

The Boston Globe

FRIDAY, JUNE 13, 2008

A solution for the Iran crisis

THE FAILURE to resolve doubts about Iran's nuclear program looms as the world's most ominous security threat. A military attack to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities could produce catastrophic consequences. An Iranian breakout from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty would almost certainly frighten Iran's neighbors into acquiring nuclear weapons themselves.

The world needs to honor Iran's right under the treaty to peaceful nuclear energy, while preventing Iran from producing nuclear weapons. There may have been a time when Iran would have settled for access to nuclear fuel produced outside Iran. But as a result of President Bush's refusal to bargain with Tehran earlier, the options for preserving the nuclear nonproliferation regime have narrowed to the imperfect, the intolerable, and the unthinkable.

This is why a 3-year-old proposal from MIT physicist Geoffrey Forden and former British ambassador John Thomson is stir-

ring renewed interest, as the Globe's Farah Stockman recently reported. In their plan, an international consortium would run a uranium enrichment facility on Iranian soil. This could provide Iran with a supply of nuclear fuel for the 20 reactors it wants to build by 2035. And if Iran's leaders rejected participation in such a consortium, their bluff would be called.

The plan's proponents would have the enrichment facility designed in such a way that advanced enrichment technology would be "black-boxed," so that Iranian technicians could not steal it. They also envision having a self-destruct mechanism built into the facility's advanced centrifuges — to prevent Iran from diverting enriched uranium.

Some variation of this consortium idea might eventually resolve the dangerous confrontation over Iran's nuclear program. But that cannot happen until America has a president who ventures into the Iranian bazaar and tries to strike a bargain.