an unprecedented international coalition to put pressure on Iran's leaders. In eight separate United Nations Security Council Resolutions, the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France (countries that don't often see eye-to-eye), and other representatives of the international community came together to demand that Tehran stop its uranium enrichment activities. He described how his administration had attempted to address

this problem diplomatically, but that Tehran continued to defy its international legal obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. He reminded his audience that his policy has always been to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, with diplomacy if at all possible, but by force if necessary.

He had pursued negotiations until the last possible moment, but the window for diplomacy was now effectively shut. Iran was on the verge of a nuclear weapons capability.

Only days earlier, the president had issued an ultimatum to Iran's leaders. Either they could suspend their uranium enrichment activities and give international inspectors unrestricted access to their country, or they would face the full wrath of the US military. They were given forty-eight hours to respond. Now that window had also closed.

"The decision to use force is not one that I come to lightly," said the president. He was coming to the heart of his speech. "But Iran's leaders have left me with no choice. Therefore, on my orders, US and coalition forces will begin airstrikes on Iran's nuclear facilities tonight." He cautioned that this was not a dispute between the United States and the Iranian people, but rather a conflict between an international community that values peace and security and an Iranian leadership that prizes its reckless pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability over its international obligations and the welfare of its own people. "It is my sincerest hope that this conflict will end swiftly and decisively with the destruction of Iran's nuclear facilities. But, if Iran's leaders choose to retaliate against the United States and our allies, we will be forced to defend ourselves. In either case, we will accept no outcome short of victory. May God bless our brave men and women in uniform and may God bless the United States of America."

After a decade-long standoff, the United States and Iran were going to war.

This is a scenario that has not yet come to pass, but it very well could in the near future. In his 2014 worldwide threat assessment, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper declared that Iran's advanced nuclear program constitutes one of the greatest emerging national security challenges to the United States of America.¹ Deciding on how to address the threat, therefore, is among the most important choices currently facing the US government. As I see it, there are only three possible outcomes of the crisis. First, the United States and Iran could come to a mutually satisfactory diplomatic settlement. Second, Washington could simply acquiesce to a nuclear-armed Iran. Or, third, the United States and/or Israel could take military action designed to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Clearly a diplomatic solution to this crisis would be best. That is why the United States has pursued negotiations with Iran over its disputed nuclear program for the past decade. In November 2013 the United States and a group of other world powers struck an "interim" nuclear deal with Iran that was widely lauded as a historic breakthrough. Yet, as President Obama clearly explained, the interim deal is only a "first step." To truly solve the problem, the two sides must strike a more comprehensive diplomatic accord that fully resolves the Iranian nuclear crisis. But the successful negotiation of such a far-reaching agreement will be difficult. President Obama himself estimated that the odds of a successful diplomatic accord are "no better than 50/50." Moreover, it is possible that even a comprehensive diplomatic accord will not succeed in neutralizing the Iranian nuclear threat.

This means that at some point in the foreseeable future, a US president might be forced to choose between the less attractive options of acquiescing to a nuclear-armed Iran and conducting a military strike on Iran's key nuclear facilities.

President Obama has declared that he has already made his choice. He has repeatedly said that his policy is to prevent, not contain, a nuclear-armed Iran and that all options, including the use of force, are on the table to achieve that outcome. Those who know him well, including those who have worked with him in the White House on this issue, swear that they have no doubt that the president is sincere when he says he is willing to bomb Iran if necessary to stop the spread of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. This position also has overwhelming support in the US Congress.

But is this the right call? How did we even get to this point? How close is Iran to having nuclear weapons, really? Is the United States truly prepared to fight another war over suspected WMD programs in the Middle East so soon after we went to war over trumped-up charges of WMD proliferation in Iraq only a decade ago? Can't we just solve this problem diplomatically? Will Iran's new president, Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate within Iran's theocratic system, improve the prospects for a comprehensive negotiated settlement? Would a nuclear-armed Iran ever use its nuclear weapons? If not, does a nuclear Iran really represent such a grave threat? Can the United States simply deter and contain a nuclear-armed Iran in the same way that we deterred and contained a much more powerful Soviet Union during the Cold War? How stable is the Iranian government? Is it possible that the regime could collapse from within, thus solving the Iranian nuclear challenge for us? Can we use covert tools like cyberattacks, assassinations, and sabotage, to stop Iran's nuclear program without going