



**Papers from the 16th Annual
Graduate Student Symposium**

**Communications tirées du 16e
Symposium annuel des étudiants**

cda institute
vimy paper

institut de la cad
cahier vimy



**Bipolarity in the Middle East:
The Regional Implications of a Nuclear Iran**

Eric Thomson

May/Mai 2014



Institut de la Conférence des associations de la défense

L'Institut de la Conférence des associations de la défense est un organisme caritatif et non partisan qui a pour mandat de promouvoir un débat public éclairé sur les enjeux notre sécurité et de la défense nationale.

Institut de la Conférence des associations
de la défense

151 rue Slater, bureau 412A
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1P 5H3

613 236 9903
www.cdainstitute.ca
cda@cda-cdai.ca

Tous les logos et les marques de commerce utilisés sont la propriété de leurs détenteurs respectifs.

L'utilisation qui en est faite dans cette publication l'est en vertu des dispositions de la loi canadienne applicable sur l'utilisation équitable non commerciale et nominative.

Conference of Defence Associations Institute

The Conference of Defence Associations Institute is a charitable and non-partisan organisation whose mandate is to promote informed public debate on national security and defence issues.

Conference of Defence Associations Institute

151 Slater Street, suite 412A
Ottawa, Ontario
K1P 5H3

613 236 9903
www.cdainstitute.ca
cda@cda-cdai.ca

All logos and trademarks used are the property of their respective holders.

Use in this publication is under non-commercial and normative fair use provisions of applicable Canadian law.

Papers from the 16th Annual Graduate Student Symposium

Communications tirées du 16e Symposium annuel des étudiants diplômés



Bipolarity in the Middle East: The Regional Implications of a Nuclear Iran

Eric Thomson

May/mai 2014

Eric Thomson is a second-year Master's student at the University of Ottawa's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs and was until recently an analyst at the CDA Institute. He has worked in the offices of two MPs on Parliament Hill; interned at the Canadian High Commission in Delhi, India; and most recently interned at the Canadian Permanent Mission to the United Nations and International Organisations in Vienna, Austria. His policy research interests focus on Middle Eastern security studies and specifically the Iranian nuclear program.

The CDA Institute and the author would like thank reviewers who provided comments on drafts of this paper, including Ferry de Kerckhove, James Fergusson, Terry Colfer and TV Paul.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect those of the CDA Institute.

Bipolarity in the Middle East: The Regional Implications of a Nuclear Iran

By Eric Thomson

Foreword

The original draft of this paper was written in November of 2012, prior to the diplomatic developments culminating from the Joint Plan of Action signed in Geneva in November of 2013. However, regardless of the outcome of the interim agreement, the arguments found in this paper would still be applicable if Iran were to develop nuclear weapons, covertly or otherwise, in the relatively near future.

This paper does not advocate allowing the proliferation of nuclear weapons; instead, it examines the implications of Iranian nuclearization. In fact, the author hopes for a world free of nuclear weapons. I am including this foreword because readers may misinterpret my arguments for support of Iranian nuclearization, which is not the case.

Within certain Western political establishments there is a focus on policy discussions that revolve around the adamant statement that a nuclear-armed Iran is unacceptable, period. I believe this position has led to a tendency to emphasize policy-based evidence making, rather than evidence-based policy making. I also believe that, despite the deeply controversial nature of such a scenario, its discussion is warranted. If the foreign policies of Western governments are determined with the end goal of a more secure and peaceful region in mind, then all possible geopolitical projections, especially issues with a significant chance of occurring, must be explored.

Discussion is not akin to support. And there are grand implications and considerations, including: Canada's national security and the security of its allies in the Middle East and abroad; regional and international energy security; human security; military strategic consequences; the role of sanctions; International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) involvement and responses; Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) safeguards; and many others.

Groupthink has discouraged creative or alternate approaches and independent thinking about the Iranian nuclear issue. We ought not to disregard policy discussions that fall within a framework that the West has stated to be politically unacceptable. A nuclear Iran is unacceptable, but not impossible. The West ought not to be caught flat-footed and suffer the consequences if such a development were to occur because it was unwilling to discuss policies outside of its self-imposed political constraints. It is a scholar's task to think about the unthinkable. Avoidance of this discussion in Canada has been interpreted as support for Canada's ally Israel. However, it is my opinion that true support comes from a willingness to discuss and analyse all possible scenarios with the end goal of maximizing preparedness to optimize Israel's security.



Introduction

Since the onset of the twentieth century, the Middle East has been consistently tumultuous. In general, the region's history is pockmarked with violent conflict. It was immersed for nearly 200 years in warfare during the Crusades, and mutual antagonisms due to a history of religious violence and sectarianism are deep-seated there. The invasions of the Seljuk Turks in the 11th century, the Mongols in the early 13th century, the splicing of the fallen Ottoman Empire after World War One and the subsequent dominance by European imperial powers, as well as the creation of the modern state of Israel in 1948 have perpetuated centuries of warfare. The latter event and subsequent major victories for Israel such as the 1948 War of Independence, the 1967 Six-Day War, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and the 1982 Lebanon War, have demonstrated a shift towards an unbalanced division of power in the region in favour of Israel. Israel's military capabilities expanded as it was all but confirmed that it became the sole nuclear power in the region in the 1960s. As the region's worst kept secret, Israel's nuclear weapons program represents informal existential deterrence: "I exist therefore I deter."¹

However, there are signs Israel's nuclear monopoly in the region may soon be challenged. The existence of uranium enrichment facilities in Natanz, Iran, was made public in 2002. Israel and its Western allies have been deeply concerned about the possibility that Iran, a sworn enemy of Israel, is constructing its own nuclear weapons. Lately, these concerns have reached a fever pitch, and understandably so. Former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad declared Iran a "nuclear state"² in 2010 and the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) Director General Yukiya Amano stated that Iran's stonewalling of an IAEA probe implied a strong possibility of military dimensions to the nuclear program.³ Israel and the United States have both made public statements about the possibility of preventative strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities. Indeed, these strikes, if they follow the current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's 'red-line policy'⁴ would be preventative war by definition. Yet, this would most likely only delay the program's completion and increase Tehran's resolve to develop a weapon to protect the nation and regime. It is possible that a preventative strike might also compel the Iranians to forgo nuclear weapons capabilities and seek an alternative to re-balance. It is much more likely, however, that a strike would further entrench Iran's hypersensitivity to exogenous meddling and serve as justification for the possession of capabilities that could deter such acts in the future. Further evidence of Iran's resolve can be inferred by its construction of the Fordow uranium enrichment facility in a disguised underground mountain bunker, which is heavily protected by anti-aircraft missile battery at the base of the mountain.⁵

Many factors have presumably driven Iran to pursue nuclearization. One of the factors would be recent American military interventions (in the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq) to overthrow regimes in the Middle East deemed hostile in one form or another to the United States or Israel. As well, Iranians point to the 1953 CIA-orchestrated coup of the democratically-elected Prime Minister of Iran Mohammad Mossadegh, and the imposition of the American-backed dictator, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. Another factor affecting Iran has been the fiery rhetoric made by the leaders of the United States and Israel referring to the regime as illegitimate and a threat to regional and international peace.

It is very possible that Iran may at some point in the near future become a nuclear power – a scenario that Washington and Tel Aviv declare to be unacceptable. The position of the United States



and Israel on the matter is bolstered by fears that the emergence of another nuclear power in the region may upend the current status quo: namely, a nuclear monopoly held by Israel, the closest ally of the United States in the region. It would remove the US and Israeli ability to attack or invade Iran without fear of an existential threat to Israel.

However, once Iran crosses the nuclear threshold (specifically, it has the capability to deploy a nuclear bomb), deterrence will apply, even if the Iranian arsenal and its delivery systems are relatively small or unsophisticated. The current crisis, characterized by thinly veiled threats of military action against Iran, will finally dissipate, leading to a Middle East that is more stable than it is today.⁶ In this paper I make several arguments. First, I argue that the ambition to achieve nuclear weapon status has been driven by the leadership in Tehran's foremost priorities: self-preservation of the Islamic regime and state. Second, I argue that the Iranian leadership is ultimately rational. This argument includes an analysis of the issues of rationality and uncertainty once Iran achieves nuclear weaponization. Third, I examine the implications of systemic anarchy in the international state system through the lens of defensive realism to argue that Iran would seek to take a second-strike nuclear stance (with 'launch on warning' systems, as Iran does not possess submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) systems). Lastly, I address the most prevalent fear of Iranian nuclearization, a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, and argue that not only is it unlikely, ultimately it is unnecessary. In sum, Iran as a nuclear power in the Middle East would further its own security interests and would subsequently increase the level of stability in the region.

Defensive Realism: The Theoretical Framework and Iranian Political Power Distribution

In terms of International Relations (IR) theory, Iran's ambitions for nuclear weapons are directed by the central tenets of defensive realism, a sub-theory of structural realism. There are two tenets. First, the state's cultivated obsession to maximize its security is a reaction to international anarchy. It may be indiscernible to other states, but the *intention* is for self-preservation. As such, the purpose of Iranian nuclear weapons would be for deterrence, rather than for suicidal first use. Iran is ultimately rational and seeks to maximize its security through the only guaranteed fashion: self-help. Second, material power drives states' foreign policies through the medium of calculations and perceptions of leaders. This contrasts with the perspective of offensive realists who see no role for leaders' calculations and perceptions and forego this analysis by labelling states as opaque unitary black boxes.⁷ In the case of Iran, examining the leadership's rhetoric is pertinent to understanding, though does not define, the state's foreign policies.⁸ (A brief description of the key players of Iranian politics is necessary and can be found in Note 8.) As a result, the political composition of power in Iran implies that certain single members, such as the President, do not solely dictate major policy decisions. Nonetheless, examining the foreign policy decisions of Iran's leadership can aid in deducing the reasoning for their actions.

The Roles of Regime and State Survival

The foremost priority of the leaders in Tehran is ensuring the survival of the Iranian regime and state. Since it is argued here that nuclear armament would strengthen Iran's national security, it is necessary to determine which threats would decrease as a result. Iran's nuclear ambitions can be framed through the concept of defensive realism because, as noted, the prime objectives of both foreign



and domestic policy in Iran have been regime survival and security maximization.⁹ Rival states have been identified and their constant influence has undermined Tehran's national security interests, and this makes it evident why nuclearization as a defensive armament of deterrence is indispensable to Iran's survival. The regime's survival interest, honed by centuries of living in a region dominated by Sunni Arabs, is reflected in Tehran's identifiable 'red lines': defence against foreign invasion and opposition to externally supported revolution.¹⁰ These red lines for Tehran have shaped rhetoric and policies which rivals perceive as hyperbolic indignation.

Tehran's perception of the American presence in the Middle East is that of a meddling bully hegemon striving to undermine Iranian interests and to threaten the regime's survival. Therefore, Iran's program to develop nuclear capability has been a defensive project in reaction to a "feeling of encirclement"¹¹ brought about by US military presence not only in the Gulf, but in Iraq and Afghanistan as well, and especially in relation to the close ties the United States has to several Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states.¹² For defensive realists, Iran's nuclearization has been fuelled both by the US military presence in the region and by the threats levelled against Iran by the George W. Bush administration under the rubric of the 'Axis of Evil' that many in Iran believed served as a US statement of intent about the removal of the Iranian regime.¹³ Also, given that Israel maintains a nuclear monopoly in the region, it is no wonder that Iran craves such powerful tools for deterrence. Iraq and Syria are two other states with which Israel had had tumultuous relations and these states had the resources and capability to pursue nuclear programs, but were preventively attacked by Israel with air strikes in 1981 and 2007, respectively. It is very plausible that these states were seeking nuclear weapons for deterrence purposes as well.

Since its inception in 1948, Israel has faced many national security threats from its Arab neighbours, and its leaders have viewed nuclear acquisition as a way to deter a large-scale invasion. Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion and every leader since then has believed that Israel could mitigate the structural asymmetry caused by the preponderance of men and equipment held by Arab states only through nuclear capability.¹⁴ This regional asymmetry tipped in favour of Israel after it achieved nuclear weapon capability, although it was also due to the growth of impressive conventional forces. Maintaining a regional nuclear monopoly all but guaranteed its survival. Having a monopoly on nuclear weapons allowed the state to use military means when it perceived its national security to be threatened in the Israeli-occupied territories, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria without the risk of nuclear retaliation. If Iran were to gain nuclear weapons capability, however, there would be a nuclear counterweight that would balance the current nuclear monopoly. This is in quantifiable terms and not literal power parity. Simply put, Iran would possess *sufficient* means to destroy a large portion of the territorially tiny state of Israel. And, just as Israel saw strategic utility in possession of nuclear weapons – a means of last resort and a form of deterrence – Iran too would reap these benefits in the face of, say, a formidable conventional American military force. Moreover, a conventional invasion of a nuclear-armed Iran would become increasingly unlikely and the United States or Israel would think twice before attacking Iran.

Israel has a penchant for undertaking military invasions when its national security is threatened. Nuclear bipolarity with Iran would provide an incentive for Israel to reconsider military action in favour of diplomatic engagement. This shift would provide historically unprecedented incentives



for Israeli and Iranian negotiators to discover a way to avoid risking national survival, as the overwhelming threat inherent to nuclear weapons could drive regional policy hardliners to the negotiating table.¹⁵ For example, North Korea's nuclearization was "completely unacceptable" to the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama.¹⁶ Nevertheless, once Pyongyang tested weapons in 2009 there was no other mechanism to coerce North Korea besides negotiations. As it turned out, the existence of several North Korean nuclear weapons was both tolerable and acceptable to the Bush and Obama administrations. Moreover, as Arthur Brown, the CIA East Asian Division Chief during the first term of the Bush administration stated, "if you were [Pyongyang], would you give up the only thing that has protected your regime from collapse?"¹⁷ This is an example of nuclear armament increasing a state's security and producing an incentive for rivals to engage diplomatically since military action would be too dangerous. The Six-Party Talks following North Korea's withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty are an example of regional policy hardliners driven to the negotiating table. Likewise, Iranian nuclear armament would provide an incentive for Israel to forego military action against Iran in favour of diplomatic negotiations. As a result, the likelihood of a diplomatic resolution would increase and would subsequently improve the level of regional stability in the Middle East.

The Role of Rationality

The leaders in Tehran are ultimately rational, despite spouting inflammatory rhetoric calling for the wanton destruction of Israel. Given the biases often present in the Western perception of how Islam functions as both a religious system and a political ideology, "it is important to disabuse analysts of the notion that Iran's leaders are 'mad mullahs' driven to irrational or illogical behaviour by devotion to existential goals."¹⁸ Historical evidence demonstrates that the leadership in revolutionary Tehran connects ends and means in an intelligible manner. The clerical regime has always proved rational and pragmatic when its survival has been threatened. Revolutionary Iran has never started a war, has completed deals with both Washington and Tel Aviv (for example in the Iran-Contra affair¹⁹) and sued for peace in its war with Iraq (which Saddam Hussein started) once it realized victory was unattainable. Iran also aided in the US-led effort to dislodge the Taliban in Afghanistan, taking a pragmatic approach to the regional conflict. Policy decisions in Tehran since 1979 have been calculated, rational and have been made to serve the nation's survival and interests, regardless of the regime's outlandish public statements. These foreign policy choices reflect a state that is seeking to maximize its security, not its offensive capabilities.

One could argue that the leadership in Tehran may be comprised of a hierarchy of capable decision-makers, but its bellicose rhetoric is a clear demonstration of dangerous unpredictability. It is this rhetoric which is used as evidence by the leaders in Tel Aviv and Washington to argue that Tehran is a belligerent and unstable government unfit to possess nuclear weapons. However, though the threats from Ayatollah Khamenei and former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to 'wipe Israel off the map' are inflammatory, completely unacceptable and deeply worrisome for Israel and the international community, they serve a rational purpose – paradoxically, they send the message that the leadership may be irrational enough to use nuclear weapons if it is provoked, even if this entails national suicide. This indispensable sense of fear is the working force behind deterrence. There are very few other



practical purposes for this bellicose rhetoric than to demand that threats should be taken seriously (although it may aid in shoring up domestic political support as well).

Thus, there is historical and tangible evidence of consistently rational leadership in Tehran. It may employ bellicose rhetoric but the leadership in Tehran would not ostracize itself from much of the Western world based solely on its principled stance that Israel is an illegitimate state. This rhetoric can be used as leverage. By essentially creating fear within Israel of an Iranian nuclear attack, there would be a decrease in the likelihood of Israeli provocation. This is a strategic calculation by leaders in Tehran to decrease the chance of provocation which could threaten Iran's national security interests. Fulfilling the threat to wipe Israel off the map with a nuclear attack (including presumably the risk of destroying Jerusalem, which hosts the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest site in Islam), and the resulting nuclear warfare, would be thoroughly inconsistent with Tehran's historical actions and national interests. However, the United States or Israel cannot afford to dismiss this as impossible and continue to threaten to attack Iranian nuclear facilities once Iran is a nuclear-armed state.

Iran's strategy to obtain nuclear weapons is a rational decision made to increase its national security substantively. Take for example the nuclear deterrence argument. The implications are that, because of the power of deterrence, the US/Israeli and Iranian distinct interests in security become common interests. As a result of this mutuality of interest, the manifestation of nuclear deterrence, according to the deterrence argument, is not only rational but also reasonable in its effects. Thus, becoming a nuclear power would improve Iran's national security which has been threatened by US and Israel's regional interests and power projection. This is a feat that is not to be understated in a volatile Middle East.

The Role of Systematic Anarchy

The international state system is comprised of a multitude of states that exist in a condition of anarchy and that obsess over maximizing their security. Regardless of any fundamental diplomatic breakthrough that may occur, the lack of any overarching international authority perpetuates this obsession. Tehran will never be able fully to trust the United States, Israel, or any other state to protect the Iranian regime or state. Thus, it must take full responsibility for maintaining its own existence. Nuclear armament, even with Iran's limited ballistic missile capabilities,²⁰ is the most logical and powerful way to deter a nuclear-armed aggressor. Therefore, Tehran is pursuing these weapons to maximize its security through defensive means. This is in line with the traditional balance of power theory, and the power parity hypothesis, which claims that equality in power is conducive to peace.

The power parity hypothesis is a central tenet of neorealism. It has been tested over the past 65 years (and counting) and points to empirical evidence that no two nuclear-armed rivals have engaged in conflict that has threatened either state's vital interests. For example, India and Pakistan each attained nuclear weapons in 1998. As nuclear-armed regional rivals, they have yet to engage in warfare that has threatened either state's vital interests.²¹ However, prior to their nuclearization India and Pakistan fought three bloody conventional wars following independence in 1947.²² There are no examples of large-scale conventional warfare between nuclear-armed states. If the risk of warfare increases with proliferation and when rivals have nuclear weapons, then there would be an example of two



nuclear-armed rivals engaging in a conventional war that threatened either state's vital interests. However, no such example can be found.

The most rational action for Iran and Israel in a nuclear standoff is that neither state threatens the other's national security (and in Iran's case its regime's survival as well) as doing so may risk their own state's survival. Iran's nuclear program should not be considered the actions of a rogue state but rather the reaction to exogenous threats to its national security and the formation of a benign nuclear Iran.²³ The deterrence argument can be utilized to explore the notion that Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapon capabilities could be a powerful deterrent to the outbreak of interstate conflict; in particular an Israeli or American military strike on Iran.²⁴ Therefore, it is not in Iran's security interest to maximize its power as a belligerent revisionist state. In fact, it is in its security interest to reformulate the balance of power in the region with powerful deterrence capabilities.

A Nuclear Arms Race is Highly Unlikely

The current asymmetry of power distribution in the Middle East has pushed Iran towards the development of a nuclear weapon capability. It is the most effective way to guarantee the security and survival of the regime and state. But it has led to speculation as to how other Middle Eastern states would react. One fear is that Iranian nuclearization will spark a nuclear arms race in the region. In line with offensive realist thinking, this possibility suggests that states such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, or any of the GCC states would develop their own nuclear weapons programs to maximize their power capabilities. This fear stems from the possibility that more nuclear weapons in such a volatile region would increase the possibility of disastrous consequences. Fearing consequences such as inadvertent escalation is premature for several reasons.

First, there must be a reasonable explanation for the onset of an arms race. The argument is that when an enemy or rival in the region obtains nuclear weapons it is only natural for the threatened state to obtain its own to lessen its vulnerability. This security dilemma²⁵ could create serious conflict, even if this is not the aim of any states involved. It is a flawed assumption, however, to maintain that nuclear weapons in a regional rival or enemy's possession pose a significant enough threat to instigate an arms race. As Kenneth Waltz states, "nuclear weapons are so controversial and expensive that only countries that deem them *absolutely critical to their survival* go through the extreme trouble of acquiring them."²⁶ That is why South Africa, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan voluntarily gave up theirs in the early 1990s, and why other countries like Brazil and Argentina dropped nascent programs.²⁷ For financial and practical reasons, and based on historical precedence, a nuclear arms race in the Middle East caused by Iranian nuclearization is unlikely.

Second, not only is an arms race unlikely, ultimately, it is unnecessary. It is likely that the United States would simply extend its nuclear umbrella over its key Middle Eastern allies. This is what occurred when China obtained nuclear weapons during the Cold War. The US nuclear umbrella (as part of defence agreements that date back to the end of the Allied occupation of Japan and the end of the Korean War) covers South Korea and Japan. This is why South Korea deemed it unnecessary to pursue its own nuclear weapons when North Korea obtained its own nuclear capabilities. In each case, nuclear war is extremely irrational and unthinkable due to the deterrent effect of nuclear warfare. Indeed,



the United States would even benefit from extending its umbrella over its Arab allies as a solidified security reliance on American protection puts the United States in a very favourable light with the oil exporters in the Gulf. Moreover, former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton explicitly stated that the United States would consider a “defense umbrella” over the Middle East in just such a scenario.²⁸ Thus, there would be no reason for Saudi Arabia, the other GCC states, or any other Sunni Arab state to fear Shia Iran’s nuclearization. It is extremely unlikely that Iran would use a nuclear weapon for offensive capability against these states as the leaders in Tehran understand how crucial the stability of these states is to American economic interests. Not only would it be suicidal, but it would also be completely irrational in terms of a cost-benefit analysis. Rather, Iran’s nuclearization would only be effective and rational as a defensive deterrent from aggressive rivals.

Conclusions

It is not inconceivable that the United States and its Arab allies would have to modify their policies if Iran acquired nuclear weapons to adopt to the new nuclear bipolarity. Whether this is what is best for the interests of the United States and Israel in terms of maximizing their influence in the region is not the issue. A net positive effect of Iranian nuclearization, even if it diminishes the influence of international and regional hegemony, is that it would increase the overall security of the Middle East. For example, a nuclear-armed Iran would provide a strong incentive for Israel to engage with it in an unprecedented move: diplomatic negotiations. This would increase the overall level of stability in the region due to new policies of level-headed and pragmatic diplomacy instead of military action. Also, a nuclear Iran would likely eliminate the threat of a military strike for fear of nuclear warfare, thus effectively putting an end to the ongoing threat of Israeli or American military engagement in Iran. This threat has long had the potential to destabilize the region further.

Iran’s leaders spout vile and unacceptably bellicose rhetoric calling for the destruction of Israel. However, this public display of apparent irrationality is ultimately rational as a strategy for deterrence. Historical evidence shows Revolutionary Iran’s main objective is regime and state survival. This has been demonstrated through security maximizing and pragmatic policies, including deals with its sworn enemies in Tel Aviv and Washington. In addition, Iran is not an aggressive revisionist state as it holds an interest in maintaining stability in the region. It is attempting to maintain stability by acquiring a nuclear capability to minimize the risk of interstate aggression towards it. The leaders in Tehran understand that the best way to diminish this risk is to possess a powerful enough weapon to deter rivals from threatening the country’s vital interests. This regional nuclear bipolarity, with Israel and Iran maintaining nuclear arsenals as deterrents for only defensive capabilities, would increase the level of stability in the Middle East. The notion of a nuclear Iran is deeply unpopular in Washington and Tel Aviv because it curtails the interests of those states in the region; however, it is what is best for the Middle East as a whole.



NOTES

¹ Lawrence Freedman, "I Exist Therefore I Deter. A Review of *Nuclear Fallacy: Dispelling the Myth of Nuclear Strategy*," by Morton H. Halperin, and Robert S. McNamara, *Blundering into Disaster: Surviving the First Century of the Nuclear Age*, *International Security*. Vol. 13, No. 1 (1988): 177-195. The idea of existential deterrence as developed by McGeorge Bundy is proving to be extremely attractive: "As long as ... thermonuclear weapons ... could be used against the opponent, even after the strongest possible preventative attack, existential deterrence is strong and it rests on uncertainty about what could happen." Quoted in Halperin and McNamara.

² C. Philip, "[Mahmoud Ahmadinejad declares Iran a 'nuclear state' after producing enriched uranium](#)," *The Times*, London, February 2010.

³ George Jahn, "Nuclear agency comes down on Iran," *NewsObserver.com*, 28 November 2009.

⁴ At the 2012 United Nations General Assembly, Netanyahu stated that "red lines could be drawn in different parts of Iran's nuclear weapons program. But to be credible, a 'red line' (a reference point to which the program's development to this level would spur preventative warfare) must be drawn first and foremost in one vital part of their program: on Iran's efforts to enrich uranium." To be clear, Netanyahu's physical illustration drew a red line on a drawing of a bomb that served to represent Iran's nuclear program. The red line, he said, "is before Iran completed the second stage of nuclear enrichment." This, in technical terms, would mean before Iran develops highly enriched uranium (HEU)).

⁵ Julian Borger and Patrick Wintour, "Why Iran confessed to secret nuclear site built inside mountain," *The Guardian*, 26 September 2009.

⁶ Kenneth Waltz, "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb," *Foreign Affairs*, July-August 2012.
<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137731/kenneth-n-waltz/why-iran-should-get-the-bomb> (accessed 6 November 2013).

⁷ Shiping Tang, *A Theory of Security Strategy for Our Time: Defensive Realism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

⁸ John Baylis, et al., *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007): 131. The trajectory that began with Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution to depose the Shah of Iran in 1979 has since placed Tehran in direct conflict with US interests. The Iranian regime has a constitutional government designed to give the clerical elite (which is personified by the Supreme Leader, who is currently Ayatollah Khamenei) extraordinary power to control internal politics and affect policy decisions that it deems critical to regime survival. There is an elected President and legislature, and parallel to the government's formal organization of ministries there is a 'shadow' set of offices under the Supreme Leader who often exercise the real decision-making authority on important issues. This distribution demonstrates the various bureaucratic mechanisms involved in major policy decisions. See also, Kerry M. Kartchner, Jeannie L. Johnson and Jeffrey A. Larson, *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Culturally Based Insights Into Comparative National Security Policymaking* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009): 138.

⁹ E.P. Rakel, "Iranian Foreign Policy since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006," *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, Vol 6, No. 1 (2007): 159-187. Since 1979 Iran and the GCC states have had strained relations due to Tehran's hope that the revolutionary spirit would spread to the Gulf monarchies. Moreover, the Shia minorities in the GCC states have been responsible for several of the Arab Spring uprisings in those states, and there is evidence that the Iranian government has aided these groups.

¹⁰ Kartchner, Johnson and Larson, *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction*, p. 150. However, Tehran's leadership reflects flexible, adaptive elements of strategic culture derived from both Persian culture and Shia Islam. These include the cultural and religious sanction of deception and façade when necessary to preserve the faith, one's life, or, most importantly, the regime. The roots of this flexibility are not difficult to discern: living as Shia in a sea of Sunnis, and as Persians in a sea of Arabs required developing the survival skills of the often weak and powerless. It is only logical that a historically vulnerable regime and nation under constant foreign threat to its sovereignty and interests, by regional and international states, has been forced to take any measures necessary to preserve its survival. This is why Iran seeks nuclearization despite immense international diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions.



- ¹¹ Kayhan Barzegar, "Understanding the Roots of Iranian Foreign Policy in the New Iraq," *Middle East Policy*, Vol 12, Issue 2 (Summer 2005): 49-57.
- ¹² T.R. Mattair, "Mutual Threat Perceptions in the Arab/Persian Gulf: GCC Perceptions," *Middle East Policy*. Vol. 14, Issue 2 (2007): 133-140.
- ¹³ Abbas Maleki and Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, "Iran's Foreign Policy After 11 September," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2003): 255-265. According to US President Bush, members of the 'Axis of Evil' include Iraq and North Korea. It is noteworthy to mention as food for thought that the former was invaded by the United States to depose of a leader accused of having WMD (but not at a stage of development where it could deter the United States from invasion) and the latter developed a nuclear weapon. An American or South Korean invasion of North Korea is unthinkable because it would be a suicidal choice for leaders in Seoul or Washington to make.
- ¹⁴ T.V. Paul, *Power v Prudence: Why Nations Forgo Nuclear Weapons* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 2000): 138.
- ¹⁵ Avery Goldstein, *Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century: China, Britain, France, and the Enduring Legacy of the Nuclear Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000): 44; Ehsaneh I. Sadr, "The Impact of Iran's Nuclearization on Israel," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 12, Issue 2 (Summer 2005): 60-61.
- ¹⁶ Micah Zenko, "Nuclear Weapons: US Strategy from Pyongyang to Tehran," Council on Foreign Relations, 23 January 2012, <http://blogs.cfr.org/zenko/2012/01/23/nuclear-weapons-u-s-strategy-from-pyongyang-to-tehran/> (accessed 29 November 2013).
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ Kartchner, Johnson and Larson, *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction*.
- ¹⁹ Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 2008): 114. The Iran-Contra affair was the culmination of a balanced triangular relationship—Washington wanted the release of its hostages in Iran, Tel Aviv wanted closer links with Iran, and Iran wanted arms in its war with Iraq. When the affair became public because of an arms embargo on Iran, the Reagan administration faced severe criticism.
- ²⁰ Michael Elleman, "Iran's Ballistic Missile Program," US Institute of Peace, no date given, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/irans-ballistic-missile-program> (accessed 8 November 2013). Although Iran's ballistic missiles are currently too inaccurate to be militarily effective when armed with conventional warheads, the regime likely believes that the missiles can deter and possibly intimidate its regional adversaries, regardless of warhead type. It would be far too high of a risk for Israel to dismiss warhead delivery capabilities just because it lacks surface-to-surface ballistic missiles (SSBM) or ballistic missile nuclear submarines (SSBN).
- ²¹ The only warfare the two states engaged in was the Kargil War in 1999. It was comprised mostly of skirmishes and did not threaten the survival of either state.
- ²² Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).
- ²³ Mark J. Gasiorowski, "The New Aggressiveness in Iran's Foreign Policy." *Middle East Policy*. Vol 14, No. 2 (2007): 125-6.
- ²⁴ James A. Russell, "Nuclear Strategy and the Modern Middle East," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Fall 2004): 104. The emphasis added is my own.
- ²⁵ John Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," in Tim Dunne, MiljaKurki and Steve Smith (eds), *International Relations Theories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): 81.



²⁶ Waltz, "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb."

²⁷ John Mearsheimer. PBS News Hour, "Nuclear-Armed Iran would bring 'Stability' but Risks," debate between John Mearsheimer and Dov Zakheim, 9 July 2012, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/world/july-dec12/iran2_07-09.html (accessed 4 December 2013). Emphasis is my own.

²⁸ Mark Landler and David E. Sanger, "Clinton Speaks of Shielding Mideast from Iran," *The New York Times*, 22 July 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/23/world/asia/23diplo.html?_r=0 (accessed 3 November 2013).

