Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran: Is Regional Proliferation Inevitable?

Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran

The past year has seen a steady rise in tensions with regard to Iran's nuclear programme. Iran's economy is being crippled by far-ranging sanctions and the threat of an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear facilities looms large on the horizon. Yet the country's nuclear programme marches on, stoking fears that Iran may indeed be seeking to cross the nuclear weapons threshold. In this context, it is timely to consider how key regional players would respond to a nuclear-armed Iran. Many argue that an Iranian bomb would prompt a proliferation cascade in the Middle East. However, a closer examination of the drivers for key regional players shows that this is not necessarily the case. There is a range of non-proliferation tools that could be applied by the West and others to offset this risk.

Keywords: Iran, nuclear weapons, Middle East, nuclear proliferation

The past year has seen a steady rise in international tensions surrounding Iran's nuclear activities following the publication of a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors in November 2011. Containing unprecedented detail on the suspected military dimensions of the Iranian nuclear programme, this report was widely interpreted as confirmation that Iran is intent on acquiring nuclear weapons capability and is moving towards this goal. While stopping short of drawing definitive conclusions, the IAEA report added a new sense of urgency to international efforts to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions and resolve long-standing ambiguities in Iran's nuclear programme.

In this context, the international community has attempted to increase pressure on Iran. Wide-ranging sanctions, primarily targeting Iranian financial institutions and the highly lucrative oil trade, have been imposed unilaterally by the United States and multilaterally by the European Union and have placed considerable strain on the Iranian economy.[1] In January 2012, for example, the announcement

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[1] For a detailed study, see Wiegand, ''Serious damage or temporary irritation?''.

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of additional EU sanctions caused the value of the Iranian rial to plummet as Iranians rushed to convert their currency into US dollars.[2] Impacting on the commercial sector, unemployment is high and inflation currently sits well over 20 percent.[3]

Moreover, the Iranian regime's ability to convert international opposition into domestic political support through a narrative that positions Iran as a victim struggling to secure its sovereign rights in a hostile international community is beginning to crumble. A survey conducted by the Iranian Students' Polling Agency, a group linked to the Ministry of Higher Education, revealed that public support ''dropped from 45.2 to 22.1 percent in the two-year period from 2008''.[4] Furthermore, 41 percent of those surveyed did not approve of the administration's handling of the nuclear issue.[5]

Advances in the country's nuclear programme have been paralleled by increased speculation regarding an Israeli attack on Iranian facilities. At the beginning of February 2012, the *Washington Post* reported that US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta believed an attack on Iran to be imminent. Also in early February, Ehud Barak, Israel's Minister of Defence, claimed that military action may soon be necessary because ''dealing with a nuclearized Iran will be far more complex, far more dangerous and far more costly in blood and money than stopping it today''.[6] The problem here is that while an attack on Iranian nuclear facilities would undoubtedly delay Iran's nuclear advancement, it is generally agreed that a strike would not completely destroy the program. Moreover, an attack would in all likelihood force Tehran's hand and focus Iranian efforts on acquiring the bomb, as was the case in Iraq following the Israeli bombing of the Osirak reactor in 1981.[7]

In any case, despite sustained international pressure aimed at halting or at least slowing Iran's progress, Tehran has remained firm in its nuclear defiance and the country's nuclear programme continues to advance. Experts remain divided over Iran's ultimate nuclear aspirations. James Lindsay and Ray Takeyh, for example, claim that ''the Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to become the world's tenth nuclear power'', while others argue that there is ''no evidence that Iran has already taken a political decision to test or produce a nuclear weapon''.[8] And while Iranian policymakers have consistently stressed Iran's opposition to the acquisition of

[2] ''Iran's Middle Class on Edge as World Presses In'', *New York Times*, 6 February 2012.
[3] ''Iranians Anxious over Sanctions and Mismanaged Economy'', *BBC News*, 1 March 2012; see also ''In Iran, Private Sector Feels Squeeze of Sanctions'', *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 August 2012.
[4] Lewis, ''Iranian Opinion is Key to Avoiding War'', 27. Polls must always be treated with caution. However this survey, coming as it does from an organisation with links to the state, gives an interesting insight into Iranian public opinion.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] C. H. Kahl, ''The Iran Containment Fallacy'', The Hill's Congress Blog, 22 February 2012, http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/212003-the-iran-containment-fallacy.
[7] Braut-Hegghammer, ''Revisiting Osirak''.
[8] Lindsay and Takeyh, ''After Iran Gets the Bomb''; Mousavian, *Iran's Nuclear Crisis*, 31.

nuclear weapons, primarily on religious grounds – Supreme Leader Khamenei's 2004 fatwa prohibiting the use of nuclear weapons is held up as evidence of this position[9] – prominent analysts have convincingly argued that Iran's nuclear activities extend beyond what is strictly necessary for a civil nuclear programme.[10] For example, Iran's growing stockpile of 19.75 percent enriched uranium, which could be used in a 'breakout' scenario to rapidly produce weapons-grade uranium, is already far in excess of what is needed to fuel the Tehran Research Reactor.[11]

Iran's true nuclear intentions are only known to the leadership in Tehran and, in this sense, all attempts to predict the path that Iran will take are hypothetical. That said, given the uncertainty surrounding the Iranian nuclear crisis, it is timely to consider the possibility of further regional proliferation were Iran to cross the nuclear threshold and the range of policy options that could be applied to reduce this risk.[12]

The dangers of a nuclear-armed Iran

The dangers of a nuclear Iran have been well documented and revolve around four key and overlapping concerns. The first and principal concern stems from the old maxim 'proliferation begets proliferation', namely that if Iran acquires nuclear weapons its regional rivals will follow suit.[13] In political science, neorealist theory dictates that states rely on self-help in an anarchical international environment. In this context, ''every time one state develops nuclear weapons to balance against its main rival, it also creates a nuclear threat to another state in the region, which then has to initiate its own nuclear weapons program to maintain its national security''.[14] This argument is frequently evoked in the context of debate over a nuclear Iran. In 2007, former Director General of the IAEA Hans Blix claimed that failure to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue ''could create serious risks of escalation and long-term domino effects in the region''.[15] More recently, in his speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in March, President Obama said that faced with a nuclear-armed Iran, ''it is almost certain that others in the region would feel compelled to get their own nuclear weapon''.[16] The

[9] It should be noted that this fatwa has never been published.
[10] Fitzpatrick, ''Assessing Iran's Nuclear Programme''.
[11] Albright and Walrond, *Iranian Production of 19.75 Percent Enriched Uranium*.
[12] Of course there are many uncertainties around the idea of a nuclear-armed Iran. How would Iran choose to cross the nuclear threshold? Would the regime test a nuclear weapon? Would Iran withdraw from the NPT? Clearly the path chosen by Iran would affect the nature of the regional responses. Ultimately however, whatever the manner of its development, it is the broader and longer-term regional response to the emergence of a nuclear-armed Iran, in terms of further proliferation, that is under discussion here.
[13] Schultz, ''Preventing Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons'', 18.
[14] Sagan, ''Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?'', 58.
[15] Blix, ''Weapons of Terror'', 26.
[16] US President Obama speaking at the AIPAC Policy Conference, Washington, 4 March 2012.

destabilising effects of this scenario were highlighted earlier this year by UK Foreign Secretary William Hague who warned that if left unchecked, Iran's nuclear ambitions would likely lead to ''a new Cold War'' in the Middle East.[17] This proclaimed threat of proliferation is one the factors that led Matthew Kroenig to call for an attack on Iranian nuclear facilities in a recent and controversial article.[18]

Israel in particular has much at stake in the Iranian nuclear crisis. Iran is opposed to the very existence of the state of Israel and regards the country as a ''source of corruption which has settled in the hearts of the Islamic countries under the protection of foreign powers''.[19] It is this belligerent rhetoric that has convinced Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu that ''an Iran armed with nuclear weapons is an existential threat to Israel's existence''.[20] Alongside the threat of a direct attack, Israel also fears the potential for a nuclear Iran to provide ''a cover for Iran's non-state allies to increase their attacks on Israel''.[21] A nuclear-armed Iran would thus place Israel on ''hair-trigger alert – ready to launch a nuclear weapon at a moment's notice – putting both countries minutes away from annihilation''.[22]

Beyond the Iran-Israel dynamic, there has been deep suspicion and unease for some time within the Arab world – with the exception of Syria, Iran's long-term strategic partner – as to the true nature of Tehran's nuclear programme. This has led many to interpret the recent launch of new or renewed nuclear programmes in Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia as a security hedge against Iran's nuclear progress, rather than a solution to growing energy demands.[23]

Linked to the first concern, the second point relates to what is called the 'stability-instability paradox': a state of nuclear parity between two countries ''can lead one country to think that it can be more aggressive conventionally because it is protected by its nuclear shield''.[24] If Iran were to acquire the bomb, or even a latent nuclear weapons capability, it would add considerable weight to Tehran's influence and would undoubtedly embolden Iranian actions throughout the region. An Iranian nuclear capability would provide a counterbalance to the nuclear advantage that Israel has long held in the region and allow Tehran more scope for conventional aggression. This, in turn, would increase the risk of both conventional and nuclear war in the Middle East more broadly.

As far back as 2006, Saudi media commentators claimed that a nuclear Iran would ''make the region hostage to Iranian political conduct''.[25] This prospect of a

[17] ''Hague Fears Iran Could Start 'New Cold War'", *BBC News*, 18 February 2012.
[18] Kroenig, ''Time to Attack Iran'', 78.
[19] Ayatollah Khomenei cited in Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution*, 62.
[20] ''PM: Israel Obligated to Prevent Nuclear-armed Iran'', *The Jerusalem Post*, 18 April 2012.
[21] *Ibid*., 97.
[22] Lindsay and Takeyh, ''After Iran Gets the Bomb'', 38.
[23] Edelman *et al*., ''The Dangers of a Nuclear Iran'', 69.
[24] Cited in Sagan *et al*., ''Promoting Stability or Courting Disaster?'', 139.
[25] Kaye and Wehrey, ''A Nuclear Iran'', 118.

surge in Iranian influence and aggression is an important variable underlying both Israeli and broader regional support for military strikes against Iran's nuclear programme. For example, leaked diplomatic communications revealed that in 2008, Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah called on Washington to ''cut the head off the snake'' and attack nuclear facilities in Iran.[26] An Iranian bomb would make a volatile regional security mix far more potent and it might be argued that security concerns in this context would push other regional actors to proliferate in order to balance the scales.

The third fear relates to the ability of the non-proliferation regime to survive Iranian nuclearisation. The credibility of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the regime's mainstay, is already the subject of much debate over the structural inequality that the regime promotes between nuclear 'haves' and 'have-nots'. In this context of discord, and coming in the wake of North Korea's emergence as a state with nuclear weapons, commentators have suggested that an Iranian bomb would add to existing issues and ''undermine the non-proliferation regime in a [. . .] fundamental way'', robbing it of legitimacy and credibility.[27] According to this logic, regional proliferation in the Middle East would have a cancerous effect, spreading to other areas and rendering the NPT and associated measures virtually redundant.

The fourth point goes beyond the response of sovereign states to an Iranian bomb and relates to the impact a nuclear-armed Iran would have on the capabilities of regional terrorist groups. Matthew Kroenig argues, for example, that Iran is likely to provoke regional proliferation by transferring nuclear technology ''to its allies – other countries and terrorist groups alike'' in the interests of strengthening its strategic position.[28] Iran's past record of providing conventional weapons to Hezbollah and Hamas is used as the basis for this argument.

While the above discussion would seem to hint at a certain air of inevitability with regard to the future weakening of the non-proliferation norm and the further proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, assuming Iran continues on its current trajectory, the situation is not without hope. Dire forecasts on the seemingly 'inevitable' increase in the number of nuclear weapon states have been made since the dawn of the nuclear age. In 1963, for example, US President J.F. Kennedy predicted that there might be ''fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five nuclear weapons powers'' within the next decade.[29] Similar forecasts followed the collapse of the Soviet Union when it was feared that the move to a multipolar world would result in widespread nuclear proliferation. However, proliferation has proven to be

[26] '''Cut off Head of Snake' Saudis told US on Iran'', *Reuters*, 29 November 2010.
[27] Einhorn, ''A Transatlantic Strategy on Iran's Nuclear Program'', 30.
[28] Kroenig, ''Time to Attack Iran''.
[29] Doyle, *Nuclear Safeguards, Security and Nonproliferation,* 21.

historically rare, with the number of nuclear weapons states expanding only slightly from five in 1964 to nine in 2006 following North Korea's nuclear test. In an attempt to explain this rarity, analysts have moved beyond the classical realist security model that dominated early analyses of states' nuclear decision making, acknowledging the impact of other factors ranging from domestic politics to economic concerns to national identity.[30] For while security concerns are arguably the major driver behind nuclear weapons acquisition, these can be mitigated through the development of conventional alternatives and the provision of security guarantees.

Consequently, regional proliferation cascades stemming from the insecurity created by the acquisition of nuclear weapons by rival states are far from inevitable. The flawed logic of 'proliferation begets proliferation' is clearly demonstrated in North East Asia where North Korea's nuclear weapons have not provoked Japan or South Korea, countries with advanced civil nuclear programmes, to follow suit despite a long history of regional conflict and volatile relations. In this case, strong security alliances with the United States incorporating extended nuclear deterrence have played an important role in dissuading these countries from going nuclear. Ironically, the Middle East itself offers further evidence that nuclear proliferation is not inevitable. Noted for its policy of nuclear opacity (neither confirming nor denying its nuclear arsenal), Israel acquired nuclear weapons in the late 1960s and over four decades later still remains the only nuclear power in the region.

Assessing the likelihood of further proliferation in the Middle East

The following sections will explore the potential impact of a nuclear-armed Iran on the proliferation calculus of four key Middle Eastern countries: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey. We will also assess the likelihood of Iran transferring nuclear weapons or materials to terrorist groups in the region. In 2006, Bowen and Kidd identified these regional players as the most likely, due to their proximity to Iran and suspected past interest, to proliferate in response to Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons.[31] These are also the countries that currently feature most prominently in political debate on potential regional proliferation. It is argued here that these regional powers would have little to gain and much to lose by embarking on such a route, while Tehran would gain no real tactical or strategic advantage by proliferating to terrorists, an act which would most likely invite massive retaliation against Iran by the West.

[30] Hymans, "Nuclear Proliferation and Nonproliferation", 15.
[31] Bowen and Kidd, "The Nuclear Capabilities of Iran's Neighbours".

Egypt: new regime, same nuclear posture

Egypt and Iran are natural regional rivals due to similarities in geographical size and imperial pasts, and differences in religion (predominantly Sunni Arab versus Shiite Persian populations). This rivalry has been borne out through a long history of strained relations and opposition including Cairo's support of Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war, Tehran's sponsorship of Hamas and Hezbollah (even if the Muslim Brotherhood views Hamas in a more favourable light than Mubarak did), the signing of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty in 1979 and Egypt's strategic relationship with the United States. Against this backdrop, it is hardly surprising that Cairo has long viewed Iran's nuclear programme with suspicion describing it, in leaked diplomatic cables, as a ''strategic and existential threat'', while hinting to US officials that Egypt ''might be forced to begin its own nuclear weapons programme if Iran succeeds'' in acquiring the bomb.[32]

Egypt's national nuclear infrastructure does not yet include enrichment or reprocessing facilities, making the indigenous development of a break-out capability highly unlikely in the short to medium-term. This said, a nuclear weapons programme would not be beyond Egypt's technical capabilities in the longer term. With a significant track record of scientific nuclear research, a supply of highly-trained nuclear scientists and a relatively large nuclear infrastructure that includes two research reactors, Egypt is one of the most advanced countries in the region in this area.[33] If, then, Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons, would national security considerations push Egypt to follow suit, perhaps engaging in a crash programme? History suggests otherwise.

Over the past 50 years Egypt has faced multiple external security threats, which have so far failed to drive Cairo to the nuclear option. These include the crushing military defeat by Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967 and the past proliferation efforts of regional rivals – successful in the case of Israel, unsuccessful in the cases of Libya and Iraq. While nuclear weapons were briefly considered under Nasser in the early 1960s in response to Israel's nuclear weapons programme, development efforts were frozen following the 1967 war and then abandoned following Sadat's succession to the presidency in 1970.[34] Egypt instead chose to pursue a strategy of nuclear diplomacy, under which it has used the non-proliferation treaty and other international fora to apply pressure to Israel's nuclear weapons programme for the past four decades. It would seem very unlikely that the threat presented by a nuclear-armed Iran would cause Cairo to abandon this approach. Egypt has never faced Iran in a major military conflict, nor is Cairo involved in any territorial disputes with Tehran. Consequently, the security threat posed by a

[32] ''Cable: Egypt Scared of Iran Threat'', *Al-Jazeera*, 16 December 2010; and ''Egypt says may Seek Atomic Arms if Iran does: WikiLeaks Cables'', *Reuters*, 2 December 2010.
[33] Tertrais, ''The Middle East's Next Nuclear State''.
[34] Rost Rublee, ''Egypt: Flirtations, Frustration and Future Uncertainty''

nuclear-armed Iran is arguably weaker that the challenges Egypt has faced from other quarters. Furthermore, relations between the two countries have improved since the fall of the Mubarak regime. In March 2011, then Foreign Minister Nabil Elarabi declared that Iran was no longer an ''enemy state''.[35] This was followed a month later by the appointment of the first Iranian ambassador to Egypt in 30 years.[36]

A proliferation driver of arguably greater strength stems from the prestige and connotations of modernity that remain associated with nuclear weapons. Cairo has long seen itself as the leader of the Arab world and certain analysts have argued that it is the threat that a nuclear-armed Iran would pose to this regional status that would provoke Egypt to initiate its own weapons programme.[37] However, here again it is important to note that there is a precedent: Egypt's status has been challenged before, particularly through the country's humiliating defeat at the hands of Israel during the Six-Day War. And while this event provoked much discussion of the nuclear option, a full scale weapons programme was never initiated.[38] Of greater concern would be if Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons were to push Israel to alter its declaratory policy of nuclear opacity. By raising the profile of its nuclear weapons in response to Iran's development, Israel would derail the push for a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East that Egypt has championed since 1995, increase pressure on Cairo to respond with its own programme, and impact upon possible containment strategies towards a nuclear Iran by further complicating relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

Of course, while Egypt's policy of nuclear diplomacy has remained constant since Sadat, the recent revolution has opened the door to a possible change of strategy. This is unlikely to be seen in the short term, not least because the Foreign Ministry, which sets Egypt's agenda on non-proliferation issues, has been relatively unaffected by the change in leadership.[39] In the longer term, however, Egypt's nuclear strategy will be dependent on the policies of the new leadership. The influence of the Muslim Brotherhood is an important variable here since the recently elected president, Mohammed Morsi, was the Brotherhood's candidate. In the past the Muslim Brotherhood have been vocal in calling for Egypt to restart its nuclear power programme and develop nuclear weapons both to counter Israel's capabilities and for the purposes of national prestige.[40] In 2006, for example, Hamdi Hassan, a spokesperson for the Muslim Brotherhood parliamentary

[35] A. Eleiba, ''Revolution warms Egyptian-Iranian Relations'', *Ahramonline*, 5 April 2011.
[36] ''Iran Appoints Ambassador to Egypt, First in 30 Years'', *Reuters*, 19 April 2011.
[37] Einhorn, ''Egypt: Still on non-Nuclear Course''.
[38] Rost Rublee, ''Egypt's Nuclear Weapons Programme'', 556.
[39] N. Fahmy, ''The Egyptian Revolution and the Future of WMD in the Middle East'', *CNS*, 1 March 2012, http://cns.miis.edu/activities/110228_fahmy_egypt_qna.htm.
[40] Hurst, ''Is Mideast on Brink of an Arms Race?'', *Toronto Star*, 27 January 2007.

caucus, stated that, ''we [Egyptians] are ready to starve in order to own a nuclear weapon that will represent a real deterrent and will be decisive in the Arab-Israeli conflict''.[41] However, James Walsh argues convincingly that the Muslim Brotherhood's pro-nuclear position under the Mubarak regime was based on political expediency, fuelled by opposition to Mubarak's policies rather than grounded in any fundamental belief in the merits of an Egyptian bomb.[42]

In summary it would appear that the factors that might push Egypt to acquire nuclear weapons have been stronger in the past than they are now, while the domestic and international environments are more constraining. While the fall of the Mubarak regime and the subsequent rise of the Muslim Brotherhood has added an air of uncertainty to the future of Egyptian nuclear policy, it has also increased the cost of embarking on the path to nuclear weapons. Such a decision would likely incur huge economic and security costs. The new Egyptian regime is currently receiving $1.3 billion in annual military aid from the United States.[43] Moves towards proliferation would undoubtedly see this aid withdrawn. Furthermore the political turmoil experienced as Egypt's new government comes to grips with the challenges of leadership is likely to reduce Cairo's interest in going nuclear in the short term, with any thoughts of proliferation having to be balanced against the broader economic and political variables.

Saudi Arabia: the logic of restraint

Iran's relationship with Saudi Arabia is based on a longstanding and deeply rooted rivalry stemming from their aspirations to regional leadership, differences in political ideology – the Islamic Republic rejects the Saudi model of monarchic rule, the close relationship between Riyadh and Washington, and the Sunni/Shia sectarian divide that separates the political elite of both.[44] For Takeyh, ''the fact that both countries predicated their legitimacy on the transnational mission of safeguarding Islam made them natural competitors''.[45] In the 1980s, Saudi Arabia directly opposed Iran when it supported Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq war. Then, in the 1990s, the Saudis provided support to the Taliban government in Afghanistan while Tehran aligned itself with the Northern Alliance. Relations improved somewhat in the early 2000s when both Iran and Saudi Arabia signed a regional security agreement and Prince Abdullah denounced the reference to Iran as part of the 'axis of evil'. However, the opposition was renewed in 2005 when Saudi Arabia took a

[41] Salama and Hilal, ''Muslim Brotherhood Presses for Nuclear Weapons'', 6.
[42] Walsh, ''Will Egypt Seek Nuclear Weapons?'', 22.
[43] ''Once Imperiled, U.S. Aid to Egypt is Restored'', *The New York Times*, 23 March 2012.
[44] It should be noted that while the sectarian divide remains an important variable in the Iran-Saudi relationship, Iran has also tried to transcend religious sectarianism through its support for the Sunni groups Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Milani argues that this has ''undermined the regional position of such powerful Sunni countries as Egypt and Saudi Arabia''. See Milani, ''Tehran's Take'', 55.
[45] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution*, 132.

firm stand against Iran's nuclear programme, and this position has not changed. In February 2010 Saudi Deputy Foreign Minister for Bilateral Relations, Khalid Al-Jindan, told an American diplomat that Saudi Arabia faced a "clear and present danger" of an attack by a nuclear Iran.[46] More recently, in March 2012, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal identified "Iran's continued interference in the affairs of the countries in the region as well as its suspicious nuclear programme" as one of the key threats to regional security and stability.[47]

Given the history of poor relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, it is not surprising that analysts have claimed that "if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, Saudi Arabia will feel compelled to do the same".[48] Saudi officials were recently reported as claiming that Riyadh would launch a "twin-track nuclear weapons programme" in the event of a successful Iranian nuclear test. An article published in the London *Times* described a scenario whereby Saudi Arabia would attempt to purchase warheads from abroad while also adding a military dimension to its planned civil nuclear programme at home.[49] The notion of Saudi Arabia purchasing weapons from abroad dates back to the 1990s, when a Saudi diplomat defected to the United States and alleged that Riyadh had provided the financing for both the Pakistani and the Iraqi nuclear weapons programmes. He also claimed that a pact signed between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan tied Islamabad to protecting Saudi Arabia if the kingdom were attacked with nuclear weapons.[50] More recently, in 2005, a German magazine claimed that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia had been cooperating on nuclear weapons research for years.[51]

Despite this alarmist rhetoric, however, there is also a strong case to be made against Saudi nuclearisation. Beyond the Kingdom's primitive nuclear infrastructure – in a survey of Saudi nuclear capability, James Acton and Wyn Bowen found that the kingdom lacks sufficient experience and expertise in practically all areas of the nuclear fuel cycle – Saudi Arabia's political and strategic context do not favour the acquisition of nuclear weapons.[52] Two key points support this view.

First, from a security perspective, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States has held firm since the 1940s, despite a number of challenges – most notably the participation of a number of Saudi nationals in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. At the heart of the relationship is an understanding that "in exchange for Saudi Arabia's stable custodianship of its oil reserves [and] reasonable rates

[46] "Demarche Response: Mobilizing Pressure To Persuade Iran", US State department cable released by Wikileaks, 3 Feb 2010, 14-6.
[47] "Opening Statement of Prince Saud Al-Faisal in the Joint Press Conference with US Secretary of State", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saudi Arabia, 1 April 2012.
[48] Lippman, *Nuclear Weapons and Saudi Strategy*.
[49] H. Tomlinson, "Saudi Arabia Threatens to go Nuclear 'Within Weeks' if Iran gets the Bomb", *The Times*, 10 February 2012.
[50] See Al Khilewi, "Saudi Arabia is Trying to Kill Me".
[51] Al Marashi, "Saudi Petro-Nukes", 78.
[52] Acton and Bowen, "Atoms for Peace in the Middle East", 443.

of production [. . .] the United States guarantees Saudi security through the sale of conventional arms and an implicit commitment to defend the country should the need arise''.[53] In recent years, the role of Washington as the silent guarantor of Riyadh's security has assumed additional importance as the Middle East has experienced profound structural changes. The fall of the pro-Saudi Mubarak regime in Egypt; protests and instability in Bahrain and Yemen; the collapse of the pro-Saudi government in Lebanon; and civil war in Syria have upended the established regional order and made Riyadh's position less secure.

In this context, and given the determination of the United States to prevent nuclear proliferation in the region, a move by Saudi Arabia to acquire nuclear weapons holds few positives for Riyadh's security calculus. With its own nuclear infrastructure incapable of delivering a nuclear weapon in the short- to medium-term, Islamabad would be the most likely route to the bomb.[54] However, that Saudi Arabia would jeopardize its deeply-rooted security relationship with the world's only superpower for dependence on Pakistan is almost inconceivable. The United States is Riyadh's leading source of advanced conventional military equipment, from AH-64 Apache attack helicopters to F-15S multirole fighters, while an arms deal worth some USD 60 billion was approved by US Congress in 2010.[55] The loss of this source of advanced arms would have important implications in terms of Riyadh's conventional capabilities since these systems ''are far more advanced than Iranian military technology, and serve to both limit Iran's influence and provide a major deterrent to Iranian forces''.[56] Viewed in this light, it may be argued that an Iranian bomb would give the Saudi–US relationship renewed impetus, with both countries keen to offset the Iranian threat to regional stability and the broader economic environment.

Second, Saudi Arabia's economic policy outlook exemplifies Etel Solingen's seminal theory on the relationship between economic liberalism and nuclear restraint. Solingen argues that political coalitions favouring economic liberalisation – reduction of state control over markets and increased privatisation and foreign investment – are more likely to be receptive to ''compromise nuclear postures that do not endanger their [economic] interests''.[57] In this regard, Saudi Arabia's emphasis on facilitating the growth of foreign investment is significant. Riyadh has cultivated extensive trade relations with most international powers and in 2012, Saudi Arabia was identified as one of the leading global economies in terms of

[53] *Ibid*.
[54] In this scenario, Saudi would likely either seek to purchase or lease nuclear weapons from Pakistan or have nuclear weapons under Pakistani control stationed on Saudi territory. See Chubin, *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions*, 129.
[55] Wilner, *Iran and the Gulf Military Balance*.
[56] *Ibid*.
[57] Solingen, ''The Political Economy of Nuclear Restraint'', 138.

''business-friendly regulation''.[58] The monarchy has placed emphasis on foreign investment as a means of reducing over-reliance on oil and gas, increasing employment opportunities for the local population (population growth of almost two percent equates to a need for some 200,000 new jobs per year), and reinvigorating the Saudi private sector.[59] In this context, the acquisition of nuclear weapons would have far-reaching consequences, stalling progress and bringing progressive economic isolation, thus drastically changing the nature of the kingdom's international trade relations. In terms of both internal and external stability then, it would appear that Saudi's interests are best served by nuclear restraint.

Syria: a political regime in flux

The Syrian case is of particular interest given Damascus' recent history of nuclear proliferation. In September 2007, Israel destroyed a facility near the town of Dair Alzour in a dawn air strike. According to a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) briefing, the object of the attack was a nuclear facility alleged to be the ''centrepiece of an incipient nuclear weapons programme''. The CIA revealed that the nuclear reactor at Dair Alzour was built with North Korean assistance and, crucially, was unsuited for electricity production or nuclear research.[60] A number of questions remain unanswered with regard to Syria's recent nuclear activities: a 2010 IAEA report stated that ''Syria has not cooperated with the Agency since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and the other three locations allegedly functionally related to it''.[61] Since it was attacked, however, there is little evidence to suggest that Syria has restarted its nuclear programme and it is unlikely that a nuclear-armed Iran would reverse this position.[62]

As Iran's sole state ally in the region, Syria's position differs markedly from its neighbours. The regime in Damascus has long been a source of support for Iran in a hostile regional environment. At first glance, the ideologically-driven Islamic Republic would appear to be incompatible with the secular state of Syria: Tehran's desire to export the Islamic revolution in the wake of 1979 did not align with the cultural and religious perspective of Syria. However the partnership, initially formed to counter Saddam Hussein's expansionist aspirations, has endured

[58] IFC, *Doing Business*, 5. http://www.doingbusiness.org/~/media/FPDKM/Doing%20Business/Documents/Annual-Reports/English/DB12-FullReport.pdf.
[59] N.J. Brimson, and B.T. Al Ghazzawi, ''Saudi Arabia Investment Guide'' (online), 2009, 1, http://www.herbertsmith.com/NR/rdonlyres/D9112B8A-AB7C-4E36-85E7-D045CD2DF3FF/0/SaudiArabiaInvestmentGuideENG.pdf.
[60] Spector and Berman, ''The Syrian Nuclear Puzzle'', 100-1.
[61] IAEA, ''Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic. Resolution adopted by the Board of Governors on 9 June 2011'', Vienna, 9 June 2011, http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2011/gov2011-41.pdf.
[62] Syria's restraint is based on its poor indigenous infrastructure and its resultant dependence on external assistance, among other things.

as an alliance of convenience since the 1980s due to both countries' willingness to prioritise regional strategic interests.

Of course the relationship has not been without tension. Throughout the 1980s, for example, Iran and Syria competed for influence in Lebanon and then, in the early 1990s, Iran was highly critical of Syria's willingness to negotiate with Israel over lost territory at the expense of Palestinian interests. However, despite ideological and practical differences, the uneasy alliance between the two countries has held firm due to long-standing common interests, primarily their opposition to Israel and the US. From a strategic perspective, the Iran-Syria alliance was intended to ''deter the U.S. or Israeli military threat in the short term and to prevent the institutionalization of a U.S. role in its backyard in the long term''.[63]

In recent years, the alliance between the two countries has been strengthened by the Assad regime's support for Iran's nuclear programme. In 2009, for example, the Syrian President defended Iran's nuclear advancement and emphasised ''the right of Iran and other countries that are signatories to the NPT to enrich uranium for civilian purposes''.[64] Then, in 2010, Assad voiced his praise for ''Iran's readiness for direct dialogue to remove all suspicions over its peaceful nuclear programme''.[65] More recently, Iran has lent military support to the Assad government's crackdown on protests against the regime.[66] Viewed through the lens of security then, and in the context of long-standing shared interests and cooperation, a nuclear-armed Iran would hold little threat for Syria. Rather, an Iranian bomb would likely strengthen links between the two countries and be viewed by Damascus as a counterweight to both Israel's position of strength and the American presence in the region.

This said, the close relations that have developed between Iran and Syria over the course of the last two decades may count for nothing if the reverberations of the Arab Spring topple the Assad regime. Since early 2011, the regime in Damascus has been beset by protests as opposition forces attempt to wrest power from President Assad. The situation has escalated dramatically in recent months as the anti-government rebellion has evolved into a full-fledged civil war. Senior figures of the Assad regime have been assassinated and the regime has been further undermined by defections, most notably that of former Prime Minister Riyad Hijab.[67] In the north of the country, rebel forces recently took control of all Syria-Iraq border points.

On a larger scale, the Syrian conflict has, to a certain extent, assumed the role of a regional and international proxy war that ''pits the Syrian regime, along with Iranian and Russian backers, against the Syrian rebels, Arab regimes (led by Saudi

[63] Barzegar, ''Iran's Foreign Policy Strategy after Saddam'', 173.
[64] ''Syria Defends Iran Nuclear Plans'', *AFP*, 3 December 2009.
[65] ''Syrian, Iranian Presidents Discuss 'Advanced' Ties, Regional Issues'', *SANA News Agency* (online), 2 October 2010.
[66] ''Iranian General Confirms Troops are in Syria'', *The Times*, 29 May 2012.
[67] ''Former Syria PM: Assad's Regime Disintegrating'', *The Telegraph*, 14 August 2012.

Arabia and Qatar) and the US''.[68] This political turmoil has important implications for any potential proliferation on the part of Damascus. On the one hand, if the Assad regime were to fall – a scenario that looks increasingly likely and one which would be favourable to the United States – a more democratic regime in Damascus would possibly distance itself from Tehran while strengthening relations with the United States and the West more broadly.[69] In this context, the political and strategic dynamics of the Middle East would be profoundly altered, strengthening the US presence in the region and further isolating the Iranian regime. The risk of Syrian proliferation would be greatly reduced in such an environment as the relationship between Damascus and Washington would be heavily influenced by the US stance against proliferation. Nuclear restraint would undoubtedly be a necessary condition of any economic or military support for the new Syrian regime.

On the other hand, if President Assad manages to somehow weather the storm, the coming years will likely be spent trying to consolidate his hold on power domestically and rebuilding the Syrian state, leaving little room for a nuclear weapons programme. The rebellion is now deeply-rooted and will not be extinguished easily or quickly. Moreover, the conflict has taken its toll on Syria's infrastructure and economy in the past year and significant resources will be required to rebuild the country. In any case, Syria is now at the centre of world attention and any questionable nuclear activity would be closely observed by the international community, particularly Israel.[70] And having disabled the Syrian nuclear programme once, Israel would surely not hesitate to repeat history.

Turkey: eyes turned towards Europe

Similar to Saudi Arabia, Turkey's relationship with Iran has historically been characterised by rivalry, based largely on competing expansionist and religious ambitions. Sinan Ülgen reveals that ''from 1979 until the late 1990s, Turkish officials viewed Iran with contempt because of the regime's alleged support for Islamic extremists seeking the overthrow of Turkey's secular republic and Iran's alleged support for Kurdish separatists in northern Iraq and southern Turkey''.[71] Conversely, Ankara's proximity to Washington with regard to security matters was viewed with suspicion in Iran.[72]

The turn of the millennium brought a change of direction in bilateral relations between the two countries, with three principal factors contributing to

[68] ''With Syria in Turmoil, Lebanon Remains at Risk'', *The Guardian*, 15 August 2012.
[69] Dobbins, ''Coping with a Nuclearising Iran'', 41.
[70] In the nuclear context, the IAEA Board of Governors had already expressed an ''absence of confidence that Syria's nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes'' in 2011. (IAEA, ''Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic'', 2, http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2011/gov2011-41.pdf).
[71] Ülgen, *Turkey and the Bomb*.
[72] Elik, *Iran-Turkey Relations*, 2.

improved relations. First, Iranian and Turkish interests have aligned over the issue of Kurdish separatism, with both countries determined to prevent the rise of an independent Kurdish state that would likely encroach on both Turkish and Iranian territory.[73] Second, Turkey and Iran have developed strong energy and economic links. Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan recently claimed that ''Iranian-Turkish bilateral trade would reach $30 billion by 2015''.[74] At present, for example, Iran is the second largest supplier of natural gas to Turkey after Azerbaijan. Third, Turkey has proved sympathetic to Tehran's nuclear cause. In 2009, Erdogan accused the West of treating Iran unfairly over its nuclear programme and in 2010, it voted against the imposition of additional sanctions on Iran by the UN Security Council.[75]

Of course the trend of warming relations has not been without fluctuations. Most recently, Turkey's participation in the NATO missile defence system and opposing positions on the Syrian crisis have strained the relationship. This said, there has always been a ''complexity to the Turkish-Iranian relationship that includes elements of cooperation as well as hostility. Turkey has traditionally viewed Iran [...] as a large and important nation-state that must be managed, rather than confronted.''[76] This has meant that the countries have a contradictory relationship that frequently sees them cooperating despite certain tensions.[77] In general terms, then, while the divide over Syria has the potential to exert considerable strain on the relationship, relations between Turkey and Iran are largely positive. Iran's ambassador to Turkey, Bahman Hoseynpur, recently summed up the longer-term situation in saying that ''relations between the two countries are at the highest level and are expanding''.[78]

The present relationship is the culmination of over a decade of rapprochement and indicates that, were Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon, this would not be perceived as an immediate threat to Turkey. Beyond this immediate and more superficial observation, however, there are more powerful factors exerting an influence on Ankara's position regarding proliferation.

First, while technically capable, Turkey lacks the necessary infrastructure to produce an indigenous nuclear weapon. Ülgen states that ''typically, a proliferating state attempts to develop the complete nuclear fuel cycle because the technologies

[73] Gordon and Taspinar, *Winning Turkey*, 55.
[74] Cited in Ehteshami and Elik, ''Turkey's Growing Relations with Iran'', 654.
[75] ''Turkey Chastises the West on Iran'', *BBC News*, 26 October 2009.
[76] McCurdy and Danforth, ''Turkey and Iran''.
[77] A USD 24 billion gas deal was signed by Ankara and Tehran in the 1990s, even as both countries accused each other of ''supporting terrorist organizations in one another's territory – Islamic fundamentalist groups as well as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey, and Mujahadin al-Khalk in Iran''. *Ibid*.
[78] ''Diplomat says Iran-Turkey Ties in Highest Possible Level'', *Islamic Republic News Agency*, 11 April 2012.

allow would-be proliferators to indigenously produce the necessary fissile material for weapons use under the guise of a civilian power program''.[79] And while Turkey is keen to develop its nuclear infrastructure in order to facilitate a civil nuclear programme – Canadian nuclear technology company, CANDU, is conducting a feasibility study for Turkey's first civil nuclear power reactor – as yet, the country has no enrichment or reprocessing capability.[80] Consequently, there is little potential for Turkey to 'go nuclear' in the short term without procuring the necessary material and technology from abroad.

Second, despite ongoing debate over the credibility of extended deterrence, Ankara accepts that security guarantees from the United States and NATO are ''integral to Turkish security''.[81] In 2008, Ahmet Davutoglu, then foreign policy advisor to the Prime Minister, stated unequivocally that ''security means NATO for Turkey''.[82] Moreover, as part of Ankara's NATO commitment, American tactical nuclear weapons have been stationed in Turkey for over four decades. The actual use of these weapons presents significant logistical challenges since the Turkish air force ''does not have aircraft certified for nuclear missions'' and the United States ''does not permanently maintain a nuclear fighter wing at Incirlik''.[83] However, the presence of these tactical nuclear weapons have served a number of positive functions, including deterring potential proliferants in the region, linking Turkey with NATO, and acting as a reminder of the United States' commitment to defending Turkey.

Third, membership of the European Union (EU) is a political priority for Ankara and the Turkish government would be wary of jeopardizing its relations with European powers by going nuclear. Since negotiations over Turkey's accession began in 2005, the process has faced a number of obstacles, ranging from the need to increase the pace of democratic reform to the opposition of other key member states such as France and Germany.[84] Opposition from the then French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, was a key factor in the lack of movement on the Turkish bid for membership. However Sarkozy's departure, along with other changes in the European political landscape, has opened the way for the negotiations on Turkish membership to be reconvened. In this context, and given European attempts to negotiate a solution to the Iranian nuclear crisis, Ankara is surely aware that any move towards the acquisition of nuclear weapons would spell the end of Turkey's EU aspirations.

[79] Ülgen, *Turkey and the Bomb*, 20.
[80] ''Turkey Infrastructure: Back on Track?'', *Financial Times*, 20 April 2012.
[81] Varnum, ''Turkey in Transition'', 236.
[82] ''Top Adviser: Turkey Managed to have Zero Problem-foreign Policy'', *World Bulletin*, 29 October 2008.
[83] Ülgen, ''Turkey and the Bomb'', 12.
[84] Varnum, ''Turkey in Transition'', 237.

Iran: arming terrorists with nukes?

With regard to the nightmare scenario in which Iran might pass nuclear materials or even a nuclear weapon to a terrorist group, this would seem highly improbable. Tehran has long provided financing, training, logistical support and weapons to a number of terrorist groups within the Middle East, as a means of both exporting its Islamic revolution and striking the United States and Israel.[85] This history, combined with Tehran's belligerent rhetoric on Israel – in 2005, President Ahmadinejad appeared to suggest that Israel should be ''wiped off the map'' – has evoked fears of a nuclear-armed Iran facilitating nuclear terrorism.[86] However, a closer analysis of this scenario reveals that this would neither fit with Iran's past behaviour nor advance Tehran's current interests.

The most obvious and compelling argument as to why Iran would abstain from proliferating to terrorist groups is the massive retaliation that would almost certainly be the ultimate consequence of a nuclear terrorist attack facilitated by Iran. While Iran would certainly seek to deny any involvement in such an attack, advances in nuclear forensics in recent years have greatly increased the likelihood of nuclear material being traced back to its source. The forensic 'fingerprint' present in all fissile materials reveals information on its geographical origins as well as the processing methods used in its production, and remains identifiable even after a nuclear explosion.[87] In this context, any evidence linking Iran to nuclear terrorism would undoubtedly signal the end of the regime in Tehran.

Certainly, a nuclear-armed Iran could embolden Iran's terrorist proxies in their conventional attacks – in this context, a variant of the stability-instability paradox mentioned earlier could see an Iranian bomb serving to deter retaliation leading to regime change even as levels of state-assisted conventional terrorism increased. And in general terms, while Iran has reduced its state-sponsored terrorism since the 1990s, it still has the capability to strike out through its proxies on a global scale. Over the past 24 months, there has been an upsurge in Iranian sponsored terrorist attacks; Tehran has been linked to bombings in Bulgaria, Georgia and India, as well as to a plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian ambassador in Washington. However, it is also worth pointing out that ''despite its messianic pretensions, Iran has observed clear limits when supporting militias and terrorist organizations in the Middle East''.[88] For example, Iran has the capability to supply groups such as Hezbollah with chemical or biological weapons, but has chosen not to do so.

[85] Byman, ''Iran, Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction'', 169.
[86] ''Debating Every Last Word of Ahmadinejad's 'Wipe Israel Off the Map'', *The Atlantic Wire*, 5 October 2011.
[87] Kamp, ''Learning to Live with a Nuclear Iran'', 163.
[88] Lindsay and Takeyh, ''After Iran Gets the Bomb'', 37.

No room for complacency

A nuclear-armed Iran is by no means a foregone conclusion. There is no evidence to suggest that a political decision to acquire the bomb has been made in Tehran and, in this context, the cumulative effects of crippling economic sanctions, political pressure and the growing threat of an Israeli attack are important variables in Iran's nuclear equation.[89] For now, the focus of the international community rightly remains on preventing Tehran from developing nuclear weapons. At the same time, serious consideration must be given to the policy measures that would be required if Iran were to cross the nuclear threshold. For while further proliferation in the region is not the inevitable consequence of an Iranian bomb, there is no room for complacency. Non-proliferation tools are many and varied and the full range must be applied to ensure that in the long term, even if Iran were to go nuclear, this would not bring about a nuclear domino effect in the Middle East.

First, preservation of the NPT as a normative structure is a key element in efforts to contain further regional proliferation. Iranian nuclearisation would represent an important setback for the NPT, and indeed the non-proliferation regime as a whole, "by demonstrating that the great powers are unable or unwilling to act collectively to stop proliferators".[90] In this context, the treatment of Iran post-nuclearisation by the international community would hold enormous significance, giving a politically powerful message regarding the consequences of proliferation and defiance. Lindsay and Takeyh sum up this point well in terms of the US response:

> It would matter whether Washington reassured Israel or fuelled its fears. It would matter whether Washington confronted regional proliferation efforts or turned a blind eye, as it did with Pakistan in the 1980s. It would matter whether Washington pushed ahead with efforts to strengthen the NPT regime or threw in the towel.[91]

Beyond the importance of signalling, other options frequently discussed in this context include extended deterrence, conventional military support and financial assistance. Extended deterrence, for example, has played an important role in stabilising the Korean peninsula and, as such, has been touted as a possible means of containing a nuclear-armed Iran. Edelman, Krepinevich and Montgomery write that "it has become popular in policy circles to think that containing a nuclear-armed Iran, stabilizing relations between Iran and Israel, and preventing additional proliferation will require expanding U.S. security commitments to several U.S. allies and partners in the Middle East".[92] This view was

[89] Bowen and Brewer, "Iran's Nuclear Challenge: Nine Years and Counting", 924.
[90] *Ibid.*, 41.
[91] *Ibid.*, 42.
[92] Edelman *et al.*, "The Dangers of a Nuclear Iran", 74.

fuelled by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's 2009 suggestion that the United States would extend ''a defence umbrella'', a statement that many in the Middle East interpreted as being akin to ''nuclear protection''.[93]

However, the idea of extending a nuclear umbrella over the Middle East poses a number of problems. First, some countries would be reluctant to be openly protected by the United States. This would amount to admitting reliance on the United States in terms of security and would sit uncomfortably with regional powers. After Hillary Clinton's statement, for example, then Egyptian President Mubarak stated that Egypt ''will not be part of any American nuclear umbrella intended to protect the Gulf countries'', since this would imply ''accepting foreign troops and experts on our land – and we do not accept that''.[94] Second, the notion of a US nuclear umbrella over the Middle East would not hold the same credibility as it does in North East Asia, ''since the willingness and the ability of the United States to defend its partners in the region against a nuclear-armed Iran are questionable''.[95] Kathleen McInnis argues convincingly that the forward deployment of both ground troops and nuclear weapons that were central to credible deterrence during the Cold War are unlikely to be replicated in the contemporary Middle East due to the rise of anti-US sentiment in recent years.[96]

More likely is an increase in conventional arms sales to key regional players. The most probable threat from a nuclear-armed Iran would take the form of increased conventional aggression in the region. In this context, the provision of ballistic missile defence systems, for example, with advanced early-warning and command control facilities would greatly enhance the conventional deterrence capability of regional powers and go some way to offsetting the nuclear imbalance in the region.[97] Karl-Heinz Kamp writes that ''should diplomacy as the first defence line and deterrence as the second both fail, it would be useful to have a third line in the form of a missile defence that could further effect the opponent's cost-benefit calculations''.[98] And the United States has already embarked on this route: in December 2011, following a USD 1.7 billion deal to upgrade Saudi Arabia's Patriot missile defence system earlier in the year,[99] the US Department of Defense announced a deal worth USD 3.5 billion to sell two Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) batteries to the United Arab Emirates (UAE).[100]

[93] Tertrais ''Security Guarantees'', 3.
[94] F. Mahdy, ''Egypt Rejects US Nuclear Umbrella'', *Inter Press Service*, 20 August 2009.
[95] Edelman *et al.*, ''The Dangers of a Nuclear Iran'', 67.
[96] McInnis, ''Extended Deterrence'', 180.
[97] Toukan and Cordesman, *The Iranian Nuclear Challenge*, 46.
[98] Kamp, ''Learning to Live with a Nuclear Iran'', 170.
[99] ''Raytheon Lands $1.7B Contract from Saudi Arabia'', *Associated Press*, 21 June 2011.
[100] J. Wolf, ''U.S. in $3.5 Billion Arms Sale to UAE Amid Iran Tensions'', *Reuters*, 31 December 2011. This marked the first foreign sale of this advanced anti-ballistic missile system and was described by the Pentagon as ''an important step in improving the region's security through a regional missile defence architecture''.

Beyond supplying key regional players with advanced conventional arms aimed at assuaging fears over security, the international community must also promote greater engagement with key players in the Middle East. Coercion is a necessary tool to counter proliferation. However too much outside interference in regional affairs breeds suspicion and can foster a 'who's next?' mentality. It is important, therefore, that non-proliferation efforts engage with the theory that economic liberalism promotes nuclear cooperation and transparency. Iran's regional neighbours must be offered the necessary incentives to make economic engagement with the international community appear more desirable. The more deeply-embedded Iran's neighbours become in the international economy, the less attractive nuclear proliferation will seem.

Ultimately, there are many variables influencing the nuclear environment of the Middle East. Clearly, a nuclear-armed Iran would pose a significant threat to regional stability, and at first glance it seems that proliferation by neighbouring countries fearful of Iranian regional ascendency would be a likely response. However, the unique nature of individual domestic contexts, combined with the gamut of non-proliferation tools and incentives available to the international community indicates that a proliferation cascade in the Middle East is not a very likely outcome at all.

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