

The country of Iran is on the verge of nuclear weapons production. Such a development will have grave consequences for the geopolitical situation in the Middle East. Below is my op-ed that recently ran in the Washington Times, Omaha World Herald, and Lincoln Journal Star. I thought you might be interested in reading it.

Unless we improve our strategy, the world will awaken very soon to the headline, "Iran has the nuclear bomb."

For many years, the United States and other world powers have tried various tactics to halt the nuclear ambitions of Tehran's clerical elites. They have, in essence, litigated Iran's case in the United Nations Security Council. They have imposed several rounds of economic sanctions. And they have tried to engage Iran with diplomacy, most recently with a deal that could have begun the long process of normalizing relations.

But through all this, Iran's leaders have not blinked as they move closer and closer to the ability to make a nuclear bomb on short notice.

Tehran doubts the collective resolve of world powers. It's not difficult to see why. European corporations continue to do business with Iran. Russia exploits the international row over Iran's nuclear program for its own geopolitical gain. In the maneuvering, China seeks to profit. The international deadlock over Iran's nuclear intransigence certainly seems bleak.

In the last six months, however, something unforeseen happened in Iran. Something that has stunned leaders in Tehran. Something that could help us eventually transcend the international deadlock.

In June, everyday Iranians started taking to the streets to protest the presidential election's controversial outcome. In Tehran alone, crowds of demonstrators swelled up to the hundreds of thousands.

The protests were nothing short of remarkable. Indeed, Iran had not seen demonstrations like this since 1979, the infamous year in which the current regime first seized power.

Iran's leaders were initially caught flat-footed by the protests, but they quickly mounted a counter-offensive. Over the following days and months, Tehran's crackdown became ever more brutal.

YouTube enabled the world to witness the barbaric shooting in broad daylight of female demonstrator Neda Agha-Soltan. News networks broadcasted in real time the violent clashes between regime-sponsored militias and protesters. The international media reported the shocking slayings of opposition figures on the Islamic holy day of Ashura in late December. Among those killed that day was Ali Moussavi, nephew of the man whom the opposition views as the rightful winner of the contested presidential election.

Yet the Iranian regime's escalating violence only emboldened the Iranian people's resolve. What had started out as a series of protests quickly became something else. It became a movement.

By year's end, demonstrators throughout Iran were calling not for a mere recount of the June election. They were directly challenging the legitimacy of Tehran's clerical authoritarian regime.

While Washington focuses on a new round of sanctions, many Iranian people continue to risk their lives in the country's growing protest movement. They continue to brave the regime's fists, clubs, water hoses, and bullets to take to the streets. They continue defiantly to hold signs and chant slogans not just in Farsi, but in English, so that the whole world might know their calls for justice and dignity.

With their growing mass protest movement, everyday Iranians have already accomplished what sanctions and other forms of multilateral pressure aim to do: create the conditions for change in Tehran.

While I support new sanctions, it is time for the White House, Congress and the entire international community to elevate the Iranian people's struggle to the center of the world stage.

The Iranian people deserve a more moderate, reasonable and just government in Tehran. The Iranian people may also be the last and best hope for halting Iran's drive to nuclear weapons capability. And it may be the Iranian people who help the world avoid a nuclear arms race in the Middle East.