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Iran's Nuclear Future

Critical U.S. Policy Choices

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Preface

U.S. decisionmakers will confront a series of critical policy choices as Iran's nuclear program continues to evolve. The purpose of this study was to define these choices, describe the underlying complex considerations, assess their potential effectiveness, and uncover where policy trade-offs will be required. Given that the U.S. Air Force will be called on to carry out the military tasks associated with the policy choices, this study suggested ways in which the Air Force can prepare.

The research reported here is the product of a fiscal year 2010 RAND Project AIR FORCE research project, "Aligning Nuclear Forces for the New Strategic Environment." The project was sponsored by the Assistant Chief of Staff for Strategic Deterrence and Nuclear Integration, Headquarters U.S. Air Force (AF/A10); the research was conducted in the Strategy and Doctrine Program of RAND Project AIR FORCE. This monograph will be of interest to anyone concerned about how Iran's nuclear program may develop and what this could mean for future security in the critical region of the Middle East.

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Influencing Iran

The United States will face critical policy choices as Iran's nuclear program continues to evolve. Using an analytical framework designed for the new strategic environment, we focused on how to influence Iran in its future decisions, judging first that the Iranian leadership acts rationally, assessing costs and benefits in making its foreign policy decisions. Iran's national security interests (survival of the regime, protection of the homeland, and expansion of its regional influence) are unlikely to change, so the challenge for the United States is to affect the calculations of how the Iranian leadership pursues these interests.

Iran's decisions regarding its nuclear program will be shaped primarily by its perception of the external environment (e.g., the U.S. threat) and the value placed on nuclear weapons in serving its national security interests. But different future Iranian nuclear postures are possible, and an internal political debate exists in Iran on the future of the nuclear program.[1] This situation offers the United States a potential lever of influence.

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[1] Iran's future nuclear posture could range from *virtual* (having the know-how and infrastructure to develop a nuclear weapon but stopping short of doing so), to *ambiguous* (developing a nuclear weapon but not declaring its existence), to *declared* (demonstrating the existence of a nuclear weapon capability through a test or withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty).

Critical U.S. Policy Choices

This monograph describes the complex considerations underlying future U.S. policy choices in responding to Iran's evolving nuclear program, assesses their potential effectiveness, and uncovers where policy trade-offs will be required.

How Can the United States Dissuade Iran from Nuclear Weaponization?

A dissuasion strategy depends on the ability to influence the calculations of costs and benefits on the part of a party. Such a strategy has two potential components that could be applied singularly or at the same time: raising the potential costs of acting and providing incentives for not acting. While military forces play an important role, a dissuasion strategy would seek to convey more broadly that a party would not profit from a given course of action. Despite a wide range of policies at its disposal (see Table S.1), the United States faces a serious challenge in dissuading Iran from nuclear weaponization, given how Iranian national security interests could be served by nuclear weapons, the hard-line views of the current Iranian regime, and the difficulty of shaping the internal political debate in Iran.[2]

If Iran Were to Acquire Nuclear Weapons, How Could the United States Deter the Use of Those Weapons?

While Iran's historical behavior, national security interests, and military planning suggest that it is likely to be cautious in undertaking any military actions against U.S. military forces in the region, plausible paths to U.S.-Iran conflict exist. Iran's military doctrines and conventional capabilities provide it with alternatives to using nuclear weapons in a conflict, and given the overwhelming superiority of both U.S. conventional and nuclear forces, any Iranian use of nuclear weapons would hold enormous risks for Iran. Thus, Iran is likely to use nuclear weapons only under a narrow set of circumstances that would revolve around

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[2]   For the purposes of this study we chose to define *nuclear weaponization* as the confirmed ability to produce an operational nuclear warhead.

Table S.1
Policy Choices in Dissuading Iran from Nuclear Weaponization

Dissuasion Strategy	Policy	Choices	Considerations
Construct system of costs for acting	Pay price: Economic sanctions	Target regime with broad-based economic sanctions	Reinforces costs of nuclear program and buys time over the long run for fundamental political change but could support hard-liners
		Target banks and businesses of Revolutionary Guards	Avoids hurting factions that may be willing to stop nuclear program before nuclear capability is declared but difficult to implement because investments can be shifted
	Deny potential gains: Military pressure	Train for conventional attacks against nuclear facilities and expand deployment of regional missile defenses	Raises prospect that investment in nuclear program is highly uncertain but reinforces Iran's vulnerability and could lead to acceleration of nuclear program
		Prepare for nuclear attack	Communicates to regime that developing nuclear weapons could undermine security but also expands threat, giving potential support to hard-liners in internal Iranian debate; is marked departure from U.S. goal of reducing reliance on nuclear weapons
Provide benefits for not acting	Offer incentives	Recognize regime's political legitimacy, rescind broad economic sanctions, refine statements on availability of military options	Could lower perception of threat and affect internal Iranian debate but could reward Iran for intransigence and send wrong signal to potential proliferators; political support in United States is unlikely

Iran viewing itself as vulnerable to U.S. conventional military defeat and threatened as a regime by U.S. conventional military operations.

Table S.2 describes the approaches available to the United States to deter an Iranian attack with nuclear weapons against U.S. military forces and regional partners (e.g., Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC] states, Israel).[3] The choice of an approach will depend largely on views of what motivates Iranian behavior: Would the threat of nuclear retaliation against Iran be credible, or will other ways need to be found, such as managing escalation in a conventional conflict or pursuing a capability to defeat an Iranian use of nuclear weapons militarily? Each of these approaches involves uncertainties and challenges, but these choices need to be considered in advance of Iran's potential acquisition of nuclear weapons.

How Can the United States Reassure Its Partners of the Credibility of Approaches to Deterring Iranian Nuclear Attacks?

Given that the United States would have available a menu of potential reassurance policies that could involve both political and military commitments, what might its partners (e.g., GCC states, Israel) seek and when?

U.S. partners will be interested in U.S. policies to provide and potentially expand U.S. conventional forces for their defense. But they are unlikely to request other reassurance policies until two additional developments occur: (1) Iran assembles nuclear weapons and declares itself to be a nuclear power, and (2) Iran acquires an intercontinental ballistic missile to deliver its nuclear weapons. At this point, the calculus of U.S. partners would be expected to change, since the first development would remove any ambiguity about Iran's nuclear capability and the second could seriously undermine the credibility of the United States in using its nuclear weapons on behalf of its partners, given that Iran would be capable of threatening to respond with its

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[3]   The United States has an interest in deterring Iran's use of nuclear weapons against U.S. partners in the region. Our analysis found that a U.S. approach to deterring Iran's use of nuclear weapons against U.S. military forces in the region, if viewed as credible by Iran, would extend to the GCC states and Israel.

Table S.2
Alternative U.S. Approaches to Deterring an Iranian Attack Against U.S. Military Forces in the Middle East

Approach	U.S. Force Posture	Rationale	Changes in U.S. Military Planning
Raise costs of using nuclear weapons by threat of retaliation	Projected U.S. conventional and nuclear forces sufficient	Hard to find plausible paths to major conventional conflict U.S. conventional systems can inflict devastation without resorting to nuclear weapons Crossing nuclear threshold risks regime's survival	None
	Need to reinforce retaliatory threat by displaying nuclear capabilities in the region	Current U.S. nuclear posture lacks credibility, given its deployment at sea and in the United States	Exercise nuclear-capable bombers in region and possibly deploy them there temporarily Commit specific U.S. nuclear-capable systems for planning purposes to respond to Iran's use of nuclear weapons
Deny benefits of using nuclear weapons	Need to focus conventional military planning and operations on ability to defeat nuclear attack, even though feasibility uncertain	U.S. threat of nuclear retaliation lacks credibility, given likely asymmetries of interests between the United States and Iran in conventional conflict	Seek capabilities to locate, track, and destroy Iran's nuclear weapons and their delivery means before they are launched Deploy robust missile defenses to intercept nuclear weapons after they are launched
Manage escalation in a conflict	Projected U.S. conventional forces sufficient	Need to keep Iran from viewing its use of nuclear weapons as "least bad option"	Pursue measured military operations and forgo large-scale conventional invasion and intensive air campaigns aimed at crippling the regime's leadership

nuclear weapons against the U.S. homeland.[4] The reticence on the part of the GCC states, especially Saudi Arabia, arises from likely domestic political opposition, their expected continuing interest in keeping open some cooperation with Iran, and their potential concerns that such a military expansion may only embolden rather than deter Iranian aggression and make them potential military targets. Relying too heavily on U.S. nuclear capabilities, in Israel's view, could erode its own nuclear deterrent.

To the extent that U.S. partners are reassured, this decreases their interest in seeking alternative security partners or developing their own nuclear weapons. In the case of Israel, a credible U.S. deterrent could also reduce the potential to pursue unilateral military actions or openly declare its nuclear posture.

How Should the United States Seek to Influence Iran?

To achieve U.S. nuclear dissuasion and deterrence goals, our analysis suggests that three approaches are available, each based on a different assumption about Iran and how to influence its calculations of costs and benefits:

- Iran only responds to pressures and threats; thus, the first approach seeks to influence Iran by raising the costs.
- Iran only responds to the prospect of the loss of any gains, not threats; thus, the second approach seeks to influence Iran by denying the regime the benefits of actions that the United States seeks to dissuade or deter.
- Iran's sense of vulnerability is what motivates its behavior; thus, the third approach seeks to influence Iran by reducing the external threat facing it and the survival of its regime.

For our assessment of these approaches, see Table S.3.

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[4]   According to the U.S. Department of Defense, "With sufficient foreign assistance, Iran could probably develop and test an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of reaching the United States by 2015" (U.S. Department of Defense, *Unclassified Report on Military Power of Iran*, Washington, D.C., April 2010c, p. 11).

Table S.3
Assessment of U.S. Overall, Integrated Approaches to Influencing Iran

Approach	What Are Implementing Military Activities?	How Will It Affect Internal Debate in Iran on Weaponization?	Will U.S. Partners Support It?	How Effective Will It Be?
Raise costs to Iran	Expanded conventional offensive and defensive (and possibly nuclear)	Undermines factions that could oppose development of nuclear weapons	Unlikely until Iran is a declared nuclear power	Undermined by lack of international support for robust military measures
Deny benefits to Iran	Conventional, focused on offensive strikes and missile defenses	Uncertainty about whether it makes any difference	Likely	Undermined by lack of military capabilities and uncertainty of success
Reduce threat to Iran	Conventional, focused on managing escalation, with nuclear relegated to background	Supports factions that could oppose development of nuclear weapons	Very unlikely	Undermined by uncertain support from American public

What is clear is that the United States will not be able to avoid future policy choices or trade-offs among its nuclear dissuasion, deterrence, and reassurance policies. Adopting an overall, integrated approach with a clear purpose and rationale for U.S. policies would have these additional benefits. It would enhance the ability to signal clearly to Iran what the United States intends in terms of its goals. Such an approach should make it easier to gain support from the international community and could help in demonstrating U.S. commitments to its regional partners. Finally, an overall, integrated approach would likely improve the chances of winning support at home from Congress and the American people.

The U.S. Air Force: Preparing for the Future

While there is uncertainty about which policies decisionmakers will choose, what is clear is that the Air Force, in support of combatant commanders, will play a key role in whatever military tasks are required. Our analysis suggests some ways that the Air Force can prepare for whichever policies decisionmakers choose (see Table S.4).

The Way Ahead

In brief, our study has set the stage for identifying situations in the future that will call for U.S. policy choices and potential trade-offs in dealing with Iran's nuclear program, not for making recommendations on any one policy or approach. The study's value is in grounding future policy choices in a critical regional analysis, in describing the complex considerations underlying the various policy choices therein, and in uncovering where in these policies tensions will arise and trade-offs will be required. This monograph underscores the Air Force's contributions and provides considerations for its future planning. Finally, the analyses presented here provide decisionmakers with an analytical framework that can help them plan for achieving future U.S. nuclear dissuasion and deterrence goals vis-à-vis Iran and for reassuring U.S. partners in the Middle East.

Table S.4
Air Force Preparations

How Should Air Force Prepare?	Steps Air Force Could Take
Understand purposes and timelines for military tasks	Military tasks for nuclear dissuasion will not necessarily be the same for nuclear deterrence and reassurance; timelines for military tasks will depend on what happens in Iran's nuclear program.
Design exercises and war games to support different policy choices	Exercise objectives for bombers could aim not only to demonstrate to Iran that investment in nuclear capabilities could possibly be destroyed but also to influence the internal Iranian debate over nuclear weaponization. War games could investigate the ways in which a conflict between the United States and Iran might arise and escalate to use of nuclear weapons; they could also be used to test deterrence approaches with and without nuclear weapons.
Ensure that it can operate under nuclear threat	Survey U.S. Air Force facilities in region for vulnerability to nuclear effects and identify material improvements for hardening facilities and introducing alternate and more resilient procedures.
Provide ways to manage escalation in conflict with Iran	Investigate concepts of operations to manage escalation in U.S.-Iran conflict, e.g., reinforce political communication that signals limited U.S. objectives; focus on immediate threat by directly targeting Iran's regime-supporting paramilitary forces; and withhold targeting of Iran's political leadership.

Acknowledgments

Abbreviations

EU	European Union
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
JTAGS	Joint Tactical Ground Station
MOP	Massive Ordnance Penetrator
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPR	U.S. Department of Defense *Nuclear Posture Review Report*
NPT	Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, or Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
PAF	RAND Project AIR FORCE
SLBM	sea-launched ballistic missile
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WMD	weapons of mass destruction

Introduction

Study Objectives and Scope

The challenges facing the United States in the new strategic environment have been a matter of debate and analysis for many years. How to respond to Iran's nuclear program has been at center stage. What has been missing is a systematic way of thinking through the complex issues and potential policies available to U.S. decisionmakers to achieve the multiple goals of *dissuading* Iran from developing nuclear weapons; *deterring* Iran from using its nuclear weapons, if it were to acquire them; and *reassuring* U.S. regional partners with respect to the credibility of the U.S. approach to deterring Iran's use of nuclear weapons against them. This monograph takes up the challenge of filling this gap.

Future U.S. policies will understandably emerge through complex U.S. political and bureaucratic decisionmaking processes, and the actions of other countries will place constraints on what the United States will be able to do. But the United States will have critical policy choices, and it is these choices that this monograph seeks to illuminate. Given the critical role that Air Force conventional and nuclear capabilities will play in implementing these policies, we assess both its contributions and ways in which it can prepare for the future.

There are a number of potential policies and issues related to Iran's future nuclear program that this study did not address. The first is how the United States might undertake, through covert operations or the use of its military forces, an effort to deny Iran a nuclear weapon capability. Another is how the United States could seek to deter Iran's use

of conventional military forces against the United States or its regional partners. The study also did not address the policies available to the United States to deter Iran from transferring its nuclear technology to its allies. Each of these deserves attention but would call for a different set of policies and potential military capabilities than those discussed here.

Analysis Framework for the New Strategic Environment

We employed a four-step analytical framework developed for the new strategic environment (see Figure 1.1). The first step, a regional analysis, provided the foundation for defining U.S. nuclear dissuasion, deterrence, and reassurance goals and the "setting" for addressing critical policy choices (step 3). The step in between (step 2) involved identifying the range of different "ways" available to the United States to achieve these goals; for each of these ways, we assessed prospects for success. In the final step, we described Air Force contributions to implementing future U.S. policies and identified insights for future Air Force planning.

Step 1: Conduct Regional Analyses

We described Iranian national security interests and Iran's military strategy, doctrine, and posture. Then, we focused on U.S. partners in the Middle East (Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC] states and Israel);

Figure 1.1
Analysis Framework for the New Strategic Environment

Step 1: Conduct regional analyses	Step 2: Define ways to achieve U.S. goals for nuclear dissuasion, deterrence, and reassurance	Step 3: Define and assess critical U.S. policy choices	Step 4: Describe U.S. Air Force contributions

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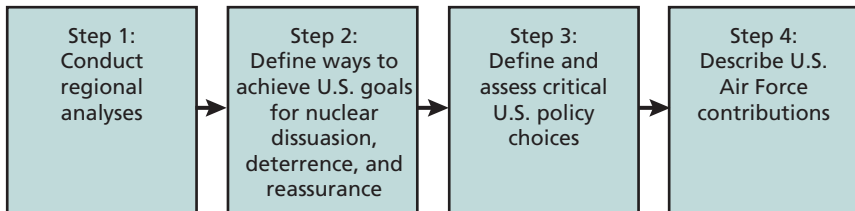
we defined their views of Iran, their internal and regional situations, and then their relations with the United States. From this analysis, we defined U.S. nuclear dissuasion, deterrence, and reassurance goals.

Step 2: Define Ways to Achieve U.S. Goals for Nuclear Dissuasion, Deterrence, and Reassurance

We defined what we meant by dissuasion, deterrence, and reassurance. A dissuasion strategy depends on the ability to influence the calculations of costs and benefits on the part of the other party and has two potential components that can be applied singularly or at the same time: raising the potential costs of acting and providing incentives for not acting. While military forces play an important role in a dissuasion strategy, such a strategy would seek to convey more broadly that a party would not profit from a given course of action.[1] Political, economic, and military activities are available as ways to support a dissuasion strategy. On the cost side, such ways include export controls, economic sanctions, and demonstrations of military capabilities; on the benefits side, such ways include offers of political and security dialogues and steps to relax economic and military pressures.

Like dissuasion, deterrence depends on the ability to influence the calculations of costs and gains on the part of the other party. This can be achieved by constructing a system of costs (through pain or penalty), displaying prospective costs through the demonstration of capabilities and the general will to use them, or by reducing prospective benefits.[2] Available to the United States to construct a system of costs are U.S. nuclear and conventional military forces, which can be displayed through regional exercises and deployments; available to the United States to reduce prospective benefits are surveillance systems, precision-strike conventional forces, and missile defenses.

A reassurance strategy calls for finding ways for U.S. partners to gain confidence that U.S. obligations (declaratory statements) backed

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[1] For a discussion of the concept of dissuasion supporting such a definition, see Michael Quinlan, *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons: Principles, Problems, Prospects*, Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 19.

[2] Quinlan, 2009, p. 23.

by U.S. military forces serve to ensure their security by deterring attacks on them. Key, then, will be these countries' views and how they judge the credibility of a U.S. approach to deterring attacks on them. Available to the United States for reassurance are political guarantees, security cooperation, and regional military activities.

For each of the ways identified to implement U.S. nuclear dissuasion, deterrence, and reassurance goals, we assessed the prospect of success.

Step 3: Define and Assess Critical U.S. Policy Choices

Based on these analyses, we defined the critical policy choices that the United States will confront in achieving its nuclear dissuasion, deterrence, and reassurance goals. Given that success depends importantly on whether and how the United States can influence Iran, we went on to define three overall, integrated approaches based on different perspectives on how to influence Iran's calculations of costs and benefits. We then assessed these overall, integrated approaches in terms of their prospects for affecting the internal Iranian debate on the future of its nuclear program, for gaining the support of U.S. regional partners, and for achieving U.S. goals.

Step 4: Describe U.S. Air Force Contributions

The policies defined in step 3 involve a number of different military tasks. Policy choices still need to be made, and the Air Force will contribute to all of them. Thus, the final step in our analytical framework involved suggesting how the Air Force could prepare.

How Our Analytical Approach Differs from Others

While Iran's nuclear program and its implications for U.S. policy have generated a great deal of research and commentary, the analytical approach used here is distinguished in a number of ways. The approach is systematic and transparent, capable of being adapted should the environment or assumptions change. The approach builds on an analysis of the regional setting—that is, the motivations behind Iran's nuclear

program, Iran's view of its own threat environment, and the factional debates inside Iran that will inform its decisions regarding its future nuclear posture. That regional analysis also extends to U.S. partners in the region, which are analyzed in terms of how they view the threat posed by Iran, their confidence in U.S. commitments to their defense, and the constraints imposed by their domestic politics on the reassurance policies that they may seek from the United States. The approach focuses on concrete policies, not abstract theories. In contrast to studies that do not differentiate between or clearly define U.S. nuclear dissuasion, deterrence, and reassurance goals, this approach systematically treats each of these areas to draw out tensions between the various goals and the choices that policymakers will face in prioritizing among them. This approach also has particular utility for the Air Force in that it offers an appreciation of the contributions that the Air Force can make and insights for its future planning. Finally, unlike studies that are prescriptive or that presuppose what "ought" or "should" be U.S. policy,[3] this approach does not proscribe policy choices but rather puts forth considerations for designing a strategy to achieve future U.S. nuclear dissuasion and deterrence goals vis-à-vis Iran and for reassuring U.S. regional partners.

Organization of This Monograph

Achieving U.S. goals with respect to Iran's future nuclear program will require influencing Iran, and so Chapter Two provides background for

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[3]   Clark A. Murdock, Jessica M. Yeats, Linton F. Brooks, M. Elain Bunn, Franklin C. Miller, and James L. Schoff, *Exploring the Nuclear Posture Implications of Extended Deterrence and Assurance: Workshop Proceedings and Key Takeaways*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 2009; Elbridge Colby, "Extended Deterrence in the Middle East: Possibilities for Deterring a Nuclear Iran, Assuring Allies, and Stemming Proliferation," in Taylor Bolz, ed., *In the Eyes of the Experts: Analysis and Comments on America's Strategic Posture*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace, 2009; James M. Lindsay and Ray Takeyh, "After Iran Gets the Bomb: Containment and Its Complications," *Foreign Affairs*, March–April 2010; Eric S. Edelman, Andrew F. Krepinevich, and Evan Braden Montgomery, "The Dangers of a Nuclear Iran: The Limits of Containment," *Foreign Affairs*, January–February 2011.

how that might be accomplished. Chapter Three defines the Iranian actions that the United States wishes to dissuade and outlines the critical U.S. policy choices. Chapter Four focuses on deterring a nuclear-armed Iran. First, it sets the stage by describing the paths to a potential U.S.-Iran nuclear conflict and then defines the different approaches available to deter Iranian use of nuclear weapons against U.S. military forces and partners in the region. Because the United States also needs to find ways for its partners to have confidence that the obligations backed by U.S. military forces serve to deter Iranian nuclear attacks on them, Chapter Five addresses the reassurance policies available to the United States and the prospects that Israel and the GCC states would seek them. Chapter Six returns to the U.S. need to be able to influence Iran and defines and evaluates three overall, integrated approaches based on different perspectives on how to affect Iran's calculations of costs and benefits. And finally, because the Air Force will be called on to implement whatever policies are ultimately chosen, Chapter Seven concludes by pulling together the menu of potential military tasks and then suggests ways in which the Air Force could prepare.

The monograph includes two appendixes that supplement the regional analyses on reassurance in Chapter Five. Appendix A focuses on the GCC states, and Appendix B focuses on Israel.

Influencing Iran

Critical to achieving future U.S. goals with respect to the evolution of Iran's nuclear program will be finding ways to influence Iran's decisions. This chapter provides background on how this might be accomplished by describing Iran's national security interests, assessing whether it can be expected to act rationally, outlining the current situation and uncertainties with respect to Iran's future nuclear program, and describing the ongoing internal debate.

Iran's National Security Interests

While there is uncertainty surrounding how Iran may evolve politically in the near to medium term, Iran's overall national security interests are broadly supported by the political elite and a large section of the population. These interests involve ensuring the survival of the current regime by deterring a U.S. invasion of Iran, protecting the homeland against all external threats (potentially by neutralizing U.S. conventional military superiority), and maintaining and expanding Iran's influence and power in the Middle East and beyond.

Ensuring Regime Survival

Iran's national security strategy is based on ensuring the survival of the regime under the *velayat-e faghih* (rule of the supreme jurisprudent), the leadership of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and, increasingly, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. Iran's sense of threat was particularly heightened after the U.S. invasions of Afghani-

stan and Iraq and the overthrow of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, after which Iran's leadership felt that its Islamic regime was in grave danger and that the United States would use Iraq as a base to invade Iran and overthrow the Islamic Republic.[1] Since the Iraq War, Iran sees its position in the region as strengthened, however.[2]

Iran's leaders are also concerned about the United States using Iran's domestic opposition to destabilize the regime.[3] Supreme Leader Khamenei, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and the top echelon of the Revolutionary Guards appear to view the June 2009 Iranian presidential election and the ensuing mass protests as part of a "velvet revolution" (*enghelab e makhmali*) sponsored by the United States.[4] Iran's leadership, especially conservatives and fundamentalists who have come to increasingly dominate politics, thus believe that the threat from the United States is multidimensional, with the United States exerting political, military, economic, cultural, and ideological levers of power to challenge Iran.[5]

In addition to what Iran perceives as U.S. sponsorship of Iranian opposition groups, the regime sees Saudi Arabia as another state fan-

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[1] David E. Thaler, Alireza Nader, Shahram Chubin, Jerrold D. Green, Charlotte Lynch, and Frederic Wehrey, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-878-OSD, 2010.

[2] See Frederic Wehrey, Dalia Dassa Kaye, Jessica Watkins, Jeffrey Martini, and Robert A. Guffey, *The Iraq Effect: The Middle East After the Iraq War*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-892-AF, 2010.

[3] "Leader Calls US, Zionists Iran's Worst Enemies," Fars News Agency, January 26, 2010.

[4] Radio Zamaneh, "Iran Intelligence Minister 'Identifies' 80 Dissident Groups," December 23, 2009.

[5] Kazem Jalali, spokesman of the Parliament's National Security Committee, reflected on Iranian elite attitudes toward the United States in this statement:

> The Americans are seeking various degrees of power, and it would be naïve to think that the President of the United States wants to change this order. . . . The Americans do not desire relations with Iran, but they want to negotiate with Iran. . . . During the past year, we have seen no fundamental change but in the tone of the words of the United States. . . . The behavior of this country is the same as during the Bush government. They still look upon Iran as [part of] an Axis of Evil, and they have only changed their language. We think our administration should act in a more precise manner. ("Interview with Kazem Jalali," in Persian, *Abrar Newspaper* [Iran], November 24, 2009)

ning unrest inside the Islamic Republic. Specifically, Iran's most restive ethnic minorities (specifically, the Kurds and Baluchis) are Sunni, and the regime alleges that Saudi Arabia—the self-proclaimed leader of the Sunni Muslim World—supports Baluchi separatist groups that launch regular attacks on Iran's security forces.

Protecting the Homeland Against All External Threats

A second national security interest is the defense of the homeland against potential adversaries that have overwhelming conventional military superiority. In this regard, the United States is viewed as the primary—but not the only—security threat. Iran is also concerned about conventional and unconventional threats from neighboring countries, including a nuclear-armed Pakistan. Israel's overwhelming conventional and nuclear military capabilities are perceived to threaten not only the Iranian regime but also such critical Iranian allies as Syria and Hezbollah.[6]

Expanding Regional Influence

A third Iranian national security interest is to expand its regional influence and assert its perceived right to act as the dominant power in the Persian Gulf region, which is not unique to Iran under the Islamic Republic. Iran has long viewed itself as the region's "natural" and preeminent power and, since the Islamic Revolution, a resister of Western and, more specifically, U.S. "imperialism."[7] This involves increasing military support for its allies in the region, especially Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria, and, increasingly, Iraq. Iran sees not only Israel but also Sunni Arab states (such as Egypt) and Turkey and Pakistan as geopolitical rivals.

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[6]   Iran does not view the elimination of Israel as a fundamental foreign policy goal, despite the regime's harsh rhetoric. Iran's leaders do view Israel as an ideological and geopolitical threat, but they do not view Israel as posing the same level of threat as the United States.

[7]   Iran's strategic culture is based on the perception of itself as a great historical power. This view dates to the founding of the Persian Empire in 550 BC. Iran's modern rulers, from the last shah to Ayatollah Khamenei, have viewed Iran as the "natural" power of the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East.

These national security interests are unlikely to change in the years ahead. Arguably, nuclear weapons could be viewed as serving these interests by deterring a U.S. invasion of Iran, neutralizing U.S. conventional military superiority, and expanding Iran's influence and power in the region. Thus, U.S. decisionmakers face the challenge of finding ways to influence the Iranian leadership in how it pursues these interests and, more specifically, how it views the costs and benefits of acquiring nuclear weapons.

Can Iran Be Expected to Act Rationally?

Influencing Iran turns importantly on whether it can be expected to act rationally. There are those who maintain that Iran acts based on its Islamist ideology and that President Ahmadinejad's messianic views shape and inform Iranian foreign policy.[8] In our judgment, the Iranian leadership assesses costs and benefits in making foreign policy decisions and, therefore, can be expected to act rationally in the future. That judgment is informed by an analysis of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy over the past 30 years, which, although often articulated in revolutionary or ideological terms, can be understood through the lens of Iran's interests in regime survival, maintaining territorial sovereignty, and expanding its regional influence.[9]

Iran's foreign policy was most ideologically driven in the years immediately following the revolution and was manifested in efforts to "export" the Islamic Revolution to other regional countries. However, Iran's costly war with Iraq and its increasing international isolation led it to pursue more pragmatic foreign policies after the death of Ayatol-

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[8]   Michael Rubin, "Can a Nuclear Iran Be Contained or Deterred?" Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Middle Eastern Outlook No. 8, November 2008; Mehdi Khalaji, *Apocalyptic Politics: On the Rationality of Iranian Policy*, Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus No. 79, January 2008; Amitai Etzioni, "Can a Nuclear-Armed Iran Be Deterred?" *Military Review*, May–June 2010.

[9]   For a discussion of these views, see Barry R. Posen, *A Nuclear-Armed Iran: A Difficult but Not Impossible Policy Problem*, New York: The Century Foundation, 2006.

lah Khomeini in 1989. Iran moderated its foreign policy to serve the interests of those seeking to implement political, economic, and social reforms. The break was not entirely clean, given that Iran continued to support international terrorism, for example. But under the presidencies of Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989–1995) and Mohammad Khatami (1995–2005), Iran improved relations with neighboring countries. Under Khatami, Iran followed a policy of rapprochement with the GCC states and even cooperated with the United States in establishing the Afghan government in 2001.

Iran's foreign policy under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (in office since 2005) has been more radical than that under his predecessors, although this reflects both Iran's increasing vulnerability (U.S. military deployments on both its eastern and western flanks) and the need to focus on external enemies to compensate for the regime's weak domestic political legitimacy. The government's foreign policies are meant to pursue the interest of regime survival above all else.

Perceptions of its vulnerability and military inferiority lie behind its training and funding of "proxy" groups in the Arab world and beyond. Such efforts can be seen as low-cost means for Iran to project its influence in these areas while maintaining enough plausible deniability to avoid being the target of a military response. Similarly, Iran's forgoing of significant investment in air force capabilities reflects a logical calculation that it cannot catch up to its potential adversaries (e.g., the United States and Israel) in this realm and will gain more deterrence and coercive leverage by building its missile program and, possibly, a nuclear weapon capability.

That Iran's behavior in the past three decades has been characterized by relatively careful calculations of costs and benefits does not mean that its understanding conforms to Western assessments. And Iran's policies emerge through a political process that involves some internal debate and likely depends on imperfect information. This problem is exacerbated by the limited channels for communication between Iran on the one hand and the United States and Israel on the other. However Iran's foreign policies may appear to those outside Iran, calculations of costs and benefits drive key Iranian foreign policy decisions.

Iran's Nuclear Program: Prospects and Uncertainties

Iran's civilian nuclear program is broadly supported across the Iranian government and military and among the population. At the same time, acquiring a nuclear weapon capability is rarely explicitly advocated by Iranian officials or others; in fact, nuclear weapons are regularly denounced as counterproductive and anti-Islamic.[10]

Iran's nuclear infrastructure (an underground enrichment facility at Natanz, the uranium conversion plant in Esfahan, the Bushehr nuclear power plant, the heavy-water plutonium production plant in Arak, and the enrichment facility in Qom, situated inside a mountain base operated by the Revolutionary Guards) all suggest that the Iranian leadership is pursuing a nuclear capability that could lead to the production of operational nuclear weapons. There are strong doubts that Iran's enrichment activities serve purely civilian purposes, as the regime claims, given the secretive nature of its nuclear program and reported nuclear warhead research.[11]

According to James R. Clapper, Director of National Intelligence,

> Iran's technical advancement, particularly in uranium enrichment, strengthens our assessment that Iran has the scientific, technical, and industrial capacity to eventually produce nuclear weapons, making the central issue its political will to do so. These advancements contribute to our judgment that Iran is techni-

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[10] In a supposed fatwa (religious ruling), Ayatollah Khamenei has ruled that nuclear weapons are against Islamic laws and are therefore unobtainable. (Khamenei's fatwa has never been published and, if it exists, may be subsequently voided because of the concept of *maslahat e nezam*, expediency of the system.) See Robert Collier, "Nuclear Weapons Unholy, Iran Says," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 31, 2003.

[11] Institute for Science and International Security, *Farsi and English Versions of Document on Neutron Initiator*, Washington, D.C., December 14, 2009. Iran has claimed that it seeks to enrich uranium for civilian purposes, including supplying fuel for Tehran's medical reactor. However, only France and Argentina are believed to have the capability to use enriched uranium to create fuel rods for the medical reactor. See Voice of America, "IAEA Fears Iran Working Now on Nuclear Warhead," February 18, 2009.

cally capable of producing enough highly enriched uranium for a weapon in the next few years, if it chooses to do so.[12]

At the same time, it is not clear that Iran has made the decision to create actual nuclear weapons, and three future nuclear postures are possible: (1) Iran could achieve a "virtual capability" by developing the know-how and infrastructure to assemble a nuclear weapon but stopping there, (2) it could develop nuclear weapons but leave this capability ambiguous, or (3) it could acquire nuclear weapons and declare their existence through withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or by conducting a nuclear test.

A virtual or ambiguous nuclear capability could be attractive to Iran as a way of avoiding expanded international economic sanctions and isolation. Moreover, Iran does not want to jeopardize its partnership with Russia and China or provide a pretext for the GCC states, especially Saudi Arabia, to acquire a nuclear weapon capability of their own.[13] Iran's attempts to assemble or test nuclear weapons may invite not only international opprobrium but also U.S. or Israeli strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities.

Iran's approach to its nuclear program has consistently supported its overall strategy: to delay punitive measures like sanctions by engaging with international organizations—i.e., the United Nations (UN) and IAEA—while progressing unhindered with its nuclear pro-

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[12] James R. Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, *Statement for the Record on the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence*, Washington, D.C., February 16, 2011, p. 4. Clapper described Iran's capabilities, as reported by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), as increasing from

> about 3,000 centrifuges in late 2007 to over 8,000 currently installed. At the same time, the number of operating centrifuges that are enriching uranium has grown at a much slower pace from about 3,000 centrifuges in late 2007 to about 4,800 in late 2010. Iran has used these centrifuges to produce more than 3,000 kilograms of low enriched uranium.

[13] For a comprehensive review of the Saudi-Iranian relationship, see Frederic Wehrey, Theodore W. Karasik, Alireza Nader, Jeremy J. Ghez, Lydia Hansell, and Robert A. Guffey, *Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam: Rivalry, Cooperation, and Implications for U.S. Policy*, Santa Monica, Calif: RAND Corporation, MG-840-SRF, 2009.

gram.[14] Hence, Iran is likely in the near to medium term to strive to stay within the bounds of international norms and laws established by the NPT while continuing with uranium enrichment and warhead experimentation.[15]

Internal Debate on the Future of Iran's Nuclear Program

In the coming years, Iran's decisions concerning the future of its nuclear program will be shaped primarily by its perception of its external environment (the threat to Iran and the value placed on nuclear weapons as a deterrent) and the role of nuclear weapons in furthering its broader national security interests. In addition, domestic politics could play a role. Differences among the factions with respect to the potential costs and gains of developing nuclear weapons could provide the United States with a potential lever of influence.

Reformist political factions led by former President Mohammad Khatami, former Prime Minister Mir Hussein Mousavi, and former speaker of Parliament Mehdi Karroubi, the leaders of the opposition Green Movement, broadly accept the need for a civilian nuclear program and, perhaps, a military program as well. However, they have been more cautious in their nuclear policies vis-à-vis the international community, believing that Iran must pursue political and economic reforms to survive and that its nuclear program puts the country on a dangerous course, particularly with the United States.

The nuclear program was revitalized after the end of the Iran-Iraq War and made substantial headway during Khatami's presidency (1997–2005), which was otherwise a time of relative moderation and

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[14] Iran's rejection of the "uranium swap" may have jeopardized its long-time negotiating strategy by uniting Russia and perhaps China behind the U.S. position.

[15] According to Supreme National Security Council deputy director Ali Baqeri, Iran's participation in the treaty "safeguards" its interests ("Membership in NPT Safeguards Iran's Interests," *Tehran Times*, December 2, 2009). See also the statement by Ali Larijani that Iran is seeking a nuclear capability like that of Japan, which has "nuclear technology but does not possess any nuclear weapons," in "Iran's Nuclear Program Will Follow Japanese Model: Larijani," Mehr News Agency, February 25, 2010.

pragmatism in Iranian foreign policy. Khatami pursued a policy of engagement with the IAEA and the European Union (EU) to reach a compromise on the nuclear program. Iran even briefly suspended its enrichment of uranium in 2003 as a compromise gesture. Khatami's policy did not lead to a cessation of the nuclear program as a whole, but it did open a window of opportunity for Iran and the international community to solve the nuclear impasse. It also facilitated Khatami's efforts to lessen Iran's isolation and improve ties with important regional states, such as Saudi Arabia, and with European powers, such as France and Germany. Consequently, Iran was able to attract greater foreign trade and investment.

Today, Karroubi and Mousavi are also amenable to a more "moderate" nuclear policy, as evidenced by their foreign policy stances in the 2009 presidential election.[16] The Green Movement is in many ways a byproduct of the Islamic Revolution and represents reformist trends within the Islamic Republic. Hence, even a victorious Green Movement that manages to capture power within Iran will not necessarily stop Iran's nuclear program to the complete satisfaction of the United States. But the forces most supportive of the Green Movement—the Iranian middle and urban classes, students, technocrats, and the intelligentsia—are aware of the costs associated with Iran's increased diplomatic and economic isolation resulting from Iran's nuclear pursuits.

The Green Movement leadership may, however, recognize the utility of the nuclear program in providing a military deterrent and expanding the Islamic Republic's sense of prestige at home and abroad. The nuclear program existed during Mousavi's term as prime minister. However, the movement is also aware that developing nuclear weapons could lead to greater confrontation with the United States. The Green Movement and the reformists are thus more likely to support a virtual nuclear posture that provides Iran with a measure of protection and respect without leading to further economic isolation and perhaps military conflict with the United States or Israel. Hence, the Green Move-

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[16] Joe Klein and Nahid Siamdoust, "The Man Who Could Beat Ahmadinejad: Mousavi Talks to Time," *Time*, June 12, 2009.

ment is more likely to oppose the development of nuclear weapons and, especially, the further step of declaring that capability.

The Green Movement's views on the nuclear program are shared by pragmatic conservatives, such as former President Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani. Like the reformists, Rafsanjani favors economic reforms, including privatization and the attraction of foreign investment. Rafsanjani and his acolytes have been strong supporters of the nuclear program, yet they have been critical of the Ahmadinejad administration's nuclear policy.[17] Former national security adviser and pragmatic conservative Hassan Rouhani, responsible for Iran's freezing of uranium enrichment in 2003, has been particularly critical of Ahmadinejad. Nevertheless, pragmatic conservatives like Rafsanjani and Rouhani are likely to support some sort of nuclear weapon capability as a deterrent to an external invasion. However, they are less likely to support the declaration of a nuclear capability if it would further undermine the regime's ability to survive.

Iranian principlists, or fundamentalists, including Ahmadinejad and the top echelon of the Revolutionary Guards, have taken a more strident position on the nuclear program.[18] Ahmadinejad and the Guards' leadership appear to be less concerned about the diplomatic and economic costs of the nuclear program. The principlists, much like the reformists and pragmatic conservatives, appear to view the program as providing a potentially useful military deterrent.

However, the principlists also derive much greater political legitimacy from the nuclear program than do the Green Movement/reformists and the pragmatic conservatives, something that became clear during the 2009 presidential election. At that time, the legitimacy of the Ahmadinejad administration, and in fact the entire political system, was called into question by a broad section of the Iranian

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[17] "Iran Be Barname Solh Amiz Haste I Khod Edame Khahad Daad" ["Iran Will Continue Its Peaceful Nuclear Program"], Fars News Agency, December 16, 2008. Rafsanjani's resignation from the Assembly of Experts in March 2011, most likely due to pressure from the principlists, may make him a less powerful player in Iranian politics for the foreseeable future.

[18] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Ahmadinejad Compares Iran's Nuclear Program to Train with 'No Breaks,'" February 25, 2007.

population. Furthermore, Ahmadinejad's performance on economic and foreign policy issues was roundly criticized by the political class, including reformists, pragmatic conservatives, and even prominent principlists, such as parliamentary speaker Ali Larijani. Thus, Ahmadinejad and the principlist leadership are less likely to compromise on the nuclear program, because they are likely to believe that concessions to the United States could lead to a further loss of legitimacy.

It is also unlikely that the top echelon of the Revolutionary Guards will follow a more "moderate" nuclear policy. The Guards' control of the economy and national security decisionmaking has made it the dominant powerbroker in Iranian politics. The Guards, widely believed to control the military aspects of the nuclear program, have a vested interest in seeing the nuclear program come to fruition. It must be noted that the Guards are themselves a divided force, with some elements supporting the reformists and some supporting the pragmatic conservatives; even some principlists within the Guards may oppose Ahmadinejad and his policies. Nevertheless, the Guards remain controlled by principlists who view the nuclear program as strengthening the regime in the face of internal and external opposition. Hence, the Guards' view of the nuclear program is shaped not only by its value as a military deterrent and source of regional and international prestige but also by its utility as a source of ideological and political legitimacy. The principlists and the Revolutionary Guards are less likely to support a virtual nuclear program that does not enhance Iran's military and diplomatic power and their own domestic political position. Thus, they are more likely to support a decision to acquire nuclear weapons and to declare that capability for military and political purposes.

However, the ultimate decision rests with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. It is not certain whether Khamenei favors developing nuclear weapons in the *near future*, but he has been more supportive of Ahmadinejad's nuclear policy than those of his predecessors, including Khatami. In addition, Khamenei has become increasingly beholden to the Revolutionary Guards to maintain his authority. Hence, his views on the nuclear program are more likely to be shaped by hardline principlists in the political and military establishment. In addition, Khamenei is relying on the program's advancement, and Iran's defiance

of the United States, to burnish his own ideological and nationalist credentials.

Thus, it is possible that the Iranian regime could move to develop nuclear weapons if its stability is seriously undermined by the domestic opposition. Such a step could be claimed as a "victory" for the Iranian government, and a nuclear-armed regime could serve as a rallying point for Iran's nationalistic population. However, this could also lead to greater international isolation.

In sum, there are many uncertainties with respect to the outcome of the factional debate over the future of Iran's nuclear program, but it could provide an opportunity for the United States to influence Iran's future decisions.

Dissuading Iran from Nuclear Weaponization

This chapter defines the Iranian actions that the United States wishes to dissuade, describes the components of a dissuasion strategy, outlines current U.S. policies toward Iran's nuclear program, and concludes with an assessment of the critical U.S. policy choices.

Iranian Actions That the United States Wishes to Dissuade

Given the state of Iran's nuclear program, it is clear that Iran today has largely acquired the materials, equipment, and technology needed to develop a nuclear weapon. International efforts to control exports and interdict trade can now only hope to slow Iran's progress and possibly deny it the specific technologies needed, for example, for nuclear warhead miniaturization and for mating a warhead on a missile.

Thus, the Iranian action that the United States will wish to dissuade in the future will be nuclear weaponization. For the purposes of this study, we chose to define nuclear weaponization as the confirmed ability to produce an operational nuclear warhead. Whether Iran has actually taken the political decision to develop nuclear warheads is a matter of considerable uncertainty.[1] Even if it does produce such a weapon, the regime will still need to decide whether to declare its exis-

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[1] According to James R. Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, in his February 2011 testimony, "We continue to assess Iran is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons in part by developing various nuclear capabilities that better position it to produce such

tence or leave its nuclear capabilities ambiguous. Given this, there is an opportunity for the United States and the international community to seek to dissuade Iran from nuclear weaponization and declaring the existence of a nuclear weapon capability through a nuclear test or withdrawal from the NPT.

A dissuasion strategy depends on the ability to influence the calculations of costs and benefits on the part of the other party and has two potential components that can be applied singularly or at the same time: raising the potential costs of acting and providing incentives for not acting. While military forces play an important role in a dissuasion strategy, such a strategy would seek to convey more broadly that a party would not profit from a given course of action.[2]

Current U.S. Policies Toward Iran's Nuclear Program

Today, the United States employs policies aimed at both raising the costs to Iran of pursuing its nuclear program and offering incentives for forgoing the development of nuclear weapons. The United States seeks to isolate Iran and raise the costs to Iran through economic sanctions that are both broadly based, involving government restrictions on the import and export of goods and services, and targeted at specific sectors, persons, and groups. The United States also has conventional military capabilities deployed in the region that demonstrate its potential ability to inflict costs on Iran should it pursue a nuclear weapon capability.

At the same time, the United States has taken some preliminary steps to engage Iran, most recently reflected in negotiations over swapping nuclear materials. Begun in 2009, these negotiations have not

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weapons, should it choose to do so. We do not know, however, if Iran will eventually decide to build nuclear weapons."

[2] For a discussion of the concept of dissuasion supporting such a definition, see Quinlan, 2009, p. 19.

succeeded, and Iran's continuing uranium enrichment dims future prospects.[3]

In the 2010 U.S. Department of Defense *Nuclear Posture Review Report* (NPR), the United States announced a revision in its negative security assurance, presenting Iran with both a threat and an opportunity with respect to its nuclear program. The United States declared that it "will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against nonnuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations." According to the NPR, "This revised assurance is intended to underscore the security benefits of adhering to and fully complying with the NPT."[4] Because Iran is judged by the United States to be in violation of the NPT, the United States implicitly retained for itself the right to use its nuclear weapons against Iran. Iran's compliance with the NPT would remove this U.S. nuclear threat and thus provide a potential incentive for Iran to forgo developing nuclear weapons. The NPR elicited strong negative reactions from the Iranian leadership, which emphasized the threat posed by the United States rather than the incentive.[5]

Critical U.S. Policy Choices

What are the policy choices available to U.S. decisionmakers to dissuade Iran from nuclear weaponization in the future?

Raise Costs

In theory, there are two broad approaches to raising the costs to Iran of nuclear weaponization. The first involves economic sanctions and depends on finding ways to ensure that Iran will pay a price for its

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[3] These negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 (the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) have sought to have Iran ship out enriched uranium to be made into fuel rods for a small reactor that produces medical isotopes and is running out of fuel.

[4] U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, Washington, D.C., April 2010b, p. viii.

[5] "Larijani: US Nuclear Policy Bellicose," Iranian Students News Agency, April 12, 2010.

actions. The second involves military steps to demonstrate to Iran that it is not going to improve its situation, or reduce its vulnerabilities, through its actions. For each, we describe the policy choices and consider how they may affect Iran's perceptions of the external environment (and motivations for acquiring nuclear weapons) and the internal political debate over the future of its nuclear program.

Pay a Price: Economic Sanctions. For more than 30 years, the United States has used economic sanctions against Iran to different ends, including undermining domestic support for the Islamic regime and, more recently, imposing costs on Iran for pursing its nuclear program. These sanctions have resulted in the flight of domestic and foreign capital from Iran and have isolated Iran economically and politically. But the regime has survived and, indeed, remains defiant toward the international community. Iran has also been able to make substantial progress in its nuclear program.[6]

A variety of sanctions are in place today. Many are focused on preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear and missile materials and technology. Others aim to make Iran pay a price for pursuing its nuclear-related activities, and these sanctions are focused on reducing economic investment and trade with Iran, with the United States specifically targeting the energy sector. More recently, sanctions have been targeted toward officials in the regime, specifically the top echelons of the Revolutionary Guards. These sanctions involve specific requirements (e.g., a freeze on certain Iranian assets) and general calls for "vigilance" and "restraint." The sanctions are international in scope, imposed by the UN Security Council, and unilateral on the part of the United States, the EU, and others. Congress has also recently passed the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act, which punishes international firms that invest in Iran's energy sector or provide Iran with refined fuel products. See Table 3.1 for a description of current economic sanctions on Iran.

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[6]   For a discussion of economic sanctions and their role in influencing Iran, see Suzanne Maloney, *The Economics of Influencing Iran*, Washington, D.C.: Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institution, Middle East Memo No. 16, March 2010; Meghan L. O'Sullivan, "Iran and the Great Sanctions Debate," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 4, October 2010.

Table 3.1
Current Economic Sanctions on Iran

Sanctions	United Nations	United States
Counter–nuclear weapons	Prohibit the transfer of nuclear, missile, and dual-use items (UNSCR 1737) Prevent provision of financial services that contribute to Iran's proliferation-sensitive activities (UNSCR 1929) Vigilance in transactions involving Iranian shipping lines (UNSCR 1929)	Sanctions on companies and individuals selling WMD technology (Intelligence Services Act of 1996) Prevents supply of advanced technology to Iran (Executive Order 13382) Sanctions on foreign individuals and corporations that assist Iran's WMD program (Public Law 106-178) Opposes U.S. nuclear agreements with countries supplying nuclear technology to Iran (Public Law 109-293)
Broad-based energy		Restricts international energy investment in Iran (Intelligence Services Act of 1996) Bars sale of refined gasoline, shipping insurance or other services to deliver gasoline, or supplying equipment to Iran or performing construction on its oil refineries (Comprehensive Iran Sanctions Act of 2010)
Broad-based financial	Restraint in international lending (UNSCR 1747) Vigilance in transactions involving Iranian Central Bank (UNSCR 1803) Vigilance with respect to foreign activities of all Iranian banks (UNSCR 1803)	Bans U.S. trade and investment in Iran (EO 12959) Bars banks from handling any indirect transactions (2006 U.S. Treasury Department restriction) Bans on foreign aid and a vote against international loans (based on Iran's designation as a sponsor of terrorism)
Targeting Revolutionary Guards	Freeze assets of 40 named Iranian persons and entities (UNSCRs 1737, 1747, and 1803) Restraint with respect to travel of 35 named Iranians and ban on travel of 5 others (UNSCRs 1737, 1747, and 1803) Freeze assets of 41 additional Iranian firms, including 15 linked to Islamic Revolutionary Guards (UNSCR 1929)	Sanctions Iranian officials who are human rights abusers (Comprehensive Iran Sanctions Act of 2010)

NOTE: UNSCR = UN Security Council resolution. WMD = weapons of mass destruction.

The content of the UN sanctions represents what is politically acceptable to members of the UN Security Council. Most of the sanctions had already been designated by the United States or the EU, but gaining UN support has meant wider implementation.[7] The UN has set up a multilateral body to assist states in implementing their financial obligations under the two previous UN resolutions and has named Iran to its blacklist. But the UN has no enforcement mechanism, and the United States is limited in its ability to impose costs on individuals or companies outside the United States.

As a result, many nations continue major trade with and investment in Iran. Since 2008, trade between the 27 EU member countries and Iran has decreased by nearly 30 percent, but it still totaled almost 19 billion euros in 2009.[8] European banks and companies have largely been vigilant in doing business with Iranian banks, and indications are that Japanese and even some Chinese banks have taken steps in cutting off relations. But Iranian banks still maintain ties to a variety of banks in China, Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Bahrain. Moreover, countries continue to invest in Iran's energy sector, including such major powers as China.[9] Iran has also reduced its dependence on foreign imports of refined oil products and built up its oil reserves through purchases from India, Turkmenistan, and the Netherlands.[10]

Supporters of economic sanctions focus on their value in demonstrating international opposition to Iran's actions with respect to its nuclear activities. While sanctions raise the costs to the regime,

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[7] See Matthew Levitt, "Why the Iran Sanctions Matter," *Foreign Policy*, June 11, 2010a, for a description of the UN sanctions and their likely effect.

[8] European Commission, "Iran: E.U. Bilateral Trade and Trade with the World," July 19, 2010.

[9] Danielle Pletka, "The Right Sanctions Can Still Stop Iran," *Wall Street Journal*, December 10, 2009; Derek Scissors, *China Global Investment Tracker: 2011*, Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, January 10, 2011.

[10] Thomas Erdbrink and Colum Lynch, "Iran Is Prepared for Fuel Sanctions," *Washington Post*, June 24, 2010.

few argue that they are likely to stop Iran from pursuing its nuclear program.[11]

To achieve the U.S. dissuasion goal of preventing nuclear weaponization, the policy choice for the United States is whether to keep pressure on the regime through broad economic sanctions that reinforce the costs of Iran's nuclear program *or* to refine the approach to sanctions with the goal of affecting the internal political debate, in which different factions hold different views.

The case for keeping up the economic pressure is that these measures can inflict costs, impede progress, and buy time over the long run for fundamental political change. Facing significant budget shortfalls, the Ahmadinejad administration is in the process of enacting major subsidy cuts, potentially leading to greater domestic unrest and political opposition.[12] Now that UNSCR 1929 and the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act have been passed, the focus in this policy choice would be to seek to close loopholes and better implement the existing sanctions.[13]

The case for refining the approach to economic sanctions is that sanctions arguably hurt those reformist and pragmatic conservative factions that may support moving to only a virtual or ambiguous nuclear capability. At the same time, sanctions aid the principlists who benefit from Iran's increasing diplomatic and economic isolation. For example, the Revolutionary Guards have taken advantage of Iran's isolated and monopolistic business environment to become the country's most powerful economic actor. Any sanctions regime can also be used by hardliners to rally public support. Moreover, broader economic sanctions create frictions with other countries, such as Russia and China, whose support the United States needs if sanctions are to be effective.

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[11] Jim Lobe, "Iran: Sanctions' Effectiveness Widely Questioned," Inter Press Service, June 9, 2010.

[12] Radio Zamaneh, "Ahmadinejad's Subsidy Cuts Divides [sic] Iranian Parliament," April 4, 2010.

[13] Matthew Levitt, "Giving Teeth to the Iran Sanctions: Targeting Re-Export Loopholes," Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch No. 1674, June 25, 2010b.

Thus, another approach to economic sanctions could be to target the banks and businesses of the Revolutionary Guards, thereby raising costs to them and possibly insulating the Iranian population from increased economic pressure. This approach would build on the existing sanctions against the Revolutionary Guards and expand them to include a ban on all export financing to these entities.

While promising in theory, targeted sanctions are difficult to implement because they depend on knowledge of the precise sources of revenue of each of the different Iranian political factions. Moreover, such sanctions may not apply enough pressure against such key actors as Khamenei and top Revolutionary Guards commanders, because they can shift their investments elsewhere.

Deny Gains: Military Pressure. The United States, by more visibly demonstrating its military capabilities in the region, could seek to communicate to Iran the prospect that its investment in the nuclear program would not enhance its security and could increase the risks to the regime, notwithstanding the uncertainties associated with the United States being able to destroy Iran's nuclear infrastructure. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has implied such an outcome in such statements as "It is not in Iran's interest to have a nuclear arms race in the Gulf where they would be less secure than they are today."[14]

Beyond public statements, the United States could expand its deployments of conventional forces, especially naval and air assets, as well as its exercises of longer-range precision-strike systems in the region. The United States could also demonstrate its military capabilities to signal to Iran the potential vulnerability of underground nuclear facilities, for example, by training for conventional strikes; flying intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance sorties to gather information

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[14] Hilary Clinton, U.S. Secretary of State, transcript of interview with Charlie Rose, June 30, 2010. In another interview, Secretary Clinton stated,

> We want Iran to calculate what I think is a fair assessment, that if the US extends a defense umbrella to the region, if we do even more to support the military capacity of those in the Gulf, it's unlikely that Iran will be any stronger or safer, because they won't be able to intimidate or dominate, as they apparently believe they can, once they have a nuclear weapon. (Julian Borger, "US Ready to Upgrade Defences of Gulf Allies if Iran Builds Nuclear Arms," *Guardian*, July 22, 2009)

on Iran's nuclear program; and publicizing its testing of its Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP) weapon.[15]

Nevertheless, expanded U.S. conventional activities could be counterproductive. The large U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf region appears to have heightened Iranian threat perceptions vis-à-vis the United States. Iran's political and military elite are wary of the U.S. military presence in Iraq, Afghanistan, and across the Persian Gulf region. This perception of threat may have contributed to Iran's increased efforts to shore up its nuclear program, which appear to have accelerated since 2003. Although the Iranian elite does not perceive an imminent U.S. military attack meant to overthrow the regime, it nevertheless views the United States as a long-term military threat to the Islamic Republic.

The Iranian government is aware of the United States' overwhelming nuclear capability, including the U.S. intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and sea-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). Greater psychological effect on Iranian political and military decisionmakers could possibly be achieved by U.S. movements and exercises of its nuclear-capable bombers and dual-capable fighter aircraft in the region to signal to Iran the potential costs of nuclear weaponization. Such activities could undermine the narrative of hard-liners and principlists that Iran's nuclear program increases its security. These activities could, however, have the effect of increasing Iran's sense of vulnerability and motivating Iran into accelerating its nuclear program. Such activities would also represent a departure from the Obama administration's goal of reducing U.S. reliance on nuclear weapons in its overall national security strategy and could be counterproductive with U.S. partners in the region who are anxious about aligning too closely with the United States.

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[15] The MOP is a non-nuclear 30,000-pound weapon designed to destroy deeply buried bunkers. The Air Force is testing and plans to deploy MOPs on either the B-52 or B-2 bomber. See Jim Wolf, "Pentagon Eyes Accelerated 'Bunker Buster' Bomb," Reuters, August 2, 2009.

Provide Incentives

To the extent that Iran's development of a nuclear weapon capability is motivated by its sense of vulnerability and fear for the survival of the regime, positive incentives could be used to dissuade Iran from nuclear weaponization.

The United States could reverse its past policies and undertake diplomatic actions to support the political legitimacy of the Iranian regime and take steps to integrate Iran into future Persian Gulf regional security activities. On the economic side, the United States could rescind specific economic sanctions (e.g., unfreezing Iranian financial assets held in the United States and the lifting restrictions on selling Iran spare parts for its civilian airplanes). The United States could refine its declaratory statements with respect to its intentions about the future of Iran's nuclear program and, indirectly, the regime by forgoing or eliminating the phrase "all options are on the table."[16] Such measures would aim to affect the Iranian regime's sense of threat and possibly serve to strengthen the position of reformists and pragmatic conservatives in the internal political debate.

However, dialogue and engagement with the current Iranian regime have been largely unsuccessful in the past. The Islamic Republic derives domestic legitimacy, in part, from its opposition to U.S. "hegemony." Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei has been among the most vocal opponents of engagement or cooperation with the United States. In addition, the Revolutionary Guards' principlist leadership is deeply suspicious of U.S. motivations and objectives with regard to the Islamic Republic. The June 2009 Iranian presidential election and the militarization of Iranian politics under the Revolutionary Guards have further complicated the U.S. engagement effort toward Iran as more moderate voices in the political system, such as Khatami, Mousavi, Karroubi, and even Rafsanjani, have been effectively marginalized. Moreover, Iran is locked in a geostrategic competition with

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[16] U.S. statements today are sending somewhat contradictory messages. For example, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, stated that "a preemptive military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities is a bad option that would set off 'unintended consequences,' but one the United States reserves the right to use" (Anne Gearan, "Admiral: U.S. Ready for Iran," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 19, 2010).

the United States across the greater Middle East, from Afghanistan to Iraq and the Levant. The nuclear issue may be the central issue defining the U.S.-Iran relationship, yet it is hardly the only source of conflict between the two countries.

Political support for such incentives in the United States is also lacking. For the past 30 years, Iran has largely been viewed as inimical toward U.S. interests in the Middle East and beyond. Iran is increasingly viewed as an expansionist power, particularly because of its influence in Iraq and the "success" of Iranian "proxies" in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. Hence, the Islamic Republic's possible pursuit of nuclear weapons is not seen merely as serving the purposes of protecting its own security but as a strategy to expand Iran's reach across the Middle East. Moreover, a substantial section of the U.S. foreign policy establishment views Iran's engagement with the United States on the nuclear issue as "buying time" for the nuclear program's advancement.

Conclusion

Despite a wide range of policies at its disposal, the United States faces a serious challenge in dissuading Iran from nuclear weaponization, given how Iranian national security interests could be served by nuclear weapons, the hard-line views of the current Iranian regime, and the difficulty of shaping the internal political debate in Iran. Targeted sanctions do offer a potential opportunity to affect the internal debate, but only over the longer term. Removing broad-based sanctions could be useful in keeping Iran from declaring a nuclear capability were it to acquire nuclear weapons. The United States will find it difficult to strike the right balance between employing its conventional and nuclear forces to signal costs to Iran and avoiding contributing to a threat environment that could undermine the U.S. dissuasion goal. Providing incentives to Iran to forgo nuclear weaponization is even more problematic because of the nature of the U.S.-Iran relationship and the view held by many Americans that incentives are likely to be counterproductive in affecting Iran's calculus with respect to its nuclear program.

Deterring a Nuclear-Armed Iran

Were Iran to acquire nuclear weapons, the United States would need to define approaches to deter its use of these weapons against the United States, U.S. military forces in the Middle East, and U.S. regional partners. From past writings on deterrence, as well as historical lessons, a general understanding emerges that deterrence depends on raising the costs of the potential use of nuclear weapons, reducing the potential benefits, and credibly demonstrating the ability and intention of taking those actions. Successful deterrence depends on Iran acting rationally on the basis of assessing costs and gains.[1]

This chapter begins by setting the stage for deterring a nuclear-armed Iran by describing Iran's military behavior and planning, the potential paths to a U.S.-Iran conflict, and then the paths to Iran's use of nuclear weapons. It then defines the different approaches available to the United States to deter Iranian use of nuclear weapons against U.S. military forces and U.S. partners in the region.

Iran's Military Behavior and Planning

Historical Military Behavior

The Islamic Republic of Iran has historically avoided direct military confrontation with the United States, preferring to use proxies against U.S. regional partners so as to avoid providing the United States with

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[1] For the reasons described in Chapter Two, we judge that Iran does act rationally but recognize that miscalculations and accidents are always possibilities before and during a

a pretext for using its overwhelming conventional military forces. The Iranian elite is cognizant of the United States' superior military power, especially after witnessing the defeat of Saddam Hussein in 1991 and 2003. The closest that the United States and Iranian forces have come to fighting in a conventional conflict was during the 1984–1988 Tanker War, but this episode is best understood as Iran's attempt to expand the Iran-Iraq War to Iraqi allies as a means of punishing them for their support to Iraq.

Iran has targeted the United States and U.S. interests indirectly though Hezbollah in Lebanon and Jaysh al-Mahdi and the Special Groups in Iraq. Attacks on the U.S. embassy and Marine Corps barracks in Lebanon in the 1980s and the recent lethal aid to Iraqi and Afghan insurgents fighting U.S. forces can all be linked to Iran. This approach allows Iran to maintain plausible deniability while achieving its objectives, including deterring a U.S. invasion and expanding its regional influence at the expense of U.S. power. In addition, relatively low-level asymmetrical attacks against U.S. forces aid in the prevention of a full-scale conflict with the United States, which Iran recognizes it would invariably lose.

Military Doctrine

Iran's experience during the Iran-Iraq War—costly static warfare with Iraqi use of chemical weapons and ballistic missiles against Iranian forces and cities—has shaped Iran's overall military doctrine.[2] The Iranian military is keen to avoid a long, costly war against a better-equipped foe. Confronting superior U.S. conventional capabilities, Iran has pursued a military doctrine and conventional military capabilities that emphasize deterring a U.S. attack, absorbing a U.S. conventional attack (particularly air strikes), and then punishing the aggressor, initially through asymmetrical tactics and capabilities. Iran's military doctrine is shaped, to some extent, by Shi'a and Islamic revolutionary

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military conflict. On the dangers of nuclear accidents, see Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2002.

[2]   See U.S. Department of Defense, 2010c.

ideals of resistance (*moqavemat*) and martyrdom (*shehadat*).[3] However, it is largely based on the reality that, while Iran cannot win a military conflict with the United States, it can nevertheless impose enough costs to declare a "political" or symbolic victory, much as Hezbollah did during its war with Israel in the summer of 2006.

Iran's military doctrine calls for "active defense," "passive defense," and "mosaic defense."[4] *Mosaic defense* refers to Iran's concept of an asymmetrical defense to be used in the case of an invasion by a conventionally superior force. To implement this doctrine, Iran has dispersed its command-and-control and military forces into many units capable of fighting U.S. forces autonomously in the event of an air or land invasion.[5]

Conventional Capabilities

Iran operates two parallel military forces: the Artesh, a conventional ground, air, and naval military force estimated to number 300,000–400,000 and tasked with defending the homeland from external threats, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, tasked with "guarding" the principles of the Islamic Revolution and the system of the Islamic Republic. The Revolutionary Guards, which number around 125,000 members (in addition to 100,000–300,000 Basij paramilitary forces), are Iran's dominant internal security and intelligence force, but they

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[3] Iran's military views Imam Hossein, who died in the desert of southern Karbala while fighting thousands of the caliph's soldiers with only 70 of his own men, as a model worthy of emulation. The Islamic Republic's view of victory—resistance without an actual victory—has shaped its general military doctrine. Fariborz Haghshenass, "Iran's Doctrine of Asymmetric Naval Warfare," Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch No. 1179, December 21, 2006.

[4] *Active defense* refers to the use of kinetic means to defend Iran's nuclear and military facilities from U.S. or Israeli air strikes, for example, through the use of surface-to-air missiles. *Passive defense* refers to defending against (i.e., absorbing) an attack through nonkinetic means, for example by concealing or hardening nuclear and other military facilities, often underground. "Iran to Stage Wargames on Safeguarding N. Centers," Fars News Agency, November 21, 2009.

[5] Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities: The Threat in the Northern Gulf*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2007.

are also tasked with deterring and defending against external enemies. The force operates its own ground, air, and naval forces, and the specialized Qods Force is responsible for devising and executing Iran's asymmetrical military doctrine. The Revolutionary Guards also control Iran's tactical and strategic missile forces.[6] Given that the Revolutionary Guards are Iran's premier military and security force, play a primary role in shaping Iran's military doctrine, receive more resources than the regular military, and command Iran's missile forces, they will also likely be in charge of Iran's nuclear forces, were such a capability to be acquired.

Iran's conventional forces have been configured to prevent an attack by the United States or Israel. Given that its air force/air defenses and land forces remain particularly vulnerable, Iran's asymmetrical military doctrine relies on the capabilities of allied regional insurgents and terrorist groups.[7] Iran's conventional military doctrine depends on its naval forces and advanced missile forces, which could be used to target U.S. forces and the GCC countries in the event of an armed conflict. These forces are also viewed as useful in achieving Iran's foreign policy objectives during peacetime (e.g., more "equitable" division of gas and oil resources in the Persian Gulf).

Iran's naval forces and strategy are designed to deter a U.S. attack by raising costs, specifically by "shutting down" the Strait of Hormuz, dramatically raising the price of oil, and inflicting great economic damage to the United States, the GCC states, and the industrialized world (including U.S. allies and rivals such as Japan and China) at large. Moreover, Iran plans to use its naval capabilities to inflict enough U.S. casualties to degrade America's political willpower to continue a potential conflict. Iran's naval doctrine relies on conventional and,

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[6] "Iran: IRGC to Establish Separate Missile Command," Mehr News Agency, August 28, 2008.

[7] This specialized Qods Force, believed to number a few thousand members, is responsible for training various regional insurgent and terrorist groups allied with Iran, including the Lebanese Shi'a group Hizballah; the Palestinian groups Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine–General Command; Iraqi Shi'a insurgent groups such as the Jaysh al Mahdi and the Special Groups; and, perhaps, Shi'a dissident groups based in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain.

most importantly, asymmetrical weapon platforms and capabilities, such as small fast-attack boats and mini-submarines.[8]

Iran's first line of deterrence against a U.S. (or Israeli) attack is its expanding stockpile of ballistic missiles, which can threaten U.S. bases in the Persian Gulf, Iraq, and Afghanistan; its regional rivals Israel and Saudi Arabia; and the GCC countries that host U.S. forces (Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE). In addition, more advanced missiles, such as the Shahab-3 and Sedjil, may provide it with the opportunity to target parts of Europe and Russia (see Figure 4.1). However, even if Iran has no interest in targeting Europe, the growing range of its missiles may

Figure 4.1
Range of Shahab-3

RAND MG1087-4.1

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[8]   Office of Naval Intelligence, *Iran's Naval Forces: From Guerilla Warfare to a Modern Naval Strategy*, Suitland, Md., Fall 2009.

give it some prestige as a "great" military power.[9] Iran is likely pursuing an ICBM capability as well, and the U.S. Department of Defense assessment of Iran's military power concluded, "With sufficient foreign assistance, Iran could probably develop and test an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of reaching the United States by 2015."[10]

Military Exercises

Iran's military doctrine of active, passive, and mosaic defense has been demonstrated through such exercises as Asemane Velayat 2, which took place in November 2009 and was intended to protect Iran from aerial attacks against its nuclear facilities.[11] Iran's other major military exercises (such as the Great Prophet series, Blow of Zulfaqar, and the Defenders of Velayat Skies series) have featured its doctrine of deter, absorb, and retaliate while demonstrating its ability to conduct joint operations with various services. More important, Iran has taken every opportunity to show off its missile capabilities through repeated tests of multiple missiles and launching salvos. A specific goal of these demonstrations has been to demonstrate that enemy countermeasures or anti–ballistic missile systems could be overcome.[12]

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[9] The Department of Defense estimates that the Sedjil-2 had a range of roughly 2,000 km, although it could have been greater if engine problems were resolved. Iran successfully test-fired the Sedjil-2 on September 28, 2009, as part of a military exercise to practice preventive and defensive operations (Peter Crall, "Progress Seen in Iranian Missile Test," Arms Control Association, June 2009).

[10] U.S. Department of Defense, 2010c, p. 11.

[11] According to the commander of Khatam ol-Anbia Air Defense Base, Brigadier General Ahmad Miqqani, "Given that the battle grounds have been transformed into a scene of asymmetric warfare, all our instruction manuals contexts as well as our tactics have changed and they will be tested during the wargames" ("Iran to Stage Wargames on Safeguarding N. Centers," 2009).

[12] STRATFOR, "Iran: Making a Point with Military Exercises," November 3, 2006; "IDF Trains for Simultaneous Hizbollah, Iran, Syria Missile Strikes," *Haaretz*, June 8, 2008.

Paths to Conflict

Our analysis of Iranian behavior in the past, national security interests, and military planning suggest that Iran is likely to be cautious in its direct military actions against U.S. military forces in the region. Nevertheless, we were able to define three hypothetical but plausible paths to Iran's potential use of military force against U.S. regional military forces: a response to enhanced international pressures that Iran may perceive as acts of war (e.g., a naval blockade or oil embargo), a response to U.S. or Israeli attacks against its nuclear infrastructure, and the initiation of attacks to bolster its external influence in the region or to consolidate its domestic power. In these three paths, the conflicts would likely draw in the GCC states where U.S. military forces are based. Also possible, but more uncertain, would be whether Saudi Arabia and Israel would become involved in any or all of these potential conflicts.

Conflict in Response to International Pressures and Actions Perceived as Acts of War

In this path, the United States and its allies impose an embargo on Iran's import of refined fuels. Iran could view such an embargo as an act of war, and it could respond by attempting to close the Strait of Hormuz, using mines, antiship cruise missiles, or fast patrol boats.[13] Such a conflict could expand to include broader Iranian attacks on U.S. military forces in the region (including U.S. aircraft carrier groups in the Gulf) that are supporting the naval embargo. Iran could also expand the conflict to its Arab neighbors in a replay of the Tanker War, if it were to view these states as facilitating the embargo or more generally supporting U.S. military operations.[14] Potential targets in these countries could include coastal tanker-loading facilities, power

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[13] For details on interdiction efforts in the Proliferation Security Initiative, see U.S. Department of State, "Interdiction Principles for the Proliferation Security Initiative," Washington, D.C., September 4, 2003.

[14] The Tanker War set a precedent for Iran's expanding of conflicts to punish its Arab Gulf neighbors for their perceived enabling role—in this case, providing financial support to Iraq during the 1980–1988 war.

and desalination plants, and offshore oil and gas platforms, which Iran could seize.

Conflict in Response to a U.S. or Israeli Attack Against Iran's Nuclear Facilities

In this path, the United States or Israel attacks Iran's nuclear facilities (in the U.S. case, with assets launched from bases in GCC countries and from sea-based aircraft carriers).[15] The Iranian regime would likely feel domestic pressure to respond and would perceive few international political costs in doing so. It could respond with military attacks against U.S. military forces in the region. Iran has already provided lethal support to extremist groups operating in Iraq that target U.S. forces with improvised explosive devices, indirect fire, and other asymmetric tactics. U.S. military forces operating in Afghanistan would also be potentially vulnerable. Iran could respond militarily against Israel, and such retaliation would be supported in the region, especially among Arab publics. Iran could also launch missiles against its Gulf neighbors or other Arab states if it believed that these states helped facilitate the Israeli or U.S. attack (e.g., through the provision of airspace, refueling, intelligence). GCC states hosting particularly significant U.S. forces (e.g., Qatar and Bahrain) may be especially vulnerable to an Iranian attack.

Conflict to Expand Regional Influence or Consolidate Domestic Power

In this path, Iran could choose to initiate a conflict to bolster its regional or domestic power. One way would be to focus on trying to remove U.S. forces from Iraq and Afghanistan, which Iran views as limiting its own freedom of action and challenging what it perceives as its rightful position as the dominant power in the region. Given its inferior con-

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[15] For a discussion of an Israeli strike on Iran and its consequences, see Steven Simon, "An Israeli Strike on Iran," New York: Council on Foreign Relations Center for Preventive Action, Contingency Planning Memorandum No. 5, November 2009. For another, more detailed assessment, see Abdullah Toukan and Anthony H. Cordesman, S*tudy on a Possible Israeli Strike on Iran's Nuclear Development Facilities*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 14, 2009.

ventional military capabilities, Iran is more likely to rely on asymmetric capabilities, such as support for various proxy groups hostile to the United States. While some Iranian behavior has indicated support for stabilizing forces in Iraq and Afghanistan (sometimes in alignment with U.S. interests) as the best means for securing a U.S. withdrawal from both countries, Iran has also supported militant groups acting against U.S. forces.[16] This has allowed Iran to pressure the United States without being directly held responsible for military actions. Hard-liners in the Iranian government could see value in attacks on U.S. military forces to make the costs of staying in these countries higher and as a way to divert attention from dissent and unrest at home.

Iran's Potential Use of Nuclear Weapons

Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons is likely to serve its interests primarily in deterring the use of military force against the regime and expanding its influence in the region rather than as a military instrument. Nevertheless, the calculus of risk in initiating and conducting conventional conflicts between Iran and the United States and other states in the region would change if Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons. This could lead to more restraint on Iran's part, but it could also encourage a willingness to escalate a conventional conflict and potentially use its nuclear weapons.[17]

Iran's military doctrine and conventional capabilities provide it with alternatives to using nuclear weapons in a conflict, and any Iranian use of nuclear weapons would hold enormous risks for Iran. Thus,

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[16] See, for example, James F. Dobbins, *After the Taliban: Nation-Building in Afghanistan*, Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008. Recent Iranian support for Iraqi Sunni factions' inclusion in the new Iraqi government after the March 2010 national election also demonstrates Iran's interest in Iraqi stability, in part to help facilitate a U.S. withdrawal from the country.

[17] For a discussion of how the acquisition of nuclear weapons led to actions to test the responses and limits of other powers but did not lead to overt military aggression, see David Ochmanek and Lowell H. Schwartz, *The Challenge of Nuclear-Armed Regional Adversaries*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-671-AF, 2008, pp. 32–37.

our analysis suggests that any use of nuclear weapons is likely to occur only under a narrow set of circumstances that would revolve around Iran viewing itself as vulnerable to U.S. conventional military defeat and threatened as a regime by U.S. conventional operations. Any conventional conflict, those defined here or others, would hold the possibility of Iran using nuclear weapons, however.[18]

The purpose of Iran's use of nuclear weapons would likely be to deter further U.S. conventional attacks and could involve a demonstration of its nuclear capabilities in one of the following ways: through a nuclear test or a high-altitude electromagnetic pulse attack over land or at sea. Or Iran could decide to use its nuclear forces directly against U.S. military forces and bases in the region. Iran's emphasis on its naval and missile forces, including the allocation of resources and the number of exercises involving those forces, makes them likely candidates for a role in any future nuclear doctrine. Nuclear warheads would most likely be delivered by Iranian missiles and possibly also by naval forces (e.g., antiship cruise missiles).

In theory, Iran would have to make a decision about whether to focus the use of nuclear weapons only against U.S. military forces or to expand its objective to include neighboring states that are U.S. partners. In practice, because the United States has a significant military presence in all the GCC states except Saudi Arabia and Oman, an Iranian nuclear attack against U.S. military forces in the small GCC states would be nearly indistinguishable from an attack against these countries.[19] In the future, Iran could decide to target Saudi Arabia rather than U.S. military forces with its nuclear weapons, thereby

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[18] Ochmanek and Schwartz (2008, pp. 38–39) argue that Iran's use of nuclear weapons could come early in a conventional conflict to forestall decapitating strikes to take down the regime, to preserve its small nuclear arsenal, and in anticipation of the arrival of U.S. forces deploying from long distances. Another scenario, explored by Jason Zaborski, "Deterring a Nuclear Iran," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Summer 2005, would be Iranian use of nuclear weapons to deter a U.S. response to an Iranian conventional attack against one of its neighbors.

[19] Oman is a unique case in that while it has hosted large contingents of U.S. forces during regional conflicts (e.g., the 2003 invasion of Iraq), during peacetime, there are very few U.S. forces in the country.

demonstrating Iranian capabilities while potentially avoiding a U.S. nuclear response. Such an attack would risk significant backlash from the Arab world, however, and Iran could not be guaranteed that the United States would not retaliate. Iran could also use nuclear weapons against Israel, but in this case, it would need to take into account the Israeli nuclear deterrent, which is widely believed to include significant second-strike capabilities.

Current U.S. Policies and Capabilities

The United States is creating "regional security architectures" around the world.[20] In the Middle East, it uses military facilities in all the GCC states except Saudi Arabia. The numbers of personnel in these countries range from some 30 in Oman, to around 2,000 in the UAE and around 50,000 in Kuwait. In Saudi Arabia, the United States has 200–300 military personnel and around 500 contractors.[21] To raise the costs to Iran of using its conventional military forces, the United States deploys offensive conventional forces in the region and commits to regional defense long-range precision-strike capabilities that are deployed elsewhere. The United States also has military forces capable of attacking Iran's nuclear infrastructure and is expanding its capabilities to deny Iran the benefits of using its missile forces through land- and sea-based missile defense systems, both in the region and in Europe.

The United States has devoted particular attention to bolstering its missile defenses against Iran's short- and medium-range ballistic

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[20] For a description of U.S. regional security architectures, see U.S. Department of Defense, 2010b, pp. 32–33.

[21] See Kenneth Katzman, *Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RS21534, January 20, 2010a, and *Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 95-1013, April 26, 2010b; see also Christopher M. Blanchard, *Qatar: Background and U.S. Relations*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL31718, May 5, 2010a, and *Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL33533, June 14, 2010b.

missiles. These capabilities include advanced Patriot batteries, X-band radar for detecting and tracking ballistic missiles, and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system batteries for area defense, along with space-based sensors and sea-based capabilities. The U.S. Navy has been deploying *Aegis*-class destroyers and cruisers equipped with ballistic missile defense systems to patrol the Mediterranean Sea. The United States hopes to develop capabilities using unmanned aerial vehicles to track missiles.[22] It is also in the process of converting heavy bombers and long-range missile systems to conventional roles and developing other non-nuclear prompt global strike capabilities.[23] These capabilities are all supported by strong U.S. political commitments to the defense of regional partners.

The U.S. commitment to conventional elements of its regional security architectures, according to the NPR, "is vital to moving toward a world free of nuclear weapons." At the same time, the NPR states that "the U.S. nuclear posture has a vital role to play" in these architectures.[24] U.S. strategic nuclear forces provide the backdrop for its regional security architectures, which include a triad of ICBMs, nuclear-capable heavy bombers (B-52Hs and B-2s), and SLBMs. The NPR states that, unlike ICBMs and SLBMs, heavy bombers can be "visibly deployed forward" to signal U.S. capabilities and deter potential adversaries in a crisis.[25] The United States also maintains tactical aircraft capable of delivering both conventional and nuclear weapons; for example, the F-16 is deployed in Turkey and other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries. In the future, the F-35 joint strike fighter will be able to deliver nuclear weapons.

With respect to the potential use of nuclear weapons, the NPR concludes that the United States "would only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests

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[22] U.S. Department of Defense, *Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report*, Washington, D.C., February 2010a, pp. v, 22–23.

[23] U.S. Department of Defense, 2010b, pp. 24, 34. See also Craig Whitlock, "For Deterrent, U.S. Looks to Conventional Warheads," *Washington Post*, April 8, 2010.

[24] U.S. Department of Defense, 2010b, p. 33.

[25] U.S. Department of Defense, 2010b, p. 22.

of the United States or its allies and partners."[26] At the same time, the NPR states that Iran, as a proliferating state, "must understand that any attack on the United States, or our allies and partners, will be defeated, and any use of nuclear weapons will be met with a response that would be effective and overwhelming." Rather than specifying a nuclear response, the report states, "The President, as Commander in Chief, will determine the precise nature of any response."[27] It does indicate, however, that the threat with respect to proliferating states has not in any way increased U.S. willingness to use nuclear weapons.[28]

Policy Choices for Deterring Iran's Use of Nuclear Weapons Against U.S. Military Forces

In the discussion that follows, the assumption is made that Iran has nuclear weapons available for use during a conventional conflict with the United States. The number of nuclear weapons is not specified because it cannot be predicted. The United States has the following approaches available to deter Iran's use of nuclear weapons against U.S. military forces.

Deter by Managing Conflict Escalation

Circumstances exist in which conflict between Iran and the United States could occur, although it is difficult to define situations that could escalate into major conventional war. But if this happens, U.S. conventional military superiority means that Iran would likely face military defeat and, potentially, the end of the regime.

In its approach to deterring Iran from using nuclear weapons, the United States could undertake to keep a conflict from escalating to the point that Iran would view its use of nuclear weapons as the "least bad" option. This could be done by limiting potential U.S. military goals in a conflict to avoid threatening the Iranian regime and making

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[26] U.S. Department of Defense, 2010b, pp. vii, 17.

[27] U.S. Department of Defense, 2010b, p. 33.

[28] U.S. Department of Defense, 2010b, p. 16.

clear this intention through political communications. In the conduct of its conventional military operations, the United States could pursue measured military operations and forgo a large-scale conventional invasion and intensive air campaigns aimed at crippling the regime through attacks on leadership facilities and national command-and-control centers. The problem with such an approach is that it would be difficult to execute and could not be counted on to succeed. Putting U.S. forces at risk and devoting resources to a military conflict that has limited objectives would likely be a difficult sell to Americans in any war; it would be especially difficult given the 30-year history of confrontation with Iran. Statements and tailored military operations may also not be effective in communicating to Iran that U.S. goals are limited. Signaling is complicated by the lack of regular communication and mutual suspicion. Moreover, the United States cannot be sure that it understands Iran's "redlines"; while the United States may believe that it is showing restraint in prosecuting the conflict, from Iran's perspective, simply the prospect of conventional military defeat could lead its leaders to use nuclear weapons.

Anticipating the need to manage escalation, the United States could try to pursue a security dialogue with Iran to explore ways to communicate in a future crisis or conflict. But first, such dialogues would need to get under way. Foreshadowing to Iran that this would be the U.S. deterrent approach could also undercut the ability of the United States to deter Iran's use of conventional forces, either directly or through proxies, on its neighbors and U.S. military forces in the region.

Given the limitations of this approach, the United States needs to consider other potential methods of deterring Iran's use of nuclear weapons against its military forces in the region. Table 4.1 presents a summary of these approaches.

Deter by Raising the Costs of Using Nuclear Weapons by Threat of Retaliation

Threatening retaliation is an approach to deterring Iran, but it raises the question of whether current and projected conventional and nuclear

Table 4.1

Alternative U.S. Approaches to Deterring an Iranian Attack Against U.S. Military Forces in the Middle East

Approach	U.S. Force Posture	Rationale	Changes in U.S. Military Planning
Raise costs of using nuclear weapons by threat of retaliation	Projected U.S. conventional and nuclear forces sufficient	Hard to find plausible paths to major conventional conflict U.S. conventional systems can inflict devastation without resorting to nuclear weapons Crossing nuclear threshold risks regime's survival	None
	Need to reinforce retaliatory threat by displaying nuclear capabilities in the region	Current U.S. nuclear posture lacks credibility, given its deployment at sea and in the United States	Exercise nuclear-capable bombers in region and possibly deploy them there temporarily Commit specific U.S. nuclear-capable systems for planning purposes to respond to Iran's use of nuclear weapons
Deny benefits of using nuclear weapons	Need to focus conventional military planning and operations on ability to defeat nuclear attack, even though feasibility uncertain	U.S. threat of nuclear retaliation lacks credibility, given likely asymmetries of interests between the United States and Iran in conventional conflict	Seek capabilities to locate, track, and destroy Iran's nuclear weapons and their delivery means before they are launched Deploy robust missile defenses to intercept nuclear weapons after they are launched

force posture and planning would be sufficient or whether something more is needed to ensure the credibility of such a threat.

Current U.S. Conventional and Nuclear Posture Is Sufficient. The case for why Iran will be deterred from using nuclear weapons against U.S. military forces rests on a number of considerations. First, while possibilities of a proxy conflict or limited military engagements exist, it is difficult to see a conflict between the United States and Iran escalating to a major conventional conflict, because Iran faces overwhelming destruction. Crossing the nuclear threshold risks further devastation for Iran, thereby directly threatening the regime's survival; also, in using its nuclear weapons, Iran would be using up the very weapons it had acquired for other purposes. Second, the United States, with the deployment of long-range conventional precision-strike systems, has credible military capabilities to inflict high levels of devastation without resorting to the use of nuclear weapons. In this approach, existing U.S. declarations with respect to using nuclear weapons would remain unchanged. The threat of U.S. nuclear retaliation could be made more explicit in the event of a conventional conflict so as to reduce the prospect of Iran misreading U.S. intentions.

U.S. Nuclear Retaliatory Threat Needs to Be Reinforced. The case for doing more rests on the view that the threat of U.S. nuclear retaliation is not sufficiently credible to Iran, given that the current U.S strategic nuclear posture is deployed only at sea and in the United States. In this approach, the United States would expand its regional nuclear presence. U.S. decisionmakers would also need to decide whether to specify—beyond what is in the NPR—that any use of nuclear weapons would be met with a U.S. nuclear response.

Historically, in Europe, the United States undertook to ensure the credibility of its deterrent against both conventional and nuclear attacks by the Soviet Union by expanding the forward deployment of its conventional military forces, deploying its U.S.-based conventional and nuclear-capable forces in European theater exercises, involving European countries in nuclear planning under NATO auspices, locating U.S. nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles in NATO countries, undertaking programs of nuclear cooperation with individual Euro-

pean countries that included providing U.S. nuclear weapons for their use, and designating some SLBMs for NATO contingencies.

Such steps would be available to the United States to shore up its deterrent against Iran's use of nuclear weapons, although potential constraints would likely come into play. Levels of U.S. conventional forces are unlikely to expand in the Gulf region, given the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq and U.S. commitments to operations in Afghanistan. U.S. fighter aircraft capable of carrying nuclear weapons could be deployed in the region, but they are potentially vulnerable to Iranian preemptive missile attacks. The United States no longer deploys nuclear weapons on its surface ships or submarines (other than Trident SLBMs); thus, regional nuclear deployments offshore are not available.

The United States does have nuclear-capable bombers that could be exercised in the region. These bombers are capable of both using nuclear weapons standing off from the target (with air-launched cruise missiles) and penetrating. These systems could also be temporarily deployed to U.S. bases in the region.[29] Beyond these regional nuclear activities, the United States could announce its commitment of specific nuclear systems (e.g., long-range nuclear-capable bombers, dual-capable aircraft in Europe or the United States) to respond to any Iranian use of nuclear weapons. Partners could be engaged in nuclear planning. Whether U.S. partners in the region would be amenable to the United States taking these steps is uncertain, given domestic political pressure and fears of becoming a nuclear target. This topic is discussed in the next chapter.

Deter by Denying Iran the Benefits of Using Nuclear Weapons

The case for doing something different to deter Iran's use of nuclear weapons against U.S. military forces rests on the difficulty, if not impossibility, of making a U.S. threat of nuclear retaliation credible, given the asymmetries in interests that are likely to exist in any con-

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[29] U.S. heavy bombers (B-52s, B-1s, and B-2s), limited under the New Start Treaty, can be "temporarily located outside national territory," with the provision that these nations are notified, consistent with part 4 of the treaty protocol. See Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, April 8, 2010.

ventional conflict between Iran and the United States. Facing conventional defeat, Iran could view its vital interests to be at stake, whereas U.S. interests will be important but less than vital. Rather than deterring Iran, U.S. threats of nuclear retaliation could be viewed as a bluff, thereby emboldening Iran to take risks in a conventional conflict and possibly even increasing its incentives to use nuclear weapons.

An alternative to an approach based on the threat of nuclear retaliation is for the United States to seek to deny Iran the benefits of using its nuclear weapons by being able to locate, track, and destroy them and their delivery means before they are launched and to intercept any remaining missiles through robust missile defenses. Such conventional capabilities are not in the U.S. inventory today, and even with more sophisticated tracking and missile defense capabilities, it may not be feasible to defeat an Iranian nuclear attack entirely, given that Iran has different ways to deliver nuclear weapons, and, in some cases, only one weapon would need to survive and detonate for Iran to achieve its goals. Nevertheless, the United States could pursue programs to raise serious doubts about the effectiveness of any potential use of Iran's nuclear weapons.[30]

Policy Choices for Deterring Iran's Use of Nuclear Weapons Against U.S. Regional Partners

The United States also has an interest in deterring Iran's use of nuclear weapons against U.S. partners in the region. Our analysis found plausible pathways to Iran's use of nuclear weapons against Saudi Arabia, the other GCC states, and Israel.

Because the United States has a military presence in all the GCC states except Saudi Arabia, it is difficult to find a path to Iran's use of nuclear weapons against these states that would not implicate the United States. Significant U.S. force presence in Kuwait, Qatar, Bah-

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[30] For a discussion of this approach, see Ochmanek and Schwartz, 2008, pp. 40–56. The authors link this deterrent approach with the need to temper U.S. goals in a conventional campaign to reduce the prospect that Iranian leaders would view the use of nuclear weapons as the least bad option.

rain, and the UAE, combined with the small size of these states, means that Iran could not target them without involving U.S. military forces. Thus, an approach to deterring Iran's use of nuclear weapons against U.S. military forces in the region, if viewed as credible by Iran, would extend to these GCC states.

Given Israel's military doctrine and nuclear deterrent, Israel does not have to rely on the United States to deter an Iranian nuclear attack. Indeed, the Israelis may believe that Iran would view Israel's existing nuclear deterrent as more credible than that of the United States because of the stakes involved and Israel's willingness, at least in the past, to attack civilian population centers. Israel's long-standing special relationship with the United States would clearly enhance the credibility of a U.S. threat to use nuclear weapons on Israel's behalf. Thus, a U.S. approach to deter Iran's use of nuclear weapons against U.S. military forces in the region, if viewed as credible by Iran, would serve to reinforce Israel's nuclear deterrent.

The case of Saudi Arabia is distinct because it is the only GCC state without a significant U.S. military presence that would necessarily implicate the United States in any nuclear attack on its military forces. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is central to U.S. energy security; it is the state with the largest known petroleum reserves, the natural leader in the GCC, and the closest balancer to Iran on the Arab side of the Gulf. Moreover, there is a clear precedent for U.S. intervention on the Saudis' behalf. During the 1990–1991 Gulf War, and more recently, the United States has communicated its commitments to Saudi Arabia through robust security cooperation as well as strong declaratory statements. Thus, a U.S. approach to deterring Iran's use of nuclear weapons against U.S. military forces in the region, if viewed as credible by Iran, would likely extend to Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

Given that conflicts between the United States and Iran could lead Iran to use nuclear weapons—were it to acquire them—the United States needs to design a credible nuclear deterrence strategy. This, in

turn, calls for an appreciation of the narrow circumstances in which Iranian use could occur and the different approaches available to the United States to affect how Iran perceives the potential costs and gains of using its nuclear weapons. One's choice of deterrence approach will turn largely on how one views Iran's motivations, just as was true in the case of designing nuclear dissuasion strategies. Will Iran be deterred by the threat of U.S. nuclear retaliation, or will other ways need to be found, such as managing escalation in a conventional conflict or pursuing a capability to defeat Iran militarily? Obviously, uncertainties exist, but so do choices, and these need to be considered in advance of Iran's potential acquisition of nuclear weapons.[31]

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[31] Ochmanek and Schwartz (2008, pp. 48–50) suggest the possibility of offering a safe haven to enemy leadership as a way to pursue major military objectives without putting the leaders themselves at risk.

Reassuring U.S. Regional Partners

Were Iran to acquire nuclear weapons, the United States would need to ensure that its partners in the region (the GCC states and Israel) have confidence that U.S. obligations backed by U.S. military forces will serve to deter Iranian nuclear attacks on them. What matters, then, are the views of U.S. partners and whether they would seek specific steps on the part of the United States for reassurance. To the extent that GCC states are reassured, this decreases their interest in seeking alternative security partners or developing their own nuclear weapons. In the case of Israel, a credible U.S. nuclear deterrent could reduce the potential for it to pursue unilateral military actions or openly declare its nuclear posture.

The history of efforts to ensure the credibility of the U.S. deterrent in the eyes of NATO allies is varied and has often seen differences of views (e.g., the multinational force in the 1960s, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces in the 1970s). History also shows that the way in which NATO allies viewed the credibility of the U.S. deterrent was a function of both their perceptions of the Soviet threat and also what was happening domestically and in their relations with the United States.

Taking these lessons as a point of departure, this chapter begins by briefly describing the context in which the GCC states and Israel view Iran, its goals, and its military strategies. It also discusses these countries' perspectives in terms of their interests and military policies and how they view the United States and its policies. For an expanded description of the views of the GCC states, see Appendix A; for an

expanded description of the views of Israel, see Appendix B. After setting the context, the chapter then poses the question, "What would the United States expect these countries to seek in terms of reassurance policies to give them confidence in the credibility of the U.S. deterrent?" We conclude the chapter by describing the U.S. policy choices that could arise.

The Setting

Views of the GCC States

Our analysis begins by treating the GCC as a group, given that the GCC, in theory, operates from the principle of collective defense and the countries have closely coordinated their positions on Iran's nuclear development. These states are anxious that Iran is the ascendant power in the Gulf and that the potential acquisition of a nuclear weapon would further tip the balance of power in the region in Iran's favor. Given their proximity to Iran and the presence of domestic Shi'a populations, the GCC states are also concerned that a nuclear-armed Iran would be further emboldened to meddle in their domestic affairs. Of the potential Iranian uses of military force, the GCC is most concerned about being the target of a missile strike in retaliation for a preventive strike launched by the United States against Iranian nuclear infrastructure. They also worry that they could become the target of a nuclear strike. This sense of vulnerability on the part of the GCC states has led to a two-part strategy that includes upgrading their missile defense and conventional military capabilities while also carefully calibrating their rhetoric to assuage Iran that the GCC will not be a launching point for any attack against it.

While there is a unified position on the Iranian nuclear program, there are important differences within the GCC in terms of how the states view the broader issue of engagement with Iran.[1] As the leader

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[1]   To illustrate the complexity of intra-GCC politics, there are differences even within states regarding the type of relationship sought with Iran. For example, Abu Dhabi and Dubai (two emirates in the UAE) have different positions on the broader issue of engagement with Iran.

within the GCC and an ideological and strategic competitor to Iran, Saudi Arabia has been most animated in its perceptions of the Iranian threat. Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE are also concerned, given their particular vulnerabilities arising from significant Shi'a populations. Qatar and Oman have been most accommodating of Iran.

In terms of GCC views of the United States, Gulf leaders and analysts saw the war in Iraq and its aftermath as a strategic error that exposed U.S. vulnerabilities and benefited Iran. These states are also concerned that the United States may trade Tehran's support in stabilizing Iraq and Afghanistan for the recognition of an Iranian sphere of influence in the Gulf. As a result, there is interest in these countries in diversifying their security relationships through arms purchases with, among others, France, Russia, and China.

Relative to the GCC states, Egypt is worried about Iran's influence but does not view Iran as a direct military threat.[2] Egypt has tried to distance itself from any military options against Iran while purporting to provide strategic depth to the GCC. It has also assumed a role in coordinating the Arab diplomatic response to Iran. While no Arab partner represents a near-term risk for nuclear proliferation, should Iran acquire and test a nuclear weapon, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are the two Arab states that will pose the greatest future risk.

Both Egypt and the GCC states are constrained in their ability to support coercive measures against Iran, given the opposition from their publics. This domestic constraint, along with the desire not to antagonize Iran,[3] has led both the GCC states and Egypt to distance themselves from publicly advocating for a military strike against Iran

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[2] Given the uncertainty regarding Egypt's political future after the January 2011 demonstrations, it must be acknowledged that Egypt's positions on these issues could change. That said, the strength of the military as a power broker in Egypt and the fact that no opposition movement, including the Muslim Brotherhood, is close to Iran, suggests continuity in Egypt's basic position on Iranian nuclear development.

[3] It has been revealed, however, that some GCC officials have advocated privately for a strike. David E. Sanger, James Glanz, and Jo Becker, "Around the World, Distress over Iran," *New York Times*, November 28, 2010.

and to be cautious in approaching the issue of sanctions against Iran.[4] The wave of unrest in the region could have different effects on how Arab governments approach Iran's nuclear development. The power of the Arab street to challenge, and in several cases bring down, regimes could make leaders hesitant to support additional sanctions or military action against Iran that would antagonize their already restive publics.

Views of Israel

Israel views Iran as a hegemonic regional power posing both an ideological and strategic challenge to the Jewish state. Iranian nuclear capabilities are perceived as an existential threat,[5] ranging from actual Iranian use of nuclear weapons (either by intention or by accident) to providing nuclear cover for more aggressive actions by Iranian proxies to triggering a regional nuclear arms race. Israel's potential response will stem from its existing military doctrine and posture, which favor self-reliance, overwhelming force, and deterrence.

Israel's Begin Doctrine calls for preventing adversaries from acquiring nuclear weapon capabilities, and Israel has demonstrated its willingness to act on this doctrine in both the Iraqi and Syrian cases. This doctrine and Israeli military training and acquisitions suggest that a military strike against Iranian nuclear facilities is a viable option, even if the effectiveness of the strike would likely be limited and entail high costs for Israel. At the same time, Israel has consistently and publicly expressed a preference for nonmilitary solutions to the Iranian nuclear challenge, favoring heightened economic and diplomatic pressure. Recent reports have also suggested Israeli involvement in sabotage efforts, including the Stuxnet computer worm, to slow Iran's nuclear program without having to resort to a conventional military strike.[6]

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[4] The UAE, an important trading partner of Iran, has recently shown greater willingness to implement sanctions, including a move in August 2010 to freeze bank accounts and close down the offices of firms suspected of violating the sanctions.

[5] Ehud Barak has been a notable exception on this point. See "Barak: Iran Poses No Immediate Existential Threat to Israel," *Haaretz*, April 19, 2010.

[6] William J. Broad, John Markoff, and David E. Sanger, "Israeli Test on Worm Called Crucial in Iran Nuclear Delay," *New York Times*, January 15, 2011.

While its goal is preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, Israel is also developing capabilities (particularly sea-based second-strike options, advanced missile defenses, and early warning systems) to prepare for deterring a nuclear attack and defending itself against rapidly developing Iranian missile threats. The possibility has even arisen that Israel might change its current policy of nuclear ambiguity to bolster its deterrence against a nuclear-capable Iran.

Israel's relationship with the United States involves implicit U.S. security guarantees. However, Israel is concerned about the erosion of U.S. regional commitments and stature. Israeli perceptions and concerns regarding both Iran and the United States raise key uncertainties for the future. The situation could lead Israel to take actions that are undesirable from a U.S. perspective, such as launching a military attack against Iran without U.S. coordination, which could lead to potential Iranian retaliation against U.S. military forces in the region. A less immediate Israeli action that could complicate U.S. regional diplomacy would be an Israeli shift to an overt nuclear posture, which would significantly affect U.S. nonproliferation efforts.

Current U.S. Policies for Reassurance

The United States is engaged in a number of policies and programs aimed at promoting the security of its partners in the region. Within the realm of political support, high-level U.S. officials regularly visit the GCC states delivering a message that the United States is committed to the stability of the Gulf and the defense of its Arab allies.[7] High-level U.S.-Israeli exchanges have accelerated, and President Obama publicly reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to Israel's security when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited the White House in July 2010.

The United States (in the NPR) has declared, as a positive reassurance to its partners, that "any attack on the United States, or our allies

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7   See Hillary Clinton, U.S. Secretary of State, transcript of remarks at Forum for the Future: Partnership Dialogue Session, Doha, Qatar, January 13, 2011.

and partners, will be defeated, and any use of nuclear weapons will be met with a response that would be effective and overwhelming."[8]

In addition, the United States is engaged in defense cooperation with its regional partners that encompasses training, equipping, and joint exercises. The focus of much of this cooperation has been in the field of missile defense, in which the United States has pursued a multi-layered approach. Specifically, it has buttressed existing Israeli capabilities by deploying Patriot batteries and THAAD systems to reinforce Israel's own systems (Arrow II and III and David's Sling) and providing X-Band radar for early warning. With regard to the GCC states, the United States has upgraded its capabilities in the form of point defense (e.g., Patriot systems) and recently cleared the sale of THAAD to the UAE. This equipping function has been accompanied by joint exercises (Juniper Cobra and Eagle Resolve), which serve to both signal the U.S. security commitment and improve the interoperability of U.S. and partner forces.

In addition to security cooperation focused on defensive capabilities, the United States is also engaged in improving its partners' offensive military capabilities. This has traditionally taken the form of U.S. sales of fighter aircraft to both Israel and the GCC states, an area in which regional partners enjoy a tremendous advantage over Iran.[9] A new development, however, is an increased willingness by the United States to provide guiding systems (e.g., joint direct attack munitions) to Saudi Arabia that would increase the accuracy of that country's munitions. In October 2010, the United States announced plans to sell up to $60 billion in advanced military aircraft to Saudi Arabia, including new F-15s, upgrades to Saudi Arabia's existing fleet of F-15s, and new helicopters.[10] While always sensitive to maintaining its qualitative mili-

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[8]   U.S. Department of Defense, 2010b, p. 33.

[9]   Anthony H. Cordesman and Abdullah Toukan, *US, Gulf and Israeli Perspectives of the Threat from Iran—Part I*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2011.

[10] See Andrew J. Shapiro, Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, and Alexander Vershbow, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, "Briefing on Pending Major Arms Sale," transcript, Washington, D.C., October 20, 2010.

tary edge, Israel, in this case, has not opposed the sale.[11] The United States also agreed to sell Israel 20 F-35 stealth fighter aircraft and considered providing an additional 20, significantly enhancing Israel's anti-aircraft defenses.[12]

U.S. Reassurance Goal: Ensure Confidence in Credibility of a U.S. Nuclear Deterrent

Our analysis focuses on what the United States might need to do to reassure its partners in the Middle East of the adequacy and credibility of the U.S. deterrent, if Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons. Given that the United States would have available a menu of potential reassurance policies that could involve both political and military commitments, we asked the question: What might these countries seek?

Israel and the GCC states are the countries most likely to require reassurance from the United States. Egypt, on the other hand, is more removed from a potential Iranian military threat and is, therefore, less likely to seek additional reassurance policies. Hence, this analysis focuses on Israel and the GCC states. We then separate out Saudi Arabia from the other GCC states, given the Saudis' heightened sensitivity toward engaging in public security cooperation with the United States.

What we discovered was that the type of reassurance that Israel and the GCC states would seek would likely depend first on the stage of Iran's nuclear program—whether Iran moves from its current program to possessing the components and know-how to assemble nuclear weapons (i.e., a virtual capability), whether it actually develops but does not declare a nuclear weapons capability (i.e., an ambiguous capability), or whether it both develops and then declares its capability by testing a nuclear device or withdrawing from the NPT (i.e., a declared

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[11] For reporting on views in Israel, see "Israel Not Expected to Oppose $60b US-Saudi Arms Deal," Associated Press and Bloomberg News (*Jerusalem Post*), October 20, 2010.

[12] "Israel Wants More Stealth Fighters," Agence France-Presse (*Defense News*), December 15, 2010.

capability). Second, the type of reassurance sought will depend on whether Iran has developed and successfully tested an ICBM, thereby acquiring the ability to put the U.S. homeland at risk. Table 5.1 presents our analysis.

Table 5.1 shows current U.S. policies and possible future reassurance policies. An "X" means that the regional partner—Israel, Saudi Arabia, or other GCC states—would likely seek such a reassurance policy; a "?" indicates that there is a possibility that the country would seek such a reassurance policy, but there is considerable uncertainty. The uncertainty would likely recede if the development of Iran's nuclear program were to be coupled with more aggressive behavior in regional affairs or if hard-line elements of the Revolutionary Guards were able further to consolidate their power.

A different analytical question would be whether U.S. partners would support each of these policies. We concluded that the results would be similar. That is, the countries would be expected to support the policies marked with an "X" and, for those with a "?," uncertainty would exist. The results could possibly change if the United States applied pressure to gain the support of the partners; in this case, the GCC states could find themselves having to go along, given their extreme dependence on the United States as a security guarantor.

U.S. partners will likely continue to seek the current forms of security cooperation (military equipping, training, and exercising), as well as U.S. political support, as Iran's nuclear program proceeds. But they are unlikely to request other reassurance policies until two additional developments occur: (1) Iran assembles nuclear weapons and declares itself to be a nuclear power,[13] and (2) Iran acquires an ICBM to deliver its nuclear weapons. At this point, the calculus of U.S. partners would be expected to change, since the first development would remove any ambiguity about Iran's nuclear capability and the second could seriously undermine the credibility of the United States in using its nuclear weapons on behalf of its partners, given that Iran would be

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[13] The time dimension is complicated by the fact that Iran's progression from one stage to the next could itself be unclear, particularly the shift from a virtual posture to an ambiguous posture.

Table 5.1
Will Partners Seek These U.S. Reassurance Policies?

	Stage of Iran's Nuclear Program								
	Current Through Virtual Nuclear Weapon Development			Ambiguous Nuclear Weapon Development			Declared Nuclear Weapon Development and Possession of ICBMs		
Reassurance Policy	Israel	Saudi Arabia	Other GCC States	Israel	Saudi Arabia	Other GCC States	Israel	Saudi Arabia	Other GCC States
Current policy									
Make statements of political support	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Equip, train, and exercise with regional partners	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Potential future policies									
Make explicit and public security guarantees (i.e., defense pacts)						X	?	?	X
Expand U.S. conventional offensive and defensive forces in the region	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
Commit nuclear-capable bombers and fighter aircraft for planning purposes to respond to Iran's nuclear use							?	?	?
Undertake nuclear weapon preparations in the region (e.g., exercises)				?			?		?
Deploy aircraft capable of delivering nuclear weapons in the country									?
Base nuclear weapons in the country									?
Extend nuclear guarantee (e.g., commitment to retaliate with nuclear forces if partner is attacked)							?	?	?

NOTE: X = likely to seek the reassurance policy; ? = possible but uncertain that the country would seek the reassurance policy.

capable of threatening to respond with its nuclear weapons against the U.S. homeland.

Still, even under such circumstances, some U.S. partners in the Gulf may refrain from seeking additional U.S. reassurance measures, particularly the highly sensitive ones involving U.S. nuclear activities in the region. This is the case for the GCC countries and, especially, for Saudi Arabia because of likely domestic political opposition and potential concerns that such military escalation may serve to embolden rather than deter Iranian aggression and make these countries potential military targets. In Israel's case, it may judge that relying too heavily on U.S. nuclear capabilities will erode its own nuclear deterrent.

Explicit and Public Security Guarantees

Explicit and public security guarantees could include publicizing classified security agreements (e.g., U.S. security commitments to Saudi Arabia) or issuing statements that lay out clear commitments (e.g., U.S. pledges to use force to defend an ally's sovereignty).[14] Requests from the smaller GCC states (Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the UAE) for such guarantees could come if Iran's nuclear posture reaches an ambiguous stage; these states would be vulnerable, given their own limited defense capabilities and the existence of outstanding bilateral issues with Iran that could provide a pretext for conflict (e.g., disputed territory, maritime boundaries). At the same time, the GCC states will be reluctant to request such guarantees because they would not want to further undermine their legitimacy by appearing to be U.S. protectorates. In addition, these states would not want to be seen by Iran as lining up with the West in a containment strategy that would make them direct rather than indirect parties to a conflict when they are trying to present themselves as bystanders.

Given domestic sensitivity to defense cooperation with the United States, Saudi Arabia could seek more robust security guarantees than

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[14] See Kenneth Katzman, Congressional Research Service, statement to the House Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight and Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, House Foreign Affairs Committee, at the hearing "The Proposed U.S. Security Commitment to Iraq: What Will Be in It and Should It Be a Treaty?" January 23, 2008.

current U.S. commitments, but it would likely wish for them to remain secret. This accounts for the uncertainty in our evaluation as to whether Saudi Arabia would seek this reassurance measure even if Iran were to declare its nuclear posture and acquire ICBMs. Saudi Arabia may also prefer to pursue its own nuclear deterrent rather than relying on more open U.S. guarantees.

Israel, too, would be reluctant to seek explicit and public security guarantees prior to Iran declaring a nuclear weapon capability and ICBMs, given the priority it places on self-sufficiency and its concern that its own deterrent could be compromised by appearing to need outside support for its defense.

U.S. Conventional Forces

With respect to reassurance policies involving U.S. conventional military forces, Israel is already engaged with the United States in policies to promote its defense and could be interested in the United States expanding its conventional forces. However, it would not necessarily support such deployments in Israel itself, because such a step could imply a decreased confidence in its own military capabilities and would run counter to Israel's military doctrine emphasizing self-reliance.

Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states would be reluctant to support an expanded U.S. conventional force presence in the region because it could imply a lack of independence from U.S. foreign policy or could be seen by Iran as GCC support for a preventive U.S. strike. The reticence of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE to publicly acknowledge their acceptance of the two additional Patriot batteries provided in early 2010 suggests that a request for additional offensive forces would require significant progression in Iran's nuclear development. The key trade-off for the GCC states is whether the immediacy of the Iranian threat trumps the costs in domestic legitimacy. Should Iran reach an ambiguous nuclear posture, these states would be much more likely to request a bolstered U.S. conventional presence as a way of implicating the United States in any Iranian attack on them. And while it is highly unlikely that the Saudis would request the return of a U.S. military force presence in their territory, they are likely to support an expanded U.S. presence in the *region*, which would enhance

their defense without imposing the political costs of actually hosting these forces.

U.S. Nuclear-Related Military Activities

With a declaration of an Iranian nuclear weapon capability and acquisition of ICBMs, it is possible, but still uncertain, that the GCC states (other than Saudi Arabia) would seek U.S. reassurance through any of the policies involving U.S. nuclear-related activities. Such activities could involve committing nuclear-capable bombers or fighter aircraft for planning purposes to respond to Iran's nuclear weapon use, undertaking nuclear preparations in the region through exercises, or deploying to the region (either temporarily or permanently) aircraft capable of delivering nuclear weapons. The reticence of the GCC states to request these measures arises from their view of the implications if a potential conflict in the region were to escalate, including likely public opposition and the states' continuing interest in keeping the door open to cooperation with Iran in other areas, particularly trade. Nevertheless, an Iranian nuclear test and more aggressive behavior could lead the GCC states to seek one or more of these reassurance policies.

The possibility that Saudi Arabia would seek any of these U.S. nuclear-related military activities is remote, even more so than that for the other GCC states. Were Iran to achieve a declared nuclear posture and an ICBM capability, it is possible, but still uncertain, that the Saudis might seek reassurance through a U.S. commitment of nuclear-capable bombers or fighter aircraft for planning purposes to respond to Iran's nuclear use. This is the result of the Saudis' particular sensitivities over public security cooperation with the United States and because, as the largest and most militarily capable of the GCC states, Saudi Arabia has attempted to maintain at least the pretense of self-sufficiency in national defense.

If Iran were believed to have acquired nuclear weapons but had not declared their existence (an ambiguous posture), Israel could be interested in the United States undertaking nuclear weapon preparations in the region—for example, through exercises of nuclear systems, likely in coordination with Israeli forces. But there is uncertainty whether Israel would seek such reassurance policies then or even after Iran

declared itself a nuclear power. Similar uncertainty exists about whether Israel would seek any other U.S. nuclear-related activities, even after an Iranian declaration of a nuclear capability. Israel could be interested in a U.S. commitment of nuclear-capable bombers to respond to Iran's nuclear use, but it would be unlikely to seek permanent U.S. deployments of nuclear-capable aircraft in the region or the basing of nuclear weapons. The reason is that Israel could see such steps as calling into question its own nuclear deterrent. Finally, if Iran's nuclear development leads Israel to remove the ambiguity of its capability and move to a declared status, Israel may have even less interest in U.S. nuclear reassurance measures.

U.S. Nuclear Guarantee

One additional reassurance policy could involve the United States extending a nuclear guarantee. The United States could, for example, either publicly or privately elaborate on the statement in the NPR as follows: Any attack on the United States, or our allies and partners, will be defeated, and any use of nuclear weapons will be met with a response that would be effective and overwhelming *and would include nuclear weapons*.

Our analysis suggests that a request for such a guarantee is unlikely to occur until Iran becomes a declared nuclear power with an ICBM capability, and even under those circumstances, it is very uncertain whether this would happen, and especially for a public nuclear guarantee. For Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states, there would be concerns that a nuclear guarantee would imply that these states were part of Iran's "target set." Israel's reluctance would arise from a concern that such a guarantee would undermine the credibility of its own nuclear deterrent.

Whether it is in the United States' interest to extend such a nuclear guarantee is a separate issue, and views differ as to whether, in the face of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, it would be appropriate to add U.S. partners in the Middle East to U.S. allies in Europe and Asia under the U.S. nuclear umbrella. While this policy choice is unlikely to arise until Iran is very far along in its nuclear program, when it does, it will deserve attention.

Conclusion

U.S. partners will be interested in U.S. policies to provide and potentially expand U.S. conventional forces for their defense. The United States could face the policy choice in the near term in terms of how public its security cooperation should be. There is a basic tension on the part of these Arab partners between the desire for the United States to reaffirm its commitment to their defense (through the deployment of conventional forces and the provision of equipment and training) and the desire to avoid public announcements of defense cooperation and the potential to become embroiled in a conflict that they see as fundamentally between the United States and Iran.[15] Whether these states will wish to see a bolstering of U.S. offensive forces and larger troop deployments in the region remains an open question insofar as these measures could undermine the domestic legitimacy of the GCC regimes and risk antagonizing Iran.

Additional policy choices could arise if Iran were to reach the stage of having acquired both ICBMs and a nuclear weapon capability, depending on how U.S. partners view the credibility of the U.S. nuclear deterrent. Our analysis has suggested the possibilities that could arise. What our analysis has not been able to do is predict whether common views between the United States and its partners on these issues will emerge or whether, in the view of U.S. partners, any U.S. policies can provide both a credible deterrent and reassurance.

What is clear, however, is that it is not possible to conclude in the abstract the relationship between what the United States defines as necessary to deter Iranian use of nuclear weapons and what U.S. partners determine is needed to extend deterrence and provide reassur-

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[15] From a U.S. perspective, it is tempting to dismiss the notion that states hosting the U.S. Central Command and the Fifth Fleet can credibly portray themselves as neutral third parties to such a conflict. However, these states have made a public commitment that their territory will not be used as a launching point for a strike on Iran, affirmed that Iran has the right to a peaceful nuclear energy, argued that Iran's intent to weaponize its program is yet unproven, and committed themselves to the peaceful resolution of the standoff.

ance. Whether these requirements are the same or necessitate different or additional steps will be known only when the choices are made.[16]

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[16] The relationship among deterrence, extended deterrence, and reassurance is discussed at length in Murdock et al., 2009. Their conclusion is that the requirements are different and cumulative.

Approaches to Influencing Iran

Because the United States will need to find ways to influence Iran to achieve its nuclear dissuasion and deterrence goals, we defined three overall, integrated approaches. The approaches are based on different assumptions about Iran and how to influence its calculations of costs and benefits:

- Iran only responds to pressures and threats; thus, the first approach seeks to influence Iran by raising the costs.
- Iran only responds to the prospect of the loss of any gains, not threats; thus, the second approach seeks to influence Iran by denying the regime the benefits of actions that the United States seeks to dissuade or deter.
- Iran's sense of vulnerability is what motivates its behavior; thus, the third approach seeks to influence Iran by reducing the external threat facing it and the survival of its regime.

Next, we defined the menu of policies appropriate for implementing each of these approaches (see Table 6.1). These policies are drawn from those discussed in Chapters Three and Four and are intended to be illustrative of what each of the approaches might entail. Not all of the policies would need to be undertaken to implement the approach, and other policies could supplement them. While some overlap in the policies is possible, in most cases, the approaches would have different implementing policies.

Whether Iran can be influenced in the ways sought by the United States is uncertain. But given that different views exist in Iran

Table 6.1
U.S. Approaches to Influencing Iran

Approach	Perspective	Illustrative Implementing Policies
Raise costs to Iran	Iran responds only to pressure and threats.	Expand all types of economic sanctions, broad-based and targeted, and seek widespread international support.
		Increase U.S. offensive and defensive conventional military activities in region.
		Reinforce U.S. strategy of nuclear retaliation through declaratory statements and possibly regional nuclear activities.
Deny benefits to Iran	Iran responds to the prospect of losing gains, not to threats.	Target economic sanctions to affect internal debate on nuclear program (i.e., against Revolutionary Guards).
		Build up regional missile defenses and offensive conventional capabilities with the goal of defeating a potential Iranian nuclear attack.
Reduce threat to Iran	Iran's sense of vulnerability motivates its behavior.	Relax broad-based economic sanctions (e.g., on refined oil imports) that threaten Iran's political stability.
		Signal acceptance of Iran's regime.
		Focus on managing escalation in a potential conflict with Iran.
		Relegate the threat of nuclear retaliation to the background and forego any regional nuclear activities.

with respect to its nuclear program, it seems worth the effort to consider different approaches to affecting the internal Iranian debate. If Iran acquires nuclear weapons, the decision to use them in a conflict with the United States would almost certainly be affected by previous U.S.-declared threats (nuclear and conventional), commitments to U.S. regional partners, and the conduct of U.S. conventional military operations.

We began by assessing how each of the approaches could be expected to affect the internal debate on the future of Iran's nuclear program. Arguably, the first approach of raising costs to Iran would undermine the factions that are opposed to nuclear weaponization, while an approach that reduces the threat to Iran could lend support to them. It is unlikely, in our view, that an approach based on denying benefits to Iran would make much difference in the internal debate.

Next, we focused on what the United States might expect in terms of support for each of these approaches from its partners in the Middle East. For the most part, U.S. partners will be ready to support policies in these approaches that involve economic sanctions against Iran and conventional military activities in the region, although they may resist very robust U.S. conventional capabilities until Iran has declared itself a nuclear power.

For the approach of raising costs to Iran, U.S. partners would be reluctant to support steps to reinforce the U.S. strategy of nuclear retaliation through regional nuclear activities, at least until Iran became a declared nuclear power and also acquired ICBMs. Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states would likely view such policies as too provocative, signaling that the U.S. had abandoned the goal of prevention in favor of a containment strategy. For Israel, such nuclear activities could call into question the credibility of its own nuclear deterrent.

Saudi Arabia, the other GCC states, and Israel would be likely to agree with an approach that focused on denying Iran benefits, if it were judged to be feasible. In this case, however, as described in Chapter Five, they could possibly seek U.S. nuclear guarantees or regional U.S. nuclear activities for reassurance if Iran became a declared nuclear power and acquired ICBMs.

On the other hand, none of these countries is likely to support an approach that seeks to reduce the threat posed to Iran. In their view, such an approach would signal acceptance of Iran as a nuclear power; in conjunction with an Iranian declaration of itself as a nuclear power, it could increase the risk of proliferation by Saudi Arabia and could lead Israel to declare its own nuclear capability.

It is important to note that this assessment is based on the expected views of U.S. partners as we understand them today and into the future, absent any specific efforts on the part of the United States to use pressure to push one or the other of these approaches or their attendant policies. In addition, the partner views described here do not account for potential changes in Iran's behavior as a result of the United States pursuing any of these approaches or from other internal or external events.

Finally, we assessed, in a very general way, the potential effectiveness of each of the approaches. An approach that raises the costs to Iran would be undermined by the lack of international support for robust economic sanctions and military measures against Iran. Denying Iran the benefits of its nuclear weapons, as an approach, is undermined by serious difficulties in targeting economic sanctions, managing conflict escalation, and defeating an Iranian nuclear attack. An approach that would reduce the threat to Iran clearly lacks support from the U.S. Congress and public, and the history of U.S. relations with Iran suggests that that is unlikely to change without significant changes in Iranian behavior.

What is clear from this analysis is that, in all cases, U.S. decisionmakers will face difficult policy choices at each stage in the future evolution of Iran's nuclear program. To illustrate the type of choices that decisionmakers could confront, we looked at one scenario in which Iran develops nuclear weapons but its nuclear posture remains ambiguous.

In this situation, the United States could have an interest in dissuading Iran from moving from an ambiguous to a declared posture, since that would increase Iran's ability to employ nuclear coercion and could lead to regional proliferation, and it could also lead Israel to remove the ambiguity surrounding its own nuclear posture. At the same time, the existence of Iranian nuclear weapons would call for the United States to design a strategy to deter their use. Thus, the United States would be pursuing its nuclear dissuasion and deterrence goals simultaneously. Table 6.2 shows a summary of our analysis.

Polices aimed at raising the costs to Iran could arguably support factions inside Iran that favor declaring the country's nuclear posture. But deterrence could be undermined absent the United States making clear to Iran the potential costs of using its nuclear weapons. Increasing the costs to Iran through nuclear-related activities to shore up deterrence would be resisted by U.S. regional partners until Iran acquired ICBMs and declared the existence of its nuclear weapons. The American public could be expected to support such an approach, and, militarily, such an approach would be feasible.

Denying benefits, as an approach, raises the prospect that Iran's investment in its nuclear program could be destroyed and a nuclear

Table 6.2
Iran Reaches Ambiguous Nuclear Capability: Assessment

U.S. Approach	Would It Dissuade Iran from Declaring Nuclear Capability?	Would It Deter Iran's Nuclear Use?	Will U.S. Partners Support It?	Will the American Public Support It?	Is It Militarily Feasible?
Raise costs to Iran	Could increase Iran's sense of vulnerability and undermine factions favoring staying with ambiguous nuclear posture	Helps by constructing and displaying costs	Unlikely until Iran is further along in its nuclear program	Likely	Yes
Deny benefits to Iran	Could reinforce Iran's sense of vulnerability and undermine factions favoring staying with ambiguous nuclear posture	Helps by constructing and displaying costs	Likely	Likely	Very uncertain
Reduce threat to Iran	Could reduce Iran's sense of vulnerability and support factions favoring staying with ambiguous nuclear posture	Uncertain	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Yes

attack potentially defeated, but it could also reinforce Iran's sense of vulnerability and give support to those favoring declaring its nuclear posture. By displaying formidable U.S. conventional capabilities, such an approach could bolster deterrence of any Iranian use of nuclear weapons. U.S. partners in the region would likely support this approach, as would the American public. There is, however, great uncertainty about its military feasibility.

The approach of reducing the potential threat to Iran could support factions that favor keeping the Iranian nuclear posture ambiguous but would likely be politically untenable both with U.S. regional partners and with the American public. Steps to relax economic sanctions, draw Iran into regional security activities, or reduce the U.S. military posture in the region would be viewed as rewarding Iran for developing nuclear weapons. It is uncertain how such an approach would affect deterrence of any Iranian use of nuclear weapons, but it could embolden Iran in its policies and military activities.

What is clear is that an approach of "pursuing all policies to the greatest extent possible" in this situation is not sustainable. The United States will not be able to avoid future policy choices and trade-offs among its nuclear dissuasion, deterrence, and reassurance policies. Adopting an overall, integrated approach with a clear purpose and rationale for U.S. policies would bring these additional benefits. It would enhance the ability to clearly signal to Iran what the United States intends in terms of its goals. Such an approach should make it easier to garner support from the international community and could help in demonstrating U.S. commitments to its regional partners. Finally, an overall, integrated approach would likely improve the chances of winning support from the Congress and the American public.

Air Force Contributions and Preparing for the Future

While uncertainties exist about which nuclear dissuasion, deterrence, and reassurance policies will be chosen, what is clear is that the U.S. Air Force, in support of the combatant commanders, will play a key role in supporting whatever military tasks are required. Based on the analyses in Chapters Three through Six, Table 7.1 presents the menu of potential military tasks. Obviously, many of these tasks would be undertaken only at the direction of senior U.S. officials.

In what ways can the Air Force prepare? The first step is to understand the purposes and timelines for these potential military tasks, because they will depend on how Iran's nuclear program evolves (see Figure 7.1).

Another way in which the Air Force can prepare in its planning for exercises is to support different potential policy choices. For example, in the case of conventional and nuclear-capable bombers, one aim of a future exercise could be to demonstrate to Iran that its investment in nuclear capabilities could be destroyed. But the Air Force also needs to design exercises that are sensitive to the internal Iranian debate over the future of its nuclear program and consistent with the likely reticence on the part of U.S. partners toward robust U.S. military activities in the region.

The testing of the MOP is a good illustration of this tension. On the one hand, testing the MOP signals to Iran that some of its hardened, underground facilities could be at risk. A potential effect of these tests, therefore, is to influence how Iran views its investment in the hardening of its nuclear facilities. On the other hand, testing such a

Table 7.1
Potential Military Tasks for Dissuasion, Deterrence, and Reassurance

Type	Training	Planning	Exercising	Deployment
Conventional	Train, advise, and assist regional partners	Explore ways to signal to Iran the potential vulnerability of its nuclear facilities (e.g., through intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance sorties)	Exercise with regional partners	Expand U.S. conventional offensive forces in region
	Train for conventional strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities		Exercise long-range conventional precision-strike forces in region; exercise strike assets in concert with missile warning	Expand U.S. warning and missile defense systems in region
Nuclear		Commit nuclear-capable fighter aircraft and bombers for planning purposes to theater to respond to Iran's nuclear use	Undertake visible nuclear weapon activities in region (e.g., exercises)	Deploy aircraft capable of delivering nuclear weapons temporarily to regional bases
				Base nuclear weapons in region

massive bomb could also be expected to raise Iran's threat perceptions, further underscoring the need for nuclear weapons to deter attacks by a much more militarily capable adversary.

The Air Force could also take the opportunity in its war games to explore some of the likely situations that could arise in future conflicts with Iran. For example, it could look for the different ways in which a conflict between the United States and Iran could arise and how it might escalate to the use of nuclear weapons. It could test deterrence approaches with and without nuclear weapons.

Figure 7.1
Purposes and Timelines for Potential Military Tasks
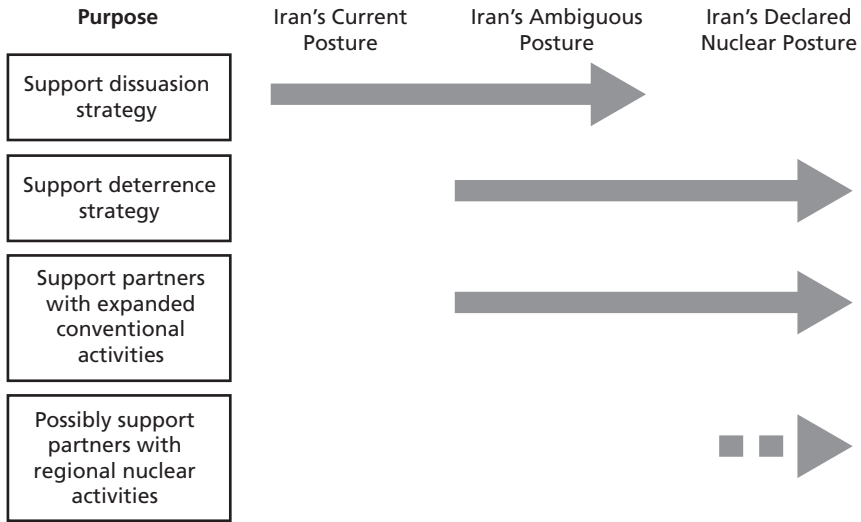
If Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons, the Air Force could prepare by ensuring that it can operate under the nuclear threat. Because Air Force facilities in the region (e.g., airfields, command posts, communication links) might themselves be attractive targets, the Air Force could survey them to discover their potential vulnerability to nuclear effects, particularly those associated with non-blast effects (e.g., high-altitude electromagnetic pulse, distant ground burst, sea burst). Based on the results of this survey, the Air Force could identify material improvements and the costs of hardening facilities and introducing alternate and more resilient procedures. One additional step would be to develop an internal-only war game exposing U.S. operators and planners to such threats and their possible countermeasures.

Over the longer term, the Air Force could be directed to engage U.S. regional partners in surveying their air force facilities and procedures to reduce their vulnerability to nuclear effects. It could also develop an extended version of the war game to involve partners in command responses. In addition, the Air Force could consider coordi-

nating with the Defense Threat Reduction Agency to develop a nuclear background course for allied personnel.

If Iran's potential use of nuclear weapons is likely to revolve around a perception of its own vulnerability to conventional defeat, and particularly to regime change as a result of a conflict with the United States, another way in which the Air Force can prepare is by investigating conventional military operations that would provide the President and Secretary of Defense with possible ways to manage escalation. This could be done, for example, by reinforcing political communications signaling limited U.S. objectives; defeating the immediate threat by directly targeting and destroying aggressing forces (e.g., Iran's regime-supporting paramilitary forces); not targeting Iran's political leadership; foregoing intensive air campaigns and attacks on Iranian national-level command, control, and communication centers; and providing a range of military options with respect to Iran's nuclear infrastructure and command and control.

Finally, in terms of overall Air Force planning, nothing in our analyses argues for the Air Force to change its current approach to keeping conventional and nuclear planning and force structuring separate for the Middle East. Moreover, combining conventional and nuclear forces in planning or force structuring for the Middle East could send the signal of "normalizing" nuclear weapons in a manner that invites proliferation by other states in the region, not only Iran but possibly Egypt or Saudi Arabia.

Our analyses also suggest that positive arguments for future U.S. nuclear forces are not likely to emerge from the Middle East region, because the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in achieving nuclear dissuasion and deterrence goals is problematic. U.S. regional partners are also unlikely to support U.S. nuclear activities in the region. Moreover, the Obama administration emphasizes non-nuclear elements in U.S. regional security architectures.

The Way Ahead

In brief, our study has set the stage for identifying situations in the future that will call for U.S. policy choices and potential trade-offs in dealing with Iran's nuclear program, not for making recommendations today on any one policy or approach. Our analysis cannot remove the uncertainties that lie ahead or predict the future, but it does provide clues about when policy choices will arise and what they will involve.

Our study's value is in grounding future policy choices in a critical regional analysis, in describing the complex considerations underlying the various policy choices therein, and in uncovering where tensions will arise and where trade-offs will be required. It underscores the Air Force's contributions and suggests considerations for its future planning. Finally, the analyses presented here provide decisionmakers with an analytical framework that can help them plan for achieving future U.S. nuclear dissuasion and deterrence goals vis-à-vis Iran and reassuring U.S. partners in the Middle East.

Context for U.S. Reassurance Strategies: GCC

GCC Views About Iran and Its Strategies

The GCC states are anxious that Iran is the ascendant power in the Gulf and that its potential acquisition of a nuclear weapon would further tip the balance of power in the region in favor of Tehran.

In public messaging, Gulf Arab leaders walk a tight rope between raising the specter of Iran as a means of closing their own ranks and galvanizing the West to action, all while taking care not to show vulnerability that could be exploited by Tehran or signal acquiescence to an Iranian-dominated regional security order. This can be seen in general comments about the rise of Iran and its Shi'a allies; however, much rarer is open acknowledgement that Iran has become the dominant regional power in the Gulf or that a nuclear-armed Iran would further shift the balance of power in favor of Tehran.

A notable exception is an official study commissioned by the Kuwaiti parliament, which offers this candid assessment of the implications of the Iranian nuclear program on Gulf security:

> The important question in the issue of the Iranian nuclear program becomes "What are the dangers of Iran possessing nuclear weapons for the Arab world and for the Gulf region in particular?" In reality, many Arab governments are truly distressed about Iran possessing nuclear weapons due to its effects on the balance of power [literally "balancing axes," or *mahāwir al-tawazunāt*] in the region. One is that Iran possessing nuclear weapons will emphasize the phenomenon of the Arabs being alone in their

nonpossession of this weapon and that they have become threatened by multiple nuclear dangers [i.e., Iran and Israel] and not just one.[1]

The views of the GCC states on the Iranian nuclear program are informed by long-standing fears that Iran aspires to the role of regional hegemon. This is based on a reading of history in which a Persian sphere of influence has extended to the Arab side of the Gulf, as well as more recent Iranian intervention in the domestic affairs of the GCC states, such as Iranian support to Shi'a populations that are feared as a potential fifth column by their parent states, and disputes with Iran over maritime boundaries and territory (i.e., Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunbs).[2]

Although the political leadership of the GCC states avoids recognition of the rise of Iran as the dominant power in the region, Gulf security analysts outside these governments openly acknowledge that Iran is well on its way to attaining this position. Iraq's inability to serve as even a partial balancer to Iran is the starting point for these analyses. Writing in the *Arab Journal of Political Science*, Kuwaiti analyst Abdullah al-Shaiji observes,

Iraq has become a theatre for Iran to settle scores with the United States and [for Iran] to increase the periphery of its power and its presence in the region, to play the role of the principal authority in the region, and to take hold of the trump cards, from West-

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[1]   Ramzi Salama et al., "Al-Milf al-Nawawi al-Irani: Ila Ayna?" ["The Iranian Nuclear File: Where To?"], in Arabic, on a study completed on behalf of the Kuwaiti Parliament (Majlis al-Umma), November 2007.

[2]   The Secretary General of the GCC, Abd al-Rahman al-Attiyah, urged Iran to

take serious and tangible measures to rebuild the trust and confidence in its relations with the [GCC countries] with the goal of distancing itself from policies of regional hegemony and elevating the political rhetoric so as to be consistent with the stated desire to develop relations and to restrain the official media discourse away from the vocabulary of threats and provocation. (General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council, "The Secretary General of the Cooperation Council in the 2nd Bahrain Security Forum and Exhibition: The Council States Are Adopting Security Policies That Are Firm and Attentive," in Arabic, February 24, 2009)

ern Afghanistan to southern Iraq and from Yemen to the Persian Gulf.[3]

Put another way, Gulf Arabs see not only an ascendant Iran but also a state with regional ambitions that include projecting influence in the Arabian peninsula, the Levant, and central Asia.

Gulf security analysts also draw a direct link between Iran's growing influence and the development of its nuclear program. As argued in a study prepared by Abdulaziz Sager, head of the Gulf Research Center, the consequences of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons would be the

> transformation of Iran into a hegemonic power over the [Arab Gulf] states of the region, its control of Iraq, its holding fast to the continued occupation of the UAE's islands, and its intervention in the domestic affairs of the [Arab Gulf] states of the region through its agitation of Shi'a groups in these countries. And this situation is what could push the GCC states, and specifically Saudi Arabia, to seek, in turn, the acquisition of a nuclear weapon to confront Iran.[4]

The GCC states fear that a nuclear-armed Iran would be further emboldened to intervene in their internal affairs.

The primary concern of the GCC states is regime security. They fear that Iran will use its influence among their domestic Shi'a populations and its soft power as a symbol of resistance to the West to further erode the legitimacy of their regimes. A Saudi military journal notes,

> Since 1979, most Iranian Revolutionary writings have agreed on classifying rulers of the majority of the Islamic states as just like Western [rulers] insofar as they display arrogance toward their people. And [these writings] have urged people to get rid of

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3 Abdullah Khalifa al-Shaiji, "Iraq and the Security of the Arab Gulf Region: Consequences of the Security Situation in Iraq on the Gulf Cooperation Council States," in Arabic, *Arab Journal of Political Science*, No. 18, Spring 2008.

4 Abdulaziz Sager, "The Strategic Situation in the Gulf: An Outlook Study to 2025," in Arabic, paper presented to the Manama Development Forum, February 8–9, 2008.

their rulers who serve—according to the Iranian view—the interests of the enemies of Islam.[5]

And while allegations of Iranian meddling are often exaggerated by Arab states to delegitimize domestic opposition or as a ploy to gain Western military aid that can be used for regime security, Iran does have a record of intervention in Gulf affairs, including its support of Shi'a opposition groups in Bahrain, Iranian pilgrims using the *haj* as a forum for protesting Saudi Arabia's role in world affairs, and Iran's present support of Shi'a actors in Iraq.

Fear that Tehran is working to undermine the legitimacy of Gulf Arab regimes and stir up unrest are reflected in constant appeals to Iran to respect the sovereignty of the GCC states and strictly adhere to noninterference in their domestic affairs.[6] Feelings of vulnerability to Iranian influence are further exacerbated by the potential of a nuclear-armed Iran. As one Saudi commentator notes, "The experience of history demonstrates that Iran waits for any opportunity to implement its revolutionary agenda and that it does not hesitate to make the nearby Gulf states a theatre for this. If it obtains nuclear weapons this will provide it an ideal military cover to achieve this mission."[7]

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[5] "The Iranian Regional and Nuclear Project," in Arabic, *Journal of King Khalid Military College*, January 6, 2009.

[6] As the General Secretariat of the GCC stated,

> Despite this positive position on the part of the GCC states toward Iran, it is often met, in return, by positions and policies of Iranian officials that sway between unfriendly and hostile—and without justification. The recent statement that was issued by Natiq Nouri . . . and that was repeated in groundless, false, and hostile claims against the Kingdom of Bahrain, is not the first [of its kind]. It was preceded by other claims from delegates of the Iranian parliament and others. And . . . there were slanders from the Assistant Iranian Foreign Minister for Research Affairs that dealt with the legitimacy of the GCC regimes. And this is what is deemed as a clear—and rejected—intervention in the internal affairs of the GCC states. . . . Infringing on the sovereignty and security of any of the member states of the GCC represents a red line, the consequences of which will include all the GCC states setting forth from . . . the principle of collective security. (General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council, 2009)

[7] "Wikileaks and the Gulf Position Towards a Nuclear Iran," in Arabic, *Al-Hayat*, December 16, 2010.

Among the potential Iranian uses of force, the GCC is most concerned about being the target of a missile strike in retaliation for a preventive strike launched by the United States against Iranian nuclear infrastructure.

Given that the GCC states host significant numbers of U.S. forces (including U.S. Central Command forward bases in Qatar and the 5th Fleet in Bahrain), these states are concerned that they would be implicated in any attack launched by the United States against Iran and that they would be the likely target of retaliation due to their proximity to Iran. These threat perceptions are conditioned by statements from Iranian officials that amount to implicit or explicit threats against the GCC states.[8] In light of these threats and Iran's history of targeting the Gulf states in conflicts to which they are not a direct party (e.g., the Tanker War as an expansion of the Iran-Iraq War), GCC leaders fear that they would "pay the price" of any preventive strike on Iranian nuclear infrastructure.[9]

Although the GCC has a unified position on the Iranian nuclear program, there are important differences in terms of how the states view the broader issue of engagement with Iran.

As the leader within the GCC and an ideological and strategic competitor to Iran, Saudi Arabia has been most animated in its threat perceptions.[10] This is visible in Saudi Arabia's efforts to build its conventional military capabilities as a countermeasure to Iran, as well as its attempts to contain Iranian influence in Iraq and Lebanon by support-

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[8]   For example, an Iranian Foreign Ministry official warned in an interview with *Defense News* that, in the event of an attack on Iranian nuclear infrastructure, "Ballistic missiles would be fired in masses against targets in Arab gulf states and Israel. The objective would be to overwhelm U.S. missile defense systems with dozens and maybe hundreds of missiles fired simultaneously at specific targets" (Riad Kahwaji, "Iran Vows Large-Scale Retaliation if U.S. Attacks," *Defense News*, June 4, 2007).

[9]   "Bahrain's Foreign Minister to *Al-Hayat*: We'll Pay the Price of Striking Iran and Any Agreement with It," in Arabic, *Al-Hayat*, September 30, 2009.

[10]   Henner Fürtig, "Conflict and Cooperation in the Persian Gulf: The Interregional Order and U.S. Policy," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 4, Fall 2007.

ing Sunni-Arab groups in these states. After Saudi Arabia, the most animated in their threat perceptions of Iran are Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE. This is a factor of their particular vulnerabilities (significant Shi'a populations, in the case of Bahrain and Kuwait, and the presence of Iranian nationals in Dubai, in the case of the UAE),[11] as well as outstanding bilateral issues (e.g., disputed maritime and territorial boundaries). Kuwait and Bahrain have also been most acquiescent to Saudi leadership within the GCC. Kuwait and Bahrain's deference to Saudi Arabia in Gulf affairs was apparent in the December 2009 GCC summit, at which the Bahraini prime minister, Prince Salman al-Khalifa, carefully acknowledged, "Our great brother Saudi Arabia is the axis of stability and balance in the region" and can be considered "the strategic depth and the natural extension of Bahrain."[12]

On the other hand, Qatar and Oman have been most accommodating of Tehran.[13] As for Qatar, this is linked with Doha's attempts to position itself as independent—including putting itself forward as a potential mediator in a number of regional disputes—and its chafing at Saudi Arabia as the "big brother" in the GCC. Qatar's hosting of a 2008 summit that included Iranian president Ahmadinejad and Hamas leader Khalid Mish'al, leading Saudi Arabia (as well as Egypt) to reduce their representation at the gathering, is one indication of the GCC states' differing approaches to engaging Iran and its

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[11] It is estimated that Shi'a account for two-thirds of Bahrain's population, 20–25 percent of Kuwait's population, and 10 percent of Saudi Arabia's population. There is also a sizeable Iranian expatriate community in Dubai.

[12] "The Prime Minister of Bahrain: The March of the GCC Is Not Rapid or Slow," in Arabic, *Asharq al-Awsat*, December 14, 2009.

[13] According to an article in *Al-Hayat* newspaper,

> Qatar and Oman do not see Iran as a source of threat to Arab interests or to Arab states. . . . Oman, in particular, is a bird singing a different tune altogether from that of the other four countries [i.e., Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, minus Oman and Qatar] in the GCC. And not just toward Iran but also in the context of the crisis with the Houthis in Yemen. . . . There are those who are emphatic about a policy of pleasing Iran and containing Iran's attempts, desire, and program to destabilize the security of the GCC states. And Qatar is perhaps at the head of this group, and with it Oman, that does consider Iran a source of danger or instability. (Raghida Dargham, "The Gulf Security Challenges in Front of the Kuwait Summit," in Arabic, *Al-Hayat*, December 11, 2009)

allies. Finally, Oman has a long history of avoiding any appearance that it is siding against Iran, as evidenced by the fact that, unlike its GCC counterparts, Oman remained neutral in the Iran-Iraq War and has continued to be the strongest advocate in the GCC for dialogue or cooperation with Tehran. Oman's desire to retain friendly relations with Iran was also evidenced when the Sultan of Oman became the first head of state to visit Tehran after the 2009 disputed presidential elections and when the Omani ambassador to Iran accepted Iran's invitation to join a delegation touring its nuclear facilities ahead of the 2011 Istanbul talks.[14]

As to whether Iran is "deterrable," the GCC states discuss the Iranian nuclear issue from a rational-actor perspective that accepts the logic of self-interest and deterrence.

The statements of GCC public officials often include appeals to Iranian self-interest. Characteristic of the messaging is a comment by Saudi Crown Prince and Defense Minister Sultan: "With respect to Iran our hope . . . is that it is prudent and keeps its country away from any problems and [allow it to] proceed in a manner that benefits it."[15] Appeals to rationality are also used by GCC leaders to tamp down the escalation of rhetoric between Iran and its Arab Gulf neighbors.[16]

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[14] Rodger Shanahan, *The Gulf States and Iran: Robust Competitors or Interested Bystanders?* Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, November 2009; "Tehran Denies the Slowing of Its Nuclear Program and Carries Out the Exhibition of Its Facilities to an 'Objective' Delegation," in Arabic, *Al-Hayat*, January 17, 2011.

[15] "Al-Amir Sultan: We Are Not in Need of Nuclear Weapons and We Call on Iran to Be Prudent," in Arabic, *Asharq al-Awsat*, April 19, 2006.

[16] For example, after it was suggested by an Iranian official that any preventive strike against Iran's nuclear facilities would be met by a missile attack on U.S. military installations in the Gulf states, Deputy Crown Prince and Interior Minister Nayaf stated,

> I think that the brothers in Iran completely realize that [attacking the Arab Gulf states] is not in the interests of Iran and that Iran will not be a source of harm to its neighbors and its brothers. This is rational and sensible. And those [Arab Gulf] countries will not be a source of harm to Iran. ("Prince Nayef: The Iranians Realize That It Is Not in Their Interest to Do Harm to Their Neighbors," in Arabic, *Asharq al-Awsat*, June 18, 2007)

GCC Military Strategies

The GCC states are upgrading their missile defense systems and air forces with U.S. assistance.

The Gulf Security Dialogue has been used as a mechanism for the GCC states to improve their missile defense capabilities, by upgrading the Patriot system in Kuwait and through the provision of the Patriot 3 and THAAD air defense system to the UAE. In addition to the upgrades already under way in Kuwait and the UAE, press reports in late January 2010 suggested the transfer of two additional Patriot batteries each to Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE.[17]

While the GCC states are concerned by multiple threats, including internal security challenges, the acquisition of missile and air defense systems is clearly linked to countering the threat from Iran's missile arsenal. As argued by Tariq Khaitous, "Although [the UAE's] THAAD purchase is the clearest example, the pattern of procurement by other GCC states indicates that the weapons are well suited to counter Iranian threats and hard to explain from other perspectives."[18]

In addition to missile defense, Saudi Arabia is also in the process of acquiring up to 84 new F-15s and upgrading its existing 70 F-15s with improved radar.[19] Significantly, the proposed arms sale would also authorize Saudi Arabia to purchase one-ton guided bombs that could be used to penetrate buried targets and underground facilities.

Upgrades in equipment are being complimented by training and joint exercises with U.S. forces to improve interoperability. For example, in recent years, the annual U.S.-GCC exercise, Eagle Resolve, has focused on missile defense and "attack consequence management."[20]

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[17] David E. Sanger and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Speeding Up Missile Defenses in Persian Gulf," *New York Times*, January 30, 2010.

[18] Tariq Khaitous, *Arab Reactions to a Nuclear-Armed Iran*, Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus No. 94, June 2009, p. 4.

[19] "US Advances Saudi Arabia F-15 Package," *Wall Street Journal*, October 20, 2010; "Eyeing Iran, Saudis Upgrade F-15 Fleet," United Press International, June 15, 2010.

[20] Christopher M. Blanchard and Richard F. Grimmett, *The Gulf Security Dialog and Related Arms Sales Proposals*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL34322, October 8, 2008.

At the same time that the GCC states are building up their conventional military capabilities, these states are calibrating their messaging to avoid antagonizing Iran.

Despite Iran's often-provocative language toward the Arab Gulf states, GCC officials have tried to tamp down any escalation by emphasizing the commitment that their territory would not be used as a launching point for a preventive strike against Iran. To remove any ambiguity, the GCC states have made this commitment both individually and collectively. In addition to ruling out their territory for a preventive strike against Iran, the GCC states have attempted to signal through public statements their commitment to the following principles: Iran has a right to peaceful nuclear energy, it has not been proven that Iran's program is intended for the development of nuclear weapons, and the GCC states are committed to the resolution of the issue through peaceful means.

Saudi Arabia is the pivotal state in any GCC response to the security challenge posed by Iran.

Saudi Arabia's unique role in the GCC is based on the fact that it dwarfs the other five members of the organization, whether judged by hard-power metrics (e.g., size of economy, population, military capabilities) or soft power, such as its role as the custodian of Islam and self-proclaimed leader of the Sunni Muslim community. Saudi Arabia's leadership role in the GCC's collective defense can be seen in the fact that it outspends the other five members by nearly a 2-to-1 ratio and has offensive capabilities (intermediate-range missiles) not possessed by any other member state.[21] Saudi Arabia has also been active in protecting the traditional Sunni-Arab order by checking Iranian influence in Iraq and Lebanon.[22]

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[21] These are the CSS-2 ballistic missiles purchased from China in 1986.

[22] Particularly revealing in this regard was the op-ed penned by Nawaf Obaid, at the time a prominent adviser to the Saudi government, suggesting that Saudi Arabia would intervene

GCC Views of the United States

The GCC states see the United States as a less reliable guarantor of Gulf security since the Iraq War.

Although the prevailing narrative in the United States is that U.S. credibility was restored by turning around the security situation in Iraq, Gulf leaders and analysts continue to view the wars in Iraq as (1) exposing U.S. vulnerabilities and (2) a strategic error that was to the benefit of Iran.[23] A Saudi military journal put it this way:

> The current international and regional conditions appear favorable to Iran's regional strategy since the U.S. and its allies are involved in two wars in the region [Iraq and Afghanistan] with an enormous cost in lives and money, a matter which has shaken confidence in the [ability of the] United States to affect preemptive wars.[24]

This has led some in the region to question the credibility of U.S. commitments to defend its GCC partners in the event of an Iranian attack on them. As argued by a Saudi commentator,

> It is not clear that the Gulf states have true, reassuring guarantees from the international powers to defend them in the event

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in Iraq in the event of a precipitous U.S. withdrawal that turned the state over to Iran's Shi'a allies:

> Over the past year, a chorus of voices has called for Saudi Arabia to protect the Sunni community in Iraq and thwart Iranian influence there. . . . Remaining on the sidelines would be unacceptable to Saudi Arabia. To turn a blind eye to the massacre of Iraqi Sunnis would be to abandon the principles upon which the kingdom was founded. It would undermine Saudi Arabia's credibility in the Sunni world and would be a capitulation to Iran's militarist actions in the region. (Nawaf Obaid, "Stepping into Iraq: Saudi Arabia Will Protect Sunnis if the U.S. Leaves," *Washington Post*, November 29, 2006)

Saudi Arabia's willingness to back Sunni Arab allies in checking Iranian influence can also be seen in its support for the Hariri family and the March 14th bloc in Lebanon.

[23]   This point is developed in depth in Wehrey, Kaye, et al., 2010.

[24]   "The Iranian Regional and Nuclear Project," 2009.

their territory faces an Iranian attack. If we accept, for the sake of argument, that there are guarantees of this sort, then to what extent would these powers fulfill their promises and stand with their allies?[25]

In addition to the consequences of the Iraq war, the GCC states are concerned that the United States may trade Tehran's support in stabilizing Iraq and Afghanistan for the recognition of an Iranian sphere of influence in the Gulf. This has been communicated through talk of the United States and Iran reaching a second Sykes-Picot Agreement, in reference to the British-French division of their own zones of influence in the Middle East following World War I and the break-up of the Ottoman Empire.[26] The GCC states have also complained about being left out of P5+1 negotiations with Tehran in a manner that could "undermine the GCC states' security, stability and national interest."[27] During the Manama Dialogue of December 2009, the Bahraini foreign minister was particularly frank on this matter, noting, "If there are discussions about the region and the region is not represented in them, then that means there is someone talking behind our backs. One of them wants to make deals in which we are absent from the discussions. This is a fundamental mistake in the format of the negotiations."[28]

Examples of security diversification are emerging among GCC states.

The clearest indication of diversification in security relationships is the new French navy and air base in the UAE. That the stationing of French forces in the UAE was intended as both a signal and deterrent to Iran was evident in comments during the official opening of

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[25] "Wikileaks and the Gulf Position Towards a Nuclear Iran," 2010.

[26] Abdulaziz Sager, "The Interests of the Gulf Countries and the American-Iranian Bargaining," in Arabic, *Asharq al-Awsat*, June 8, 2010.

[27] Nicole Stratke, "GCC and the Challenge of US-Iran Negotiations," Gulf Research Centre, March 5, 2009. P5+1 refers to the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany.

[28] "Feltman: I Will Discuss in Washington the Participation of the Gulf Countries in the Iranian Nuclear File Negotiations," in Arabic, *Asharq al-Awsat*, December 14, 2009.

the base. President Nicolas Sarkozy said, "Be assured that France is on your side in the event that your security is at risk." An aide drew an even more explicit link to Iran: "We are deliberately taking a deterrent stance. If Iran were to attack, we would effectively be attacked also."[29] Just as the UAE has reached out to France, so has Oman stepped up its military-to-military cooperation with India. For example, in October 2009, the two countries ran a weeklong joint air defense exercise called Eastern Bridge.

As for the GCC states' relationships with Russia and China, they have focused on arms sales and energy development, respectively. Particularly significant in this regard are Saudi Arabia's efforts to acquire the S-400 air defense system from Russia, which, viewed through the lens of Russia's freeze on the S-300 sale to Iran, shows clear security competition between the two heavyweights on each side of the Gulf. These practical steps toward security diversification have been echoed by analysts such as Abdulaziz Sager, the director of the Gulf Research Center, who argues that the instability of the Gulf "demands more than at any time in the past that the GCC states coordinate their policies with regard to the United States, on the one hand, and strengthen their relations with the great international powers like China, Russia, Japan, and the EU, on the other hand."[30]

Future Uncertainties

Should instability in Bahrain lead to regime change, a new government more representative of that country's Shi'a population may seek improved relations with Iran.

The Sunni monarchy in Bahrain has been one of the GCC states most receptive to a U.S. presence, including the hosting of the Navy's 5th

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[29] Both quotes in this section are from International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Gulf States Step Up Defenses: Perceived Threat from Iran Prompts New Approaches," *Strategic Comments*, Vol. 15, No. 9, November 2009.

[30] Sager, 2008.

Fleet in Manama. Similarly, Bahrain has generally been supportive of efforts to dissuade Iran from weaponizing its nuclear program as well as strengthening the U.S.-led regional security order. The al-Khalifa monarchy's receptiveness is best explained by its heightened threat perceptions of Iran. With Shi'a accounting for two-thirds of the country's population, the monarchy feels vulnerable to Iranian influence, and this is further exacerbated by occasional statements from Iranian leadership asserting that Bahrain is an Iranian province rather than a sovereign state.

Unrest in Bahrain, some of which is driven by feelings of disenfranchisement among the country's Shi'a majority, has led both the Bahraini and Saudi monarchies to take an even tougher line against Iran. For example, shortly before the arrival of a Saudi-led Penninsula Shield force to assist Bahrain in providing for its internal security, the Saudi foreign minister threatened that "any finger raised against the Kingdom will be cut off. . . . Saudi Arabia does not allow anyone to intervene in its affairs."[31] The King of Bahrain has warned of foreign plots and in March 2011 withdrew Bahrain's ambassador to Iran in protest over what was deemed Iranian intervention in Bahrain's affairs. What role Iran actually played in mobilizing Bahrain's Shi'a to demonstrate against the monarchy is unclear, but the threat posed by the protests in Bahrain has clearly hardened the positions of the GCC states against Iranian interference. Should the al-Khalifa monarchy retain power, it is likely to be even more inclined to seek measures that contain Iranian influence, including opposing further development of Iran's nuclear program.

On the other hand, should the Bahraini opposition prevail in its goal of replacing the monarchy, a future government in Bahrain may be more inclined to seek improved relations with Tehran. The main Bahraini opposition group, al-Wifaq, is far from an Iranian proxy, but it is likely to be much more accommodating of Iran, which tries to position itself as the protector of the Shi'a community in the Gulf. This would make Bahrain even less likely to support an expanded U.S. pres-

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[31] "Sa'ud al-Faisal: We'll Cut Off Any Foreign Finger Extended Against Us," in Arabic, *Al-Hayat*, March 20, 2011.

ence designed to signal to Iran that a military option is on the table or further sanctions designed to raise the economic costs to Iran of pursuing its nuclear program.

While no Arab ally represents a near-term risk for nuclear proliferation, should Iran test a nuclear weapon, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are the two states that will pose the greatest proliferation risk.

Among the Arab allies, Saudi Arabia and Egypt deserve particular attention as proliferation risks. Saudi Arabia merits attention as a function of its economic resources, ties to Pakistan, and its potential access to nuclear technology, as well as its view of its role as the leader of the Sunni Muslim world and protector of that community. Saudi Arabia currently boasts no nuclear infrastructure and lacks the scientific expertise to develop a nuclear weapon indigenously.[32]

In contrast, Egypt's proliferation risk is linked to the fact that it has had a civilian nuclear program since the early 1960s (supported by the former Soviet Union), possesses two research reactors and 5,500 nuclear scientists and technicians,[33] and views itself as a natural leader of the Arab world, given its size (comprising nearly one-quarter of the region's population) and historic role as ideological standard bearer. The official position of Saudi Arabia and Egypt is that their civilian nuclear programs are intended as an energy source only. Moreover, these two partners' dependence on the United States (as the security guarantor for Saudi Arabia and the source of Egypt's military development through the $1.3 billion Cairo receives annually in foreign military financing), affords the United States substantial leverage in keeping these partners from seeking a nuclear deterrent of their own.

Both Egypt and the GCC states are constrained in their ability to support coercive measures against Iran because of opposition from their publics.

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[32] Kate Amlin, "Will Saudi Arabia Acquire Nuclear Weapons?" Washington, D.C.: Nuclear Threat Initiative, August 2008.

[33] Gulf Research Center, "Nuclearization of the Gulf," *Security and Terrorism Research Bulletin*, No. 7, December 2007.

A second major uncertainty is the scope of cooperation that the United States can expect from its allies in the region if it pursues more coercive measures against Iran. The GCC states, in particular, are constrained by the fact that openly siding with the West against Iran would likely be met by significant opposition from their publics, an important concern for regimes that already suffer from weak domestic legitimacy.

For example, in contrast to the genuine concern of Arab governments about the development of Iran's nuclear program—even if some states are more animated by the threat than others—Arab publics are much more sanguine about the implications of a nuclear Iran. In fact, in a recent Arab public opinion survey, 57 percent of respondents felt that Iran acquiring nuclear weapons would be a positive development, and 20 percent believed that it "would not matter."[34] In contrast, only 21 percent of respondents believed that Iran obtaining nuclear weapons would be a negative development. The significance of Arab public opinion is that it represents an additional constraint on the Arab allies embarking on a containment strategy toward Iran. While regimes in the region are authoritarian in nature and not as beholden to public opinion as states with more representative forms of government, Saudi Arabia's evolving position on U.S. basing in the country is just one example of how public opinion has a real impact on these regimes' security policies and defense strategies. In this case, the Arab public's respect for Iranian "resistance" to Western power is not sufficient to keep the GCC states from upgrading their conventional and missile defense capabilities; however, it almost certainly does inform the GCC states' declarations to take off of the table any use of their territory for a preventive strike against Iranian nuclear infrastructure. It would also complicate the Arab states' willingness to openly endorse a bolstered sanction regime against Iran or, in the event of a full-blown security crisis, accept that their territory would be used as a staging area for theater nuclear forces.

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[34] The data in this section are from Shibley Telhami, with Zogby International, *2010 Arab Public Opinion Poll*, August 5, 2010, p. 50. The sample size for the poll was 3,976 with a margin of error of ±1.6 percent. Respondents were drawn from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

Context for U.S. Reassurance Strategies: Israel

Views of Iran and Its Strategies

Israelis see Iran as harboring hegemonic designs for the region.

For most Israelis, Iranian regional ambitions are clear: a quest for hegemony and control over the region, to the detriment of Israeli interests and even its survival.[1] As an Israeli Foreign Ministry strategic assessment suggests,

> The strategy of regional hegemony pursued by Iran is the primary strategic influence in this region. The Iranian threat with its four components—the nuclear project, the support for terrorism, the attempts to undermine pragmatic Arab regimes, and the ideological-theological threat—remains at the core of Israel's foreign policy agenda.[2]

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[1] Some Israeli analysts, particularly those with expertise in Iranian affairs, do attempt to understand Iran's perceptions and recognize Iranian vulnerabilities in the economic arena and in terms of the U.S. threat. See, for example, Efraim Kam, "Introduction," in Efraim Kam, ed., *Israel and a Nuclear Iran: Implications for Arms Control, Deterrence, and Defense*, Tel Aviv, Israel: Institute for National Security Studies, Memorandum No. 94, July 2008, p. 7. But such sentiments are not widely discussed, particularly not in official circles, other than pointing out Iran's economic vulnerabilities in efforts to ratchet up sanctions against it.

[2] Eran Etzion, "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Situation Assessment for 2008–2009," *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 12, No. 1, June 2009, pp. 52–53. Etzion was the deputy head of Israel's National Security Council from 2005 to 2008 and is currently head of the Foreign Ministry's political planning division. This strategic assessment was the first of its kind since Israel's inception.

Many Israelis also believe that Iran's hegemonic ambitions are driven not only by its strategic interest in challenging Israel as its main competitor for regional dominance but also by an ideological mission to destroy the Jewish state itself.[3]

While Iran's ideological framing of its anti-Israel rhetoric might mask underlying strategic motives, Israelis nonetheless take this ideology seriously. The consolidation of power of the more ideologically minded, less pragmatic Iranian leaders since the June 2009 presidential election and the widespread belief that this leadership is intent on acquiring nuclear weapons have only further intensified Israel's concern about Iran.

Israelis view Iranian nuclear designs as an existential threat.

Many Israelis—and certainly Israel's official position—maintain that Iran poses an existential threat and, therefore, its nuclear designs are not acceptable. What exactly do Israelis fear from Iran's nuclear quest, and why do they perceive it as an existential threat?

First, across the political spectrum, Israelis believe that Iran's use of such weapons against it is a viable possibility, particularly given the widespread view in Israel that ideology is a major driver of Iranian actions.[4] Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has expressed concern

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[3]   A Foreign Ministry assessment argues,

> The total delegitimization of Israel's existence, which lies at the heart of Iran's policy, is based on deep ideological foundations and attracts growing popular support not only among Shiites but also among Sunnis. Alongside the United States ("the great Satan"), Israel ("the little Satan") is the primary focus for incitement and subversion. (Etzion, 2009, p. 53)

[4]   Although the Holocaust has been referenced only rarely, "except on the extremes, in Israeli politics," Israeli analysts Yossi Klein Halevi and Michael B. Oren state that "the Iranian threat has returned the Final Solution to the heart of Israeli discourse." They explain, "The threat of a theologically motivated nuclear assault against Israel tends to be downplayed in the West; not so here. The former head of Israel's National Security Council Giora Eiland has warned that an apocalyptically driven Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would be willing to sacrifice half his country's population to obliterate the Jewish state" (Yossi Klein Halevi and Michael B. Oren, "Israel's Worst Nightmare," *New Republic*, February, 5, 2007). Halevi and Oren write at length about the perception of a theological basis underlying the existential threat posed to Israel:

that Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons would pose a direct threat to Israeli civilians (albeit through like-minded allies): "I don't subscribe to the view that Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons is a status symbol. . . . These are people who are sending thousands of missiles to their terrorist 'proxies,' Hizballah and Hamas, with the specific instruction to bomb civilians in Israel."[5] Netanyahu has also argued that the Iranian regime is driven by an ideology that is not rational and, unlike the Soviet Union, may not always choose survival over its ideology.[6]

Second, Israelis worry that, even if Iran did not intentionally use nuclear weapons against Israel, the potential for unintended use or accidents would be a significant risk, as Israeli-Iranian deterrence differs in significant ways from the Cold War context. Prominent Israeli experts on deterrence question the probability of Iran's intentional nuclear use against Israel, since "in view of Israel's widely assumed large nuclear arsenal and numerous delivery vehicles . . . it appears highly improbable that even a fanatic leadership would choose such a policy. . . . No regime, even if endowed with the most extreme ideology, chooses to commit suicide."[7] Nonetheless, such analysts still worry about the dangers of a nuclear-armed Iran because it poses other risks, particularly unintended escalation and accidents, given the short distances in the

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Military men suddenly sound like theologians when explaining the Iranian threat. Ahmadinejad, they argue, represents a new "activist" strain of Shiism, which holds that the faithful can hasten the return of the Hidden Iman, the Shia messiah, by destroying evil. . . . And so Ahmadinejad's pronouncements about the imminent return of the Hidden Imam and the imminent destruction of Israel aren't regarded as merely calculated for domestic consumption; they are seen as glimpses into an apocalyptic game plan. (Halevi and Oren, 2007)

See also Chuck Freilich, "The Armageddon Scenario: Israel and the Threat of Nuclear Terrorism," Ramat Gan, Israel: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, Perspectives 104, April 8, 2010.

[5] Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel, excerpt from interview on NBC's *Meet the Press*, June 21, 2009a.

[6] On-the-record address to the Council on Foreign Relations, New York, July 8, 2010.

[7] Yair Evron, "An Israel-Iran Balance of Nuclear Deterrence: Seeds of Instability," in Efraim Kam, ed., *Israel and a Nuclear Iran: Implications for Arms Control, Deterrence, and Defense*, Tel Aviv, Israel: Institute for National Security Studies, Memorandum No. 94, July 2008, p. 52.

region and the absence of direct communication between Israel and Iran (as occurred in the U.S.-Soviet case).[8]

Third, Israelis fear that a nuclear-armed Iran will provide a cover for Iran's nonstate allies to increase their attacks on Israel and may even prompt Israelis to flee the country in the face of such rising threats. Netanyahu has spoken, for example, of Iran providing a "nuclear umbrella" for terrorist groups, which, in his view, would be a "departure in the security of the Middle East . . . [and] certainly the security of my country."[9]

A final Israeli concern relates to the potential of a nuclear Iran triggering further nuclear proliferation in the region; nearly every Israeli strategic assessment on the subject includes this prospect. Israel views a multipolar nuclear Middle East as particularly threatening to regional stability and Israeli security, even if this prospect is less directly existential than other Israeli concerns about Iran's nuclear program.[10]

Internal and Regional Political and Military Interests and Policies

Israel's security doctrine is focused on self-reliance, overwhelming force, and deterrence, even as its security posture has shifted from Arab states to Iran.

Israel's security posture toward a potentially nuclear-armed Iran is embedded in its broader security doctrine focused on maintaining a qualitative military edge over its adversaries to offset its small size, as well as building its deterrence posture by acquiring and demonstrating

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[8]   See Evron, 2008.

[9]   Netanyahu, 2009a. Concern about a nuclear Iran providing a cover for more aggressive conventional actions against Israel and limiting Israel's freedom of action against such groups was also expressed in interviews with Israeli officials and analysts in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, January 2009.

[10]   For further examination of the reasons that Israel is concerned about Iran's nuclear program, see Ehsaneh I. Sadr, "The Impact of Iran's Nuclearization on Israel," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Summer 2005.

its willingness to use overwhelming force. Since the early 1990s, Israel has shifted its focus from security threats emanating from Arab states to the threat posed by Iran and its nonstate allies.[11] Former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's frustration with what he perceived as mild U.S. intelligence assessments regarding Iran's nuclear activities led him to begin preparing for a preventive military strike option, ordering long-range bombers capable of reaching Iran.[12] Over the past decade, Israeli concerns over Iranian missile and nuclear activity have accelerated, leading Iran to emerge as Israel's primary strategic challenge today.

Military capabilities, training, and preparations indicate that all military options are on the table (i.e., a preventive strike against Iran).

Although Israeli officials rarely speak in detail about a preventive military strike against Iran,[13] they frequently refer to the position that "all options are on the table."[14] Despite little public discussion within Israel of the military strike option, a report by a well-known Israeli journalist suggests that, in quiet deliberations, senior Israeli officials are seriously considering this option and believe that Iranian retaliation would likely be limited.[15] Netanyahu's national security adviser, Uzi Arad,

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[11] Upon taking office in 1992, former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin sought to address the growing Iranian challenge, prompting him to engage in peace negotiations with the Palestinians to resolve Israel's "inner circle of threat" so that it could deal with what he perceived as its more dangerous "outer circle of threat" coming from Iran and its nuclear program. See Halevi and Oren, 2007.

[12] Halevi and Oren, 2007.

[13] According to Ehud Yaari, "The military and intelligence communities are under strict instructions to avoid making remarks except to affirm that Israel is preparing itself for 'any eventuality.'" Yaari also notes that there is little public discussion in Israel about its options toward Iran. See Ehud Yaari, "Iran's Nuclear Program: Deciphering Israel's Signals," Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch No. 1597, November 5, 2009.

[14] See, for example, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, statement during a meeting with U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Washington, D.C., September 21, 2009.

[15] According to the report, senior Israeli officials argue that Iranian retaliation through Hezbollah or Hamas may be constrained, as both groups would want to avoid retaliation in Lebanon and Gaza. See Yaari, 2009.

has stated publicly that he believes that the international community would back an Israeli military strike: "I don't see anyone who questions the legality of this or the legitimacy. . . . They only discuss the efficacy, which is interesting. It suggests that people understand the problem."[16]

Some Israeli analysts have argued in favor of a military option against Iran, suggesting that, despite the risks and complications, "the difficulty is exaggerated, and inaction is bound to bring about far worse consequences."[17] Indeed, assessments of Israel's ability to strike Iran suggest that Israel already has sufficient capabilities to launch a unilateral attack, including its F-16 and F-15 aircraft and Global Positioning System and laser-guided munitions in sufficient numbers to penetrate Iranian defenses and reach nuclear targets.

But more detailed assessments also recognize that an Israeli unilateral attack, while possible, would be complicated by overflight challenges and long distances, among other operational and political risks that would also affect the United States.[18] Israeli leaders are aware that a military strike on Iran would be far more difficult and complicated than either the Iraqi or Syrian cases, even if some suggest that the negative consequences of an Israeli attack may be exaggerated or that the risks of an attack may outweigh the costs of doing nothing.

The effectiveness of an Israeli strike is also in question, given the dispersed nature of Iranian nuclear capabilities (and buried sites), suggesting that such a strike would, at most, delay but not halt Iran's program. Although most of the detailed assessments concerning the effectiveness of an Israeli strike come from Western analysts, some Israeli commentators and former military officers are beginning to openly express doubts about the utility of such an operation. For example,

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[16] Quoted in Janine Zacharia, "Netanyahu Aide Questions Peace Effort, Iran Sanctions," *Washington Post*, June 23, 2010.

[17] Efraim Inbar, "The Imperative to Use Force Against Iranian Nuclearization," Ramat Gan, Israel: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, Perspectives 12, December 15, 2005.

[18] For a detailed assessment of an Israeli military strike on Iran, see Simon, 2009, and Toukan and Cordesman, 2009. For further details on a potential Israeli military attack and an argument emphasizing its dangers, see Paul Rogers, *Military Action Against Iran: Impact and Effects*, Oxford Research Group, July 2010.

some commentators note that Iranian nuclear sites are now so widely dispersed and buried that the risks of an Israeli action without U.S. support would not be worth the limited setbacks it could inflict on Iran's program.[19] Such an operation would also likely require all of Israel's aerial tankers to refuel up to 100 of its jets (Israel's strike on Iraq's Osirik reactor in 1981 required only eight F-16 fighters, in contrast), making it a highly costly operation. As a retired Israeli general put it, "If there's no choice, Israel can set back the Iranian nuclear process," but it would be unable to launch a sustained campaign to stop it and would likely face Iranian retaliation through ballistic missile attacks directed against Israel.[20]

Despite these complications and risks, Israeli military acquisitions and training suggest preparation for a military option. For example, Israel conducted a long-range air exercise over the Mediterranean Sea in June 2008, where distances corresponded in reach and scale to a notional Israeli attack on Iran.[21] The Israeli Air Force has increased its overseas training and held a joint aerial drill with the United States in June 2010 that simulated a war against an "enemy state."[22] The 2010 F-35 stealth fighter aircraft agreement with the United States is another example of building capabilities with an eye toward Iran,[23] particularly since a stealth capability would be critical if Iran acquires the S-300 advanced air defense system from Russia.[24]

Several other factors could affect Israel's calculations regarding a military strike, including assessments of the success of sanctions and

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[19] See, for example, "Israelis Ponder the Perils of Hitting Iran," United Press International, December 30, 2009.

[20] "Israelis Ponder the Perils of Hitting Iran," 2009.

[21] According to one report, this Israeli exercise "really spooked a lot of people" and prompted White House discussions about the possibility of Israel flying over Iraq without U.S. permission. See David E. Sanger, "U.S. Rejected Aid for Israeli Raid on Iranian Nuclear Site," *New York Times*, January 10, 2009.

[22] Yaakov Katz, "Israel, US Hold Joint Maneuvers to Simulate Attack Against Enemy State," *Jerusalem Post*, June 11, 2010.

[23] "Israel Wants More Stealth Fighters," 2010.

[24] See Amos Harel, "Much-Heralded Jet Headed to Israel," *Haaretz*, November 10, 2009.

sabotage efforts against Iran's nuclear program. In early 2011, high-level Israeli officials expressed upbeat assessments suggesting a longer time frame for Iranian nuclear advances than in previous statements.[25] However, it is not clear whether there is consensus among Israeli officials on such assessments or how the slowing of Iran's nuclear enrichment efforts might affect Israeli calculations regarding a conventional military strike.[26]

The U.S. position is another important consideration regarding an Israeli military strike. President George W. Bush reportedly opposed an Israeli military strike on Iran, and current U.S. military leaders continue to express concerns about this option. While Israeli public support for a military strike may decrease if the United States is against it, polling shows that the majority of Israelis would still support such an option even in the face of U.S. opposition if they believed that all other options had been exhausted.[27]

Thus, an Israeli military strike is a viable option in the next several years, even if it is not Israel's preferred policy. Indeed, official statements suggest a preference for heightened economic pressure by the global community—particularly Europe, Russia, and China—to prevent Iran's nuclear advancement. Israelis also express confidence that economic sanctions, if more effectively applied, could create enough pressure on the Iranian leadership to shift course.[28] Israeli assessments

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[25] See Roni Sofer, "Dagan Backtracks: Iran May Have Nukes by 2015," *Ynet News*, January 17, 2011.

[26] See Ari Shavit, "Dagan Brought a Possible Attack on Iran Closer," *Haaretz*, January 20, 2011.

[27] According to a poll by the New America Foundation, 51 percent supported a military attack on Iran's nuclear sites "even if the Americans request us not to attack," while 41 percent would not support such an attack if the United States opposed it (New America Foundation, *Israel National Survey*, November 8–15, 2009). Another poll found that 66 percent would support a military strike against Iranian nuclear facilities if diplomatic and economic efforts failed, and, remarkably, 75 percent said that they would still support military action even if the Obama administration opposed Israel taking action. See Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies and Anti-Defamation League, *Israeli Views of President Obama and US-Israel Relations*, May 4, 2009.

[28] For example, Netanyahu recently argued, "We need to continue these efforts to bring real pressure—meaningful sanctions against the Iranian regime. They are very vulnerable

in early 2011 that the Iranian nuclear enrichment program had slowed can be attributed to the belief that economic and diplomatic pressure (as well as the setbacks Iran has faced in the aftermath of the Stuxnet computer virus and other sabotage efforts) may be working to at least delay the Iranian program.[29] So, although Israelis overwhelmingly believe that a nuclear-armed Iran is not an acceptable future and prefer the risks of a military strike over allowing Iran to go nuclear, Israel has signaled that it is not eager for a unilateral, military solution to this problem, even if it keeps this option operationally viable.

Israel is also developing and bolstering second-strike capabilities and missile defenses.

Israel is also developing capabilities focused on adapting to and potentially living with such an outcome, in addition to significant second-strike capabilities. For example, it has acquired sea-based options, most notably *Dolphin*-class submarines from Germany, which are capable of launching cruise missiles carrying nuclear warheads.

Iranian missiles are a particular concern for Israel, leading Israel to actively develop its missile defense capabilities, moving from a two-tier system of missile defense (based on the Arrow II and Patriot systems) to a four-tier system based on the Arrow II, Arrow III, Patriot, and David's Sling systems.[30] Toward the end of the George W. Bush

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economically and, I think, also in terms of the legitimacy they have lost among the international community. . . . We now have opportunity to impose effective sanctions" (Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel, excerpt of address at the Eilat Journalism Conference, November 29, 2009b).

[29] See, for example, Broad, Markoff, and Sanger, 2011.

[30] See Uzi Rubin and Michael Elleman, "Iranian Missiles and U.S. Missile Defense," Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch No. 1598, November 6, 2009. For further details on Israel's missile defense options to counter a nuclear Iran, see Uzi Rubin, "Missile Defense and Israel's Deterrence Against a Nuclear Iran," in Efraim Kam, ed., *Israel and a Nuclear Iran: Implications for Arms Control, Deterrence, and Defense*, Tel Aviv, Israel: Institute for National Security Studies, Memorandum No. 94, July 2008. Part of this layered missile defense also includes the Iron Dome missile shield, intended to intercept rockets from Gaza and Southern Lebanon. Unlike the Arrow and David's Sling systems, which were developed in cooperation with the United States, Iron Dome is an

administration, the United States also delivered the X-band radar system, controlled by U.S. forces, to an air base in Israel's Negev (southern) region, along with supporting U.S. equipment and personnel.[31] Although U.S. European Command has deployed troops and Patriot air defense systems to Israel in the past for joint exercises and Iraq War contingencies, the X-band deployment constitutes a permanent U.S. presence on Israeli soil.[32] This sophisticated long-range early-warning radar can detect targets from thousands of miles away, making it a particularly important system for future contingencies involving Iran.[33] The Pentagon agreed to link the X-band radar into the U.S. Joint Tactical Ground Station (JTAGS); the U.S. government had denied earlier Israeli requests for JTAGS due to security classification objections by the Air Force, so this deployment was viewed as a significant advancement for Israeli early-warning systems.[34]

Moreover, one of the largest U.S.-Israeli joint exercises, the biennial Juniper Cobra missile defense exercise, took place in October and November 2009 (the Israel Defense Forces have been conducting these exercises with U.S. European Command and the Missile Defense Agency since 2001).[35] The 2009 exercise involved 2,000 military personnel and tested multiple missile defense systems, including the Aegis interceptor system (on the USS *Higgins* based in Haifa's port and

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Israeli project. Israel announced a successful test of the system in early January 2010. See Sheera Frenkel, "Israel Says Tests on Iron Dome Missile Shield Have Been a Success," *Times* (London), January 8, 2010.

[31] The delivery took place on September 21, 2008. See Gayle S. Putrich, "U.S. Deploys Radar, Troops to Israel," *Defense News*, September 26, 2008.

[32] Putrich, 2008.

[33] On a visit to Israel in August 2008, the director of the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency argued that the new system would "add precious minutes" to Israel's response time to incoming missiles, noting, "The missile threat from Iran is very real, and we must stay ahead of the threat" (quoted in Putrich, 2008).

[34] According to an Israeli defense expert, "Since they threw in JTAGS, it's become a whole new ballgame. We're looking at a very generous gift from the United States, even it means we have to compromise on sovereignty by having U.S. troops deployed here" (quoted in Barbara Opall-Rome, "U.S. to Deploy Radar, Troops in Israel," *Defense News*, August 18, 2008).

[35] See Yaakov Katz, "Israel Goes Ballistic," *Jerusalem Post*, September 11, 2009a.

focused on security threats in Israel's north), THAAD, and Patriot-3. The exercise was aimed at integrating U.S. missile defense systems, like the Aegis and THAAD, with the Israeli Arrow in the face of an attack and generally improving interoperability between U.S. and Israeli systems to better prepare for future attacks against Israel (in contrast to the Patriot system deployed against Iraq in the 1991 Gulf war, which was viewed as unsuccessful).[36] Israeli news reports discussed the exercise in the context of countering accelerated Iranian ballistic missile development and defending Israel against attack, as well as the Obama administration's shift from missile defense interceptors in Eastern Europe to sea-based missile defense in the Mediterranean Sea.[37] Other joint U.S.-Israeli military exercises and stepped-up high-level military exchanges have further signaled U.S. interest in intensifying the security relationship with Israel in the context of rising concerns over Iran.[38]

Views of the United States

Israelis worry about the general erosion of U.S. power and stature.

Although Israel has no public, formal defense pact with the United States, repeated public statements by U.S. officials and references to Israel in official U.S. security documents imply that the United States is committed to guaranteeing Israel's security and survival. Enhanced military cooperation with Israel over the past several years has reinforced such views.

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[36] See Ilene R. Prusher, "To Defend Against Iran Missiles, US and Israel Conduct Joint Exercises," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 29, 2009.

[37] See Katz, 2009a; Yaakov Katz, "Israel, US to Simulate Response to Regional War During Missile Defense Drill," *Jerusalem Post*, October 11, 2009b; and Yaakov Katz, "Juniper Cobra Exercise Here to Help US Design European Missile Shield," *Jerusalem Post*, November 1, 2009c.

[38] See Charles Levinson, "US, Israel Build Military Cooperation," *Wall Street Journal*, August 14, 2010.

At the same time, because Israeli policymakers view every issue through the prism of Iran,[39] Israelis view U.S. commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan as a distraction. Moreover, when U.S. stature in the region eroded after the invasion of Iraq and the instability and violence that ensued, Israel worried that its own deterrence posture would be undermined, given its close relationship with Washington.

From the perspective of many Israelis, the erosion and limitations of U.S. power were serious strategic consequences of the Iraq War, even if the official Israeli position opposed a premature U.S. withdrawal. One Israeli analyst suggested that the "Iraq War convinced everyone that the United States can't go to war anywhere else, and the intelligence debacle has made things difficult for the future."[40] If the newly formed government in Iraq insists on a complete U.S. withdrawal from the country, or if the U.S. drawdown leads to renewed large-scale violence, perceptions of declining U.S. influence in the region are likely to increase among Israeli decisionmakers.

Israelis are wary of U.S. engagement policies and fear that the United States has already accepted Iran's nuclear status.

Since Rabin began focusing Israel's attention on Iranian nuclear efforts, Israeli leaders have consistently raised concerns about the U.S. inclination to downplay this challenge. The 2007 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate—which suggested that Iran had halted its nuclear weapon development, even if it continued enrichment programs—was particularly alarming to Israel, leading to sharp and negative responses from leaders and analysts.[41] While high-level Israeli officials are now making similar, less alarmist, assessments of Iran's nuclear timeline,

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[39] Author interviews in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, February 2008 and January 2009.

[40] Author interview with Israeli analyst and former government official, February 22, 2008, Tel Aviv.

[41] As Member of Knesset Yuval Steinitz put it, "The NIE Report dealt a severe blow to the fight against Iranian nuclearization; it gave China and Russia an excuse to soften their stance. The report if entirely unfounded . . . it is the most bizarre report I have ever read" (Yuval Steinitz, summary of remarks at Assessing Iran's Nuclean Intentions and Capabilities, Eighth Herzliya Conference, January 22, 2008).

Israeli reports suggest that the prime minister and other national security officials remain concerned about Iran's nuclear advances and favor continued pressure, including a credible military option, to address this threat.[42]

Moreover, President Obama's low favorability ratings among Israelis in some polls reinforce views that U.S. engagement policies toward Iran will come at Israel's expense.[43] Moreover, statements by U.S. leaders, even if intended to reassure Israelis, are taken as evidence that the United States may be accepting of the eventuality of a nuclear Iran. For example, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's notion of providing a U.S. "nuclear" or "defense umbrella" for regional allies backfired in Israel; such statements were read as U.S. acquiescence of a nuclear-armed Iran.[44]

Still, despite the friction in U.S.-Israel relations in the first year of the Obama administration, the majority (76 percent) of Israelis still believed that the United States would help Israel if it faced a threat to its existence, or so-called "moment of truth."[45] Another poll found that, by a margin of 63 to 31 percent, Israelis believed that the United States was the only country that Israel can count on.[46] Israeli leaders were also pleased with President Obama's assessment in spring 2010 that

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[42] Shavit, 2011.

[43] Polling numbers on Obama's popularity in Israel vary significantly. Some polls have shown his favorability rating to be as low as 4 percent (see Gil Hoffman, "4% of Israeli Jews: Obama Pro-Israel," *Jerusalem Post*, August 27, 2009). Others, such as a December 2009 poll by the New America Foundation, have reflected a favorability rating of 41 percent. Another poll put Obama's favorability at 60 percent, and even 81 percent, among opinion-holders; see Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies and Anti-Defamation League, 2009. Still, even the New America Foundation poll found unusually high numbers of Israelis believing that Obama is weak on terrorism (50 percent) or naïve (43 percent).

[44] As one senior Israeli security source is quoted as saying, "What is the significance of such guarantee when it comes from those who hesitated to deal with a non-nuclear Iran? What kind of credibility would this [guarantee have] when Iran is nuclear-capable?" (quoted in Aluf Benn and *Haaretz* correspondent, "Obama's Atomic Umbrella: U.S. Nuclear Strike if Iran Nukes Israel," *Haaretz*, December 11, 2008). Also see Yoel Guzansky, "Compromising on a Nuclear Iran," *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 12, No. 3, November 2009, p. 88.

[45] Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies and Anti-Defamation League, 2009.

[46] New America Foundation, 2009.

Iran was pursuing a nuclear weapon capability that is "unacceptable."[47] Some Israeli officials believe that the Obama administration has demonstrated its seriousness about stopping the Iranian nuclear program through its multilateral and unilateral actions to isolate Iran and have even begun to accept U.S. engagement efforts, believing that they can show that Iran is not serious about a nuclear agreement, thus enhancing international pressure rather than undermining it.[48]

Future Uncertainties

Could there be a removal of ambiguity in Israel's nuclear posture?

Although Israel is assumed to maintain a significant nuclear weapon capability, as well as land-, sea-, and air-based means of delivery,[49] its official nuclear posture is one of ambiguity or opacity. This policy is expressed through the oft-used expression that "Israel will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East, nor will it be the second." This posture has eroded somewhat over the years,[50] but it has proven useful in terms of balancing Israel's deterrence interests with its relationship with Washington.[51]

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[47] Herb Keinon, "Obama Warns Iran Must Be Stopped," *Jerusalem Post*, April 6, 2010.

[48] Author interviews with Israeli officials, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, August 2010.

[49] Estimates of Israel's nuclear arsenal range from 100 to 300. Israel's nuclear triad includes its Jericho missile program (these land-based ballistic missiles are presumed to be the primary means of delivery), air force fighter jets equipped to deliver nuclear warheads, and cruise missiles launched from the German Type 800 *Dolphin*-class submarines. See Seth Elan et al., *Open Source Research on Nuclear Doctrine and Strategy, Command and Control, and Delivery Systems in Iran and Israel*, Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, December 2005.

[50] For example, in 1998, Shimon Peres essentially acknowledged Israel's nuclear program, stating, "We didn't build this (nuclear) option to get to Hiroshima, but rather to get to Oslo" (quoted in Gawdat Bahgat, "Israel and Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Summer 2006, p. 113). Also cited in Elan et al., 2005, pp. 58–59.

[51] Israel's agreement with the United States to accept its nuclear ambiguity dates to a 1969 meeting between President Richard Nixon and Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir. The agreement suggested that the United States could live with an Israeli nuclear capability (ending

Despite this opaque policy, Israeli deterrence statements make it clear that it reserves the right to employ this option in the face of unconventional threats. After Saddam Hussein threatened to destroy Israel with chemical weapons in April 1990, then–Defense Minister Rabin stated that "we have the means for a devastating response, may times greater than [the magnitude of] Saddam Hussein's threats."[52] Similarly, prior to the 2003 Iraq War, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said,

> If Iraq attacks Israel, but does not hit population centers or cause casualties, our interest will be not to make it hard on the Americans. If, on the other hand, harm is done to Israel, if we suffer casualties or if non-conventional weapons of mass destruction are used against us, then definitely Israel will take the proper action to defend its citizens.[53]

Similar statements by Israeli officials suggest a countervalue rather than counterforce nuclear posture, emphasizing its deterrent purpose.[54] Because open nuclear discussion in Israel is still prohibited, Israelis have not yet had a public debate about the levels of nuclear capability that would serve as a sufficient deterrent.

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the Kennedy and Johnson administrations' pressure on Israel to give up this capability) as long as Israel did not publicly declare or test its nuclear warheads. Such a compromise policy allowed Israel to maintain its deterrent while avoiding a clash with the United States and violating international nonproliferation norms. The policy also bridged differences among the Israeli national security elite; the Israeli security establishment was initially divided about whether Israel should go nuclear. For details on the history of Israel's nuclear development and negotiations with the United States, see Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, and Shai Feldman, *Israeli Nuclear Deterrence: A Strategy for the 1980s*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

[52] Quoted in Shai Feldman, *Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East*, Cambridge, Mass.: Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, 1997, p. 102.

[53] Quoted in Elan et al., 2009, p. 55.

[54] For example, during the 1991 Gulf War Rabin argued, "How do you think we deterred the Syrians? What did we tell them? We told them: If you strike Tel Aviv with surface-to-surface missiles—Damascus will be destroyed. If you attack Haifa with such missiles, Damascus and Haleb would not remain—they would be destroyed. We will not deal with the missile launchers, we will destroy Damascus instead" (quoted in Feldman, 1997, p. 102).

Israel's posture of ambiguity has served it well, but it has eroded over time, and some have argued—albeit for different reasons—for a revision of this policy. If the scenario of Iran openly declaring its nuclear weapon capability emerges, or if confidence in U.S. guarantees erodes, Israel will face growing pressure to bring its bomb out of the basement. To some, this shift in doctrine to an open nuclear posture would seem necessary to bolster Israel's deterrence. For example, a 2003 advisory report for then–Prime Minister Sharon recommended specifying 15 high-value targets from Libya to Iran to strengthen the credibility of Israel's nuclear deterrent.[55] Some experts also argue that Israel may need to move away from ambiguity, not only for deterrence but also to build reliable early-warning systems between Israel and Iran, should Iran become a known nuclear state.[56] But if the virtual or ambiguous Iran nuclear scenario unfolds, Israel would be less likely to change its current posture, although the dangers of an ambiguous posture could create some incentives for Israel and Iran to start back-channel or track 2 discussions on nuclear confidence-building measures.

The internal nature of the Iranian regime may also affect what Israel decides with regard to its nuclear posture in the future, as well as how Israel perceives the Iranian threat in its hierarchy of concerns. Or other regional developments (such as a regime change in Saudi Arabia) may shift Israel's perception of the Iran threat relative to other regional challenges. In the past, Israel has had internal debate about the severity of the Iranian challenge, and the strategic logic of cooperating with non-Arab periphery states, like Iran (albeit secretly), held well after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Such debate about Iran could conceivably arise again in a different regional context or if Iranian leadership changes.[57]

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[55] For details on this report, see Louis Rene Beres, "Israel's Uncertain Strategic Future," *Parameters*, Spring 2007.

[56] See Reuven Pedatzur, "The End of the Military Option," *Haaretz*, October 14, 2009.

[57] Trita Parsi argues in his book *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Iran, Israel and the United States* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007) that Netanyahu came to office in 1996 seeking to undo the peace process and refocus Israel on a periphery strategy (e.g., secret or open alliances with non-Arabs to balance Arab threats). A government report was critical of the shrill rhetoric of Rabin and Peres on Iran, and Netanyahu requested an

At the same time, Israel would be unlikely to forgo its nuclear deterrent even in the unlikely scenario of the Islamic Republic collapsing, as long as Iran and others in the region continue to maintain other types of WMD. Some Israeli analysts believe that Israel's nuclear capabilities offer little deterrence value and argue that Israel should consider moving toward serious arms-control talks and eventual disarmament.[58] Other analysts similarly argue that Israel's nuclear posture is outdated and needs to change to allow for more transparency and accountability in today's security environment.[59] But this position is still the minority view mostly held by academics, and the defense establishment and popular opinion still strongly support maintaining Israel's nuclear deterrent, particularly with the looming specter of a nuclear-armed Iran.

Could there be a more formal security agreement with the United States?

Some discussion has emerged regarding the possibility of a formal defense pact with the United States in response to an overt or even

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intelligence assessment. A debate followed between Amos Gilad (representing military intelligence) and Uzi Arad (representing Mossad, the Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations). Gilad argued that Iran had replaced Iraq as Israel's most serious existential threat. Arad argued that Iranian armament was largely defensive and aimed at deterring Saddam; he recommended toning down Israel's rhetoric on Iran to avoid making Israel Iran's main enemy. (A prominent former general and scholar, Shlomo Brom, was on this side as well.) For several months, Netanyahu followed Arad's advice, but Israeli policy quickly reverted to the Gilad camp, where it remains today.

[58] Israeli scholar Zeev Maoz argues, for example, that Israel's nuclear capabilities failed to deter adversaries in the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars or in Iraq in the 1991 Gulf conflict. Consequently, he believes that Israeli policy should move toward a nuclear weapon–free zone. Maoz also argues that the Iraqis did not use chemical weapons in the 1991 war because their capabilities were too crude and conventional strikes were more effective—not because of Israeli deterrence. See Zeev Maoz, "The Mixed Blessing of Israel's Nuclear Policy," *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Fall 2003, and Louis Rene Beres and Zeev Maoz, "Correspondence: Israel and the Bomb," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 1, Summer 2004.

[59] The most authoritative and vocal advocate for a shift in Israel's nuclear posture is Avner Cohen, particularly in his recent book, *The Worst-Kept Secret: Israel's Bargain with the Bomb*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

ambiguous nuclear Iran.[60] But such a pact would surely face resistance in Israel, as it would openly challenge Israel's long-standing doctrine of self-reliance. As an Israeli analyst explained,

> Israel must forestall any impression in Iran that Israel lacks an adequate deterrent of its own and is dependent on American deterrence. Furthermore, strategic reliance on the US or NATO may incur a cost—for example, demanding that Israel subscribe to the idea of a nuclear weapons–free Middle East—such that it is important to assess whether the same benefit can be achieved without the formal agreement.[61]

Israel is already expressing discomfort about its increased reliance on U.S. capabilities, such as the X-band early-warning radar system that is deployed in Israel but controlled by U.S. forces.[62]

Moreover, it is not clear that Israel will feel that a formal defense pact is necessary. It could ask for confirmation of existing implicit or private U.S. guarantees rather than a formal pact. And as long as Israel maintains its own nuclear deterrent with credible second-strike capabilities, a formal pact with the United States may be less likely than the continuation and enhancement of less formal security guarantees and military cooperation.

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[60] There has been some discussion about possible Israeli membership in NATO in response to a nuclear-armed Iran. However, despite enhanced cooperation between Israel and NATO in recent years, it is not clear that either Israel or NATO is interested in full Israeli membership in the organization. It is unlikely that Israel would feel that it could depend on NATO, and NATO members would be reluctant to become entangled in wars involving Israel. For a discussion of these and other challenges, see Josef Joffe, "Israel and NATO: A Good Idea Whose Time Will Never Come," Ramat Gan, Israel: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, Perspectives 77, May 25, 2009.

[61] Efraim Kam, *A Nuclear Iran: What Does It Mean, and What Can Be Done?* Tel Aviv, Israel: Institute for National Strategic Studies, Memorandum 88, February 2007, p. 78.

[62] Israeli officials have expressed concern, for example, that the system will expose Israeli secrets to the Americans. Israelis also worry that this system will anger the Russians, since its range will allow the U.S. to monitor aircraft over southern Russia. See Gil Ronen, "Israeli Officials: X-Band Radar May Expose Israeli Secrets to US," *Arutz Sheva*, October 4, 2008.

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