

# The Nuclear Race in Middle East, Arab World- Iran

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**Abstract:** For over the last decade, the international standoff over the Iranian nuclear program has captured world attention and posed significant challenges to regional security in the Middle East and beyond. Given Iran's important geostrategic position and critical involvement in key Middle Eastern affairs, the July 14-2015 Declaration on a comprehensive nuclear agreement between Iran and the P5+1 not only mitigates the risk of nuclear proliferation but also presents significant implications for the future order of the Middle East. Whether moving toward greater accommodation with regional states or pushing forward with its revolutionary policies that confront regional order, Iran's role in the Middle East is now more important than ever and will be a critical subject of analysis, research, and discussion in the foreseeable future. Nuclear weapons are controversial and recent events have thrust Iran into the nuclear spotlight. These weapons in the hands of the fanatic regime in Tehran will grant them a membership card in the open nuclear club. They will become the ninth member, along with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, India, Pakistan, and North Korea. This would devastate the stability of nuclear nonproliferation in the world and drastically increase the risk of nuclear war by opening the floodgates through which Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and others could flow. The Iranians, as well as other Islamic fanatics, have missile delivery systems and much of the knowledge required to develop nuclear weapons. Nothing can stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons this decade. This paper will explore the impact of the Iranian nuclear program on the Middle East. Therefore, the Relations between Iran and the West significantly deteriorated as a result of the 1979 Iran Islam revolution and the hostage crisis, but things got worse as Iran developed its nuclear programme. The strategic impact in the Gulf region of the nuclear agreement with Iran will hinge on the perceptions of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries as to whether or not it helps to curb Iranian "adventurism" and, especially, its support for destabilizing activities in the region.

**Keywords:** Nuclear weapons, nuclear program, nuclear deterrence.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

(Nuclear deterrence theory is underpinned by the idea that the threat of nuclear weapons is enough to render the potential costs an aggressor is likely to shoulder far higher than the potential benefits if they were to engage militarily).

The nuclear arms race heated up throughout the 1950s. Stunned that the Soviets had been able to develop an atomic bomb of their own so quickly, President Harry Truman decided to 'up the ante' by declaring that the United States intended to develop a more powerful hydrogen bomb. In January 1950, Truman declared:

'It is part of my responsibility as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces to see to it that our country is able to defend itself against any possible aggressor. Accordingly, I have directed the AEC to continue its work on all forms of atomic weapons, including the so-called hydrogen or Super bomb.'

Codenamed Ivy Mike, the United States exploded the world's first hydrogen bomb in November 1952. The Soviets followed with their own hydrogen bomb a few years later. In the early years of the arms race, the United States held a lead, but throughout the 1960s and 1970s the Soviet Union began to close the gap.

The nuclear arms race was central to the Cold War. Many feared where the Cold War was going with the belief that the more nuclear weapons you had, the more powerful you were. Both America and Russia massively built up their stockpiles of nuclear weapons.

The world greatly changed when USA exploded the H-bomb in 1952. This one bomb was smaller in size than the Hiroshima atomic bomb but 2500 times more powerful. The Russians produced an H-bomb in 1953 and the world became a much more dangerous place. However, it is possible that the sheer power of these weapons and the fear that they evoked, may have stopped a nuclear war.

The development of intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs in the late 1950s changed the contours of Cold War military strategy. An ICBM is a long-range ballistic missile. The key word here is 'intercontinental.' That says it all. Intercontinental ballistic missiles are capable of being launched from one continent to another. In the context of the Cold War, ICBMs were designed to carry nuclear warheads. The world's first ICBM was the Soviet R-7. The United States followed shortly after with their Atlas Missile.

Because both superpowers were capable of pushing a button and virtually obliterating one another within a matter of minutes, military theorists formulated the doctrine of (Mutually Assured Destruction), or MAD. According to this view, if one country launched missiles, the other, having a few minutes' notice before impact, would retaliate by launching missiles also. Both countries, therefore, would be destroyed. Some viewed this doctrine as a deterrent to war because both countries would be less likely to launch missiles knowing that it would only result in mutual destruction.

One of the most critical moments of the nuclear arms race was the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962. When an American spy plane discovered missile sites in Cuba, a mere 90 miles from American soil, it presented a major diplomatic confrontation between President John F. Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. Kennedy was advised by some military leaders to launch a strike against the missile sites, but instead he issued an order to blockade Cuba, while secretly negotiating with the Nikita Khrushchev. A deal was worked out, and the Soviets ended up removing the missiles from Cuba. Throughout the Cuban Missile crisis the world feared that it would be standing on the brink of World War III.

Many experts would agree that Iran's nuclear programme appears more like a means than an end for the Iranian leadership in its quest for regional ascendancy and regime survival. While Iran would probably be more interested in having a nuclear option than a nuclear arsenal, it may well end up with assembled nuclear weapons sometime in the near future. Whether this happens by default, and not design, will not change the end result and its consequences.

The Arab regimes share a belief that Iran is using its civilian nuclear program as a pretext to develop a nuclear military capability. Since the end of the Cold War, Iran's sense of security has been in constant flux. Iran has been wary of the growing U.S. presence in the region, first with the removal of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001 and then with the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Arab countries understand Iran's security concerns and recognize that the Islamic Republic faces numerous challenges. However, with the exception of Syria, none of the Arab regimes has expressed support for Iran's nuclear ambitions. The Arab world's relations with Iran are marked by deep mistrust following centuries of religious and political rivalry. Iran, the birthplace of Shia Islam, has competed over the leadership of Islam with Arab states, most of which are majority Sunni. Some Arab states consider Iran to be an occupying power in Arab lands: the United Arab Emirates has claimed sovereignty over the three disputed islands located at the entrance of the Persian Gulf since its independence in 1971, and Iraq has a long-standing dispute with Iran over control of the Shatt al-Arab waterway.

Arab concerns about Iran's nuclear program give rise to many questions, such as the following: If Iran succeeds in becoming a military nuclear power, transparently or opaquely, how would the Arab regimes react? What security measures would Arab regimes take to counter an Iranian nuclear bomb? Would a nuclear armed Iran undermine the Arab leadership and tip the balance of power in the Middle East? Could nuclear weapons provide Tehran with more leverage against the United States at the expense of the Arab states? Would a nuclear-armed Iran lead to further proliferation in the region and maybe to the erosion of the nonproliferation regime? What are appropriate measures that Arab states could take to avoid such an escalation? This study addresses these questions by exploring the different options available to Arab governments to counter a nuclear-armed Iran and the factors that would influence their decisions.

As result I would say that, As of September 2010 there were 441 nuclear power reactors in operation in 29 countries according to the IAEA. The share of nuclear energy in overall electricity generation was the highest in Western Europe (almost 27%); it was zero in the Middle East. The IAEA report in question also stated that 65 countries had announced their interest in developing nuclear energy. About a fifth of these countries were in the Middle East. The nuclear energy option was being looked at not only by the countries that have considered that option for decades (such as Egypt, Turkey,

UAE, and Saudi) but also by new countries such as Jordan. Only Lebanon had not expressed any interest in the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Even though it is possible that the key states in the region could learn to live with this outcome, especially if the Israeli posture of 'nuclear weapons in the basement' were to be adopted by Iran, and if the circumstances allow for a degree of 'nuclear socialization', the concern has been expressed that a nuclear Iran could serve as a 'tipping point' for some states in other regions in their thinking about acquiring a nuclear capability. Some experts even predict that a cascade of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferation, especially regarding nuclear weapons, could lead to a strong incentive for prominent non-nuclear countries, such as Germany and Japan, to 'go nuclear'. It is possible to speculate whether Iran's nuclearization would be the 'straw that broke the camel's back'.

At the regional level, experts differ over the seriousness of the Iranian threat for the Middle East and even beyond. According to a rather alarmist view expressed by Therese Delpech, and shared by several Arab, European, Israeli and US analysts and officials, Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons and long-range missile delivery systems is likely to strengthen the more radical elements in Iran and to affect its behaviour in the region. Shahram Chubin expects drastic changes should Iran acquire nuclear weapon status: such a development would tilt the regional balance away from the Sunni Arab states, challenge and complicate US hegemony, and sow doubts as to the advisability of over-reliance on the USA in the region. Bertram has asserted that Iran's nuclearization would 'introduce a further element of insecurity and uncertainty into a part of the world where stability is already fragile, the potential for conflict high and which sits on a wealth of fossil energy sources that make it a theatre of strategic rivalry'.

A key question is the extent to which nations in the Middle East, South and North East Asia would operate according to rational norms, as generally understood, with respect to the use or threatened use of nuclear weapons. Would the rules of cold war nuclear deterrence apply in the emotional circumstances of the Middle East conflict (or the Indo-Pakistani rivalry)? According to Dogbert Brito and Michael Intriligator, the reason for concern is simple: the larger the number of countries with nuclear weapons, the greater the likelihood that at least one of them may be governed by someone who is not adequately 'stable' or 'rational'. If countries possess nuclear weapons, nuclear peace thus comes to depend on the emotional stability or rationality of the leaders of all of them, and it is threatened by the weakest link in the chain. As the chain gets longer, the threat in the category of psychological stability becomes greater.

As Nye (1987) maintains, 'a balance of power is essential but difficult to maintain' and further argues that in an 'anarchic world states vie for power in the context of intense security dilemma' according to which the defensive posturing of one appears offensive to another, and therefore incites escalation (Jervis, 1978). Iran's rivalry with the GCC Arab states is independent of its rivalry with Israel and the US because of different ideological, ethnic and geopolitical reasons and it adds fears that 'Iran's nuclear ambition would trigger a spate of nuclear proliferation across the Middle East' (Mabon, 2013). Interestingly, Waltz (2010) calls for a nuclear balance of power between Iran and Israel and doesn't discuss other imbalances it could generate between Iran and other regional states. Ehteshami (2010) argues that 'Iran's strategic rise exposes it to classic counterbalancing in a region such as the Middle East, in which power politics continue to dominate the region's interstate relations'. Moreover, as Walt's (1987) 'Balance of threat' theory explains, states respond to any rising power by 'balancing' against it rather than 'bandwagoning'. Walt further contends that even at the height of Pan-Arabism, balancing against Egypt was not just practised by 'conservative monarchies but even by ostensibly Pan-Arab regimes in Syria and Iraq when Nasser posed a threat to them' (Hinnebusch, 2003, p. 64). From this perspective, Arab GCC states are likely to take some countermeasures to bridge this security dilemma with Iran and perhaps the nuclear option could be the starting point. The Gulf States adopted a typically ambiguous approach to the announcement of nuclear between Iran and world powers.

## 2. IMPACT OF IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME ON THE REGIONAL STABILITY AND SECURITY OF THE MIDDLE EAST?

More than 30 years after Iran's revolution, it's political, military, and international activities continue to challenge and perplex its neighbors and many Western democracies. RAND research has informed and influenced U.S. policymakers on a range of topics, from engagement and containment and Tehran's ability to exploit pan-Islamic causes to Iran's ongoing development of nuclear capabilities.

A landmark agreement over Iran's nuclear program was reached on July 13, 2015 in the Austrian capital of Vienna, following nearly two years of negotiations. According to the deal, Iran's nuclear activities will be curbed in exchange for

sanctions relief. The main aim of the agreement is to end the nearly 12 year long stand-off between Iran and the six world powers Germany, the US, Russia, China, Britain and France. The deal was announced by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and the European Union's foreign policy Chief Federica Mogherini in a joint statement.

Some observers have speculated that the repercussions of the Iran nuclear agreement will increase the current instability in the Middle East. Others insist that an improvement of relations between Tehran and the West might affect the region positively. All agree on only one point: the historic deal will change the balance of power in the Middle East.

Despite nearly seven decades of Nuclear weapons, (NWs) and four decades of Cold war in which they figured prominently, we still do not know very much about, or with any degree of assurance, what NWs can and cannot do beyond create widespread destruction. Questions about deterrence, extended deterrence and the political utility of NWs and whether these are general propositions/ laws or culturally or state specific, cannot be reliably answered. Here I just want to shed some light upon the speech of The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed Elbarradei, determined that "Iran has been developing a nuclear fuel cycle. Have they taken the step from that into weaponization? We have not seen that. But I am not yet excluding that possibility." All that is certain about Iran's program is that the West does not have any idea how far Teheran has advanced in its bid to achieve nuclear weapons capability. However we can understand how Iranian leaders view nuclear weapons. Ali Rafsanjani in 1988 said: *Chemical and biological weapons are poor man's atomic bombs and can easily be produced. We should at least consider them in our defense. Although the use of such weapons is inhuman, the war thought us that international laws are scraps of paper. "With regard to chemical, bacteriological, and radiological weapons training, it was made clear during the Iran-Iraq war that these weapons are very decisive. It was also made clear that the moral teaching of the world are not very effective when war reaches a serious stage and the world does not respect its own resolution and closes its eyes to the violation and all the aggression which are committed on the battlefield. We should fully equip ourselves both in the offensive and defensive of chemical, bacteriological, and radiological weapons"*.

Therefore, the Relations between Iran and the West significantly deteriorated as a result of the 1979 Iran Islam revolution and the hostage crisis, but things got worse as Iran developed its nuclear programme. The West regarded Iran as a threat to the region, and tried to persuade it to abandon its nuclear operations. However, Iran has consistently claimed that its nuclear operations are being carried out for peaceful means. The tension between the West and Iran reached its peak during Ahmadinejad's presidency. With harsh statements against the US and Israel, Ahmadinejad at various points brought the parties to the brink of war. Bilateral tensions were reduced and harsh statements were replaced with mutual goodwill gestures when Hasan Rouhani was elected as the new president in August 2013. As a result, a 6-month interim deal on Iran's nuclear program has been signed between Iran and the G5+1 countries in Geneva. According to the deal, Iran will suspend its nuclear programme to a significant extent, dispose of its 20% enriched uranium, and resume uranium enrichment activities only at a rate of 5%. In return, the international community will reduce the sanctions around \$7 billion. If the parties do not fulfill their obligations within 6 months, an extension of 6 months will be granted.

Therefore, the challenge is verifying that there are no undeclared enrichment facilities or capabilities. Most of Iran's effort in the enrichment area has been concentrated on centrifuge technology which Tehran is aggressively pursuing. The IAEA found that Iran repeatedly violated its safeguards agreement during an 18- year period of covert development and testing. Currently, Iran is operating a small centrifuge cascade and is conducting research and development work at a pilot facility in Natanz. This is the beginning of a much larger effort with hundreds of centrifuges at the pilot facility. Iran notified the IAEA that this fall it will begin installing the first of 3000 centrifuges at an industrial enrichment plant that is also at Natanz. Let there be no mistake that what Iran calls innocent research and development is actually the next step toward achieving a large-scale enrichment capability. Supporting this conclusion, Iran is now producing feedstock for centrifuges at a uranium conversion facility at Isfahan. Iran has already produced approximately 85 tons of uranium hexafluoride at Isfahan. If this amount of feedstock were enriched in centrifuges to weapons grade material, the result would be enough highly-enriched uranium (HEU) for about 10 nuclear weapons. Nearby, Iran has dug an underground tunnel for storing uranium hexafluoride. The facility at Isfahan is also capable of converting uranium hexafluoride to uranium metal; the form used in nuclear weapons components. In a recent CIA briefing before the Congress, U.S. lawmakers were told in closed session that Iran was not only involved in a clandestine nuclear program, but that the country is on a fast track to producing the final product. Iran could have had its first prototype nuclear bomb ready for testing by late 2020.

The strategic impact in the Gulf region of the nuclear agreement with Iran will hinge on the perceptions of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries as to whether or not it helps to curb Iranian “adventurism” and, especially, its support for destabilizing activities in the region. The potential emergence of Iran as a more responsible regional actor holds out the possibility for a major improvement in relations, and even for crafting political solutions to destabilizing Middle East conflicts. There is also the prospect of an expansion in trade between Iran and Arab Gulf countries, especially the United Arab Emirates and Oman. But many GCC countries remain concerned that Iran could emerge from the accord enriched and emboldened, with no change in what they strongly perceive to be aggressively hegemonic regional ambitions. These concerns and prospects indicate the pitfalls and opportunities for maximizing the benefits and minimizing the costs of the nuclear agreement in the Gulf region.

It is often claimed that the Arab Gulf countries are simply, unanimously, and categorically opposed to the agreement. For example, The Times of Israel quotes a senior Israeli official saying, “There is a lot of opposition to it, especially from countries in the region. Iran’s neighbors – those who know Iran best are united in opposition to the deal.” Such claims are not an accurate reflection of the range of responses. While many GCC countries, including the largest and most influential, Saudi Arabia, are highly skeptical about the agreement and concerned about its impact, the Gulf reactions are varied and complex.

The current US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, highlighted on June-2016, how “Iran is technically capable of producing enough highly enriched uranium for a weapon in the next few years”. Undoubtedly, a nuclear-armed Iran will inevitably “throw existing security structures into flux, recalibrating the Middle Eastern strategic order. The contours of this increasingly nuclear zed political landscape are shaped by a myriad of interlocking and complex factors. Naturally, Iran’s nuclear programme is sure to elicit responses from Washington, Israel and a host of Arab states, most notably those of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), particularly Saudi Arabia.

Imagine how the Middle East would look if Iran in fact succeeded in achieving a military nuclear capability. This challenge, which has preoccupied many researchers and analysts alike, is usually addressed in the framework of traditional concepts that developed during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, the ability of this traditional world to the assumption that deterrence regimes exist primarily between two main actors: the defending party, which seeks to deter, and the attacking party, which serves as a target for attempts at deterrence. Importantly, the regional build-up of nuclear capabilities will significantly contribute to further instability through increased multipolarity in the region. According to Powell (2003), critiques of nuclear deterrence theory see it as “an obsolete and possibly dangerous kind of Cold War thinking” due to its embeddedness in the notion of bipolarity. In a neorealist vein, this is inapplicable to a nuclear Middle East due to the intrinsically temperamental nature of multipolar systems; the nature of multipolarity involves a constant dynamism in the security architecture and an unstable balance of power, in which uncertainty prevails. Furthermore, nuclear powers within a more multipolar region would, according to Elderman & Krepinevich (2011) be “more prone to miscalculation and escalation than a bipolar competition”, which would also serve to further accentuate the chances of “erroneous information about the other side’s nuclear intentions” (Blair), undermining the applicability of deterrence theory.

Of course, the effect of Iran’s nuclear programme upon regional stability is underpinned by whether Iran is a revisionist or benign power. To many, Iran has aspirations of attaining hegemony over the Gulf aspirations that could be realized with the deterrence, compliance and coercive capabilities of nuclear weapons in the interstate bargaining process. Indeed, according to Mindell (2008), a nuclear weapon would “increase their ability to take more aggressive steps in asserting their pre-eminence in the region”, largely through being able to use the specter of a nuclear strike to renegotiate regional security arrangements. Furthermore, the deposition of the Taliban, Jihadists, and radical groups has eliminated considerable impediments to a potential Iranian regional hegemony. Naturally, a more emboldened, nuclear Iran is bound to raise fears in the Gulf, particularly amongst the GCC. In particular, the perennial dispute between Iran and the UAE over the territorial rights to disputed islands in the Strait of Hormuz could be a first point of call for an emboldened revisionist Iran. In face of this, Abu Dhabi has reportedly sought to counterbalance against the Iranian threat through arms deals with Washington, including one recently of 500 hellfire missiles (RT, 2011c).

Saudi Arabia expressed its views through comments by Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir. After meeting with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on July 16, Jubeir said “All of us in the region want to see a peaceful resolution to Iran’s nuclear program;” but that “If Iran should try to cause mischief in the region we’re committed to confront it resolutely.”

He emphasized the need for a “robust and continuous inspections regime to make sure Iran does not violate the terms of the agreement,” and a quick snapback of sanctions in the event of Iranian non-compliance. Jubeir insisted that Iran should use the anticipated flood of income arising from sanctions relief in a constructive manner, saying “We hope that the Iranians will use this deal in order to improve the economic situation in Iran and to improve the lot of the Iranian people, and not use it for adventures in the region.”

This skepticism comes despite considerable U.S. reassurance offered at the May U.S.-GCC Camp David Summit, and a phone call July 14 in which President Barack Obama briefed King Salman on the U.S. understanding regarding the agreement with Iran. Jubeir’s pointed warning about the use of sanctions relief for “adventures in the region” is a reference to Iranian support for clients and proxies in conflicts such as Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. If the agreement results in more responsible behavior by Iran, particularly with regard to regional conflicts, then it will be seen as a positive development by Gulf countries, which are generally more alarmed by Iran’s interest in expanding its influence in the region than its nuclear program. Consequently, if Iran’s behavior doesn’t change, or even becomes more aggressive, the nuclear agreement is more likely to be viewed as a negative development. The first and most important test of this question will arise as sanctions relief provides an influx of income to Tehran’s coffers. What the regime does with that windfall will be scrutinized very carefully by its neighbors, and will shape their perception of the regional strategic implications of the agreement.

As Abu Dhabi-based English-language daily *The National* phrased it in an unsigned editorial, “What Iran does with the money will determine how the Gulf views the deal? If they use it to build infrastructure, to invest in the talents of their people, and build a genuine, positive relationship with their neighbors, then there will be celebrations on this side of the Gulf as well. If, on the other hand, they continue their meddling, continue to foment unrest in Yemen and Iraq, and continue their support for the regime of Bashar Al Assad in Syria, then all the fears of the Gulf will have been realized. It will be the old Iran, merely with new window dressing.”

Several experts, however, predicted or expressed concern for the opposite effect: an Iranian drive towards weaponization or regional proliferation. As Abdulaziz Sager explains, “there are widespread doubts that Iran will stick to the letter and spirit of the agreement.” Likewise, Abdulwahhab Al-Qassab notes Iran’s potential use of “nuclear blackmail” against regional states as well as the heightened risk of proliferation that will ensue as a result: “A sort of nuclear race could be expected since the Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, are already embarked on sort of peaceful nuclear programs. This will bring the region into a warm sort of cold war where wars of attrition between subordinates will prevail on bases much more harmful than what we see now in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.”

However, some scholars emphatically argued on the contrary that when the region could live with nuclear Pakistan and India and the west could live with nuclear Soviet and North Korea, one can also live with nuclear Iran. However, nuclear Iran is not desirable for the sake of universal good. From a realistic perspective, one can argue that given Israel’s nuclear ambiguity nuclear Iran may stabilize the region and perhaps constrain Israel’s expansionist policy. This argument stems from balance-of power and regional security architecture theories. However, the ground reality is opaque, which paints a bleak or uncertain future for the region. The stalemate will continue as long as Israel maintains its ambiguous nuclear policy and revisionist neighborhood policy. Neither Iran nor Israel has declared officially or hinted slightly that they possess nuclear warheads or weapons thus creating a space for security dilemma to operate.

Another set of problems emerges because the negotiating process has created its own realities. The interim agreement accepted Iranian enrichment; the new agreement makes it an integral part of the architecture. For the U.S., a decade-long restriction on Iran’s nuclear capacity is a possibly hopeful interlude. For Iran’s neighbors—who perceive their imperatives in terms of millennial rivalries—it is a dangerous prelude to an even more dangerous permanent fact of life. Some of the chief actors in the Middle East are likely to view the U.S. as willing to concede a nuclear military capability to the country they consider their principal threat. Several will insist on at least an equivalent capability. Saudi Arabia has signaled that it will enter the lists; others are likely to follow. In that sense, the implications of the negotiation are irreversible.

However, if the Middle East is “proliferated” and becomes host to a plethora of nuclear-threshold states, several in mortal rivalry with each other, on what concept of nuclear deterrence or strategic stability will international security be based? Traditional theories of deterrence assumed a series of bilateral equations. Do we now envision an interlocking series of rivalries, with each new nuclear program counterbalancing others in the region?

Previous thinking on nuclear strategy also assumed the existence of stable state actors. Among the original nuclear powers, geographic distances and the relatively large size of programs combined with moral revulsion to make surprise attack all but inconceivable. How will these doctrines translate into a region where sponsorship of non state proxies is common, the state structure is under assault, and death on behalf of jihad is a kind of fulfillment?

The final stages of the nuclear talks have coincided with Iran's intensified efforts to expand and entrench its power in neighboring states. Iranian or Iranian client forces are now the pre-eminent military or political element in multiple Arab countries, operating beyond the control of national authorities. With the recent addition of Yemen as a battlefield, Tehran occupies positions along all of the Middle East's strategic waterways and encircles archrival Saudi Arabia, an American ally. Unless political restraint is linked to nuclear restraint, an agreement freeing Iran from sanctions risks empowering Iran's hegemonic efforts.

Absent the linkage between nuclear and political restraint, America's traditional allies will conclude that the U.S. has traded temporary nuclear cooperation for acquiescence to Iranian hegemony. They will increasingly look to create their own nuclear balances and, if necessary, call in other powers to sustain their integrity. Does America still hope to arrest the region's trends toward sectarian upheaval, state collapse and the disequilibrium of power tilting toward Tehran, or do we now accept this as an irremediable aspect of the regional balance?

Moreover, we can see the agreement can serve as a way to dissociate America from Middle East conflicts, culminating in the military retreat from the region initiated by the current administration. As Sunni states gear up to resist a new Shiite empire, the opposite is likely to be the case. The Middle East will not stabilize itself, nor will a balance of power naturally assert itself out of Iranian-Sunni competition. (Even if that were our aim, traditional balance of power theory suggests the need to bolster the weaker side, not the rising or expanding power.) Beyond stability, it is in America's strategic interest to prevent the outbreak of nuclear war and its catastrophic consequences. Nuclear arms must not be permitted to turn into conventional weapons. The passions of the region allied with weapons of mass destruction may impel deepening American involvement.

Until clarity on an American strategic political concept is reached, the projected nuclear agreement will reinforce, not resolve, the world's challenges in the region. Rather than enabling American disengagement from the Middle East, the nuclear framework is more likely to necessitate deepening involvement there—on complex new terms. History will not do our work for us; it helps only those who seek to help themselves.

Nonetheless, the implications for regional stability ultimately hinge upon whether the Islamic Republic is a revisionist or status-quo power. Suspicions, particularly from Israel and the GCC about Iranian support for Shia proxies in both the Levant and Gulf and threats of a Shia-led Iranian pursuit of regional hegemony are not ill-founded. However, it is necessary to draw upon a constructivist and pluralist review of the origins and nature of Iranian foreign policy, as well as the theory of defensive realism, which suggest that Iran's nuclear programme is reactionary in nature, nullifying the argument for Iran as an intrinsically revisionist state.

### 3. POST-DEAL U.S. STRATEGY ON IRAN AND THE MIDDLE EAST

For a number of years, the major world powers - The United States, China, France, Germany, Russia, and the United Kingdom (the "P5+1") - followed a two-track policy: encouraging Iran to engage in diplomatic negotiations, while imposing increasingly comprehensive sanctions against Iran's energy and financial sectors. Both the United States and Israel promoted the imposition of sanctions as well as the search for a diplomatic resolution, while warning that there will be a time limit for these policies, and that "all options" – including military action - remain on the table.

On April 2, 2015, the P5+1 (the US, UK, China, Russia, France and Germany – with EU facilitation) announced a framework agreement, setting the parameters for a final Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement with Iran over its nuclear program. The parameters, which emerged after an intense eight-day period of negotiations in Lausanne, Switzerland, and followed two years of talks between the world powers and Iran, create a basis for negotiations over a final agreement to be concluded by June 30, 2015.

The GCC countries are six distinct sovereign and independent entities that come together to seek common approaches to securing their basic interests. Although they agree on much, they nonetheless do not have a single, unified foreign policy, especially on granular regional issues such as relations with Iran. Each GCC country has a specific and unique

relationship with Iran that informs its strategic thinking. While all six GCC members view Iran as a potential threat to their security, they have employed a wide variety of approaches in their policies toward Iran since the 1979 revolution to deal with this challenge. Therefore it is not at all surprising that the Gulf countries have expressed a range of reactions to the deal.

Oman, not surprisingly, most warmly welcomed the agreement, calling it a “historic win-win.” For a variety of reasons, Oman has developed and maintained the warmest relations with Iran of any of the GCC countries. Indeed, its good offices played a crucial role in the Tehran-Washington back channel diplomacy that led to the Iran-P5+1 nuclear negotiation, some of which were hosted in the Omani capital, Muscat. Qatar – which jointly manages an oil field with Iran – also has a history of warmer relations with Iran than many of its fellow GCC members, and Doha quickly welcomed the nuclear agreement. Kuwait, too, publicly expressed congratulations to Iran on the agreement, and said it hopes the accord will “strengthen the security and stability of the area.”

The U.S. commitment to Middle East stability remains high. The United States works to ensure energy security and stability in the Gulf and the long-term security of Israel, while also seeking a comprehensive agreement with Iran over its nuclear program that prevents nuclear proliferation. As well as Ensuring successful implementation of the nuclear deal with Iran will pose major challenges. It will require ongoing engagement with Iran, the management of tensions deriving from Iranian regional activities, and tending to the credibility of Washington's nuclear redline—the commitment to use “all necessary measures” to keep Iran from the bomb.

The future of Syria and Iraq remain highly uncertain, and outcomes in both countries will have a long-term impact on the stability of the Middle East as a whole. The threat of terrorism has grown in Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and northern Mali, where militants have allied themselves with the forces of Al Qaeda, and U.S. counterterrorism operations continue in Yemen. How the United States assesses and approaches these security challenges has a major impact on U.S. foreign policy as a whole. The Middle East Program regularly evaluates these challenges and seeks positive opportunities for U.S. engagement in the Middle East on matters related to regional security.

The vast majority of American contributors saw the nuclear agreement as a clear signal of a change in America’s position on Iran and interpreted the United States to be moving closer to Iran and preparing for a greater rapprochement. This idea of course has been an important source of concern for many Arab leaders. Some authors claimed that this trend was initiated back in 2003 with the cooperation between the U.S. and Iran over post Saddam in Iraq. Other reasons given for a shift in U.S. policy on Iran included that the U.S. objective to craft a more effective containment strategy necessitated an Iran without nuclear weapons; that the U.S. wanted to increase its leverage in the Middle East by playing different countries off one another and hence the need to engage Iran; or, that the U.S. would like regional actors to shoulder more of the costs in managing their affairs and providing security. According to Imad Salamey, “a New Deal Middle East will feature international recognition and incorporation of Iran into regional power constellations, which will intensify rivalry to assert dominance.” However, simultaneously and “in light of power constraints and regional deadlock, the rewards attained will perpetuate Iran’s foreign and security aspirations in the Arab World within an arranged and internationally determined code of conduct,” which would presumably allow the U.S. and the international community greater leverage in managing and influencing the conflicts and politics of the Middle East.

Whether or not U.S.-Iran relations will fundamentally change with a potential “grand bargain deal” and solve any outstanding contentions between the two countries on the heels of the current nuclear agreement is still open to speculation. As Waleed Hazbun argues, “In 2003 the U.S. was in a far stronger position, while now Iran holds important cards in conflicts across the region.” Although the nuclear agreement “suggests nothing of the sort of regional ‘grand bargain’ proffered by Iranian officials and dismissed by Americans. It could potentially result in a more expansive agreement. However, “The key question remains if the U.S. and Iran will seek to find common ground on mutually recognized legitimate security concerns or will exacerbate regional rivalries through military escalation.”

#### 4. CONCLUSION

At the end I would like to point that, the strategic impact in the Gulf region of the nuclear agreement with Iran will hinge on the perceptions of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries as to whether or not it helps to curb Iranian “adventurism” and, especially, its support for destabilizing activities in the region. The potential emergence of Iran as a more responsible regional actor holds out the possibility for a major improvement in relations, and even for crafting



political solutions to destabilizing Middle East conflicts. There is also the prospect of an expansion in trade between Iran and Arab Gulf countries, especially the United Arab Emirates and Oman. Even if political tensions persist to some extent, the impact of the agreement might still lead to an increase in Iranian trade with some GCC countries. The biggest beneficiary is likely to be the UAE, which, despite its territorial dispute with Iran over three islands in the Gulf, and other important disagreements, has maintained close trading ties with Iran. Dubai, in particular, stands to gain with an estimated 400,000 Iranian residents and well-established trading relationships with Iranian partners.

But many GCC countries remain concerned that Iran could emerge from the accord enriched and emboldened, with no change in what they strongly perceive to be aggressively hegemonic regional ambitions. These concerns and prospects indicate the pitfalls and opportunities for maximizing the benefits and minimizing the costs of the nuclear agreement in the Gulf region.

In the Middle East, distinguishing between friendly enemies and hostile friends is a daunting task. Yet key conflicts of interest between the U.S. and Iran are slowly fading, making a regional rebalancing necessary. Iran's desire to play a central role in the region puts it at odds with the U.S. aim of being the dominant power in the Middle East. But as Washington shifts its attention to the Asia-Pacific and seeks to avoid costly military engagements in the Middle East, Iran's ambitions could come in handy. Iran's desire to be a leading power brings with it the responsibility to fight back against destabilizing elements such as IS. In this context, Iran has already proven itself, while America's closest allies have either failed to provide support against IS beyond symbolic measures or have at least indirectly supported the group.

In the Middle East, the Syrian regime, which celebrated the agreement as a "great victory," is seen as potentially one of the biggest regional winners from the nuclear deal. Iran has invested a huge amount of money and resources in propping up the Syrian regime, including focusing the efforts of its Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah, to saving the regime in Damascus. Indeed, Assad seemed to be anticipating even more Iranian support in the context of the agreement, saying "We are reassured that the Iranian Islamic Republic will continue and with greater momentum supporting the just causes of the peoples and working to bring about peace and stability in the region and the world." Saudi Arabia and several of the other GCC countries are among the strongest regional opponents of Assad. The prospect of even more Iranian support for the Assad regime was one of the issues addressed by Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, who complained that "The agreement restored respect to this regime that should not have been respected and should have been punished not just for its nuclear program but also for its aggressive behavior in the area."

Some would argue that the nuclear deal is destabilizing the region and increasing tensions. That is a misdiagnosis. It is not the nuclear deal, but rather certain U.S. allies' reaction to Obama's diplomacy with Iran, that is increasing tensions. Such reactions are neither automatic nor inevitable. These states can choose to react differently. They can address what they perceive as negative side effects of a nuclear deal without resorting to destabilizing measures.

For Obama, alliance management following the conclusion of a nuclear deal with Iran cannot only focus on reassuring these states' of America's commitment to their security. It must also include insisting that America's allies themselves redouble their commitment to regional stability. However, everything hinges on the nuclear issue being fully resolved first.

After the framework for Tuesday's final deal was reached in April, 2015. Obama attempted to head off Gulf skepticism and assure key allies that a pending nuclear agreement would not impact U.S. support for them. But a summit convened by the president at Camp David was not attended by all leaders, which some considered a silent rebuff of Obama's efforts.

"There is worry at the top of the leadership of the Gulf States that the president is not really serious about doing significant efforts to ... restrain Iran's activities in the region," says Matt McInnis, a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. "There's a lot of mistrust and doubts with President Obama amongst Gulf leaders, so I think a lot of them are going to be waiting to see who the next president is and hope for a better relationship."

Saudi Arabia in particular is wary of U.S. attention pivoting to Iran. The Saudis and the Iranians are currently supporting opposing sides in an ongoing conflict in Yemen, with the Saudis backing the Yemeni government and the Iranians backing the Houthi rebels. Goldenberg says the U.S. must take steps to activity convince the Saudis that it still opposes such Iranian proxy activity. He added, "I think the first and foremost thing is to actually show up and say, 'We're going to have serious and strategic discussion about how to push back on Iran's influence in the region and how we're going to have a strategy about that and how we're going to do this together. We care about this,'" Goldenberg says. "Signaling that level of commitment is the most important thing we can do."

Detractors of a deal have also long argued that an agreement leaving Iran with any enrichment capacity would spark a regional arms race, convincing the Saudis that if Iran were left with enough capability to develop a bomb, Riyadh would need such capability, too. Goldenberg says this theory is misguided because the Saudis have more pressing concerns in the region.

"They care a lot more about Iran's support for terrorism than they do about the nuclear program," Goldenberg says. "Building nuclear programs is expensive and difficult and also results in a lot of international approbation. This is not easy cost-free stuff, especially when the United States will be very strongly pushing them not to."

However, U.S. officials claim that the nuclear accord bans Iranian arms transfers. Iran denies this is the case. Iran's arms transfers have fueled sectarian tensions and violence in the region, thereby undermining the U.S. campaign against ISIS and al-Qaeda and its affiliates. To deter further Iranian cheating and defuse regional violence, the U.S. and its allies should interdict future Iranian arms transfers and work to create a more moderate third way in Syria by arming members of the opposition there, in the hope of drawing off support from extremists. By pushing back against Iranian activities that violate the JCPOA and that undermine its interests by stoking violence in the region, the U.S. may also deter Iran from additional challenges to the nuclear accord.

Finally, the U.S. should recognize that given technological trends, the conventional military option against Iran's program is a wasting asset. By the time that the core provisions of the nuclear accord expire 10-15 years hence (assuming the accord remains in force at that time), Iran is liable to have much more robust air defenses (S-300s or better) and the means to ensure that a clandestine program is immune to a conventional U.S. strike. Iran has used past suspensions to advance parts of its program, and it will be sure to do so in this case. Accordingly, the U.S. should consider alternative ways of deterring an Iranian nuclear breakout when the MOP bomb—the conventional weapon of choice for use against deeply buried, hardened facilities—is no longer a viable option. These alternative options might include cyber and other forms of sabotage, and threats to destabilize the Islamic Republic by means of a campaign of political warfare. In sum: while the nuclear deal has a number of significant flaws, at least some can be rectified by a number of mitigation measures, which provide the basis for an effective implementation strategy. President Obama's willingness to commit to these measures and to such a strategy will be a leading indicator of whether the nuclear deal with Iran will achieve its intended goal of blocking Iran's path to the bomb, or will further destabilize the Middle East, further hasten the decline of America's fortunes in the region and beyond, and eventually pave the way for the emergence of Iran as a nuclear weapons state.

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