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THE ADVENT OF A NUCLEAR IRAN AND THE FUTURE OF MIDDLE EAST SECURITY

By

DAVID ERIC WILSON

A Thesis Submitted to the Honors College

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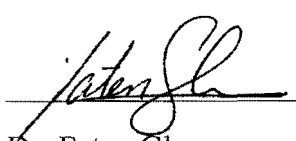

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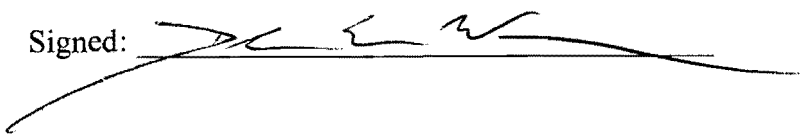
Signed: 

Abstract

In this paper, I address the subject of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and conduct an analysis of the problem based on the theories and concepts of International Relations. Specifically, I focus on the current issue of the ambiguous nuclear program being pursued by the Islamic Republic of Iran and its potential effects on regional security dynamics. In my analysis, I arrive at three central conclusions. First, I investigate current efforts of international actors to deny Iran a nuclear capability and address why they have thus far failed. I conclude that such efforts will likely continue to fail and that therefore Iran will obtain the necessary knowledge to "go nuclear." Second, I investigate the possible effects this will have on regional security, based on International Relations security theories. I conclude that the constraints of the international system, especially its anarchic nature, will lead to heightened perceptions of threat on the part of Middle Eastern states, some of which will likely pursue confrontational policies vis-à-vis Iran. Finally, I address the role of the United States in this new regional status quo and conclude that revised American polices can help to mitigate the dangers of a nuclear Iran.

Few issues arouse such a level of worldwide anxiety as nuclear proliferation. This process, by which the know-how to create atomic weapons has been disseminated to more and more actors, has resulted in ruinous wars, prompted the development of extensive sanctions regimes, and consumed the attention of international organizations. Of the recent cases of proliferation and suspected proliferation, one in particular stands out: that of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Unlike other proliferators such as North Korea, Iran has remained a member of the international legal regime of the Non-Proliferation Treaty throughout its time under suspicion of illicit nuclear activities. Also, Iran's proliferation activities come at a time when its economic and diplomatic fortunes have been on the upswing. This presents a further challenge to those who would advocate isolating proliferators and using inducements to persuade them to give up their ill-begotten gains.

Ever since its uncovering in 2002, the Iranian nuclear program has been regarded by many in the West as an intolerable action that must be curtailed. Some have argued that a nuclear Iran would mean the end of the international non-proliferation regime, resulting in regional and global arms races. Others have focused on the revolutionary and ideological aspects of the Iranian government and advanced the notion that such a regime would be less hesitant in using its newly acquired weapons. To combat these alleged doomsday scenarios, European actors have pursued a diplomatic solution with little to no success, while the United States has seemingly explored several options ranging from preconditioned negotiations to military action. As I will argue in subsequent sections, the current strategies for averting a nuclear Iran are doomed to fail for various reasons. However, it is also important to note that the effects of a nuclear Iran have been largely

misrepresented in the mainstream policy debate. While this misrepresentation could be deemed necessary to foster support for taking immediate action to prevent a nuclear Iran, its perpetuation is no longer a viable option. In light of current timetables and the ongoing diplomatic stalemate, I argue that the time has come for an objective analysis of the effects of a nuclear Iran, coupled with an assessment of its motives for acquiring nuclear weapons.

In this paper, I analyze the issue of Iran's nuclear pursuit by looking at several factors. First, by analyzing Iran's geopolitical constraints and past actions, I provide an assessment of its nuclear calculus and conclude that certain factors, such as security, weigh more heavily than others in determining Iran's present course. Second, I examine the current international efforts to halt Iran's nuclear activities. These include multilateral negotiations, sanctions, and both implicit and explicit threats of military actions. Looking at all of these, I conclude that none of these approaches as currently undertaken will succeed in preventing Iran going nuclear. Third, I attempt to analyze the effects of an Iranian bomb on regional security. Through an application of security theory coupled with an investigation of current regional foreign and defense policies, I conclude that due to the acute security dilemmas of all the interested states and exacerbated misperceptions, a nuclear Iran could potentially spark a regional arms race and even war. Fourth, I turn to the United States' interests in the region and its role in helping the parties involved avoid a major war. I conclude that by pursuing the right combination of regional policy adjustments and engagement with Iran, the United States can mitigate the negative effects of a nuclear Iran and protect its regional interests.

Why go nuclear? Iran's incentives for getting the bomb

Iran claims to be developing its nuclear technology for strictly peaceful energy production, citing the right of states to do so under Article IV of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.[1] However, the secretive nature of many aspects of this program, as well as the ties between Iran and other major proliferators such as Pakistan and North Korea, has led many to conclude that the Islamic Republic is pursuing nuclear weapons.[2] While it remains entirely possible that Iran is simply pursuing a peaceful civilian nuclear energy program, Tehran's behavior towards international nuclear inspectors and defiance in the face of international censure has eroded the likelihood that this is true. Therefore, for the purposes of this analysis, I shall assume that Iran is at the very least pursuing a "breakout" nuclear weapons capability; that is, an understanding of nuclear weapons coupled with stocks of highly enriched uranium that would enable quick and efficient construction of a nuclear weapon if deemed necessary. The reasons behind this pursuit are, like the program itself, veiled in secrecy. However, through an investigation of Iran's constraints and opportunities, it is possible to gain some insight into Tehran's nuclear motivations.

The literature on nuclear proliferation offers several explanations as to why states pursue nuclear weapons. One approach, technological determinism, argues that states will seek nuclear capabilities as soon as their development is technologically feasible. While this view was popular in the first two decades or so following the initial development of

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[1] Saberi, Roxana. "Analysis: Iran's Nuclear Fuel Debate." BBC News Online. 1 Aug. 2006.

[2] Bajoria, Jayshree and Lewis, Jeffrey. "Interview: North Korea-Iran Nuclear Cooperation." Council on Foreign Relations. CFR.org. 14 Dec 2010.

nuclear weapons, the number of states that have foregone any pursuit of nuclear weapons even when possessing the technological capability has rendered it quite worthless in terms of explanatory or predictive power.[3] Far more useful are the number of other approaches addressing nuclear proliferation from the perspective of theories based on the rational actor assumption. These include Realist, Neo-realist, and Neo-liberal approaches.[4] Possible motivations for nuclear proliferation stemming from these approaches include national security and state survival, domestic political consolidation, core-periphery relations, and pursuit of national prestige.[5]

In the case of Iran, the concerns most likely influencing the pursuit of a nuclear capability include security, especially insurance of regime survival, and pursuit of national prestige and recognition. While the clerics at first completely dismantled the country's nuclear agency upon taking power in 1979 and shut down its operations, the Iran-Iraq War reversed this decision shortly thereafter. Under the threat of Iraqi chemical weapons and having been unable to deter initial Iraqi aggression, the Iranian leadership realized the strategic value of modern weapons technology, especially the deterrent of nuclear weapons. One can imagine that the lessons of the Iraq war were quite clear for Iran's leaders. For one, the conflict demonstrated that the Iranian state was highly vulnerable to historical rivals such as Iraq, necessitating a reconstruction of Iranian defense and the development of a nuclear deterrent. Also, the actions of major and regional powers during the war reinforced the radical clerics' mistrust of the West and its

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[3] Ogilvie-White, Tanya. "Is there a Theory of Nuclear Proliferation? An Analysis of Current Debate." *The Nonproliferation Review.* Fall 1996.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., Bracken, Paul. "The Structure of the Second Nuclear Age." Seminar. Yale University. 5 Nov. 2003.

Arab allies such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.[6] During the 1990s, the United States' policy of "dual containment" of Iraq and Iran helped to further isolate Iran and, due to the threatening appearance of the large U.S. military buildup in the region, may have further encouraged the clerical regime's pursuit of nuclear weapons.[7] In the late 90s, under the reformist presidency of Mohammad Khatami, Iran made attempts to re-integrate itself into the international community and ease tensions with the United States. To some degree, the outgoing Clinton Administration in Washington reciprocated these attempts.[8] However, the events of September 11, 2001, and the United States' subsequent focus on the Middle East and Islamic radicalism, coupled with the disclosure of two previously secret nuclear facilities (Natanz and Arak) in 2002, did much to erode any incipient "dialogue of civilizations" and returned Iran to its previous state of isolation.[9] Iran's determination to acquire nuclear weapons was further bolstered after George Bush's 2002 State of the Union speech, in which the U.S. president singled out Iran as a member of an "axis of evil," along with Iraq and North Korea.[10] The military action taken against Iraq, just over a year later, helped to solidify Iran's perception of an American threat. As Iran expert Ray Takeyh noted in 2003, the removal of the Taliban regime in neighboring Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq should have provided a benefit for security-minded Iranians, but the driving force behind those developments, a "massive projection"

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[6] Takeyh, Ray. "The Iran-Iraq War: A Reassessment." *Middle East Journal.* 1 June 2010. Vol. 64 Issue 3, pp. 365-383.

[7] Ward, Steven R. "The Continuing Evolution of Iran's Military Doctrine." Middle East Journal. 2005. Vol. 59, No. 4. p. 562.

[8] Ramazani, R.K. "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iranian Foreign Policy." *Middle East Journal.* Vol. 58, No. 4. 2004. p. 557.

[9] Kibaroglu, Mustafa. "Good for the Shah, Banned for the Mullahs: The West and Iran's Quest for Nuclear Power." *Middle East Journal*. 2006. Vol. 60, No. 2.

[10] Bush, George W. "2002 State of the Union." *WashingtonPost.com*

of American power, easily negated any gains and, combined with enthusiastic rhetoric in Washington promoting "regime change" in Iran, constituted a clear and present threat to the Iranian regime's decision-makers.[11] Similarly, the absence of any use of military force against the other "Axis" member, North Korea, following its obtainment of nuclear weapons likely underscored the weapons' deterrent value in the eyes of the Iranians.[12]

While the difficulties encountered by American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan have dampened these perceptions to some extent, the international balance of military power remains heavily tilted in the United States' favor, and the American government's continued assurances that all options remain "on the table" for dealing with Iran have likely intensified Iranian anxieties and therefore their search for a means of deterring American military power.[13] Furthermore, Iran's perceptions of an external military threat have been exacerbated by Israel's recent heated rhetoric threatening military action against Tehran's nuclear program. In the relatively more risk-averse periods of American foreign policy represented by George W. Bush's second term and the early Obama administration, Israel emerged as a potential substitute for the United States' role as regional nuclear policeman when the latter's military capabilities and willingness were seemingly exhausted by two concurrent occupations and counterinsurgencies.[14]

While security remains an especially important factor in Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons, another driving force in Iranian nuclear policy is its desire for national prestige

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[11] Takeyh, Ray. "Iran's Nuclear Calculations." *World Policy Journal.* The World Policy Institute. Summer 2003.

[12] Sanger, David. "North Koreans Say They Tested Nuclear Device." *The New York Times.* 9 Oct. 2006.

[13] Ward, fn. 7; "Option of striking Iran never off the table: Pentagon." *Reuters.* 21 Apr. 2010.

[14] Ward, fn. 7

and recognition as a regional power. This has been especially true since the elevation of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the conservative movement to power in Iran. While the reformists under Khatami emphasized the role of trade and improved foreign relations in pursuit of this goal and downplayed the importance of nuclear weapons, the conservatives may embrace the idea of Iran regaining its former status through acquisition of massively destructive arms. At the very least, these leaders have promoted the idea of Iran achieving greatness through mastering peaceful nuclear energy. There is some merit to this proposition, as an Iran with a mastery of the full nuclear fuel cycle and able to power itself without depleting its oil or natural gas reserves could conceivably compete more effectively in the international energy markets and run a considerable trade surplus.[15] Economic concerns aside, though, nuclear weapons may have some effect on a state's international standing and prestige. Indeed, Robert Gilpin once asserted that "the possession of nuclear weapons largely determines a nation's rank in the hierarchy of international prestige."[16] However, this assertion does not appear to be borne out in historical cases of proliferation. Pakistan, for example, tested its first nuclear weapon in 1998, to the dismay of many proliferation watchers. Over twelve years later, however, Pakistan's international standing does not appear to have benefitted much at all from this "achievement;" it is instead regarded as a potential failed state due to economic stagnation, corrupt and inefficient government, and extreme internal insecurity.[17] On the other hand, formerly impoverished states like India and China obtained nuclear weapons and enjoy a high level of international standing. However, in appraisals of Chinese and

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[15] Saberi, fn. 1

[16] Gilpin, Robert. War and Change in World Politics. Cambridge University Press. 1981. p. 215.

[17] "Pakistan: A great deal of ruin in a nation." *The Economist.* 31 March 2011.

Indian international strength, it is usually their economic power, not their nuclear weapons, that is highlighted. As noted by John Mueller, the yardstick for measuring a state's international status is more and more likely to involve economic – not military – power.[18] In fact, due to their high cost and low likelihood of use for any purposes other than deterrence of enemy attack, nuclear weapons probably have a negative effect on prestige over the long term as they tend to require investments of scarce resources that could otherwise be used for more economically viable endeavors.[19]

Denying Iran the bomb: The international community's ineffective attempts to dissuade Iran from going nuclear

Since the 2002 disclosure of previously unknown nuclear facilities in Natanz and Arak, the international community, particularly Western Europe and the United States, has endeavored through several means to persuade or coerce Iran to comply with the international nuclear regime. While Iran's pursuit of nuclear energy capability was already known and evidenced by its Buseshr reactor, these disclosures brought to public record the fact that Iran was attempting to enrich uranium on its own soil, away from the eyes of international inspectors.[20] This information helped to spur European involvement on the Iranian nuclear issue, which had previously been almost solely a U.S. concern. The international effort to prevent a nuclear Iran has proceeded in distinct stages. First, from a period of 2002 to 2006, three Western European states (Germany, Britain, and France) endeavored in negotiations with Iran to bring about a suspension of its uranium

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[18] Mueller, John. Atomic Obsession: Nuclear Alarmism from Hiroshima to Al-Qaeda. Oxford University Press. 2010.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Delpech, Therese. Iran and the Bomb: The Abdication of International Responsibility. C. Hurst & Co. 2007.

enrichment. Starting in 2006, the United States offered to engage in negotiations with Iran, but only with the strict precondition that Tehran suspend all enrichment and reprocessing activities.[21] Since July of 2006 and the passage of Security Council Resolution 1696, the international effort to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue has centered around the Security Council, especially its "Permanent Five" members: the United States, Britain, France, China, and Russia. Resulting from this development, the third stage of international efforts centers on the use of multilateral economic sanctions to change Iran's defiant behavior.[22] Finally, while negotiations and sanctions have been pursued, both the United States and Israel have hinted their willingness to deploy other means – presumably military – to impede Iran's nuclear progress.

In this section, I shall be investigating the efficacy of each of the aforementioned approaches to dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue. Regarding negotiations, I conclude that both sides have adopted stances that have made stalemate inevitable and squandered opportunities to find mutually beneficial solutions. As for sanctions, I conclude that the existing sanctions regime is nowhere near strong enough to affect change in Iran's behavior; however, "strong enough" sanctions would likely be a blunt, destructive instrument with high humanitarian costs that would have little to no guarantee of success in the long-run. Military strikes, I conclude, would serve as merely a setback in Iran's pursuit of a nuclear capability and help to exacerbate its underlying causes.

Negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program have suffered from the start due to what Roger Fisher and William Ury term "positional bargaining." Specifically, both sides have engaged in "hard bargaining." In such bargaining, each side sets a position for

[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

itself and then attempts, through threats and demands, to win concessions from the other.[23] Such negotiation is usually doomed to either result in a complete breakdown, a stalemate, or an unwise agreement. This is especially evident in the deliberations over whether Iran should be permitted to enrich and reprocess uranium during negotiations. Over the past decade, each side has built up and defended highly incompatible positions. The West, on one hand, has unequivocally demanded that Iran suspend all enrichment *before* negotiations can take place. Iran, on the other hand, staunchly refuses to surrender its right to the full nuclear fuel cycle and has therefore entrenched itself in the position that negotiations with the West should occur without any preconditions.[24] Such hard bargaining has undoubtedly produced the current diplomatic stalemate, in which each side has dug itself into its position and now treats the negotiation as a contest of willpower, as opposed to a dialogue in which mutually beneficial agreement can be sought.

While positional bargaining remains a discouraging characteristic of current international diplomacy regarding Iran, other factors have also negatively affected the efforts of those concerned to reach an agreement. According to Iran expert and former American diplomat and Iran Embassy hostage John Limbert, difficulties tend to arise when dealing with Iranian negotiators due to the opaque nature of Iranian domestic politics. It remains difficult to determine who holds authority of the decisions on certain policies in Iran.[25] While ultimate authority in deciding policies falls on the Supreme Jurist, the parallel and competing authority structures such as the Revolutionary Guards

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[23] Fisher, Roger and Ury, William. Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In. Penguin. 1991.
[24] Erlanger, Steven. "Little Progress is seen in Iran Talks." *The New York Times*. 21 Jan. 2011.
[25] Limbert, John. Negotiating with Iran: Wrestling with the Ghosts of History. United States Institute of Peace Press. Washington: 2009. p. 162.

and the clerical circles often hold sway over the more visible and (for Westerners) relatable republican civilian officials.[26] For this reason, agreements may be reached with certain representatives, only to fall flat upon their domestic reception in Iran. All this is indicative of an additional complication of the complex process that Robert Putnam defined as the "two-level game" of international negotiation, in which negotiators must deal with both internal and external constraints and interests when coming to agreement.[27] Those potential agreements arrived at through international bargaining that satisfy ratification constraints form each side's "win set," or the set of all possible agreements that could pass both levels in the two level game. Cases of overlap in states' win sets signify the potential to reach a mutually acceptable agreement.[28] The larger the win sets, the better prospects for reaching such an agreement. As previously noted, positional bargaining digs negotiating parties into pre-set positions from which they are loath to derivate. As such, hard bargaining could be seen as further limiting the size of each side's win set, thereby decreasing the chances for agreement. In the case of Iran, Limbert argues, the fluid, factional politics of the Islamic Republic do not lend themselves to outside analysis.[29] This makes it even more difficult to gauge the potential for ratification of any international agreement, resulting in surprise and feelings of betrayal among negotiators when Iranian agreements are subsequently cast aside. Knowing this, international negotiators should not assume to have reached a conclusive agreement even if it appears so in negotiations, as was the case in Paris Agreement of

[26] Ibid.
[27] Putnam, Robert D. "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games." *International Organization.* Vol. 42, No. 3. 1988. pp. 427-460.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Limbert, fn. 25

2004 and the aborted external enrichment agreement of October, 2009.[30] Such breakdowns occur due to the factional and competitive nature of the Iranian domestic political system, not duplicity as is often alleged. In the case of the United States, ratification procedures are much more transparent but constraints are perhaps more severe. The strength of hawkish politicians in American civil and defense circles may reduce the size of the United States' win-set vis-à-vis Iran. Also, the operation of interest groups in American politics, especially the so-called "Israel lobby," which attempts to ensure that American foreign policy remains favorable to Israeli interests, will further constrain negotiators' ability to reach agreement with Iranian counterparts due to Israeli perceptions of Iran as a major threat.[31]

Negotiating with Iran has been a difficult endeavor for all states involved, not least for the United States, which faces myriad challenges both domestically and bilaterally with its Iranian counterparts due to a history of distrust, deception, and misunderstanding.[32] In the immediate future, negotiations over Iran's nuclear program appear doomed to repeat the continued pattern of openings and breakdowns, thanks in large part to rigid positions of the negotiators on either side. In the meantime, Iran is likely to continue to build its nuclear infrastructure and pursue enrichment due to the continued presence of the underlying driving forces that have so far propelled its activities. As such, it is likely that Iran will obtain the necessary infrastructure and supplies of highly enriched uranium to have an operating "breakout" capability, or the ability to fast track weaponization programs at moment's notice if deemed necessary,

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[30] Delpech, fn. 20; "Foreign Policy: Containing Iran." *The Economist.* 10 March 2010.
[31] See Walt, Stephen. Taming American Power. Cornell University Press: 2005. pp. 202-210. For the views of the lobby on Iran, see "The Iranian Nuclear Threat." *American Israel Public Affairs Committee.* 2011.
[32] Limbert, fn. 25, pp. 153-177.

before a negotiated solution presents itself. This is true even with the ongoing implementation of economic sanctions and threats of military force, as I will argue below.

The international sanctions regime against Iran is based around four Security Council resolutions: 1737, 1747, 1803, and 1929.[33] These resolutions, from December of 2006 onwards, have constituted the legal basis for a system of trade and financial restrictions on the Islamic Republic designed to force Iran to comply with international demands regarding its nuclear program. The sanctions specifically target members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which oversees the country's nuclear program, by freezing international assets and instituting a travel ban. The sanctions regime also bans the import and export of weaponry by Iran.[34] Also in place alongside the aforementioned international sanctions are unilateral sanctions by the United States, Britain, and France designed to put more pressure on the regime in areas where the international sanctions are deemed too lenient.[35]

By putting direct economic pressure on Iran's leadership in order to affect a change in behavior, the current sanctions regime fits the definition of targeted or "smart" sanctions. By imposing restrictions on those individuals known to be involved in the nuclear program and only certain sectors of Iran's international trade, the sanctions seem designed to inflict high costs on policymakers in Iran while sheltering the general population from the destructive humanitarian costs of comprehensive sanctions. This

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[33] "UN Sanctions Against Iran." 26 July 2010. BBC News Online.

[34] United Nations. UN Security Council Resolution 1747. 24 March 2007.

[35] Rogin, Josh. "UN vote paves way for completion of Iran sanctions bill." *The Cable.* ForeignPolicy.com. 9 June 2010.

feature of the sanctions regime appears to be due as much to Chinese and Russian fears of lost trade with Iran as it is to humanitarian concerns.[36] Though one Chinese official, in making known his country's conditions for agreeing to international sanctions, insisted they not affect the Iranian people, this was one of several concerns he noted, including first and foremost the health of the *global* economy (emphasis added) and Iranian trade.[37]

The effectiveness of both targeted and comprehensive sanctions has been widely debated in the literature. While Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliot, by subjecting a half-century's worth of sanctions instances to thorough scrutiny, brought renewed appreciation of sanctions as a tool of statecraft, certain scholars, such as Robert Pape, have remained unimpressed and challenged many of the purported successes attributed to sanctions.[38] According to Pape, economic sanctions are an ineffective tool when used to achieve noneconomic, especially political, ends. The comprehensive sanctions regime that persisted throughout the 1990s against Saddam Hussein's government and the resulting humanitarian crisis in that country gave rise to the perception among policymakers that targeted, rather than comprehensive, sanctions were the most efficient means of economic coercion.[39] However, targeted sanctions have detractors of their own. In a review of Cortright and Lopez's work on the matter, Daniel Drezner points out that contrary to their perceived benefit, targeted sanctions are not actually more efficient. This

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[36] MacFarquhar, Neil. "U.N. Approves New Sanctions to Deter Iran." *The New York Times.* 9 June 2010.

[37] Ibid.

[38] For Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliot's data and findings, see Hufbauer, Gary, Schott, Jeffrey, Elliot, Kimberly, and Oegg, Barbara. Economic Sanctions Reconsidered, third edition. Peterson Institute for International Economics. 2007.
For Pape's critiques, see Pape, Robert. "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work." *International Security.* Vol. 22, No. 2. 1997. pp. 90-136.

[39] Cortright, David, ed., and Lopez, George, ed. Smart Sanctions: Targeting Economic Statecraft. 2002.

is due, Drezner argues, to the fact that while financial sanctions or arms embargoes may initially affect decision-makers, most governments have ample resources for passing such costs on to their populations.[40] Certain scholars have remained outside the central debate over whether economic sanctions are generally effective or ineffective, and decided instead to investigate those instances where sanctions do work as intended. One such analysis, authored by Adrian U-Jin Ang and Dursun Peksen, argues that the efficacy of sanctions depends on the salience of the issue at hand to the sending and targeted governments.[41]

Considering the current sanctions against Iran, the bulk of the literature seems to suggest that the West's efforts are bound to fail. This is due to the sanctions regime's narrowly targeted nature, the inconsistency of international cooperation in enforcing it, and the asymmetric perceptions of the issue at hand by the sender and target governments. By narrowly targeting the Revolutionary Guards Corps and known participants in Iran's nuclear program, the sanctions offer several avenues for the targeted individuals to pursue minimizing their negative effects. For one, since the sanctions regime does not target the entire Iranian financial sector (as part of a conscious attempt to limit the damage inflicted on the general population), the targeted individuals can adjust by avoiding affected financial institutions and opting for those unaffected by the sanctions. Also, while the sanctions specifically target Iranian arms imports and exports, the Revolutionary Guards will still be able to purchase and sell arms, albeit in more informal, costly markets. As Drezner argues, arms embargoes do not prevent arms

[40] Drezner, Daniel. "How Smart are Smart Sanctions?" *International Studies Review.* 2003. Vol. 5, pp 107-110. Blackwell Publishing: Malden, MA.

[41] U-Jin Ang, Adrian and Peksen, Dursun. "When Do Economic Sanctions Work? Asymmetic Perceptions, Issue Salience, and Outcomes." *Political Research Quarterly.* Vol. 60, No. 1. Mar. 2007.

acquisitions, but rather merely serve to raise the costs of acquiring arms. Since the Revolutionary Guards likely have the means at their disposal to redirect such costs to the general population or even to segments of the population that may represent a perceived threat to Islamic rule, the arms trade restrictions are likely to have little to no effect on the actual arms trade of Iran while having a negative effect on the economic well-being of the Iranian people.[42]

Economic sanctions of an international, multilateral character are notoriously difficult to enforce. In such a sanctions regime, sender states that value some degree of economic cooperation with the target state will be faced with strong incentives to temper their enforcement or defect outright. In the case of nuclear proliferation, it has been suggested that for sanctions to work, the sender state must have friendly relations and/or an alliance with the target proliferating state.[43] As Scott Helfstein argues, this is not only due to the increased level of economic interdependence enjoyed by friendly states and thus an increased ability to inflict damage through sanctions, but also to the access of friendly states to avenues of influence in the target state's internal politics.[44] In the case of Iran, though, the very states (China, Russia) that would be best placed to alter its behavior through sanctions also seem to place very low priority on halting Iran's nuclear activities and a much higher priority on their own economic development. This is evidenced by the fact that China and Russia have both, at certain stages of Iran's nuclear development, agreed to supply technology and expertise to Iran.[45] As such, it remains far more likely that these states will temper their enforcement of the sanctions regime and

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[42] Drezner, fn. 40
[43] Helfstein, Scott. "Friends Don't Let Friends Proliferate." *Political Science Quarterly.* Vol. 125. 2 Nov. 2010.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Kiraboglu, fn. 9

adhere to the most lenient possible interpretation of the sanctioning resolutions. This seems especially true of Russia and China, since while they would have an incentive to defect outright from the sanctions regime against Iran, they would likely face high costs for doing so thanks to the level of international scrutiny.

Sanctions are especially likely to fail in their use against Iran due to the asymmetric perceptions of the issue at hand on either side, and the high issue salience in the target state. As U-Jin Ang and Peksen assert, the higher degree of importance attributed by a state to the issue driving the use of sanctions against it, the greater that state's willingness to incur the high costs associated with sanctions in order to pursue its initial objectives. Conversely, the higher salience of the issue for the sender state, the greater that state's willingness to implement and enforce the sanctions regime.[46] Regarding perceptions of the current sanctions, it is evident that there is a high level of asymmetry between the sender and target states. Iran views the issue at hand as significant to its own national security and foreign policy independence, as noted above. As such, it attaches a high level of importance, or salience, to not granting any concessions whatsoever under economic coercion. While the Iranian negotiators have offered to renew talks while under the most recent round of sanctions, they have remained defiant in their refusal to halt uranium enrichment as a precondition for negotiation.[47] As such, it is likely that no concessions will be forthcoming from Iran, and sanctions will continue to yield no success. For the sending states, issue salience varies considerably. While the United States and the Western European "troika" of Britain,

[46] U-Jin Ang and Peksen, fn. 41
[47] Erlanger, fn. 24

France, and Germany all appear to attach a high issue salience to the perceived issue at hand, and are thus likely to be willing to pursue the success of the sanctions regime, China and Russia are notably less concerned about the issue, and only reluctantly agreed to the imposition of sanctions and therefore likely attach little value to their success.

Throughout the international effort, there have been both explicit and implicit threats of using military force to disrupt Iran's nuclear program if it fails to comply with demands that it halt all enrichment. Initially, these threats were made by the United States, in keeping with the so-called "Bush Doctrine" of military preemption against state sponsors of terror.[48] This threat was made implicitly through such instances as the 2002 State of the Union, in which President Bush grouped Iran with North Korea and Iraq as part of an "axis of evil." The speech focused mainly on Iraq, with only a brief description of Iran's transgressions (seeking nuclear weapons, exporting terror, domestic repression).[49] In the same year, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld expressed his support of "regime change" in Iran.[50] The invasion of Iraq, just a little over a year after the State of the Union comments, clarified the threat to Iran. When the United States' focus shifted in 2006 to stabilizing an increasingly volatile Iraq and became involved in the international diplomatic efforts to stymie Iran's nuclear development, the Bush Administration stressed that all options remained "on the table," implying once again that Washington was willing to use force to achieve its ends regarding Iran.[51]

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[48] "A Survey of America and the world: Can the Bush doctrine last?" *The Economist.* 27 March 2008.
[49] Bush, fn.10
[50] "Defense Secretary Rumsfeld Warns Syria, Iran." *PBS Online*. 28 March, 2003.
[51] Weisman, Steven. "U.S. is Debating Talks with Iran on Nuclear Issue." *The New York Times.* 27 May 2006.

As the United States adjusted its strategy vis-à-vis the Iran issue, Israel began taking a more visibly active position on it. Through its internal debates and public diplomacy, the Israeli government has shown a somewhat higher level of anxiety over Iran's nuclear ambitions. In 2009, for instance, it was revealed that Israel had requested permission from Washington to unilaterally strike Iranian sites. This was further underscored by the Israeli military's large air and naval exercise in the summer of 2008, purportedly simulating the circumstances of an aerial strike on Iranian nuclear facilities.[52] Also, that same year, Avigdor Lieberman, the Israeli Foreign Minister, stated that if Iran did not agree to Western diplomatic initiatives within a three-month time period, action would need to be taken, with the implication of unilateral military actions by Israel.[53] Israel has some experience in the realm of preventive military strikes, as evidenced by its action against the Osiraq reactor facility in Iraq in 1981 and against Syria in 2007.[54]

If military strikes were launched against Iran by Israel or the United States, they would likely be limited, surgical operations designed to destroy Iran's nuclear capability while avoiding the high costs, uncertainty, and commitment of a full-scale invasion. Despite being broadly similar, American and Israeli air strikes would have important differences. An American operation would likely involve a large-scale bombing of not only Iran's nuclear sites, but also missile sites and Revolutionary Guard outposts close to the Iraqi and Afghan borders. This would, in theory, preempt any Iranian retaliation

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[52] DeYoung, Karen. "U.S. Thwarted Israeli Plan to Bomb Iranian Nuclear Facility." *Washington Post.* 11 Jan. 2009.

[53] The Associated Press. "Lieberman: Take Action Against Iran if not talks in Three Months." *Haaretz.* 5 May 2009.

[54] Bahgat, Gawdat. Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East. University Press of Florida. 2008;
Sanger, David and Mazzetti, Mark. "Israel Struck a Syrian Nuclear Project, Analysts Say." *The New York Times.* 14 Oct. 2007.

against American troops in the region.[55] In the Israeli case, due to less developed deployment capabilities and ordinance, the strike would likely bear similarities to the Osiraq case and be more or less limited to nuclear sites, leaving Israel vulnerable to Iranian missile attacks and attack by Iran's allies in the Levant, including Hizbullah and Hamas.[56]

In either case, difficulties arise from the possibility of Iranian retaliation and regional conflict initiation, as well as from the overall long-term effectiveness in averting a nuclear-armed Iran. If the United States were to opt for its military option, Iran could potentially retaliate through a variety of avenues even if the mission achieved remarkable success in neutralizing the conventional Iranian threat to U.S. soldiers. For one, Iran could attempt to disrupt world oil markets by harassing the shipping lanes in the Persian Gulf, especially in the Strait of Hormuz. This could be countered by the already robust American naval presence in the area, but at the high risk of escalating hostilities. Furthermore, Iran could use its influence over existing and formerly active Shia militias in Iraq to encourage a renewed insurgency there, thereby destabilizing an already fragile Iraqi order and diverting American attention.

If Israel went ahead with military strikes, it would, as noted previously, remain vulnerable to Iranian missile strikes and acts of terror and/or rocket/missile attacks from Iran's allies in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip. This, too, would pose significant risk of escalation and regional destabilization and could potentially ignite a large-scale conflict.

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[55] Rogers, Paul. "Military Action Against Iran: Impact and Effects." Oxford Research Group. 2010.

[56] Ibid.

While not immediately catastrophic, then, Iranian retaliation for either an American or Israeli strike could have far-reaching and possibly devastating consequences.

Furthermore, even if military strikes destroyed a significant portion of Iran's nuclear program, the end result would merely serve to harden Tehran's resolve in pursuing nuclear weapons. As noted above, Iran's pursuit of weapons results mainly from its perception of external security threats, especially those of the United States and Israel. As such, while a successful military strike would constitute a significant setback in Iran's nuclear development, Iran's long-term nuclear ambitions would remain unchanged, and perhaps intensify. Also, as often occurs in the event of external attacks, Iran's population would likely "rally around the flag" and thereby strengthen the domestic position of those Iranian leaders favoring a defiant, confrontational approach to nuclear diplomacy.

In light of the strategic difficulties posed by military strikes, it is not surprising that both the United States and Israel have allegedly engaged in covert operations against the Iranian nuclear program, with some of these initiatives apparently achieving success. Such operations have included assassinations, kidnappings, and even a highly advanced cyber attack.[57] In spite of their tactical success in disrupting Iran's nuclear pursuits, however, such operations have, like military strikes, a dubious strategic value for the West. By exacerbating Iran's security concerns and threat perceptions, covert operations will harden Iranian resolve and make it more likely that Iran will one day have a nuclear weapons capability.

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[57] "Iran Nuclear Scientist Killed in Motorbike Attack." *BBC News Online*. 31 Jan. 2011.
Broad, William, Markoff, John, and Sanger, David. "Israeli Test of Worm called crucial in Iran Nuclear Delay." *The New York Times.* 15 Jan. 2011.
"Missing Iranian Scientist Appears at Embassy in US." *BBC News Online*. 13 July 2010.

By failing to address Iran's underlying motivations for acquiring nuclear weapons, international efforts to prevent an Iranian nuclear capability have largely failed. While optimistic estimates put nuclear weapons another four years (at time of writing) out of Iran's reach, others have warned that Iran may cross a "point of no return" in just over a year.[58] In either case, barring a dramatic modification of current positions and approaches, Iran is likely to continue its pursuit and achieve a breakout capability before any agreement can be reached. However, a nuclear-capable Iran does not mean the end of diplomacy and bargaining, rather the next stage of it. Like South Africa and Libya, a nuclear Iran would not be impossible to bargain with. If given the right incentives, with its security and technological development guaranteed, Iran could still be enticed to relinquish its weapons capability. On the other hand, the use of threats and coercion thus far in dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue has been counterproductive, serving to exacerbate Iran's isolation and perceived insecurity, thereby strengthening its potential attachment to atomic weapons and increasing its distrust of the outside world. As such, relations will have to be improved to some decreased level of mutual alarm between the United States and Iran and between Israel and Iran in order for Iran to feel secure enough to relinquish nuclear weapons. As I shall argue below, this becomes an even more daunting prospect once one considers the possible effects of an Iranian bomb on Middle Eastern regional security.

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[58] "Iran could have Nuclear Weapon by 2012: Britain." *Reuters.* 31 Jan. 2011.
Melman, Yossi. "Outgoing Mossad Chief: Iran won't have nuclear capability before 2015." *Haaretz.* 7 Jan. 2011.

Security and Proliferation: An Overview

The security effects of nuclear proliferation remain an issue of contention in international relations literature. While the established wisdom remains that the spread of nuclear weapons makes war more likely, a few scholars reject this view. For example, Kenneth Waltz, often considered the father of Neorealist international relations theory, has advocated the spread of nuclear weapons in order to strengthen deterrence against conventional war. Waltz's analysis relies heavily on Rational Deterrence Theory, maintaining that the massive destructive potential of nuclear weapons causes rational state actors to reevaluate the potential costs associated with initiating war with a nuclear-armed state.[59] On the other side of the spectrum is Scott Sagan, who sees nuclear weapons as a destabilizing force due to the imperfect nature of the organizations within states that control nuclear arsenals.[60] According to Sagan, even if decision makers remain perfectly rational in their decision-making, the uncertainty and heightened anxiety of a nuclear alert could cause miscommunication or the following of bureaucratic protocols that result in the introduction of nuclear weapons into a conflict. As such, Sagan argues that proliferation should be discouraged and special attention should be paid to the organizations within states that control nuclear arsenals. Others foresee nuclear proliferation causing instability for different reasons. For example, Paul Bracken argues that factors such as multiplayer games, nationalism, and the cost of advanced command and control distinguish the current "wave" of proliferation from mid twentieth-century Western nuclear development and the corresponding theoretical models. In Bracken's

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[59] Waltz, Kenneth. "Peace, Stability, and Nuclear Weapons." *Institute for Global Conflict and Cooperation.* 1995.

[60] Sagan, Scott. "The Perils of Proliferation in South Asia." *Asian Survey.* Vol. 41, No. 6. 2001.

assessment, the causes of instability are the uncertainty and complexity resulting from the interplay of these factors.[61] On the other hand, analysts such as John Mueller are skeptical that additional nuclear weapons states will have much of an effect at all. According to Mueller, nuclear weapons do not provide much benefit to states aside from deterrence, and are unlikely to be used unless the survival of the state or its ruling regime was in serious jeopardy, as first use would invite destructive retaliation.[62]

While Waltz, Sagan, Bracken, and Mueller all offer well-reasoned analyses of the effects of proliferation, their conclusions are too limited to apply to all instances of proliferation. Waltz's model of deterrence, by focusing exclusively on the international system in which states operate, fails to address certain unit-level variables such as perception and goals that can determine specific states' security interactions. Similarly, Mueller's characterization of actors' rationality, while briefly addressing perceptions of threat as causes for proliferation, disregards these same immaterial inputs when discussing proliferation effects.[63] Conversely, Sagan's focus on sub-unit level organization creates problems for applying his conclusions to situations, such as that of Iran, where nuclear command-and-control systems are as yet undeveloped. In the case of Bracken's argument that new cases of proliferation differ from those witnessed during the Cold War, making them therefore more likely to In light of these shortcomings, and due to this analysis' focus on regional security effects, I instead rely on models of security interaction that treat nuclear weapons as just another, albeit more destructive, capability

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[61] Bracken, Paul. "The Structure of the Second Nuclear Age." Seminar. Yale University. 5 Nov. 2003.

[62] Mueller, John. Atomic Obsession: Nuclear Alarmism from Hiroshima to Al-Qaeda. Oxford University Press. 2010. pp. 95-102.

[63] Ibid.

in states' arsenals. Specifically, I will examine the Iranian case through the lens of the deterrence and spiral models of security interaction.

Deterrence theory maintains that when a state becomes aggressive and/or expansionist, other states that seek to defend their security may need to counter the aggressor's actions with displays of resolve and threats of retaliation. Since an aggressive state may view concessions as a sign of weakness on the part of other states, it becomes important for states to refuse to concede any issue to an aggressor in order to communicate strength. As such, conflicts involving issues of little intrinsic value become important to defender states in order to maintain their credibility.[64] In a system of nuclear powers, credibility becomes more difficult to maintain, as the risk of nuclear war would seem to make threats of initiating conflict over low-value issues an irrational strategy, hence Waltz's argument that deterrence reduces the likelihood of war. However, as Thomas Schelling argues, states seeking to deter an adversary when both maintain nuclear arsenals may attempt to communicate a degree of irrationality by threatening full nuclear response to any perceived aggression, no matter how unimportant the issue.[65] Such interactions resemble a game of "Chicken," in which both players seek to avoid a collision but attempt to convince one another of their willingness to collide rather than concede on an issue.[66] With nuclear powers, the interactions involved in deterrence become a sort of "brinksmanship," with each actor attempting to credibly communicate a

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[64] See Jervis, Robert. Perception and Misperception in International Politics. Princeton University Press. New Jersey: 1979.
Also, for an expansion of Jervis' ideas presented here, see Glaser, Charles. "Political Consequences of Military Strategy: Expanding and Refining the Spiral and Deterrence Models." *World Politics.* Vol. 44, No. 4. 1992. pp. 497- 538.

[65] Schelling, Thomas. Arms and Influence. 1966. Revised ed. 2008. Yale University Press. pp. 36-43.

[66] Ibid. pp. 116-125.

willingness to take a higher risk than the other in defense of a value.[67] (Schelling, 99-105) The goal of such actions by the defensive state is to convince an aggressor that the defender would initiate a devastating war rather than give up its values to the aggressive state. As Robert Jervis notes, if the balance-of-power is favorable, the

> "…combination of the high cost of war, the low probability the aggressor can win it, and the value the aggressor places on retaining what he's already won will lead even a minimally rational state to refrain from expansionist attack."[68]

Such an interaction is fraught with risk, however, and could lead to the very collision its architects hope to avoid. To address this, mechanisms such as "mutually assured destruction" (MAD) and second-strike capabilities have been encouraged in the hope of bolstering credibility and increasing stability in deterrence-based interaction. However, the availability of such mechanisms is typically restricted to large, strong states due to scarce resources, and therefore they are unlikely to exist in situations of nuclear proliferation involving relatively small, weak states.

Another possibility for regional security interaction is described by the spiral model. According to this model, conflict occurs not because of malign intentions of states but rather due to the anarchical nature of the international system and the resulting operation of the security dilemma between states. States that harbor no aggressive or malign intentions may inadvertently menace others through their own pursuit of

[67] Ibid. pp. 99-105.
[68] Jervis, fn. 64, p. 60.

defensive capabilities. Under the security dilemma, one state's unilateral pursuit of its own security can be perceived as a threat by other states, which in turn take unilateral action in pursuit of their own security and subsequently make all involved less secure. While all states in this interaction would be better off by cooperating in their pursuit of security, their fear of being exploited by one another leads to the adoption of policies of non-cooperation and hostility. The spiral model maintains that this mutual hostility and non-cooperation, evidenced by competitive policies, can lead to arms races and escalation, even full-scale war.[69]

The security dilemma is heightened or ameliorated by several factors, including the offense/defense balance, level of uncertainty, perceptions, and the payoffs associated with particular actions.[70] For example, if conditions are such that the state that strikes first can guarantee its security from attack (a classic example of offensive advantage), the security dilemma will be heightened and each state will try to attain the upper hand. Similarly, if weapons used for offensive purposes are indistinguishable from those used for defense, the security dilemma is further heightened due to the uncertainty of either side as to how the other side intends to use its capabilities. Perceptions of intent both influence and are influenced by the security dilemma. If states perceive one another as defensive, they are less likely to be threatened by one another's arms procurements. Conversely, if states perceive one another as aggressive, whether or not this is the case,

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[69] For discussions of the security dilemma see
Jervis, Robert. "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma." *World Politics.* Jan. 1978. Vol. 30, No. 2. pp. 167-214.
Glaser, Charles. "The Security Dilemma Revisited." *World Politics.* Vol. 50, No. 1. Oct. 1997. pp. 171-201.
Tang, Shiping. "The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis." *Security Studies.* Vol. 18. 2009.

[70] Jervis, ibid. and Jervis, Robert. "From Balance to Concert: A Study of International Security Cooperation." *World Politics.* Vol. 38, No. 1. Oct. 1985. p. 62.

they will feel threatened by one another's increased capabilities and thus exacerbate the security dilemma. If states face a higher cost of being exploited by others (i.e. states that are objectively or subjectively insecure), they will opt out of cooperating, thereby bringing about the result described by the security dilemma.

The choice between competitive or cooperative policies in states' security interactions is complicated by the relationship between the deterrence and spiral models. These models are distinguished mainly by the way in which they characterize the intentions of a state's adversary. When one's adversary seeks aggressive (non-security) expansion, say to attain more wealth or influence or alter (revise) the status quo, the deterrence model applies and states should pursue competitive policies to prevent the initiation of war. When one's adversary pursues security and is satisfied with the status quo, the spiral model applies and states compete due to uncertainty and misperception, even though they would be better off pursuing cooperative policies vis-à-vis one another.

While the classic dichotomy between the deterrence and spiral models relies on the aforementioned intentions of states, others have suggested that this is too simple and creates confusion. Glaser, particularly, has argued that not only intentions but also variation in motives should be taken into account in prescribing which policies states should pursue vis-à-vis an adversary. Thus, Glaser contends that greedy states interested in non-security expansion can also be insecure, such that the security dilemma may still operate with regards to these states.[71] Similarly, pure security seekers may at times launch first strikes against perceived threats, if external constraints make it so that the state would otherwise be on the receiving end of such a strike.

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[71] Glaser, fn. 69.

Since the deterrence and spiral models allow for understanding the patterns through which states interact towards more or less security based on the capabilities, material constraints, and perceptions of each, they are highly useful for assessing the effects of nuclear proliferation. Working from the assumption that states will view another state's newly developed nuclear capability as merely an additional, albeit much more destructive, military capability for that state, I endeavor to apply each model to the emerging situation in the Middle East, with a primary focus on Iran and its regional rivals, in order to prescribe policies that will limit misunderstanding and conflict.

The Sources of Iranian Conduct

Due to the importance of intentions in determining the application of the deterrence or spiral models, any analysis of the applicability of these models must begin with an assessment of the intentions and motives of the state (or states) in question. As such, this section deals primarily with determining, or approximating as closely as possible, the intentions of the Islamic Republic of Iran at this point in time. Since structural realist theory of international security as represented by the deterrence and spiral models focuses on the opposing intentions of aggressive expansion vs. pure security, the following analysis of Iran attempts to answer which intention of these two is more apparent in the Iranian state's international actions to date, taking into account Iran's external constraints, as well as attempting to dispel notions of Iran's political motivations that have thus far dominated Western policy debates.

Many policymakers in the West and elsewhere have characterized Iran as an irrational international actor, driven more by an Islamist ideology than pragmatic

concerns. This view, which lends support to confrontational policies vis-à-vis Iran and even preventive war, relies on a very selective interpretation of Iranian international behavior to be credible. Not only is this assumption of irrationality flawed, it is also dangerous, as it supports policies which would be devastating for all actors concerned. In spite of its leaders' often-heated rhetoric, Iran's actions in the international arena suggest a consistent subordination of ideology to the pragmatic interest of the state.[72] For example, Iran's relations with Russia, China, Syria, and Saudi Arabia often run directly counter to the Islamic Republic's stated ideology. Russia and China have both used force, sometimes overwhelmingly, to crack down on domestic Islamist movements. China has a staunchly anti-religious regime, based on principles of Communism and the Marxist argument that religion is the "opiate of the masses." While Russia permits much more religious diversity than it did before the collapse of the Soviet Union, it remains a largely secular state. However, in spite of seemingly incompatible state ideologies, Iran's leadership has pursued friendly, or at least mutually respectful, relations with these states based on energy ties. Syria, Iran's strategic ally in the Levant, is led by a nominally Shi'a but objectively secular elite.[73] Finally, Iran's recent pursuit of friendly relations with Saudi Arabia serves to underscore the relative unimportance of state ideology in Iranian foreign policy.[74]

The ability of the clerical regime to put aside ideology in pursuit of pragmatic interests is starkly illustrated by the secret arms deals pursued with Israel and the United

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[72] Walt, Stephen. Revolution and War. Cornell University Press. 1996. pp. 216-220.

[73] See Maoz, Moshe. "The Shia Crescent: Myth and Reality." The Brookings Institution. 2007. pp.19-20.

[74] Ward, fn. 7.

States during the Iran-Iraq War. In spite of staunch anti-American and anti-Zionist attitudes in revolutionary Iran, moderates in the revolutionary leadership were spurred by the mounting costs of the war with Iraq to purchase arms from the United States in return for freed US hostages in Lebanon.[75] While this affair ended in humiliation for those involved and a renewed deterioration in US-Iran relations, it remains an illustration of the Iranian capacity to shelve ideals in pursuit of the national interest.

As argued above, Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons is driven mainly by its interest in achieving the security offered by a nuclear deterrent. While this lends credence to the conception of Iranian armament as being intentioned on achieving security, it does not dispel the notion that Iran may also harbor expansionist intentions. In order to determine how Iran is likely to react once it has attained a nuclear capability, it is necessary to investigate trends in Iran's foreign policy behavior and assess the relative weight of security and expansionism.

Since the revolution in 1979, Iran has exhibited a few key trends in its foreign policy behavior. First, Iran's leaders, particularly Ruyollah Khomeini immediately after the Revolution, have engaged in confrontational and provocative foreign policy rhetoric. Early on, the American Embassy Hostage Crisis of 1979-1981 underscored this confrontational stance. Khomeini's view that all major powers were inherently aggressive and his advocacy of an "Islamic world order" that transcended state borders, combined with the ongoing hostage crisis, established Iran as a "pariah state" in the eyes of many observers and resulted in the Islamic Republic's isolation from the international

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[75] Ramazani, R.K. "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iranian Foreign Policy." *Middle East Journal.* Vol. 58, No. 4. 2004. p. 556.

community.[76] Iran was further isolated from the international community in 1989, when Khomeini issued a *fatwa* sentencing author Salman Rushdie to death for his satirical portrayal of Muhammad in *The Satanic Verses.* More recently, the comments of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad regarding his doubts about the Holocaust and his belief that the current regime in Israel should "vanish from the pages of history," have contributed to Iran's pariah status.[77]

Second, while provocative revolutionary rhetoric has continued, Iran's foreign policy has experienced a continued trend of moderation since the early 1980s. The Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988 helped to empower a moderate group of Iranian leaders, including then-President and current Supreme Jurist Ali Khamenei, who favored integration with the international community and downplayed the emphasis on exporting the revolution.[78] As the material and psychological costs of war became more apparent over the course of the decade, these moderate politicians and clerics gained more clout. The choice of Khamenei as the successor to Khomeini and the elevation of Akbar Rafsanjani to the post of President helped to drive Iran's further moderation of its foreign policy throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s. While this moderation may have reached its peak in the early 2000s under President Khatami, when Iran's leadership made attempts to initiate a rapprochement with the United States, Iran's actions since do not seem to suggest a full backslide into radicalism; rather, Iran's leaders at this time appear to be adjusting their policies in response to external and internal constraints, especially the threat of American or Israeli attack or subversion and domestic political unrest.

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[76] Walt, fn.72; Ibid.; Kiraboglu, fn. 9.

[77] For the original translation, see Jaseb, Hossein, and Dahl, Fredrik. "Ahmadinejad says Israel will 'disappear.'" *Reuters.* 3 Jun 2008. For the correction, see Steele, Jonathan. "Lost in Translation." *The Guardian Online.* 14 June 2006.

[78] Walt, fn. 72. pp. 218-220.

Throughout its existence, the Islamic Republic of Iran has supported several non-state actors in the Middle East, chief among them Lebanon's Hizbullah and Palestine's Hamas. While these organizations, especially Hizbullah, share some aspects of Iran's Islamist ideology, and this may have aided in their initial establishment of ties with Iran, they are now more indicative of Iran's strategy of regional balancing against perceived threats. As such, prominent examples of one of early post-revolution Iran's central espoused goals – the export of the revolution – have arguably been transformed into foremost examples of Iran's transition to traditional interest-driven statecraft.[79] While Hizbullah formed in 1982 as a Lebanese Shiite political faction to emulate the success of Islamic Revolution in Iran and establish a Shiite Islamic state in Lebanon, its utility to Iran has been not its political and social standing within Lebanon but rather its military effectiveness vis-à-vis Israel and, at times, the United States.[80] Hamas, the Palestinian political-military organization that currently governs the Gaza Strip, has a similar utility for Iran. While Iran's leaders have condemned the occupation of Muslim land in Palestine and challenged the American-mediated Peace Process, Iran has very little strategic stake in the Palestinian issue apart from its role in keeping Israel weak. As put by Khamenei, "Palestine is not Iran's jihad."[81] As such, Hamas remains valuable to Iran mainly as a means to balance against Israel. If Hamas were ever to enter into a negotiated peace settlement with Israel, its value to Iran would diminish accordingly.

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[79] Maoz, fn. 73.

[80] Moussali, Ahmad S. Islamist Politics and US Foreign Policy. University Press of Florida: 2008. pp. 137-144. Maoz, fn. 73.

[81] Bahgat, Gawdat. "Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran." *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3, Sept. 2006.

The overall effect of these observable trends in Iranian foreign policy on gauging Iran's intentions is difficult to measure definitively. Iran's trend of moderation and integration with the international system since the 1980s lends support for viewing Iran as a security seeker that will be increasingly satisfied with the status quo and therefore unlikely to pursue revisionist or expansionary policies. With a nuclear capability, a satisfied, purely security-seeking Iran would be more inclined to pursue cooperative policies in its region and perhaps renew its attempts at rapprochement with the United States, all else being equal.

However, Iran's continued, if inconsistent, tendency to portray the outside world as unjust and hostile through confrontational and provocative rhetoric may point to a degree of dissatisfaction and revisionism in Iran's intentions. Since Iran has periodically been subjected to isolation, as well as diplomatic and economic pressure, it may no longer be content to participate in an international order that treats it thusly. A revisionist Iran may be tempted to brandish its nuclear capability as a threat in order to pursue non-security goals, such as increased influence in Iraq and Lebanon or control over international shipping lanes in the Persian Gulf. Such actions by a revisionist Iran, though, would jeopardize many, if not all, of its international relationships and wreak havoc on Iran's economy, which depends largely on energy exportation. As such, a revisionist but rational Iran would likely be deterred from such actions by the potential costs, to say nothing of counter-threats from other actors. Also, while it may belie revisionist intentions, such rhetoric is just as likely to be directed towards Iran's domestic audience in order to maintain the consolidation of power in the hands of the conservative clerics.

Finally, Iran's tendency to engage in traditional balancing strategies vis-à-vis its regional rivals suggests a cautious pursuit of the state's security and non-security interests. Together, these trends in Iran's foreign policy indicate that Iran does not harbor expansionist intentions, and instead pursues nuclear weapons as a defensive deterrent. There is some danger that Iran's isolation and weak position in the international system will drive it to pursue confrontational revisionist policies, but Iran's external constraints at this time would seem to prohibit such intentions from driving real attempts at expansion. Instead, the main danger posed by a nuclear Iran resides in its interaction with its regional rivals and the United States and the resulting potential for misunderstanding, costly and destabilizing arms races, and unnecessary war.

A Perilous System in Peril: Nuclear Iran and Regional Security

Regardless of Iranian intentions, its regional rivals will likely view an Iranian nuclear capability as a threat. Whether or not this is the case will determine the wisdom of their policies, but for the moment those policies are not difficult to predict. For the purposes of this analysis I will be focusing on Israel and Saudi Arabia as Iran's major regional rivals. This is due to these states' real and potential capabilities, as well as their individual interests in a non-nuclear Iran. Along with these states I will briefly address the effects of an Iranian nuclear capability on other states in the region.

In the case of Israel, currently the only state in the Middle East in possession of nuclear weapons, Iran represents a strategic challenge and, in the eyes of some Israeli policymakers, an existential threat.[82] Israel and Iran have not had formal relations since

[82] Alon, Gideon. "Lieberman says Israel can deal with Iranian threat on its own." *Haaretz.* 1 March 2007.

the 1970s, and Iranian actions and rhetoric since the Revolution have been perceived in Israel as threatening to Israeli security and other interests.[83] Most worrisome to Israel has been Iran's support of anti-Israel Islamist militant groups in the Levant. These organizations, namely Hamas and Hizbullah, are perceived as threats to Israel's security and as a result Iran's support of these organizations, through arms deals and financial transfers, has served to exacerbate Israeli suspicions of Iran's intentions. As such, Israel is likely to adopt confrontational policies vis-à-vis a nuclear Iran. Furthermore, while Israel's nuclear arsenal and policies suggest an effective deterrent capability, its perceived insecurity and desire to preserve its "qualitative military edge" may result in policies of competitive armament that could prove dangerously destabilizing.

While relations between Israel and Iran have been strained since the Revolution, the hostility has reached a fever pitch in recent years, likely due to the rising strength and influence of Hamas and Hizbullah. While these groups' capabilities were previously restricted to terrorist and guerilla tactics in Israeli-occupied territories, Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon and the Gaza Strip, (in 2000 and 2005, respectively) coupled with the acquisition of more advanced weaponry from Iran, has strengthened these organizations vis-à-vis Israel. Hamas and Hizbullah now possess rockets and missiles capable of threatening Israeli cities, albeit with limited destructive potential.[84] The resulting situation has led to two devastating Israeli military operations, the first in 2006 in Lebanon and the second in Gaza in 2009. The stated purpose of these operations was for retaliation against actions of Hizbullah and Hamas, such as hostage-taking and

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[83] Ibid.
[84] Meranda, Amnon. "Military intelligence: Hezbollah Scuds tip of iceberg." *Ynet News.* 4 May 2010.
Perry, Dan. "Israeli Official: Hamas rockets can reach Tel Aviv." *The Associated Press.* 14 Nov. 2010.

rocket attacks, though the scale of the force used in the operations suggests that Israel was more interested in destroying or at least greatly weakening the groups' capabilities.[85] However, in pursuit of this objective, Israel's use of devastating force may have served merely to reinforce the groups' interest in armed resistance against Israel and thereby increase Iranian arms sales and influence.

The strengthened position of Iran's allies in the Levant has deepened Israel's anxiety over Iran's nuclear program. Israel fears that not only would a nuclear-capable Iran brandish its weapons in a threatening manner from afar, but also that it could transfer weapons to its "proxies" in Gaza and Lebanon.[86] Such a transfer, while feasible, is highly unlikely, and is more representative of Israeli insecurity and worst-case analysis than reality. Iran's alliances with Islamist groups in the Levant serve the strategic purposes of increasing Iranian influence in that region and destabilizing the Israeli threat to Iran. Though Iran certainly exerts some influence on these groups thanks to its record of material and logistical support, it does not have full control over their activities, and as such is extremely unlikely to transfer nuclear weapons to them. Furthermore, Iranian leaders will be aware that any such transfer, if intercepted a la the recent Gaza-bound Victoria shipment, would likely provoke severe retaliation by Israel and/or the United States.

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[85] Erlanger, Steven, and Fattah, Hassan. "Israel Blockades Lebanon; Wide Strikes by Hezbollah." *The New York Times.* 14 July 2006.
Bronner, Ethan. "As Talks Falter, Israel Warns of More Extensive Attacks." *The New York Times.* 10 Jan. 2009.

[86] "US Embassy Cables: Ehud Barak sets deadline to resolve Iran nuclear ambitions." *The Guardian Online.* 28 Nov. 2010.

At present, Israel maintains a nuclear monopoly in the Middle East, though its nuclear status remains unofficial.[87] As of the mid-1990s, Israel's nuclear arsenal was estimated at around 200 weapons.[88] These reportedly include both surface-to-surface as well as submarine based missiles. While the existence of its nuclear arsenal is widely known, Israeli policy regarding these weapons has been purposefully ambiguous. Israel refuses to confirm or deny the existence of its nuclear arsenal, but instead signals its capability and intent to other actors through leaks and political actions.[89] By charting such a policy of nuclear ambiguity, Israel hopes to strengthen the deterrent value of its so-called "Samson Option," in which Israel would massively retaliate with nuclear weapons as a last resort in response to military aggression against it.[90] While this policy has been maintained for around four decades, Israel's adherence to it is uncertain in the event of another nuclear power in the region. This is underscored by Israel's policy of denying nuclear proliferation in the region.[91]

Israel's actions and rhetoric vis-à-vis Iran and its allies suggest a high level of perceived insecurity. Interestingly, Israeli capabilities, both conventional and non-conventional, would seem to contradict this view. Israel maintains an impressive degree of technological superiority over other states (and non-state actors) in the region, including Iran.[92] However, a lack of resolution in the greater Arab-Israeli conflict, coupled with recent experiences with asymmetric warfare and terrorism, have deepened Israel's security dilemma. As such, Israel views most states in the region as potential

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[87] Maoz, Zeev. "The Mixed Blessing of Israel's Nuclear Policy." *International Security.* Vol. 28, No. 2. Fall 2003. pp. 44-77.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Bahgat, fn. 54.
[92] Ibid.

adversaries and desires a continued military advantage over all of them. These Israeli concerns over losing its so-called "qualitative military edge" could point to an increased incentive to engage in competitive arms races.

In response to a nuclear Iran, Israel could, due to the aforementioned reasons, pursue one of two policies: a first strike or deterrence. Since a nuclear Iran would initially lack much of the infrastructure to defend against an Israeli nuclear attack aimed at wiping out its retaliatory capability, Israeli leadership may well consider such a first strike. From an Israeli perspective, such a strike would be appealing for several reasons. First, it would theoretically allow them to deal with a perceived "existential threat" in a quick, decisive, relatively costless fashion. Second, it would serve to bolster Israel's credibility in making future threats by clearly demonstrating Israel's willingness to use all means necessary to defend its security. Third, it would serve as a deterrent against nuclear proliferation by any other state in close proximity to Israel. However, even apart from the catastrophic destruction and loss of life that would result from such an action, an Israeli nuclear attack would have potentially grave consequences. For one, such a strike would represent the first combat use of nuclear weapons since 1945 and would more than likely be met with isolation and other punitive measures against Israel by the international community. Also, other actors in the region, especially Hizbullah, would likely take it upon themselves to retaliate against Israel. If unsuccessful, (that is, if Iran's retaliatory capability is not fully destroyed) an Israeli first strike attempt would be met with a likely smaller-scale Iranian nuclear retaliation. While Israeli defenses could potentially prevail, such a situation would be fraught with danger and therefore best avoided. All in all, due to such risks,

Israel is unlikely to give a first strike much consideration, and instead will devote its energies to deterrence policies.

Due to Israel's perceptions of Iran as a threatening, aggressive actor and the risks of a preventive strike, Israel's most likely response to a nuclear Iran will be some form of deterrence. The wisdom of such a policy will depend on the nature of Iran's intentions. In keeping with the deterrence model, if Iran is an aggressive actor, as Israel suspects, a confrontational policy with a heavy reliance on threats and the establishment of "red lines" will be necessary to communicate resolve and prevent Iran from threatening Israeli interests.[93] An Israeli deterrence policy is likely to be communicated indirectly through leaks and domestic political debate, in keeping with Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity, but will otherwise attempt to make clear to Tehran the "red lines" that Israel will not tolerate.[94] With its apparent second-strike nuclear capability, Israel has the obvious means to deter an aggressive Iran, though in order for this deterrent to properly function, Israeli threats must be credible. If successful, such a deterrence policy opens the door to more cooperative interaction once the aggressive state realizes the defender can't be bullied.[95]

Even if a nuclear Iran will be an aggressive actor, which remains uncertain, it will likely still be insecure. In such a situation, the deterrence model has certain shortcomings and may lead to overly competitive policies. Though the deterrence model assumes that the deterring state can clearly communicate its defensive intentions to an aggressive adversary, this is unlikely to be true in practice, especially if the aggressor is insecure. As

[93] Jervis, fn. 64; Glaser, fn. 64.
[94] Maoz, fn.87.
[95] Jervis, fn. 64.

such, in spite of the defender's intentions in its pursuit of deterrence, the operation of the security dilemma results in the insecure aggressor perceiving the defender as a threat. While the aggressor may be deterred, it will not abandon confrontation as is usually argued by the deterrence model. Instead, it will pursue its own defensive armament in order to gain security vis-à-vis the defender, who then in turn feels threatened and pursues more arms itself. The resulting effect of deterrence policies in such a case, then, is a competitive arms race that follows the spiral model.[96] Therefore, if Iran does have aggressive intentions, deterrence is potentially effective, but carries with it the danger of an arms race that leaves both states worse off.

If Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons to defend its own security and not for aggressive purposes, then a policy of deterrence pursued by Israel has the effect of a "self-fulfilling prophecy," in that such competitive policies result in the very conflict they are designed to avoid. Due to the security dilemma's operation, with all else being held equal, an Israeli policy of deterrence will likely be perceived by Iran as threatening aggression, even if Israel is completely defensive in its intentions.

Saudi Arabia, like Israel, maintains a high level of perceived insecurity vis-à-vis Iran. Geographically, both states enjoy plentiful territorial access to the Persian Gulf, as well as massive deposits of oil. These conditions have, over the past century, fostered both intense competition and tentative cooperation over the control of the international oil trade. Since the Iranian Revolution, the competition between the two states has been exacerbated by concerns of ideological influence and alignment. The emergence of a revolutionary Shia Islamist government in Iran altered Iranian interests in the region's

[96] Ibid.

ideological affairs and brought it into direct competition with Saudi Arabia for influence. Saudi Arabia, a Sunni-majority state that is home to Islam's most holy sites, had previously enjoyed special status and influence among Muslim communities in the region and around the world. The rise of revolutionary Iran, however, presented these same communities with a different model and therefore challenged Riyadh's dominance.[97] Early on, Iran made various attempts to "export the revolution" to other states in the region, especially the Gulf monarchies, through appeals to the populations of these states and support for Shi'a radical movements. In spite of attempts by Iran to downplay the Shi'a aspect of the Revolution and instead give it a universal appeal, the Sunni-Shi'a divide undermined this appeal and led instead to further repression of Shi'a communities in the Sunni-led Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia.[98] Additionally, Iran's opposition to the United States has led it to highlight the close ties between the Saudi royal family and America in rhetorical attacks against what it views as Western client regimes in the region.[99] Khomeini, for example, derided the Gulf monarchies for their "American Islam." Such attacks on its leaders' legitimacy have further deepened Riyadh's threat perceptions vis-à-vis Tehran, and led it to take such measures as supporting Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War and, more recently, calling on the United States to "cut off the head" of the Iranian "snake."[100]

Also preoccupying the Saudi leadership is the perceived threat of a so-called "Shi'a Crescent," a broad alliance of states and actors stretching from Iran to the Levant

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[97] Hinnebusch, Raymond. The International Politics of the Middle East. Manchester Univesity Press: 2003.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] "US Embassy Cables: Saudi King's advice for Barack Obama." *The Guardian Online*. 28 Nov. 2010.

representing the opposing side of a Sunni-Shi'a conflict.[101] The civil war in Iraq following U.S. occupation especially led to fears of such a conflict "spilling out" from Iraq into the region as a whole, with Iran playing a central role.[102] While such an alliance is much more imagined than real, due to the divergent interests of Shi'a communities in the region, its presumed existence has intensified the Saudi-Iranian rivalry and prompted Saudi attempts to influence events in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq.[103]

Saudi Arabia's perceived insecurity vis-à-vis a nuclear Iran may lead it to seek its own nuclear deterrent. Such a pursuit by Riyadh would likely menace both Iran *and* Israel, and further destabilize regional security dynamics. As a satisfied weak state with a small population but massive amounts of resource wealth, Saudi Arabia has for the most part avoided direct engagement with the region's conflicts, preferring instead to safeguard its security by bandwagoning with the United States.[104] However, with the resurgence of Iran and the growing anti-American sentiment throughout the region after the invasion of Iraq, Riyadh has taken more of its security into its own hands, buying advanced military technology from the United States, China, EU, and Russia. Saudi Arabia's wealth has enabled it to outspend Iran by a ratio of four to one.[105] Even so, Saudi Arabia's superior conventional capabilities may be poorly matched against a nuclear Iran. The threat, real or imagined, of a nuclear Iran aggressively pursuing Gulf hegemony creates an incentive for Riyadh to pursue its own nuclear deterrent in order to protect its economic interests.

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[101] Maoz, fn. 73
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Hinnebusch, fn. 97; For a description of "bandwagoning," see Walt, Stephen. "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power." *International Security.* Vol. 9, No. 4. 1988. pp. 3-43.
[105] Cordesman, Anthony. "Iran, Iraq, and the Changing Face of Defense Cooperation in the Gulf." *The Center for Strategic and International Studies.* 28 Oct. 2010

An Arabian nuclear capability, while serving to defend the Persian Gulf from an aggressive, expansionary Iran, would create more instability and insecurity in the region if Iran does not harbor such intentions. While Iran has been developing its air and naval power in the Gulf, this has likely been driven, as noted above, by its own perception of the threat of American power in the area. Iran stands to gain much by guaranteeing its own territorial security with a nuclear deterrent, and much to lose by engaging in provocative action in the Gulf, for instance attempting to close the Strait of Hormuz. While a nuclear Iran would have the capability to do so, through a new line of bases along its Gulf coast, the Sea of Oman, and an installation at Jask at the southern mouth of the Strait, it is unlikely to do so unless first provoked.[106] Furthermore, despite its resort to hostile rhetoric against client regimes, Iran's goal remains regional *leadership*, not hegemony, and as such requires friendly relations with neighbors as opposed to domination of them.[107] With this in mind, it is unlikely that Iran would purposefully initiate hostilities with its Arab neighbors.

If Saudi Arabia were to develop its own nuclear capability, moreover, it would serve to heighten the threat perceptions of both Iran and Israel, regardless of Saudi Arabian intentions, due to the operation of the security dilemma. While Saudi-Israeli relations have been tacitly cooperative due to the reliance of each on American friendship, Saudi Arabia's role in the Arab-Israeli conflict aggravates the cultivation of truly amicable relations. Israel is loath to fully trust Arab states, and perceives most, if not all, of its neighbors as potential threats. The acquisition by Saudi Arabia of a nuclear

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[106] Ibid.
[107] Parsi, Trita. "Israel and the Origins of Iran's Pro-Arab Option: Dissection of a Strategy Misunderstood." *Middle East Journal.* Vol. 60, No. 3. Summer 2006. pp. 493-512.

capability, intended as a response to Iran's, would therefore be perceived as a potential threat to Israel and, similar to a nuclear Iran, invite confrontational Israeli policies.

A nuclear Saudi Arabia would similarly be perceived as a potential threat by Iran, and may lead to increased vertical proliferation (nuclear buildup) by that state. Such vertical proliferation would then be perceived by Israel, the United States, and Saudi Arabia as a threatening move by Iran, prompting those states to ratchet up tensions in turn.

While Israel and Saudi Arabia currently represent Iran's strongest regional rivals, other states in the region will certainly perceive the effects of a nuclear Iran and some may even, over time, emerge as competitors in their own right. The states most obviously affected are the Southern Gulf states, including Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. These states, like Saudi Arabia, are wary of an Iranian attempt to exert hegemony over the Persian Gulf and thereby threaten oil routes. While Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have cultivated economic ties with Iran, Kuwait and Bahrain, which host significant Shi'a populations, worry over perceived Iranian influence on their internal affairs.[108] Like Saudi Arabia, these states have been gradually augmenting their military capabilities over the past decade, especially by procuring arms.[109] In spite of the perceived strategic benefits and the economic feasibility of pursuing nuclear weapons, though, these states face significant constraints and incentives to forego proliferation in response to Iran. For one, most of these states are small, making them especially vulnerable to preventive strikes by other powers attempting to impede any nuclear

[108] "US Embassy Cables: UAE fret over Iranian meddling." *The Guardian Online*. 28 Nov. 2010.
"US Embassy Cables: Kuwait wary of Iranian influence." *The Guardian Online*. 28 Nov. 2010.
[109] Cordesman, fn.105.

development. Furthermore, these states enjoy benefits from their friendly relations with the West, which could be threatened in the event of proliferation.[110]

Aside from the Southern Gulf states, Iran's nuclear capability would also affect Iraq and Egypt. Iraq, as Iran's foremost historical rival, remains weak and divided following American occupation. As such, in spite of the potential long-term problems posed for Iraq by a nuclear Iran, Iraq's concerns in the present remain its own economic and political development and domestic security. For the time being, Iraq is likely to seek cordial relations with external powers, including Iran, while attempting to limit their ability to influence Iraqi domestic affairs. Egypt, as the most populous Arab state, has on occasion pursued regional leadership and in doing so engaged in rivalry with Iran. While Egypt faces little to no real or perceived threat from Iran, it nonetheless fears the emergence of Iran as a powerful regional actor, especially since Egypt desires such a role for itself. Since the fall of Mubarak, however, Egypt has tentatively pursued relations with Iran, allowing, for example, Iranian ships to pass through the Suez Canal, in spite of Israeli pleas to deny them passage.[111]

The results of a nuclear Iran in the region would not be a "cascade" of proliferation as some have envisioned, but rather a "trickle" at most. However, the incentive for regional states to increase their armaments, proliferate nonconventional weapons, or otherwise adopt confrontational policies would, all else being held equal, drastically increase. The ensuing situation could prove highly sensitive to competitive arms races and escalation of threats that, as predicted by the spiral model, can tragically lead to unintended war. Mitigating such effects will require addressing the variables

[110] Hinnebusch, fn. 97.
[111] "Egypt allows Iranian warships 'can use Suez Canal.'" *BBC News Online.* 18 Feb. 2011.

influencing the security dilemma's operation and, as I will argue below, may point to a shift in the United States' role in the region.

Mitigating the Security Dilemma: The U.S. Role

The United States remains an important actor in Middle East security due to its heavy military presence there, as well as its involvement in several key regional issues. American involvement in regional affairs was originally necessitated by Cold War containment policy, over time shifting its focus to address new priorities. Currently, the United States' principal regional interests include the security of Israel, access to the region's oil, terrorism, and the safety of its troops, both in Iraq and in bases in Kuwait and Bahrain. In keeping with these interests, the United States has a clear stake in maintained regional peace and security, and as such must play an important role in minimizing the dangers posed by regional nuclear proliferation. While the smaller regional actors, facing their individual constraints, will have little choice but to pursue confrontational policies vis-à-vis a nuclear Iran in order to safeguard their security, the United States can, through careful policy changes, alter these constraints and dissuade such policies. Likewise, by pursuing less confrontational policies itself, the United States may be able to engage with Iran and perhaps eventually dissuade Iran from possessing nuclear weapons. Finally, the United States can pursue policies in the region that will conceivably limit Iranian influence and promote a more stable, cooperative regional order.

In order to dissuade regional states from responding to a nuclear Iran with nuclear programs of their own or otherwise confrontational policies, the United States must affect

the constraints faced by these states which lead them to adopt such policies. In this instance, the constraints that must be affected are those imposed by the operation of the security dilemma. To affect changes in these constraints, then, the United States must attempt to change the variables that either heighten or ameliorate the security dilemma. The variables affecting the security dilemma, or its "regulators" include the offense-defense balance, the size of payoffs, the level of uncertainty, and perceptions of adversaries' intentions.[112]

The effect of nuclear proliferation on the offense-defense balance in the Middle East is difficult to determine. Glaser argues that with nuclear weapons and assured destructive capabilities, the offense-defense balance would be the ratio of the cost of forces required to undermine the defender's assured destructive capability to the cost of the defender's forces. Since a developed nuclear retaliatory arsenal will be better protected in most cases and therefore more costly to undermine, defense advantage holds.[113] This assertion should hold true in a regional system as well, though initially Iran's deterrent will by no means be fully developed. Instead, as noted above, Iran will likely have a relatively weak arsenal and as such, it will be easier to preemptively attack than defend from an Iranian nuclear strike, and offense will have the advantage.[114] To mitigate this dangerous situation and discourage preemptive attacks on Iran, the United States can pledge to aid regional actors in missile defense and threaten punitive measures against any state (Iran included) that adopts a "first use" policy. Over the long term,

[112] Jervis, fn. 69, 70.
[113] Glaser, fn. 69.
[114] Jervis, fn. 69, p. 188.

Iran's nuclear arsenal will likely develop into a more effective deterrent, and thereby engender a regional defensive advantage.

Crucial to the mitigation of the negative effects of an Iranian nuclear capability will be the alteration of the costs and benefits of the various policy choices available to other regional actors. Specifically, the cost of foregoing reactive policies (analogous to Jervis' "costs of being exploited") must be reduced in order to dis-incentivize further proliferation, arms races, and other confrontational policies by regional states vis-à-vis Iran.[115] The cost of remaining passive in the event of a nuclear Iran, in the eyes of states like Saudi Arabia, is the loss of perceived security and an inability to stand up to possible Iranian provocation. To reduce this cost, then, the United States should pursue certain policies that will reassure its regional allies of their security. These can include both positive and negative security guarantees. With a positive security guarantee, the United States pledges to defend a state from nuclear attack. With a negative guarantee, the United States forswears using nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states.[116] Such guarantees would need to be reiterated regularly and augmented by close defense cooperation to reassure allies. However, due to Iran's threat perceptions vis-à-vis the United States such measures should refrain from presenting a provocative military posture in order to avoid an unfavorable Iranian reaction.

Whereas the United States can act unilaterally to mitigate the aforementioned factors, its efforts alone will not reduce uncertainty and prevent misperception of intentions. To accomplish this, the United States must work to engage with Iran. By opening up a dialogue with Iran, the United States could eventually bring about a

[115] Jervis, fn. 69.
[116] Bahgat, fn. 54.

rapprochement between itself and Iran, which would remove one of Iran's main threats and create a forum for regional security cooperation. However, engagement, if reciprocated, is likely to be frustrating, lengthy, and with little to no success at first. Negotiations between Iranians and Americans will be hampered by each sides' negative preconceptions of the other, and by over a half-century's worth of grievances on either side.[117] Furthermore, though several American administrations, from Carter to Obama, have attempted to engage Iran, initial difficulties brought about by such preconceptions and misunderstandings proved enough to derail the whole policy. (ibid.)

In spite of this, as negotiations in 2001-2002 over Afghanistan show, negotiators from the two sides will be able to work together and likely come to agreement on issues of common concern. Taking lessons from the current nuclear negotiations, it will be best for both sides to begin dialogue on a broad range of issues with no preconditions, in order to build faith between the sides and prevent talks from breaking down due to the entrenched positions of either side. In such a broad dialogue, Iran and the United States could discuss common areas of interest such as Afghanistan, the Central Asian drug trade, and the reconstruction of Iraq, long before moving to more contentious topics such as nuclear proliferation or Israel. Engaging Iran incrementally in this way will enable the two parties to gradually build trust and mutual understanding. Even without a negotiated agreement, such marginal improvements in the two states' relations would help to reassure Iran of American intentions and potentially affect its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Along with engaging Iran, the United States can affect regional security incentives by following a long-term policy of containment vis-à-vis Iran. Such a

[117] Limbert, fn. 25.

containment strategy should combine American hard and soft power in the region to robustly address underlying grievances and promote economic development and integration, thereby preventing Iranian influence. The emergence of Iran as a dominant regional actor could potentially threaten American interests in the region, as well as overall regional security. To counteract this, the United States can adopt a regional containment policy to limit Iranian influence and bolster the cooperation amongst other regional actors. First and foremost, the United States can renew its mediation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. By doggedly pursuing a negotiated solution to the Palestinian issue, and when politically feasible applying leverage to Israel, the United States could reinvigorate the so-called "peace process" and pave the way for a normalization of relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors. While the most recent round of direct negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians was complicated from its inception by a lack of Israeli willingness to grant any meaningful concessions, it is conceivable that a convincing linkage of its perceived Iranian threat to the Palestinian issue could persuade Israel to abandon such recalcitrance. Such linkage could also reduce American domestic political resistance to the application of pressure on Israel, allowing for an increased potential for effective American leverage on the actors involved.

The United States can also limit Iran's influence in the region by actively supporting the development of the newly democratic regime in Egypt. A stable, democratic, and economically viable Egypt could emerge as alternative regional leader and thereby deprive Iran of influence over major regional issues. In a post-Mubarak era, the United States should support Egypt first and foremost in its economic development

and allow the newly democratic state to pursue an independent foreign policy in order to establish it as a legitimate alternative to Iranian dominance.

The alignment of Syria will be crucial in attempts to deal with a nuclear Iran, regardless how the current domestic Syrian unrest evolves. The alliance with Syria serves as a major strategic asset for Iran. However, with the common threat of a strong Iraq diminished for the time being, the only shared threats for the alliance to confront emanate from Israel and the United States. Syria, unlike Iran, has demonstrated a willingness to negotiate with Israel for a "land for peace" deal, provided such a deal is comprehensive, offering full land for full peace.[118] Syria has also shown a willingness, before its alleged involvement in the 2005 assassination of Rafik al-Hariri resulted in its international isolation, to develop diplomatic and economic ties with Europe.[119] These past actions point to a Syria that may be swayed, through the tangible benefits of peaceful cooperation, to end its hostility towards Israel and the West. Such a Syrian realignment, while maintaining Syria's relations with Iran on cultural and economic grounds, would greatly reduce Iran's ability to influence the Arab-Israeli conflict and affect its supply of military technology to non-state actors in the Levant. A Syrian realignment would not occur overnight, however, and would require the United States and its allies to play a "long game" of pursuing engagement with the Syrians and engendering negotiations between Syria and Israel.

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[118] Hinnebusch, Raymond. "Does Syria Want Peace? Syrian Policy in the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations." *Journal of Palestine Studies.* Vol. 26, No. 1. 1996.

[119] Perthes, Volker. "The Syrian Solution." *Foreign Affairs.* 2006.

Facing a nuclear Iran, the United States will need to tread more carefully in the region, avoiding overtly threatening military postures and refraining from initiating or involving itself in regional conflicts in the absence of direct threats to American interests. Such a policy will work to reassure an insecure Iran of American intentions, while rebuilding regional perceptions of the United States as a responsible actor, thereby depriving Iran and its anti-American allies of a means to exploit anti-American sentiments in the region for increased influence. However, since Iran's intentions remain uncertain to a degree and it is difficult to predict whether its goals may later shift to more overt aggression, the United States should, as part of regional containment strategy, communicate to the Iranians its lack of tolerance for certain actions. Such "red lines" would serve to deter Iranian threats to American interests and reassure regional American allies of the United States' commitment to their security without the need for overly confrontational policies or postures. For example, the United States should strongly discourage Iran from engaging in nuclear blackmail of its neighbors – that is, threatening them with nuclear attack unless they concede to Iranian demands. Also, any temptation on Iran's part to transfer nuclear weapons to other regional actors, though likely minimal to begin with as noted above, can be further diminished by a reiteration by American and Israeli policymakers of their determination to retaliate against any such transfer.

Through a cautious, long-term adjustment of regional policies combined with engagement with Iran, the United States can mitigate the potential dangers fostered by nuclear proliferation in the region. By focusing on affecting those variables that can ameliorate the security dilemma, American policies will be more likely to discourage continued proliferation in the region and reduce the potential for arms races and spirals of

hostility. Furthermore, American policy adjustments can work to limit the influence of Iran on regional actors by attempting to address the grievances that Iran could otherwise exploit and supporting regimes that could provide counterweights to the Iranian model of political repression and anti-Americanism.

Conclusion

Though recent Israeli estimates predict that Iran will be unable to produce a nuclear capability before 2015, others have forecast a nuclear-capable Iran as soon as 2012.[120] In light of these estimates and the ongoing frustration of Western-led efforts to discourage Iran's nuclear development, it is likely that Iran will possess at least a breakout nuclear capability long before international efforts can claim success. Due to the very likely adverse effects such a capability would create for Middle Eastern security, Western actors, especially the United States, should begin adjusting their regional policies as soon as possible to mitigate these effects. Special attention should be paid to the security dilemmas of regional actors vis-à-vis Iran, which cannot be abolished but the operation of which can be ameliorated. Such adjustments will need to be large-scale and long-term, made in close cooperation with Israel and Arab states, and take effect in conjunction with increased diplomatic engagement with Iran. Such large-scale adjustments in policy will be impossible to implement on an as-needed basis, and difficult even when planned years in advance. Even if American policymakers can deftly navigate the short-term crisis of a nuclear Iran, the necessary adjustments over the long-term may prove painful and uncertain. However, with the right combination of policy

[120] Melman, *Reuters* fn. 58.

adjustments and engagement, the United States may be able to minimize the potential damage wrought by a nuclear Iran and avoid the outbreak of further proliferation or war.

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