First Paper: The Bush Administration, the Iranian Nuclear Question, and U.S. Military Policy

In the Q and A period immediately following Thomas Schelling’s talk in the video we’re watching on Wednesday, Prof. Michael Intriligator says that the current administration doesn’t really believe in the nuclear taboo—that the Bush administration, in fact, had just issued a document, “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” in which it took the position that “we don’t regard nuclear weapons as anything special, just like any other weapon, we’re gonna use preemption against potential enemies, the current national security strategy document cites specifically Iran, … we wanna strike at the Iranian nuclear capabilities, and nuclear weapons—tactical nuclear weapons in particular—are gonna be an attractive way to do that.” Schelling, in his response, does not take issue with that characterization of U.S. policy on Iran, and indeed what seems to bother him about current policy is how vocal the administration has been in making those kinds of threats. U.S. leaders, he thinks, should just decide what they want to do on the Iranian nuclear issue “as privately as possible and not talk about it”; “I just wish they’d shut up.” (The part of the tape you should listen to is the section that begins at 1:12:01 and goes through 1:14:27, and picks up again with the Intriligator comment at 1:17:25 and goes through 1:19:30—you can get to this point on the video very easily by using Ctrl E on RealPlayer and typing in these numbers).

Your job in this paper is to see whether those assertions are in fact correct. First of all, take a look at the document Intriligator refers to, the 2006 “National Security Strategy of the United States of America” ([pdf version](http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/nss2006.pdf)). For the purposes of this assignment, you don’t have to read the whole document. Just do a search in the pdf version for the obvious keywords in this case—“Iran,” “nuclear,” and “preempt”—and see what turns up. Then look at the table of contents in this document and zero in on the section or sections relating most directly to the issue at hand. Then read the parts of that section (or sections) that relate to the issues Intriligator raises. It’s a good idea to print out (and mark up) the sections you’ve identified as important for these purposes; just taking notes is less efficient. Don’t forget that you’re concerned at this point with just one simple question: is Intriligator’s paraphrase of that document essentially correct? It shouldn’t take you more than fifteen minutes to do this.

Then try to find out what you can (in the limited amount of time you can spend doing this) about the larger issue of whether the Bush administration can’t keep its mouth shut and has in fact been threatening, if all other measures fail, to attack the Iranian nuclear facilities—and indeed, if necessary, to use nuclear weapons in such an attack. To see what U.S. leaders have been saying, you can do a keyword search in three important official websites.

First, the [White House website](http://www.whitehouse.gov/): click “search” on the top right and then click “advanced” (on the bottom left in the window that appears). Then, under “must contain,” type in keywords like “Iran,” “nuclear,” and “military” (to identify documents that touch on the possibility of taking *military* action against the *Iran*ian *nuclear* facilities). Under “document type,” select “Speeches and Remarks.” Since your goal is to see what the administration was saying in the year or two before Schelling spoke, limit your search to documents that were produced, say, in that two-year period prior to March 20, 2006. The list that turns up can be sorted by date. You can generally tell from the summary that appears on the screen whether the document is worth looking at. If you do click into it, you don’t have to read it in its entirety. You can do a Ctrl F search for a particular term (again, like “Iran” or “nuclear”) to zero in on passages that relate to the question. You’ll probably want to print out about two or three documents that would probably be of use to you when you write the paper. Mark up each document right after you print it out to highlight the key passage or passages. If you think there’s just a chance you might want to use a document—that you’re not sure that it’s worth printing out, but you don’t want to lose track of it entirely—then just bookmark the whole document and make a brief note of what’s important about it. You can return to those bookmarked documents later on if you haven’t been able to come up with better sources. (Actually, you might want to make a point of bookmarking every document you might use, even the ones you print out in whole or in part, to make citation easier when the time comes—the URLs are not always printed out in full on the printout.) Selecting, printing out, and marking up these White House documents should take about twenty-five minutes. Don’t forget that you don’t have to do exhaustive research—just enough to give you a feel for how tough a line the administration was taking on this issue.

Second, the [Department of State website](http://www.state.gov/): click the tab for “Issues and Press,” and then go into the link for “Iran.” Then click into the link for “Remarks” on the left side of the page. To see what administration officials were saying on this issue right before Schelling gave his talk, you might want to spend about twenty minutes checking out some of the links here from January through March 2006, bookmarking the documents that look interesting, and printing out (in whole or in part) the documents you think you’ll actually be quoting from. Incidentally, if you ever wanted to go into this issue more deeply—say, for your third paper for this course—you could go through all the material linked here, including the material for previous years (there are links for 2005, 2004 and 2003 on the left side of the “Remarks” page), and you could also check the links given on the “Congressional Testimony” page. But for this paper there’s no need to make an exhaustive search—again, just try to find passages in two or three documents that relate directly to the issue.

Third, the [Defense Department’s website](http://www.defenselink.mil/search/): again, you can search for the keywords “Iran” and “nuclear” and limit your search to speeches and transcripts. The list that appears is (or can be) sorted by date, so you can look at the material for a year or two back from March 2006, the date of the Schelling talk. Again, you can do Ctrl F searches within promising documents to zero in on relevant passages. If you find a document you might want to cite in your paper, click “printer-friendly version” at the bottom left of the document, and then print it out and mark it up. The URL will appear at the top of the document. This part of the search shouldn’t take more than ten or fifteen minutes. Don’t expect to find more than one or two documents in this website.

Finally, you might think that the administration used non-official channels to “get out the message” that it was prepared to attack the Iranian facilities with nuclear weapons if the Iranian program could not be ended in any other way. Reporters might have been told things “off the record,” so threats made in that way would not show up in the official sources. To see if that’s the case, you might want to see what appeared in the most important U.S. newspapers during the period in question.

To do that, log into the [LexisNexis news](http://www.lexisnexis.com/us/lnacademic/auth/checkbrowser.do?ipcounter=1&cookieState=0&rand=0.9828696182057645&bhcp=1) search window. This is a subscription service, so you’ll need to either use a campus computer or go through the proxy server. The link I just gave you doesn’t always work, even if you’re using a campus computer. Sometimes you get the “sign in” window, asking for an ID and a password. So try it a couple of times and if you still can’t get the search window, go into Melvyl (<http://melvyl.cdlib.org/>), click the link at the top right for “Article Database and E-Journal Lists,” and then the “A-Z List of Databases” for UCLA, then click “L,” then click the link for “LexisNexis Academic.” That will take you into the search window if you can’t get into it using the link I gave you at the beginning of this paragraph. Once you’re in it, click the red tab at the top left for “news.” Make sure the “Terms and Connectors” button is selected, and enter terms like “Iran” and “nuclear” in the top search field. Choose “In Headline and Lead Paragraphs” from the drop-down menu in the next field, and then, in the “Select Sources” field, choose first the *New York Times* and then (in a second search) the *Washington Post*, the two most important U.S. newspapers in this area. (It’s a safe bet that if administration spokesmen had been talking about launching a nuclear attack on the Iranian facilities, it would have shown up in at least one of these papers.) For each of those searches, select “Date is between” in the “Specify Date” field. If you get too many hits, you might want to narrow the search by typing in something like “attack OR strike OR bomb” in the second search field, and then selecting “Anywhere in the document” from the drop-down menu that follows. Click into those documents that look interesting, and then, if you want to print a particular document, click the “print” icon on the top right. The keywords you searched for are highlighted in red. You won’t need to save URL’s in order to cite these documents; it’s enough to just give the author, title, name of the newspaper and date of publication, and all those things are given in the printed document. This phase of the research should take no longer than twenty minutes.

(There’s one last little thing you might want to do if you have the time, but it’s by no means required. One of the pieces that turns up in the LexisNexis search is an article headlined “Cheney Warns of Iran as a Nuclear Threat,” which ends with the following sentence: “The Pentagon has denied a report in the Jan. 24 issue of New Yorker magazine that the United States is conducting secret reconnaissance missions in Iran to identify potential nuclear targets.” Does “potential nuclear targets” mean targets for a U.S. nuclear attack? Well, perhaps. And since you’re interested in seeing whether there’s any evidence the U.S. government was contemplating anything of the sort, you might want to go into this question a bit more deeply. It’s not hard to do that since a particular article was referred to. To find it, just do a Google search for “New Yorker” and “January 24, 2005.” A minute or so later, you find a link to an online version of the article, [“The Coming Wars” by Seymour Hersh.](http://www.newyorker.com/printables/fact/050124fa_fact) You then search for the term “secret reconnaissance” in that article, and you quickly zero in on the passage in question. Does the author, in that passage, actually claim that the U.S. government was looking for targets for a nuclear attack? As I say, you don’t have to do this; it’s just an example of how you go about getting to the bottom of an issue.)

Now go through the material you’ve printed out and marked up. As you read it, try to figure out what you’ll want to say in the paper—that is, how you would answer, on the basis of this evidence, the questions you need to address—namely, what are we to make of Schelling’s and Intriligator’s claims on this matter? This should take no more than another half an hour.

Now you’re in a position to write up your findings relatively quickly—that is, in about two or at most three hours, including proofreading. When you begin the paper, go right to the point. Don’t waste time with generalities—don’t, for example, talk about the general importance of this issue. Begin instead by paraphrasing the Intriligator and Schelling claims, quoting key phrases to show that you’ve paraphrased their contentions accurately. (You’ll need to cite the precise place in the video for the things you quote or paraphrase; the video itself can by identified by speaker, title, place and date, and the source given as the class website.) Then raise the question: are these claims correct? You’ll do all that in a single opening paragraph. In the next paragraph, talk about the one document Intriligator refers to to back up his claim about administration policy. Then, in the body of that paragraph, deal with the question of whether his paraphrase of that document is accurate, referring to (and quoting from) passages in the document itself. (This should be easy—just use the excerpts from the document you’ve printed out.)

In the next paragraph, deal with the general Schelling argument about the administration’s inability to “shut up.” Have U.S. leaders threatened to take military action against Iran—that is, action of any sort? Have they threatened to use nuclear weapons against the Iranian nuclear facilities? Don’t forget that for the purposes of this paper—since your goal is to see whether there was any basis for the claims Schelling and Intriligator made—you should limit yourself to the period (say, the year or two) preceding their remarks and ignore anything that was said subsequently. In this part of the paper, you should paraphrase and quote from the material you’ve found on both the official websites and in LexisNexis. This part of the paper should run to about three pages. Don’t forget that your goal is not to present everything you’ve found. You want to digest your material and sum things up as succinctly as possible. But you should include the most important pieces of evidence you’ve found.

Then, finally, in a single concluding paragraph, you should reflect a bit on the meaning of what you’ve found doing this exercise—that is, you should talk briefly about what you personally have taken away from it. The whole paper should be about four or five pages long, double-spaced and including footnotes.

Don’t forget that this paper needs to be well written. If you’re unsure about some point of grammar, either look it up or get someone to help you. The same point applies to spelling; running the spell-check doesn’t guarantee that your paper won’t have spelling mistakes, so if you’re in doubt about the spelling of a word, be sure to look it up. And make sure also that you give sources for the evidence you present, and that that material is cited according to the standard rules, as noted in the course syllabus. You don’t need a “works cited” page or even a title (“First Paper” will do). The paper is due in section on Thursday or Friday, January 10 or 11.