

The Dangers of Deterrence

James S. Robbins

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While there is still hope that Iran will not develop nuclear weapons, it is becoming more likely that a nuclear-armed Iran will become a reality in the near future. It therefore is useful to begin looking at strategic models for managing the threat of nuclear weapons if Iran actually develops them, and to consider exactly what risks the civilized world would be facing.

There is a strong body of opinion that nuclear weapons contribute to international stability through deterrence. The consequences of nuclear war, the argument goes, are so grave that the mere threat of nuclear conflict is enough to discourage national decision-makers from seeking to resolve differences through the use of force. The U.S.-Soviet nuclear balance was the paradigmatic case in this regard. Since the end of the Cold War, this model has been applied to other circumstances, such as the strategic balance between India and Pakistan.¹ With respect to Iran, the analogy holds that a nuclear power equal in size and opposed to the Israeli nuclear arsenal will add to the overall stability of the region. Alternatively, Iranian nuclear force will be more than matched by that of the United States, which presumably would be used to respond to any use of nuclear weapons on the part of the Iranians. The end result would be either no significant change in the region, or a beneficial

balance of tension.² This complacent “Cold War redux” point of view has been summarized as follows:

Could the United States live with a nuclear-armed Iran? Due to U.S. strategic predominance, many experts believe the Iranian regime would be unlikely to use its nuclear capability overtly unless it faced what it perceived to be an imminent and overwhelming threat. An Iran emboldened by nuclear weapons might become more assertive in the region, but superior U.S. conventional capabilities and strengthened regional partnerships would probably deter Iran from significant mischief, such as closing the Strait of Hormuz or attacking U.S. forces directly. The United States has options short of war that it could employ to deter a nuclear armed Iran and dissuade further proliferation. These include reassuring allies and friends in the region, strengthening active and

James S. Robbins is Senior Fellow in National Security Affairs at the American Foreign Policy Council. This piece also appears in *Taking on Tehran: Strategies for Confronting the Islamic Republic* (Rowman & Littlefield - AFPC, 2007).

IRAN

STRATEGY
BRIEF

passive defenses, improving preemption and rapid response capabilities, and reinforcing nonproliferation incentives and counterproliferation activities.³

Obviously, this argument places great faith in all parties accepting stability as a norm, as well as in the efficacy of diplomacy. Yet those who argue that the Iranian nuclear arsenal would be of little practical value must first address the simple fact that Iran is actively seeking such a capability. Presumably, the Iranian regime does not assume a nuclear arsenal would have little value, or it would not be devoting a substantial level of resources and trading a great deal of political capital in the pursuit of it.⁴ Furthermore, nuclear deterrence reaches well beyond the basic assumption that countries will not employ nuclear weapons because of fear of a counterstrike, and several critical aspects of the traditional nuclear deterrence paradigm are not present with regard to Iran. Moreover, when one examines conflict beyond the high end of the spectrum, one discovers that nuclear deterrence, even when effective, can foment conflict at other levels, and can in fact be a destabilizing force.

REQUIREMENTS FOR DETERRENCE

The classic Cold War-era nuclear deterrence model posited a number of requirements beyond two countries possessing nuclear weapons.⁵ While the lists vary from analysis to analysis, most include the following:

1. Both or all sides in the nuclear equation must be “rational actors.” That is, they must be able to understand the threat posed by nuclear weapons, to value the same things (especially the preservation of life), and be able to see the disutility of nuclear conflict;
2. Both or all sides must possess a second strike capability, i.e., be able to absorb an enemy first strike and deliver a devastating counterattack;
3. All sides must have full knowledge of the size, composition and capabilities of enemy nuclear forces;
4. All sides must have clear, open and permanent means of communication, espe-

cially in times of crisis;

5. All sides must accept the deterrence paradigm, as well as the right of the other to exist as a sovereign state.

Each of these components is worth examining in turn.

Rationality

The “rational actor” assumption is critical to deterrence modeling. All sides must have confidence that adversary decision-makers are reasonable people, motivated by the same types of concerns and desiring to preserve peace and human life. Essentially, rational actors seek to maximize chances for survival. Regimes that have shown a propensity for random or unpredictable behavior do not fit the model well; in effect, they may not be able to be deterred because they may not fully understand the threat they face, or—worse yet—may not care about the consequences.

In the case of Iran, the term “rational” may be something of a misnomer. Rationality connotes an understanding of the relationship between means and ends, as well as knowledge of actions and consequences. With respect to deterrence, the assumption is that a rational person would not risk certain destruction in pursuit of national security objectives because the outcome would be contradictory – not security, but annihilation. However, it is possible both to be rational and to hold an entirely separate set of premises about the nature of that reality and the consequences of death. In other words, one may believe that there are greater interests than preserving life. The phenomenon of suicide terrorism is a case in point; a suicide bomber cannot benefit from the act of violence he or she perpetrates, at least not here on Earth. Yet some have decided that death is preferable to life under some form of oppression. Others see it as a way of achieving fame and veneration that they could not gain any other way. Still others seek a reward in a presumed afterlife, an eternity in paradise in exchange for a moment of earthly brutality.

Whether the notion of suicide in pursuit of policy goals can be elevated to a national level remains to be seen. However, there is reason to believe that key members

1. See, for example, Mario E. Carranza, “An Impossible Game: Stable Nuclear Deterrence after the Indian and Pakistani Tests,” *Non-Proliferation Review* 6, no. 3 (1999), 11-24.

2. The unstated implication of this argument is that an Iranian nuclear capability would remove Israel’s option to carry out a first strike. Hence the notion that this balance would be more stable.

3. Judith S. Yaphe and Charles D. Lutes, “Reassessing the Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran,” *National Defense University McNair Paper* no. 69 (2005), xiii-xiv.

4. The case of North Korea, which has far fewer resources and exists in a more dire international situation, is another important example of a regime that does not accept the Western intellectual notion that nuclear weapons have little value.

5. See Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge: Policy Press, 2004), and Colin S. Gray, *Maintaining Effective Deterrence* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2003).

of the Iranian leadership are sympathetic to the *mahdaviat*, i.e., the belief in and efforts to prepare for the return of the so-called Hidden Imam, believed by many to be the Islamic messiah, or Mahdi.⁶ Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad himself has stated that the Iranian Revolution's "main mission is to pave the way for the reappearance of the 12th Imam, the Mahdi."⁷ Those beholden to this belief, moreover, foresee a time of chaos and violence, an apocalypse, which will serve as the catalyst for the Mahdi's return. While some debate whether or not human action can accelerate this event, the idea that this belief is prevalent in the Iranian leadership should give policymakers pause. A rational actor under the influence of *mahdaviatist* thought might well see nuclear conflict as an acceptable, even beneficial, option if it would hasten the timeline for human salvation. This is not a solid foundation for a nuclear deterrence framework.

Second-strike capability

Second-strike capability is the lynchpin of the doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD). It is what makes destruction "assured," because no side can completely disarm the other by a sudden surprise attack. (It is "mutual" when both sides possess this capability, which is essential to the stability model.) Developing and deploying a credible second-strike capability requires years of work on weapons systems, strategies, training, and other aspects of the nuclear apparatus. In the case of the Middle East, this would require that any parties to the deterrence model undertake a massive arms buildup simply in order to acquire the capability to deter nuclear war.⁸ This arms race, in turn, would likely spur proliferation to other countries in the region, which would multiply uncertainties. In addition, no country that accepts the MAD framework could deploy ballistic missile defenses, because the greatest level of stability is achieved when all countries are defenseless, making the enemy's second-strike capability more credible. This was the strategic logic that resulted in the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.⁹ It is doubtful, however, that the belief in the stabilizing effects of defenselessness would quickly be embraced in

such a volatile region.

Transparency

Transparency is necessary for effective nuclear deterrence. Each side must have as much information as possible about the enemy's nuclear capabilities in order to accurately understand the risks of taking action. Without this precise knowledge, the enemy's deterrent may lack credibility, which is itself a destabilizing factor. All sides must be confident that their arsenal would be able to survive an enemy strike, and at the same time, would not be able to totally destroy the enemy force if used offensively. In order to have this level of assurance, treaties or other forms of agreement that limit the number and type of forces each side may field need to be concluded. Moreover, inspection and verification regimes need to be put into place in order for each side to feel confident that the agreed-upon limits are being observed. It is highly unlikely that this type of complex structure could ever be put in place in the case of Iran; constructing a framework for transparency will be particularly difficult between countries that do not have diplomatic relations. And even during the Cold War, verification regimes had proved to be controversial and difficult to enforce. These problems would be magnified significantly in the Middle East.

Communications

In order for deterrence to be effective, all sides must be able to communicate clearly, openly and without interruption, especially during times of crisis. This is critical to building the kind of rapport that can minimize the risks of misunderstanding and avoid accidental war. During the Cold War, the most notable manifestation of this requirement was the "hot line" set up between the White House and the Kremlin in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis.¹⁰ Similar communications mechanisms and protocols would have to be established in the Middle East, a project which would run afoul of the same issues and limitations as the transparency structure.

Acceptance of the status quo

Above all, the nuclear deterrence paradigm

6. See, for example, Scott Peterson, "Waiting for the Rapture in Iran," *Christian Science Monitor*, December 21, 2005; see also Daniel Pipes, "The Mystical Menace of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad," *New York Sun*, January 10, 2006.

7. "Iran President Paves the Way for Arabs' Imam Return," Reuters, November 17, 2005.

8. See, for example, the argument presented in Gabi Avital, "End Nuclear Ambiguity: Israel Should Present Clear Second-Strike Capability in Face of Iranian Threat," *Yediot Ahranot* (Tel Aviv), October 18, 2006, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3316491,00.html>.

9. It should be noted that the United States withdrew from the agreement in 2002, with no ill effects.

10. See the *Memorandum of Understanding Regarding the Establishment of a Direct Communications Line* signed by the United States and the Soviet Union on June 20, 1963. The "hotline," originally a teletype system, was not actually used until the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.

11. Richard Beeston, "Six Arab States Join Rush to Go Nuclear," *Times of London*, November 4, 2006, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3-2436948,00.html>. The states in question are Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

is rooted in the acceptance of the existence of one's adversary. It is a status quo orientation that does not seek revisionist changes to the system, at least not through the use of nuclear forces. The model also recognizes that promoting change by other means could result in destabilizing forces at the nuclear level, possibly leading to nuclear war. Yet, there is no reason to believe that Iran accepts the existence of Israel or respects that of the United States or other countries. Iran is an explicitly revolutionary state that openly preaches policies of radical change. A nuclear-armed Iran would not forego this long-standing revisionist posture, especially since it would be better able to pursue its objectives of regional change.

Bipolarity

Even if the abovementioned conditions could be met in the Iranian case, the classic nuclear deterrence model assumes a bipolar international (or in this case, regional) system. During the Cold War, this was a reasonable—if not completely accurate—assumption. Certainly, the preponderance of power rested with the U.S. and the Soviet Union; most models therefore ignored the French, British and Chinese nuclear arsenals. The reason for this neglect was clear: lesser forces tended to complicate the models, while bipolarity made abstract game theory more comprehensible and applicable.

However, the strategic situation in the post Cold War world is more complicated. The nuclear equation in the Middle East would clearly not be limited to Iran and Israel. The United States is a major potential participant in any nuclear crisis in the region, and other third parties may become involved as a nuclear scenario—whether Iranian-Israeli or other—begins to unfold. Russia, for example, might have an interest in seeking to balance U.S. forces in order to prevent the United States from intervening. China, concerned about access to energy, could also seek to bring nuclear pressure to bear. It is reasonable to suspect that Pakistan, India, North Korea, or the European nuclear states could also become involved if the crisis escalates. None of these countries needs actually to use their weapons to affect

the nuclear balance. They only have to show a credible propensity to do so.

By the same token, the development of nuclear weapons in Iran could reasonably be expected to spur similar research and development efforts in neighboring states, particularly Saudi Arabia. It is hardly a coincidence that in November 2006, in the midst of growing international concern over Iran's nuclear programs, six Arab states announced that they themselves would be pursuing nuclear research programs.¹¹

In short, it would be a serious error on the part of strategic planners to reduce the nuclear equation in the Middle East to a more easily comprehensible bipolar system, or to assume that the dynamics of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry are universally applicable to other countries and circumstances.

Focusing on deterrence suffers from another deficiency as well. It discounts the idea that Iran actually might be seeking a nuclear arsenal that would enable it to fight and win a nuclear war, particularly against Israel. If Tehran believed that it had a credible first strike capability against Jerusalem, i.e., that it could annihilate Israel's nuclear capabilities in one massive attack, the necessary logic of nuclear strategy would argue for launching what is known as a "bolt from the blue" surprise attack.

Here, skeptics might cite the existence of the U.S. nuclear umbrella, and the probability that Washington would retaliate against any such Iranian aggression. But this is a questionable rationale on which to base a deterrence model. It is possible that the United States might choose not to respond, if presented with a *fait accompli*. Nothing the United States could do would bring back what the Iranians had already destroyed. Moreover, going to war would not be risk-free. American decision-makers would have to weigh the mixed benefits of a nuclear strike against Tehran, potentially involving millions of civilian casualties, against the risk of an Iranian retaliatory nuclear attack on a major American population center. The question at that point would be: "is it worth trading New York for Tehran, in order to have justice for Jerusalem?" Would the United States place millions of American lives in jeopardy for the

sake of its defeated ally?¹² The answer would probably be yes, but there would be strong voices in opposition. Furthermore, the very fact that American policymakers would have to take such questions into account is an example of deterrence in action.

DETERRENCE ACROSS THE CONFLICT SPECTRUM

Discussions of Iran's nuclear capability tend to focus on its effects at the high end of the conflict spectrum, i.e., the possibility of nuclear war and the prospects for deterring a nuclear exchange. However, nuclear deterrence has an impact at all levels of conflict: nuclear, conventional, and unconventional. Whether or not Iran can successfully be deterred from employing nuclear weapons in warfare, an Iranian nuclear force-in-being would have critical implications for international security, particularly in the Middle East region.

Deterrence at the nuclear level precludes one type of conflict, but in the process makes other, lesser forms more likely. Deterrence during the Cold War may be credited with preventing a global thermonuclear conflagration, but the period was not particularly peaceful. The conflicts in Vietnam and Afghanistan, Soviet interventions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the U.S. invasion of a Soviet client state in Grenada, numerous proxy wars and guerilla struggles, and the Soviet-sponsored international terror network, all attest to the lower-level violence that can proliferate under the nuclear umbrella.¹³

Both U.S. and Soviet decision-makers also sought to avoid escalation of local conflicts.¹⁴ The war in Vietnam was the classic case; the United States, more powerful than North Vietnam and potentially able to defeat the communist client state militarily without resorting to nuclear weapons, chose to limit the manner in which the war was conducted out of concerns of escalation that could potentially involve the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union, perhaps leading to a nuclear exchange. Washington did not seek decisively to defeat Hanoi because of the danger that such an effort might lead to a general war in Southeast

Asia, or maybe even in Europe, in the latter case with probable nuclear consequences. Ultimately, the United States was prepared to accept defeat in Vietnam rather than risk escalation.¹⁵ The willingness to suffer local defeats rather than risk the consequences of nuclear conflict is a powerful dynamic that disproportionately favors weaker and more erratic nuclear powers.

Thus, despite global American dominance in nuclear and conventional forces, the United States can be defeated when faced with a determined enemy with the ability to inflict violence at levels the U.S. finds unacceptable or disproportionate to its desired objectives. This underscores one reason why Iran may find nuclear weapons valuable: to enable conflict at lower levels of the conflict spectrum by engaging the fear of escalation. Because all actors possessing nuclear weapons may consider themselves safe from escalation to total war, they can fight at lower levels with relative impunity. Furthermore, the United States would have fewer options for pursuing a policy of regime change in Iran, since it would be unwise to place the current Iranian leadership in a situation where they were on the brink of downfall and had nothing to lose by launching a nuclear strike (see the scenario noted below), or one in which the regime lost control of its nuclear warheads in the ensuing chaos.

Use of force at the conventional level

Currently, the United States is the dominant conventional military force in the world. U.S. defense spending is two-thirds the aggregate defense budgets of the rest of the world combined, and is around 80 times greater than that of Iran.¹⁶ The United States could reasonably be expected to prevail in a purely conventional struggle with almost any country. Furthermore, it is likely that any state defeated militarily by the United States would be encouraged to undertake a political reformation; in other words, experience a regime change. However, it is unlikely that the U.S. would pursue such a conflict against a country with a nuclear capability. One wonders whether the United States would have been as able or willing to push to Baghdad in 2003 had

12. Incidentally, the same equation can be argued with respect to North Korea. If Pyongyang attacked Seoul with nuclear weapons, would the United States respond and place cities from San Diego to Seattle at risk, especially for something that could not be undone?

13. On the Soviet global terror network, see Uri Ra'anan et al, eds., *Hydra of Carnage: International Linkages of Terrorism: The Witnesses Speak* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1986).

14. This is not to say that neither side planned to conduct nuclear conflict; rather, if such a conflict was to occur, it would be on its own merits, not as a consequence of a local conflict that spun out of control.

15. The Korean War also weighed heavily on the minds of decision-makers, particularly the prospect of Chinese conventional intervention and unacceptable casualty levels. However, this proved to be a poor bargain; the Vietnam War resulted in 73 percent more American deaths than the Korean conflict, and the United States failed to keep the Republic of Vietnam free.

16. Christopher Langton, ed., *The Military Balance 2006* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2006), 398, 399, 403. In 2004, Iran spent an estimated \$5.6 billion on defense, while the United States spent \$455.9 billion.

Saddam Hussein's regime possessed nuclear weapons. The North Korean example is also salient here. Few now would suggest military intervention against Kim Jong-il's Stalinist state, largely because of the unpredictable consequences should North Korea use its presumed nuclear arsenal. What this illustrates is that possessing a nuclear capability can deter countries at the conventional as well as the nuclear level.

Yet such deterrence is not always equally balanced. A more erratic nuclear state seeking small-scale gains using conventional force may not face retaliation from the U.S. if the apparent risk is not perceived to be worth the potential gain. Thus, at the conventional level, the use of force would become more attractive to Iran, and simultaneously less so for the U.S. A nuclear-armed Iran might initially undertake minor conventional operations—such as seizing oil platforms in disputed waters or pressing claims against the Shatt al-Arab waterway by occupying small parcels of territory—as a way of testing American or regional resolve. Today, this type of overt Iranian conventional military action would be a *casus belli*, a provocation to which the United States could respond with massive and justifiable force. But if Iran were a nuclear power, U.S. decision-makers would have to think much more carefully about how to take action, and of what type. A military response would need to be limited, in order to prevent escalation. And whether or not they believed that Iran would use nuclear weapons in response to conventional military moves by the U.S. and its allies, Coalition planners would at least have to take the possibility into account. Furthermore, they would have to consider the possible responses of other nuclear-capable states that have interests in the region, as would the Iranians. It doubtless would be a more complex and dangerous decision matrix than any faced by policymakers during the days of Cold War bipolarity.

A number of hypothetical cases hammer home this point.¹⁷ One is a scenario very familiar to U.S. war planners; the Iranian regime closing the Strait of Hormuz and subjecting the world to energy blackmail through an "access denial"

strategy. Currently, the Coalition would respond by sending a flotilla to force an entry, probably accompanied by a punitive air campaign against high-value military, political or economic targets in Iran. At present, the Iranian regime would have no effective response. Yet a nuclear-armed Iran with medium-range missiles or other delivery systems would vastly complicate war planning. Carrier battle groups would have to be kept far out at sea. The intensity of the punitive air campaign would have to be weighed against the possibility that Tehran might seek to attack American domestic targets, perhaps with nuclear weapons. And policymakers would have to question the extent the United States would be able to rely on its Coalition partners in Europe if those countries were within range of nuclear-tipped Iranian missiles.

In another scenario, Iran launches a ground invasion through southern Iraq, into Kuwait, driving on Saudi Arabia. By doing so, Iran could seize control of four of the top five oil reserves in the world. Having taken the oil fields, Iran makes no further demands, and keeps the oil flowing. How would the international community respond, knowing that Iran would have recourse to nuclear weapons if military counter-measures were used? Would military action be taken at the risk of shutting off most Middle Eastern energy exports? Or would the international community conclude that the destabilizing risks of further conflict, made more so by the Iranian nuclear arsenal, were outweighed by the collective desire to maintain the uninterrupted flow of oil?

In a third scenario, the long-awaited democratic revolution begins to develop in Iran. Massive crowds turn out in the streets demonstrating against the increasingly harsh laws imposed by the radical government in Tehran. Students, liberals, labor groups, and even some army and police units begin to coalesce into a true revolutionary force. In response, the regime sends in its shock troops, the Pasdaran, to put an end to the unrest. In a Tiananmen Square-style crackdown, tanks roll in to crush (literally) the revolutionaries, who plead for Coalition intervention. In a non-nuclear environment,

the U.S. could give the uprising enough air support and other assistance to at least stave off catastrophe, and maybe even to tip the balance in favor of the Iranian people—and do so with the approval of the majority of the international community. If the regime had nuclear weapons, on the other hand, it is doubtful that the U.S. would risk intervention. Moreover, the international community might actually oppose support for the Iranian democracy movement, fearful that Iran's leaders would launch a last-minute Armageddon-style conflict if they faced overthrow and sensed they had nothing to lose.

Nuclear weapons and terrorism

It will be at the unconventional warfare level, however, where the destabilizing effects of nuclear deterrence will be felt most. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union backed communist guerilla movements to further Moscow's strategic aims by means short of conventional conflict.¹⁸ The United States responded, also within a limited war framework, with the Reagan Doctrine of support for anti-communist insurgencies. Such proxy wars are attractive to nuclear powers because they have little chance of escalating, they do not involve potentially costly large-scale troop deployments, and they allow the maintenance of plausible deniability.

Iran has long been a state sponsor of proxy terrorist groups, the most noted of which is Lebanon's Hezbollah.¹⁹ The United States tangled with the Iranian cat's-paw during the 1982-84 intervention in Lebanon; Hezbollah is generally believed to have been the force behind the 1983 bombings of the Marine barracks and U.S. embassy in Beirut, as well as the abduction and murder of CIA Station Chief William Buckley and other Americans. (Iran and Hezbollah have denied many of these charges, consistent with the plausible deniability rationale.) Hezbollah remains one of Iran's most effective tools for influencing events in the region, and the group is known to possess global reach. Iran's propensity to utilize terrorists and other front groups to pursue its interests is unlikely to diminish with the advent of an Iranian bomb, and in fact should increase as the regime feels increasingly safe

from significant retaliation. Therefore, one could expect a rise in terror attacks and insurgent activity in areas where Iranian interests were in play.

Beyond the energizing effect nuclear deterrence can have on low intensity conflict, there is also the possibility that terrorists would be used as delivery systems for nuclear payloads outside the deterrence framework. This so-called "nexus effect" of rogue states, weapons of mass destruction and terror groups was the intellectual underpinning the decision to pursue regime change in Iraq.²⁰ The logic of the "nexus" is that it defeats deterrence by removing accountability from the equation. A country that cannot be held responsible for an offensive nuclear strike cannot be deterred; and nuclear retaliation is meaningless in the context of targeting a terrorist group, particularly one that idealizes martyrdom. Comparing Iran to Iraq on all three of the "nexus" pillars gives little cause for confidence. Iran has a definite desire and growing capability to develop nuclear weapons, a much less stable regime, and long-running links to international terrorist groups with global reach.

The notion of the nexus has been discounted by some who believe that no regime would place nuclear weapons into the hands of terrorists for fear of losing control of the weapons and perhaps having them used against other targets, or even against itself.²¹ But it takes little imagination to formulate potential safeguards against misuse, such as arming codes or keys that would not be made available to the proxy group until the weapon is at the agreed-upon point and ready to be detonated. Yet, it is also possible that terrorist groups could obtain nuclear weapons through bribery or theft from Iran or similar less-developed countries with questionable nuclear security protocols. This possibility alone shows the destabilizing effect of nuclear weapons proliferation; humanity's most destructive weapons are gradually being placed in the care of governments of questionable reliability, prudence, and expertise. Whether the nexus scenario is activated by design or ineptitude, the results would be equally devastating.

The uncertainties introduced into

18. See Vasili Mitrokhin and Christopher Andrew, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); See also Ra'anana et al, *Hydra of Carnegie*.

19. Aaron Mannes, *Profiles in Terror: The Guide to Middle East Terrorist Organizations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 145-178.

20. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas J. Feith, "U.S. Strategy for the War on Terrorism," Speech before the Political Union of the University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, April 14, 2004.

21. See, for example, Yaphe and Lutes, xiv: "Many specialists on Iran share a widespread feeling that Iran's desire to be seen as a pragmatic nuclear power would tend to rein in whatever ideological impulses it might otherwise have to disseminate nuclear weapons or technologies to terrorists."

22. Molly Moore, "Chirac: Nuclear Response to Terrorism Is Possible," *Washington Post*, January 20, 2006, A12.

the international system by the potential of a fully enabled “nexus” state in Iran led French President Jacques Chirac in early 2006 to declare in a speech that “leaders of states who would use terrorist means against us... must understand that they would lay themselves open to a firm and adapted response on our part.”²² In doing so, the French president was attempting to bring deterrence back into the strategic equation by threatening Iran (as was widely interpreted) before the fact. Essentially, Tehran (or other state sponsors) would be held responsible for any future WMD strikes on French soil by surrogate groups.

WHO IS DETERRED?

It must be noted that there is a preferable and more durable nuclear deterrence framework than that of Mutual Assured Destruction. It is one in which one party has nuclear weapons and the other does not. This favorable framework is in place right now, and in it the United States and other coun-

tries have the preponderance of power. It would be irrational for the U.S. and other established nuclear powers to help construct an alternative model in which all countries come closer to parity.

The issue at hand is not whether Iran will be deterred once it develops nuclear weapons. The more salient question is: to what extent will the rest of the world be deterred by a nuclear-armed Iran? There are scores of possible scenarios short of nuclear war that demonstrate that deterrence at the nuclear level does not automatically translate into stability at lower levels of conflict. In fact, it leads to permanent instability as regimes pursue conflict by other means, relying on their nuclear insurance cards to deter the U.S. or any other power from using decisive measures. Consciously allowing the Iranian regime to assume the mantle of a nuclear power, therefore, would be an act of catastrophic strategic negligence, and one that would make the world a much more dangerous place.

The American Foreign Policy Council

509 C Street NE
Washington, DC 20002
Tel.: (202) 543-1006
Fax: (202) 543-1007
afpc@afpc.org

Herman Pirchner, Jr.
President

Ilan Berman
Vice President for Policy

John C. Wobensmith
*Vice President for
Development and Senior
Fellow in Intelligence
Studies*

Annie Earley
Director of Communications

Jeff Smith
Research Associate

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