

Deter and Contain:
Dealing with a Nuclear Iran

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Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Skelton, Members of the Committee and Committee staff, I am grateful for the opportunity to present to you my testimony concerning the challenges of dealing with a nuclear Iran.¹

Crafting an effective strategy for dealing with a nuclear Iran is likely to be one of the most difficult defense and foreign policy challenges facing the United States in the coming decade. Due to the volatility of Iranian politics, the clerical regime's involvement in terrorism, Tehran's troubled relations with several of its neighbors as well as the United States, and its commitment to the destruction of Israel, a nuclear Iran will have a destabilizing impact on the Middle East. For these reasons, a nuclear Iran would pose a unique danger to international peace and to the international community.

The special challenges of deterring and containing a nuclear Iran stem from the nature of the Islamic Republic, the political dynamics of the Gulf region, and Iran's support for and involvement in terrorism.

Deterring The 'Martyrdom-Seeking Nation'

Because Shiite religious doctrine exalts the suffering and martyrdom of the faithful, and because religion plays a central role in the official ideology of the Islamic Republic, Iran is sometimes portrayed as an irrational, 'undeterrable' state with a high pain threshold, driven by the absolute imperatives of religion, rather than by the pragmatic concerns of statecraft. There may have been some truth to this characterization during the heady, early days of the revolution. However, years of revolutionary violence and a bloody eight-year-long war with Iraq have made Iranians, by and large, war weary and risk averse. Tehran's cautious behavior during the 1991 uprising in Iraq and the 1998 Taleban victory in Afghanistan was the best proof that post-Khomeini Iran sought to avoid costly quagmires. In both cases, Iran abandoned beleaguered Shiite communities, rather than endanger its national interests by entering into foreign adventures.

This policy paradigm may be changing, however, with the emergence of a new generation of Iranian politicians who—like President Mahmud Ahmadinejad—are veterans of the Iran-Iraq War, are assertive nationalists who yearn for a return to the values of the revolution, and who (at least in the case of the president) embrace a version of Shiite Islam steeped in a cult of messianic anticipation of the return of the hidden Twelfth Imam. The defiant, confrontational style of this new generation has aggravated tensions with the United States and the West, and the potential implications of their worldview for deterrence and risk-taking needs to be better understood. On the other hand, all signs point to the fact that real power in Iran remains largely in the hands of the same old familiar cast of "unelected" leaders who have ruled the country for the past decade and a half—Supreme Leader 'Ali Khamene'i, Expediency Council head 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Guardian Council head Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati among others—and that they have taken steps to rein in the president and his supporters.

Operationalizing Deterrence

U.S. efforts to influence a hostile nuclear Iran must incorporate measures to deter by denial as well as by punishment. Raising doubts in the minds of Iranian decision makers about the country's ability to reliably deliver its nuclear weapons, and stoking fears that the attempted use of such weapons could threaten their personal survival and that of the regime, could make

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the use of nuclear weapons prohibitively risky for Tehran in all but the most dire of circumstances.

Deterrence by Denial: Countering Iran’s Ability to Project Influence and Deliver Nuclear Weapons

By preventing Tehran from using its nuclear potential to intimidate neighbors and enemies, and casting doubt on its ability to reliably deliver nuclear weapons, the United States and its allies can strengthen deterrence, and undermine the utility of Iran’s nuclear arsenal.

To bolster deterrence and warfighting, Iran has created a deterrent/warfighting triad that consists of the ability to: 1) disrupt oil exports from the Persian Gulf; 2) launch terror attacks on several continents in conjunction with the Lebanese Hizballah and other groups, and; 3) deliver non-conventional weapons against targets in the Middle East and beyond, by aircraft, land-based ballistic missiles, and perhaps by various non-traditional means such as ship-based ballistic missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles, boats, and terrorists.

As Iran stands up and expands its nuclear arsenal, it might seek to provide a nuclear “punch” to all three legs of its triad. Thus, to counter Iran’s deterrent/warfighting triad, the U.S and its allies will need to enhance their ability to:

- Detect and interdict attempts to covertly deliver nuclear devices by sea, air, or land;
- Identify and neutralize terrorist cells affiliated with Tehran;
- Detect and intercept nuclear-armed strike aircraft, cruise and ballistic missiles;
- Counter Iranian naval mine, small boat, and submarine warfare operations.

Much progress has been made in recent years in developing capabilities to deal with some of these threats. In other areas, much remains to be done.

Deterrence by Punishment: Threatening the Survival of the Islamic Republic

Iran’s leaders must understand that should they brandish or use nuclear weapons, the United States (and/or its regional allies) could threaten their personal survival and the stability of the Islamic Republic by conventional military strikes that:

- Target the senior leadership of the Islamic Republic;
- Disrupt the functioning of the security organizations responsible for the survival of the regime, and;
- Target key elements of the country’s economic infrastructure.

There are, however, practical obstacles to operationalizing such an approach. Political authority in the Islamic Republic is widely diffused. Though the Supreme Leader is the paramount authority, many other individuals play important roles in the regime. Moreover, the dualistic power structure of the Islamic Republic, in which revolutionary Islamic institutions counterbalance the traditional institutions of the Iranian state (the Supreme Leader counterbalances the President, the Guardian Council counterbalances the Parliament, and the Revolutionary Guard counterbalances the regular army) provide the system of clerical rule with great resilience, and would complicate efforts to destabilize the Islamic Republic by decapitation strikes.

The practical difficulties of striking leadership targets from the air, moreover, should not be underestimated. During recent wars in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, numerous attempted strikes on “high value targets” (key individuals) were unsuccessful. Success here will await the development by the United States of a real-time human intelligence capability in Iran, and more flexible and responsive tactics, techniques, and procedures for hitting time-sensitive high value targets. With sufficient resources and talent devoted to this effort, it could become a viable future option.

Targeting the regime's command and control. In Iran, several organizations have responsibility for ensuring the survival of the regime, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF), the Basij militia, the security and intelligence organs of the Justice Ministry, and the street thugs of Ansar-e-Hizballah. The IRGC and LEF units are garrisoned throughout the country, while the Basij is more loosely organized, as is the more informal Ansar-e-Hizballah. The locations of most major IRGC garrisons and LEF facilities are well known to local residents, though the fact that these organizations are rather lightly armed (relative to similar entities in other countries, such as Syria's Republican Guard and Saddamist Iraq's Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard units) and are garrisoned in or near populated areas, could make it difficult to strike these organizations in a way that would undermine their effectiveness and loosen the regime's grip on power.

Targeting Iran's economic infrastructure. Iran is acutely vulnerable to economic warfare. It's economy is heavily dependent on oil and gas exports, which provide the country with some 80 percent of its foreign exchange earnings. Nearly all of its major oil and gas fields are located in the exposed southwest corner of the country and in the Gulf—where all six of its major oil terminals are also located—and nearly all of its oil and gas exports pass through the Strait of Hormuz. Four of Iran's six main ports are located on the Persian Gulf; these handle about 90 percent of all imports by tonnage, while Iran's sea lines of communication in the Gulf are vulnerable to interdiction along their entire length. Thus, the United States and its allies could halt Iranian oil exports as well as critical imports of refined oil products and other necessities, causing great harm to the economy—which is the regime's Achilles' heel—and perhaps leading to popular unrest and political instability in the Islamic Republic. The main challenge would be to deter or disrupt Iranian retaliatory moves, which might not be limited to the Gulf region, and could take the form of an attempt to close the Strait of Hormuz, attacks on oil and gas installations on the other side of the Gulf, attacks on shipping in the Gulf, and/or a terror campaign spanning several continents.

Containing a Nuclear Iran

What factors might affect Tehran's ability to derive benefit from its nuclear weapons? And how might Tehran's acquisition of nuclear weapons affect U.S. efforts to organize a "coalition of the willing" to deter and contain a nuclear Iran?

Tehran's ability to derive political benefits from nuclear weapons will depend, to some extent, on whether Iran remains silent about its nuclear capabilities, adopts a policy of ambiguity, or makes known its newly acquired capabilities by means of an announcement or a weapons test.² Iran's actual nuclear status, however, is less important than the fact that in the coming years its neighbors are increasingly likely to perceive it as a threshold nuclear state, if not a *de facto* nuclear power, and to act accordingly. The domestic and regional contexts are also important here: Is there domestic calm or unrest in Iran? Is Iran at peace with its neighbors, or embroiled in crises or war? All these factors will affect the intensity with which the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program is felt by its neighbors, and could affect U.S. efforts to enlist foreign support in containing a nuclear Iran.

During the 1990s, Iran's neighbors rebuffed U.S. efforts to politically isolate and economically pressure the Islamic Republic; they generally deemed these measures as unnecessarily provocative and injurious to their own economic interests. Rather, they have generally preferred to keep open channels of communication with Tehran to avoid antagonizing or provoking their large and powerful neighbor, and to preserve access to

² Iran might initially remain silent to avoid censure for violating its nonproliferation treaty obligations, or to avoid compromising ongoing clandestine efforts to procure fissile material or nuclear technology from abroad. In the long-run, however, Iran's leadership might eventually be tempted to test a nuclear weapon, to demonstrate its nuclear capabilities to its domestic supporters and adversaries, and to the world.

Iranian markets. For these same reasons, Iran's neighbors will likely avoid participating in future efforts to politically isolate and economically pressure the Islamic Republic. In the international division of labor, it will largely be the job of the United States, Europe, and others to isolate Iran politically and pressure it economically.

Iran's neighbors might, however, be prepared to join the United States and Europe in pointing out to Iran's leaders that the acquisition of nuclear weapons will more likely harm than help their country, by prompting the formation of a coalition to contain Iran, deepening the U.S. role in the region, and perhaps prompting further proliferation—much of it directed at the Islamic Republic. Hopefully, this message would encourage Iranian decision makers to reassess the potential costs of a nuclear breakout. Some of Iran's neighbors might also welcome the opportunity to strengthen their hand *vis-à-vis* Iran by deepening their relationship with Washington, by expanding access, basing, and overflight rights to U.S. forces in the region, and by strengthening their conventional forces to enable them to better deal with potential Iranian military moves.

Small Steps or Grand Design? The Military-Technical and Political-Military Context of Efforts to Contain a Nuclear Iran

Operation Iraqi Freedom initially inspired hopes that the United States would build on its military success in the war to establish a new regional security architecture capable of generating stability and security in the Persian Gulf. Most of these proposals call for confidence and security-building measures, the establishment of a regional security forum, collective security arrangements, or a mix of the three. Though such ideas merit consideration, conditions are not ripe for the creation of a regional security architecture in the Gulf, where politics are highly personalized, and characterized by distrust and petty rivalries.

Accordingly, the United States should work to improve military-technical cooperation with regional friends and allies, by deepening existing bilateral security relationships where feasible (with Turkey, the GCC—or Gulf Cooperation Council states, and the Central Asian Republics), forging new bilateral security relationships where possible (with Iraq and Afghanistan), and pursuing regional cooperative ventures where desirable (augmenting efforts already underway to create shared air- and missile-defense early warning and C4I arrangements). No doubt, such an approach lacks the appeal of more ambitious proposals to create new regional political and security structures, but it would allow the United States to build on existing bilateral and multilateral efforts, and through incremental steps, lay the foundation for future regional collective security arrangements.

Countering the Iranian Threat

The principal security threats posed by a nuclear Iran include terror/subversion and limited conventional military operations conducted under the protection of Iran's nuclear umbrella, and the actual use of nuclear weapons.³ When feasible, it would be desirable for the United States to provide its friends in the region with the means to deal with each of these threats on their own—to include the fielding of an independent conventional retaliatory deterrent by some allies—so that they might have the confidence not to yield to Iranian intimidation, and might not feel compelled to acquire chemical or nuclear weapons to counter Iran's nuclear

³ Precedents for such risky gambits include Pakistan's attempt to seize part of Kashmir in 1999—leading to the Kargil crisis of May-July 1999, and the December 2001 attack on India's parliament by Pakistani-backed terrorists—that sparked a prolonged crisis and that nearly led to war between the two countries. In the former case, Pakistan's demonstration of a nuclear capability the previous year may have emboldened it to try to seize a foothold in Kashmir, in the belief that India would not risk a nuclear confrontation by expelling Pakistani forces. In the latter case, the possibility of nuclear escalation was not sufficient to preclude a terrorist incident that nearly led to war.

option. In most cases, however, the burden of responding to these threats will fall to the United States

Regional subversion, global terror. Iran might support opposition groups or sponsor acts of terrorism in neighboring countries (as it did during the 1980s) in order to intimidate, compel them to deny access and basing to U.S. forces, and to undercut U.S. power projection capabilities in the region. Here, intelligence sharing and cooperation with friends and allies, and U.S. efforts to enhance the internal security capabilities of Iran's neighbors will be key. Also vital will be U.S. efforts to encourage political and economic reform in the region, in order to defuse popular disaffection with the political status quo—particularly in countries where extreme Islamists have in the past shown a willingness to work with Iran's intelligence services (e.g., Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Afghanistan).

Staying the hand on the world's oil jugular. Iran's conventional offensive options are limited. It does not pose a ground threat to any of its neighbors, due to the small size and limited capabilities of its ground forces, although it could launch limited air, or rocket and missile strikes into neighboring countries (as it did in Iraq on several occasions during the past decade). The main conventional threat from Iran is in the naval arena, specifically: the threat it poses to the flow of oil from the region, and the ability of the United States to project power in the Gulf.

Iran's force of mines, missiles, small boats, and submarines, could temporarily disrupt shipping in the Strait of Hormuz. It could not, however, block the strait (as it claims), which is too wide and too deep to be obstructed. Moreover, although the Gulf is a significant barrier to major acts of aggression against the southern Gulf states, Iran could conduct limited amphibious operations to seize and hold lightly defended islands or offshore oil platforms in the Gulf. Its naval special forces could sabotage harbor facilities, offshore oil platforms and terminals, and attack ships while in ports throughout the lower Gulf, disrupting oil production and maritime traffic there.

Some Iranian decisionmakers might believe that 'the bomb' might provide them with a free hand to take such steps with relative impunity, by deterring an effective response by its neighbors or the United States. For this reason, it is critical that the United States help its GCC allies obtain the means to counter Iran's naval mine, special warfare, small boat, submarine, and coastal anti-ship missile forces on their own. Countering these capabilities will also require a significant U.S. military presence in Gulf. As a result, the U.S. Navy will remain susceptible to Iranian attempts to intimidate U.S. allies into denying U.S. forces access and basing. This will remain a potential vulnerability for the foreseeable future.

For this reason, the U.S. Navy's Sea Power 21 "Sea Basing" concept may be particularly useful for contingencies in or near the Gulf. This concept calls for the U.S. Navy to develop an ability to operate independent of shore-based logistical hubs, thereby limiting the impact of enemy anti-access measures and decisions by friendly states to refuse or limit access, basing, and overflight rights during crises or wartime.

Among the concepts under consideration to free the United States from reliance on shore-based facilities include new Maritime Prepositioning Force (Future) cargo ships, Joint Mobile Offshore Bases (JMOBs), and large, semisubmersible platforms. (The latter two are floating structures derived from offshore oil drilling platforms.) These would deploy to crisis zones, and serve as large afloat logistics hubs, storage or repair depots, forward operating bases for combat and support personnel, or air bases (the cargo ships may be fitted with flight decks and/or runways, or several JMOBs could be linked together for this purpose). These concepts, if proven viable, could preserve the navy's operational freedom in the Gulf, even if denied access to basing in the region. They are all, however, very expensive, are untried, and suffer from various drawbacks that might preclude their eventual deployment. Moreover,

large floating bases would be vulnerable to an Iranian nuclear strike, vitiating their utility in circumstances where the use of nuclear weapons is a plausible Iranian option.

Preventing nuclear Armageddon. To deal with the possible use of nuclear weapons by Iran, the United States will need to be able to detect the deployment of nuclear weapons and preempt their use, or at least interdict the device or weapon en route to its target.

The United States and its allies will need to establish the ability to detect the transport of nuclear weapons by small boats or merchant ships originating in Iranian ports, motor vehicles exiting Iran at official and/or unofficial border crossing points, and perhaps eventually, by individuals carrying “suitcase nukes.”

Given the relatively short distances that penetrating radiation from a nuclear device or weapon may be detected (tens of meters for gamma radiation, scores of meters for neutron radiation emanating from an unshielded device or weapon), the early detection of a nuclear weapon being delivered by nontraditional means (such as a truck or boat) will pose formidable challenges. Nonetheless, the United States should consider (if it is not already doing so) unconventional methods of employing radiation monitors: aboard yachts or other civilian pleasure craft plying the waters of the Persian Gulf; on helicopters patrolling the waters of the Persian Gulf; on unattended floating sensors clandestinely emplaced at the mouth of Iranian harbors, and; on unattended ground sensors emplaced along traditional smuggling routes on Iran’s border, and clandestinely planted adjacent to runways at Iranian military airfields. In addition, portal monitoring for radiation sources should be carried out at official border crossing points and ports of entry in neighboring states.

Preventing the delivery of a nuclear weapon by sea will also require U.S. naval forces to work with local naval forces and coast guards in the Gulf to identify and monitor suspicious vessels plying the waters of the Gulf and passing through the Strait of Hormuz, and interdict them if need be. Detecting the transport of so-called suitcase bombs will require neighboring states to monitor official ports of entry, unofficial border crossing points, and if feasible, known smuggling routes, though the sheer number of these might render such a task impractical.

The United States and its allies should likewise continue to encourage the networking of regional air- and missile-defense early warning and C4I networks, to enhance the capabilities of regional air- and missile-defenses. Several such initiatives are already underway:

- The so-called “Cooperative Belt” (Hizam al-Ta‘awun) program to create a distributed C4I network for the air defenses of the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that will enable them to jointly identify, track, and monitor hostile aircraft and to coordinate a response to airborne threats.
- American Aegis-equipped cruisers and destroyers in the Persian Gulf can provide early warning and a first line of defense against air or missile attacks from Iran toward the southern Gulf states and Saudi Arabia, with their AN/SPY-1 radar and Standard SM-3 missile—which is just now entering operational service with the U.S. Navy.
- The Cooperative Defense Initiative (CDI), which involves the GCC six, plus two (Egypt and Jordan), and which has promoted cooperation in the area of shared missile defense early warning.⁴ More, however, needs to be done to enhance cooperation among GCC members and with non-GCC members in the region.

⁴ CDI has five pillars which include: 1) shared early warning of missile strikes/C4I interoperability to permit a coordinated response to these threats; 2) active defense against theater air and missile threats; 3) passive defense against chemical and biological weapons; 4) medical countermeasures against chemical and biological weapons, and; 5) consequence management to deal with the aftermath of WMD use.

Currently, cooperation in the area of shared missile defense early warning is limited to the GCC plus two, but future efforts could expand to include other participants. Thus, missile defense early warning radars located in Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, or Saudi Arabia could provide early warning and detection and tracking data for missiles launched from western Iran against the states of the lower Persian Gulf (Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Oman), and Israel. Some of the lower Gulf states could provide early warning to Saudi Arabia with regard to missiles coming from south-central or southeastern Iran. The main challenge here will be to convince the Arab Gulf states to increase funding for missile defenses, and to transcend the petty rivalries that have in the past hindered cooperation among the Arab Gulf states in the conventional military arena.

Further afield, Israel, Jordan, and Turkey are also natural candidates for cooperation. Jordan has expressed concern that Israeli missile defenses could knock down incoming missiles from Iraq or Iran over the populated western half of the country, possibly producing casualties on the ground. Contingency deployment of U.S. missile defenses to Jordan might resolve this problem.

In addition, some have argued that boost-phased missile defense systems employing ground based interceptors located in southeastern Turkey, aboard ships in the Caspian Sea and/or the Sea of Oman, and in Tajikistan, could protect the United States against Iranian intercontinental-range missiles, if and when these are fielded. While a boost-phase missile defense would likely have many advantages over a mid-course national missile defense system, it has a major political drawback: the remnants of intercepted Iranian missiles and their warheads might land in Russia, virtually ensuring that deployment of such a system would meet with strong opposition from Moscow.

Reassure Allies by Enhancing Local Capabilities for Conventional Defense and Deterrence

The United States will want to ensure that regional friends and allies do not respond to an Iranian nuclear breakout by either accommodating Tehran, or acquiring weapons of mass destruction (WMD) of their own (Saudi Arabia might try to purchase nuclear weapons, while some of the smaller GCC states might try to leverage their extensive petrochemical industries to create a modest chemical warfare capability—although it would be nearly impossible for them to do so undetected).

To avoid such an outcome, the United States should underscore that nuclear weapons will not stop the United States from meeting its security commitments to friends and allies in the region, or from retaliating for WMD use against U.S. and allied personnel. Continued U.S. efforts to enhance the ability of CDI participants to defend against and/or mitigate the impact of a WMD incident will be the most tangible expression of this commitment. Such activities should, moreover, be complemented by efforts to enhance the ability of local allies to deal with Iranian subversion, terror, and sea denial capabilities in the Gulf—activities that might someday be conducted under the cover of a nuclear umbrella. However, such capabilities may not be enough to reassure some allies.

The United States should therefore consider helping those allies that feel most threatened by an Iranian ‘bomb’ and that desire to do something about it, to develop a credible independent conventional deterrent, in order to build confidence in their ability to stand up to Iranian intimidation, and to discourage them from acquiring WMD in response to Iran’s acquisition of the bomb.

The United States can do this by helping select Gulf allies enhance their naval special warfare and aerial precision-strike capabilities (capabilities that some are already developing), so that if Iran were ever to threaten their ability to produce and export oil, they

could threaten to respond in kind, by attacking Iranian oil production and export facilities, interrupting Iranian port operations, and interdicting Iran's sea lines of communication.

Emphasis should be placed on helping these countries develop relatively short-range precision strike capabilities so that they can hit high-value Iranian targets in the vicinity of the Gulf, but not much beyond that. This is because the most important Iranian economic targets are in the Gulf region, and because the ability to attack leadership or other targets in and around Tehran is of dubious strategic value. And by focusing on only short-range strike capabilities, the United States can ensure that its efforts to build up Arab capabilities in the Gulf do not compromise U.S. efforts to preserve Israel's "qualitative edge."

U.S. assistance in creating such capabilities should be explicitly conditioned on a commitment by these states to eschew the development or acquisition of WMD, and to dramatically clamp down on the smuggling of special materials and dual-use technologies for the WMD programs of third countries (such as Iran) through their territories. This, in particular, is a problem for Dubai in the U.A.E.

Admittedly, this is a potentially risky course of action, and it is not altogether clear that enhancing the ability of allies to disrupt the flow of Iranian oil from the region is desirable, or is an acceptable tradeoff for a halt to, or more likely a slowdown in the proliferation of WMD in the Gulf region. For this reason, continued high-level U.S. engagement with its allies will be essential, in order to keep tensions among the GCC states in check, and to restrain them in times of crisis, so that they do not use these capabilities against each other, or Iran, except in extremis.

Such efforts should, whenever possible, leverage assets and weapons currently in the inventories of these countries to avoid the appearance that the United States is stoking a regional arms race, to avert tensions among GCC states (who may fear that such capabilities will more likely be used against their fellow GCC members, rather than Iran), and to avoid provoking Iran. Emphasis should be put on qualitative, over quantitative enhancements, and the creation of small, highly capable units that will constitute the mainstay of regional efforts to deter a nuclear Iran. Most of the smaller countries in the region simply lack the manpower to create large, highly capable forces anyhow. This approach is appropriate, considering their resource base and needs.

This is not an unrealistic goal; several Arab militaries have succeeded in creating small elite units or organizations that performed well in combat, even if the performance of their sister services left much to be desired. Examples of such units or organizations include the special forces of Syria and Jordan, the Republican Guard of Iraq, and Iraq's F-1 and Saudi Arabia's F-15 fighter squadrons. There are already signs that some of the GCC states may be heading down this path: the UAE's interest in commercial satellite imagery, computerized mission planning support software, advanced simulators, and its efforts to build a potent conventional strike capability around its force of advanced precision munitions-equipped Mirage 2000-9s (60) and F-16 Block 60s (80), show what even a small state can do in this regard.

Conclusions

Efforts to deter and contain a nuclear Iran would likely encounter significant challenges. The nature of the Islamic Republic, regional politics, and Iran's involvement in terrorism make establishing a stable deterrent relationship with a nuclear Iran risky and uncertain. The experience of the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and of India and Pakistan since then, demonstrate that both preventive diplomacy and luck may be necessary to avert some kind of nuclear crisis involving Iran, and Israel or the United States, should Iran become a nuclear power in the coming years. Managing the uncertainty and instability created by a nuclear Iran is likely to pose major challenges for U.S. policy makers.

Iran may, however, emerge as the driving force behind the creation of a new regional security architecture in the Persian Gulf and southwest Asia. While it is in the long-term U.S. interest to create a free-standing balance of power in the Gulf that obviates the need for a permanent forward U.S. presence, for the foreseeable future, the stabilization of Iraq, the Global War on Terrorism, and ongoing efforts to counter the nuclear ambitions of Iran will draw the United States deeper into the affairs of the region. Enhancing the military capabilities of regional allies threatened by Iran, deepening bilateral cooperation with these countries, and encouraging multilateral cooperation in the areas of air- and missile-defense and beyond may be the best way to lay the basis for future regional collective defense arrangements. For the near term, however, the United States will remain the 'indispensable nation' when it comes to formulating a response to the possible emergence of a nuclear Iran, and to achieving security and stability in a proliferated region.