DEFENSE DOSSIER

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American Foreign Policy Council

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FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the June 2014 edition of AFPC's Defense Dossier. In this issue, we take a critical look at the Middle East—a region in perpetual crisis, and one where negative security and political trends increasingly impinge on vital American national security interests.

These include Syria, which increasingly has become a cockpit for international jihad, as well as a dangerous breeding ground for future global Islamic extremism. They also include Iran, which—despite the current nuclear negotiations with the West over its nuclear program—remains a radical, revisionist regional power. Meanwhile, in the southern Gulf, the impoverished state of Yemen teeters on the brink of full-blown crisis, buffeted by overlapping security challenges and a fractious political process.

America, meanwhile, is receding. In both its rhetoric and its practical planning, the Obama administration is actively drawing down is regional presence—and, in tandem, its role as a guarantor of regional stability. Nor are any replacements in sight; the one country once thought to be a candidate for such a role, Turkey, today occupies an increasingly uncertain place in the NATO alliance, even as it exhibits deepening authoritarian tendencies at home.

The Middle East, in short, remains a troubled region, and one in which negative developments will have enormous implications for the United States. This issue of the Defense Dossier is intended to demonstrate exactly how much. We hope that you find it worthwhile.

Sincerely,

Ilan Berman
Chief Editor

Richard Harrison
Managing Editor

AMERICA'S RECEDING STRATEGIC FOOTPRINT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

DOV S. ZAKHEIM

The Second Iraq War marked the high point of American force presence in the Middle East. In May 2008, when the "surge" was at its peak, nearly 200,000 troops were in Iraq, including over 32,000 reserve personnel. Another 23,000 were in Kuwait. More than 70,000 sailors and airmen deployed to the region. By contrast, American force levels in the Middle East throughout the second half of the twentieth century, with the exception of Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield in the nine-month period from August 1990 through April 1991, never exceeded 35,000.

Since then, however, a great deal has changed. As a result of the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq, U.S. force levels dropped to below 18,000 as of December 31, 2013. That figure represented the lowest level in nearly a quarter century. Moreover, despite its promises to the contrary, the Obama Administration's defense budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2015 is likely to result in even lower force levels.

DOLLARS AND SENSE

The Fiscal 2015 budget proposal calls for the reduction of active Army force levels from the current 490,000 to no more than 440,000, and perhaps as little as 420,000 if the Congress cannot legislate away the caps imposed by the FY 2011 Budget Control Act pursuant to the "sequester" provisions that are part of that bill. This would represent the lowest Army force level since before World War II.

Naval forces will also be affected. The Administration is planning for a fleet that in Fiscal Year 2018 will top the 300 ship force level for the first time in 15 years. Again, however, the Budget Control Act caps will—unless permanently lifted—undermine that plan. It is far more likely that the Navy will be hard pressed to maintain its current level of just under 290 ships, let alone add new ones. Moreover, the budget caps in question will virtually ensure the likely retirement of another aircraft carrier, reducing the carrier force to ten. A major component of the planned reductions is the Littoral Combat Ship, which was designed with an eye toward operations in the Middle East.

Not to be left out is the Air Force, which will have to sustain a reduction of 31 active aircraft, and will reach levels as low as any since its creation as a separate service in the armed forces.

PIVOTING TO ASIA… AND ELSEWHERE

Shifting American policy priorities also play a part in America's diminishing Middle Eastern presence. For nearly three years, the White House has been trumpeting its so-called "pivot" to Asia - a policy which, it insists, will result in a deployment of sixty percent of Naval capabilities to that region, together with other forces (including 2,500 Marines that will rotate in and out of Darwin, Australia). Setting aside for the moment the fact that sixty percent of the fleet in fact has been deployed to the Pacific and Indian Oceans since 2005, and that the plan to relocate the Marines to Australia was first gestated in the early 2000s, it is nevertheless the case that, if truly implemented, the pivot will probably result in a further drawdown of American forces in the Middle East. That drawdown is especially likely given the growing tensions between China and Japan in the East China Sea and between China and

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much of ASEAN in the South China Sea, which will increase the pressure on Washington to maintain its long-term major naval presence in East Asia.

It is ironic that while Washington is deploying ships to the Mediterranean to counter the threat of Iranian ballistic missiles, it will be hard pressed to avoid reducing its naval presence in Iran's immediate vicinity.

But Asia may no longer be the sole primary focus of Administration concerns. Already the crisis in Ukraine has resulted in a new planned deployment of an Army battalion to be spread among Poland and the Baltic states. Of course, 600 troops, no matter how capable, are hardly a tripwire—the American tripwire in South Korea totals some 23,000 troops. In fact, while the deployment, which will involve American participation in a variety of military exercises, may not extend beyond the end of the year, begging the question of what impact it could possibly have on Kremlin calculations. On the other hand, further Russian depredations along its borders are likely to increase pressure on Washington to retain in Europe the two brigades it plans to withdraw from the continent and to redeploy them eastward to reinforce the units in Poland and the Baltics. In light of drawdown due to the budget caps, the likely source of these troops will have to be the Middle East.

Similarly, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and the prospect that it might bite off a chunk, if not all, of eastern Ukraine, has prompted U.S. Navy deployments to the Black Sea. As long as tensions between Russia and her neighbors remain high, the likelihood that the Navy will continue to maintain a presence in that sea remains equally high. Moreover, the evolving strategic environment in the Mediterranean, once a major area of operations for naval forces, has also created new demands on the thinly-stretched US. Navy. The western Mediterranean is already seeing a minor American build-up, due to the home-porting of two, and soon to be four, missile defense ships in Rota, Spain. These ships constitute a critical element of the Administration's European Phased Adaptive Approach, which is meant to counter the Iranian ballistic missile threat to Europe and Israel.

In addition, there could well be pressure for the return of a full-time U.S. Navy presence to the eastern Mediterranean. To begin with, the Russian navy already outnumbers the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, and, given the overall Russian naval buildup, could add to its forces there. Washington may not accept the Russian presence with equanimity, given Russia's increasingly assertive international posture, as well as its ongoing support for the Assad regime in Syria. In addition, tensions among Israel, Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon, and Egypt as a result of overlapping claims to major gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean could create a new demand for American naval presence to serve as a confidence-building and moderating influence in the region.

Naval force levels in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf, which numbered five of the Navy's twelve aircraft carriers, 47 surface ships, twelve submarines, and two amphibious task groups at the outset of the Operation Iraqi Freedom, have thus begun to shrink due not only to declining overall force levels, or to the "pivot" to Asia, but to new and unforeseen crises elsewhere.

Ongoing American-led negotiations with Iran, which thus far have yielded few long-term concessions from that country, have accomplished what no previous Administration has accomplished: a common threat perception on the part of the Saudis and Israelis.

Current naval forces in the region total approximately 33 ships. It is ironic that while Washington is deploying ships to the Mediterranean to counter the threat of Iranian ballistic missiles, it will be hard pressed to avoid reducing its naval presence in Iran's immediate vicinity. Such reductions will underscore

the impression, already widespread in the region, that despite verbiage in the new Quadrennial Defense Review and other Administration pronouncements, Washington is in fact losing interest in the Middle East.

FROM BAD TO WORSE

Notably, the Administration has consistently followed up questionable actions in the region with others that have been even more disconcerting. It was criticized for "leading from behind" during the NATO/Arab League operation against Moammar Gadhafi. But at least it led. The President's threat that Syria not cross his "red line" by using chemical weapons has since become a sad joke, as Bashar Assad consolidates his power while continuing to kill ever larger numbers of his own people. The Administration's ham-handed attempts to influence the outcome of the Egyptian revolution have alienated all sides of that divided nation. Ongoing American-led negotiations with Iran, which thus far have yielded few long-term concessions from that country, have accomplished what no previous Administration has accomplished: a common threat perception on the part of the Saudis and Israelis. And the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks have been due in no small part to the perception in the region that President Obama is insufficiently engaged to demonstrate that he is committed to their success. Finally, America's hands-off policy toward Nuri al-Maliki, Iraq's Iranian puppet, has also alienated Washington's long-standing Sunni allies in the region, who have watched his suppression of Iraq's Sunnis explode into a new civil war. Likewise, Iraq's Kurds have looked in vain to Washington for support against Maliki's increasingly dictatorial tendencies. Only in Yemen does the White House's policy of heavy reliance on drone-based killings of ant-Western terrorists seem to meeting with some success; even in that case, however, there is no certainty that Sana'a will tolerate such operations indefinitely, or instead, like Pakistan, subject them to ever-tighter restrictions.

These missteps have been buttressed by the cutbacks in defense that the Administration has refused to tackle head-on. Instead, it has proposed increases, both for fiscal year 2015 and the four following fiscal years, which ignore the Budget Control Act caps and do not attempt to reallocate the balance of domestic and defense spending, or that between entitlement and discretionary spending. As a result, its proposed defense increases have been pronounced dead on arrival; the decline in defense spending will continue; and American credibility as both a reliable ally and determined adversary will continue to suffer, perhaps most egregiously in the Middle East. One cannot but expect that the nations of the region will be more inclined to go their own way, regardless of American preferences, whether in terms of reaching out more aggressively to China and Russia or, still worse, by developing their own nuclear capability, especially if Iran successfully fields its own.

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The American drawdown in the Middle East, in short, is a harbinger of nothing but trouble. It promises that the region will continue to suffer from instability, bloodshed, and perhaps nuclear proliferation. Washington's pipe dream of a peaceful Middle East, so elegantly articulated by President Obama in Cairo during his first year in office, has increasingly turned into the very nightmare he has so assiduously sought to avoid. And sadly, nothing the Administration is currently proposing promises to improve matters any time soon. ■

TURKEY'S TUMULTUOUS FUTURE IN NATO

CLAIRE BERLINSKI

Russia has recently reminded the world why the NATO Alliance was formed in the first place. Against Russia, Turkey may be relied upon to be, at least, a well-armed land mass situated between Moscow and the Mediterranean. Turkey will always be a headache for expansionist Russians, no matter its domestic travails. After all, the country originally joined NATO out of a well-grounded fear of Russian expansionism, and so long as NATO's chief purpose is keeping Russia out of Western Europe, Turkey will be a strategically important member of the alliance.

But, given its dependence on Russian energy and trade, Ankara is unlikely to confront Moscow directly. Some 60 percent of Turkey's energy demands are supplied by Russian natural gas, and bilateral trade amounts to about USD $40 billon annually.[1] Thus, like most of Europe, Turkey is too dependent on Russia to risk aggravating it excessively, and Turkey's fear of the Russian military—well-grounded, given that Turkey has never come out ahead of any conflict with it—will further temper its reaction. Russia, for its part, has made it clear that attempts to support the Crimean Tatars will be met by efforts to stir up Turkey's Kurds.[2]

Still, there is little doubt that where Russia is concerned, Turkey will follow NATO's lead. But absent a severe provocation from the Kremlin, it is likely to do so very cautiously. Domestic turbulence, in part the result of recent corruption scandals, has discouraged international investors and further weakened Turkey's economy. Turkey is simply not in a position to confront Russia more vigorously; with one turbulent election just past (predictably marred by accusations of fraud), and two more approaching, another economic hit is the last thing Erdoğan needs. To confront Russia over Crimea more directly, Turkey would need to regain its own political and economic stability, and this is unlikely to happen any time soon.

In many ways, Turkey's actions vis-à-vis Russia will be par for the course. In recent years, Turkey has proven itself to be a disappointing and underperforming ally, particularly in the Middle East. As in most things, our disappointment is a function of our excessively high expectations. We encouraged Turkey to take on a role in NATO far beyond its original one, fantasizing into existence a stable, prosperous and Westernized Turkey that would project NATO's power into the Islamic world. We refused to consider all the evidence indicating that no such Turkey existed.[3]

Given Turkey's centrality to the resolution of a host of sensitive issues in the region, from Cyprus, Syria, Iraq and Armenia to Israel, it is painful to see our fantasy in ruins, even if it was entirely predictable. The instability occasioned by the Arab Spring has left NATO more than ever in need of a reliable partner in the Middle East. But Turkey is incapable of playing that role, and asking it to do so risks further jeopardizing Turkey's security, stability and development—and thus its primary and original value to the defense alliance.

A DISMAL RECORD

The United States and its NATO allies were entirely too willing to accept the delusions of Erdoğan and his Islamist Justice and Development Party, or AKP, whose senior figures grandly promoted themselves as heirs to Ottoman statesmen who "knew the region." They did not, in fact, know much about the region. Nor did they possess the

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Ottomans' diplomatic sophistication, as their foreign policy track record eloquently demonstrates.

The AKP's approach to politics in general, and foreign affairs in particular, has focused overwhelmingly on the the short-term. The party seeks to stay in power from election to election while making itself and its supporters as wealthy as possible, as quickly as possible. Its policies are grounded in wishful thinking, Sunni chauvinism, naiveté and emotion, rather than deep regional knowledge or a realistic, rational analysis of the strategic picture. These policies are not merely annoying to the West—they have been an economic and strategic disaster for Turkey.

So long as NATO's chief purpose is keeping Russia out of Western Europe, Turkey will be a strategically important member of the alliance...Turkey will follow NATO's lead. But absent a severe provocation from the Kremlin, it is likely to do so very cautiously.

Turkey has outraged Egypt's new military government, cut off ties with Israel, alienated Iran by accepting a NATO radar installation and supporting anti-Assad forces, bickered with the Iraqi central government in Baghdad, irritated key Gulf states by supporting Muslim Brotherhood movements throughout the region, and left Europe unimpressed and unnerved by quantity and craziness of its conspiracy rhetoric. Turkey's EU bid, it is safe to say, was moribund even before Erdoğan had the bright idea of switching off Twitter.

In exchange for these steps, Ankara has gained no influence. Only its relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government are thriving. (Erdoğan is also on warm terms with the Hamas leadership, but this is a dubious foreign policy achievement at best.) Turkey is also the weak link in NATO's efforts to isolate Iran and combat terrorism financing. Since 2007, Ankara has been on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list. Reports that Turkey has been involved in a massive sanctions-busting scheme with Tehran, known as "gas-for-gold," are almost certainly correct. Turkey, moreover, recently appalled its NATO allies by proposing to buy its first long-range anti-missile system from China Precision Machinery Export-Import Corporation (CPMIEC), which faces sanctions for selling arms and missile technology to Iran and Syria. While the sharp response from NATO appears to have had its intended effect—Ankara has hinted that it might be backing off from the deal[4]—this kind of blunder is the direct result of Turkey's changing internal power dynamics. Although it was reportedly deeply unhappy about the choice, the Turkish military—which has been completely subordinated to the prime ministry in recent years—was helpless to do much about it.

But the AKP's most disastrous adventure has been in Syria. It is unclear to what extent it was encouraged in its recklessness by the United States, whose Syria policy can hardly be reckoned a model of clarity and strategic foresight. When Assad pulled his forces away from the border, the PYD (the Syrian analogue to the PKK) assumed control over the Kurdish majority regions, prompting Ankara to pursue the disastrous policy of arming radical groups and opening its borders to foreign fighters. The strategy rested upon the assumption that Assad would be toppled quickly. This proved false. As a result, Turkey now faces both an infuriated Assad and a serious threat from groups like Jabhat al Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS). In conjunction with a vast influx of Syrian refugees, this is now by far the most serious security problem Turkey faces. And since Turkey is in NATO, this is now NATO's problem, too.

POLITICAL CHANGE... BUT NOT FOR THE BETTER

It is fashionable now to say that Erdoğan "has changed"—from fire-breathing Islamist to liberal democrat and back again into a budding Islamic caudillo.[5] In fact, Turkey's leader is relatively unchanged. It is more accurate to say that the country's much-advertised progress over the past decade in establishing good governance, rule of law, tolerance for minorities and civil liberties never happened.

We had every reason to *want* to believe that Turkey under the AKP represented an attractive and replicable success story involving democracy, ethnic harmony, Islamic heritage, a European orientation and economic performance. Such a Turkey would have been a double asset: Through its soft power, it would have served as an inspiration to the region, while its hard power—regional intelligence and military might—could have been harnessed to serve the West's foreign policy goals.

But the key player in this fantasy didn't exist. Turkey's institutions remain as dysfunctional as they were when the AKP took power. Restrictions on political competition for parliament, including a ten-percent election threshold, ensure that minority parties have no representation. Laws regulating party formation and financing sustain an oligarchy of political insiders spread over a small handful of political parties. The economy is fragile, and Turkey is not much closer to meeting the Copenhagen Criteria for EU accession than it was a decade ago. Massive protests against AKP rule have been met with a traditionally repressive Turkish state response.

Erdoğan's struggle for power with his former ally Fethullah Gülen, a Pennsylvania-based cleric who leads a powerful transnational Islamist movement, has become increasingly vicious. It has recently taken the form of a massive corruption probe into government officials, with wiretaps leaked daily that appear to incriminate the prime minister and everyone around him in a three-ring circus of malfeasance, skullduggery and theft. The probe is widely and for good reason understood to be a form of retaliation by the Gülenists, who are well represented within the police and judiciary. Erdoğan has countered by ferreting out his opponents and stifling journalists, firing or reassigning thousands of police officers, consolidating his control of the judiciary, and shutting down social media sites to plug the leaks. As the Bipartisan Policy Center recently noted, "[Erdoğan] is maintaining his power at the cost of dismantling much of the facade on which he built it: as a forward-looking, democratic leader."[6]

What *has* changed in the past decade, with consequences as yet unpredictable, is Turkey's internal balance of power. Erdoğan has subordinated almost all of Turkey's other traditional major power centers to the executive. To some extent, the appearance that things are now falling to pieces simply reflects the difficulty he's had with digesting the last morsel—the Gülen movement. The AKP is no longer receiving domestic cooperation from the Gülenists, which accounts to some extent for the instability we're now witnessing. Equally importantly, it is no longer receiving public relations support from the movement overseas. This is an essential fact, because much of Turkey's "success" over the past decade was a fable spun by the movement. To some extent, therefore, its "failure" now is a product of the same dynamic. Turkey's failings should not be over-dramatized, however. It is no more helpful or accurate to declare Turkey an unequivocal failure now than it was to praise it as a rip-roaring success a year ago. Turkey has been a fractious and difficult ally since it joined NATO in 1952. For half a century thereafter, Turkey was plagued by military coups, pogroms, high-double-digit inflation, ephemeral political coalitions, political assassinations, civil war, death squads and corruption scandals. Nor should it be forgotten that our pre-AKP NATO all invaded Cyprus (twice), leading to general hysteria about the security of NATO's nuclear arsenal. Somehow, NATO survived.

Western states encouraged Turkey to take on a role in NATO far beyond its original one, fantasizing into existence a stable, prosperous and Westernized Turkey that would project NATO's power into the Islamic world.

Whatever the AKP's faults, and they are many, it does have some achievements to its credit. A ceasefire with the PKK held until recently, although recent reports of clashes in eastern Turkey suggest that the fragile truce may be on the verge of collapse. Despite massive and sustained street action, the number of

lives lost due to political violence has in the past year been low by Turkish standards. There has been quite a bit of economic growth, if not as much as advertised. And the police generally use less-lethal tactics than the army did, even if they serve the same ends.

STATUS QUO, SADLY

No matter the outcome of the next two sets of elections (a presidential contest later this year, and parliamentary polls in 2015), or the results of the power struggle between the AKP and Gülen, it is difficult to see any scenario in the near future in which Turkey becomes the stable, well-governed and economically vibrant foreign-policy actor it was advertised to be. In the near term, Turkey will be so consumed with its domestic struggles that it will hardly be able to focus its energies on foreign policy. But it is the long term that should worry us the most. The government's anti-Western and conspiratorial rhetoric is obviously dangerous. Erdoğan and the AKP cannot maintain their grip on power and money absent the Sunnification of public life and discourse. While there is evidence that the senior cohort of the AKP is completely cynical in its professions of piety, pragmatically they are well aware that they can only hold on power by encouraging and rewarding ever-more paranoid Sunni nationalism at the grassroots.

Turkey is also the weak link in NATO's efforts to isolate Iran and combat terrorism financing…Reports that Turkey has been involved in a massive sanctions-busting scheme with Tehran, known as "gas-for-gold," are almost certainly correct.

NATO, therefore, should expect little from Turkey beyond the performance of its core and original role. The notion that Turkey can serve as a force multiplier for NATO interests has long ago been decisively debunked, and by none other than the AKP itself. ■

ENDNOTES

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YEMEN'S FRAGILE STABILITY

JARED SWANSON

Most articles about Yemen in recent years have evoked the image of a government teetering on the edge of collapse in a country poised on the brink of chaos. The complete disintegration of the central Yemeni government would surely have disastrous consequences for regional security, for counterterrorism, and for Yemeni citizens. But after three years at the supposed tipping point, and following many crises, the Yemeni government continues to lurch forward month after month.

This survival is not as miraculous as it may seem. The 2011 Arab Spring uprisings brought about the end of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh's 33-year rule. A peace agreement brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council thereafter ended the ensuing civil strife with limited bloodshed, and established a provisional government to maintain order as well as to develop and implement a new national constitution. Since then, Yemeni authorities have managed to make headway despite intense sectarian strife, terrorism, and economic hardship.

ON THE BRINK

During much of his reign, President Saleh's ability to govern relied on cultivating political support from a complex matrix of stakeholders: among them different tribes, ideological factions, and other subgroups. The relatively peaceful nature of the 2011 transfer of power left each of these political entities and their power bases intact. Now, the survival of the transitional government relies on generating support from a very similar constellation of political forces. The primary movements that established Yemen's current political climate trace their roots back to the Cold War. During the 1980s, Yemen was divided into the People's Republic of Yemen in the Marxist south and Republic of Yemen in the capitalist north. As Communist global influence waned in the early 1990s, both countries agreed to a peaceful unification. However, in 1994, claiming the north had violated the unification agreement, the south fought to reinstate its independence. Many Yemenis had journeyed to Afghanistan to fight against the Soviets in the 1980s, and Saleh allied himself with the newly returned *jihadists* who in turn helped him to crush the southern Marxist separatists and overpower its ruling Socialist Party. In return, the Islamists returning from Afghanistan were supported in forming Islah, the main political opposition to Saleh's General People's Council (GPC) and a prominent actor in contemporary Yemeni politics.

Though Islah is based in the north of the country, it has incorporated a zealous southern minority that harbors animosity against the Socialist Party. A similar Sunni minority has provided al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) with the support base it needs to establish a firm presence in the south. The relationship between AQAP and Islah isn't clear, but leading Islah figures have been implicated with terrorists and the overlap between their support bases is concerning. Saleh did not seem to see AQAP as a security threat to his power, and the United States often faced reluctance on the part of his regime to cooperate with counter-terrorism strategies.

Rather, the main existential threat to Saleh came from a Zaidi Shi'a minority based north of Sana'a. In 2004, a local leader, Bedredin al-Houthi, was killed by government soldiers in a firefight. A large following

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of Zaidi Shi'a near the Saudi border, then called the Houthis, united to resist Saleh's government in a series of six wars. They have fought in armed conflict against al-Qaeda, supporters of Islah, Saudi Arabia, the Saleh government, and the current government, and continue to forcefully expand their territory—thereby increasing their leverage in the transition process.

Since the new government is arising from the same forces that shaped the old regime, there is a danger of recidivism in its policies, procedures, and priorities. Coming years will show if the GCC plan merely bought a more peaceful transition at the cost of underwhelming reform.

As pressure mounted in the north, percolating discontent resurfaced in south Yemen in 2007. There, a southern separatist movement called Hirak launched large, mostly peaceful demonstrations and protests calling for southern independence and redress of grievances. Hirak's popularity in the south has lent the movement substantial political weight, but the diversity of opinions within its ranks has not allowed the movement to negotiate as a unified front on many issues. For one, Hirak developed an ambiguous relationship with Islah. Islah's role in defeating the south during the civil war has not been forgotten, but as the groups clashed violently on southern streets, Hirak adherents, such as the Socialist Party, allied with Islah in peaceful political opposition to Saleh's government.

As the Arab Spring protests of 2011 erupted in Sana'a, Hirak re-established control over large areas of the south. The weakening security in the north allowed the Houthis to forcefully expand their borders, and Saleh's strained security forces were unable to prevent al-Qaeda from securing control of several southern cities. Only Islah was hesitant to enter the fray. After a year of protests and hundreds of deaths, President Saleh accepted an agreement brokered by the six Middle Eastern nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to peacefully resign and his Vice-President, Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi assumed control of the government and oversight of the GCC transition plan.

A TENUOUS TRUCE

After the partial government collapse, transitional ministries have slowly started to reestablish security and rebuild governmental authority. This past February saw the conclusion of ten months of negotiations at National Dialogues Conferences (NDC) which were mandated by the GCC plan to outline the requirements for a new constitution. Some authors tout the "Yemeni model" of the Arab Spring uprisings as a relatively peaceful and desirable transition, but it is important to note that President Hadi is a member of the GPC, the same party as former President Saleh, and that same ruling party held the largest share of seats at the NDC—and still holds a majority of seats in parliament. Since the new government is arising from the same forces that shaped the old regime, there is a danger of recidivism in its policies, procedures, and priorities. Coming years will show if the GCC plan merely bought a more peaceful transition at the cost of underwhelming reform.

From the outset, concerns have abounded regarding the legitimacy of the transitional process. Critics of the NDC note that representation was not conducted democratically. Due to the practical impossibility of conducting fresh elections, Hadi won the presidency through a rush vote as the country's sole candidate. He was then vested with sweeping powers to determine membership in the NDC and settle conflicts during the talks. In the absence of reliable data, representation in the NDC was, in effect, eyeballed, and most groups were allocated more seats based on power and practical influence than on population. Many, especially among the southern separatists, objected to the format of the NDC and boycotted the talks. Some vehemently opposed to the NDC process were marginalized, suppressed, and in some cases, targeted for UN sanctions.

Those who agreed to participate recognized the diversity of Yemen's groups and regional problems, and embraced a plan early on to divide Yemen into a federal system under which sub-states had higher degrees of autonomy. However, negotiations stalled for months, deadlocked over the number of regions to be established. To wrap up negotiations, Hadi appointed a separate committee to resolve the issue after the conclusion of the NDC, which quickly opted to divide the country into six regions. Hirak had promoted a two-region solution, and many were angered at the manner through which the number of regions was established. Though many aspects of the process are inherently undemocratic, Hadi's powers have launched initiatives and broken deadlocks that would not have been otherwise possible. Although Hadi holds substantial power, it is unclear just how far he is from a tipping point. Prospects of civil war and lawlessness have motivated most leaders to throw their weight behind the transitional process, which may grant Yemen's president a more secure position than he would otherwise enjoy.

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CONVERGING CRISES

However contested the transition process may be, many recognize that a stable central government is Yemen's best chance to cope with an array of Herculean domestic challenges. A few statistics provide a glimpse into the extent of the problems now facing Hadi's government.

Oil is the lifeblood of Yemen. It accounts for about 25 percent of national GDP, and some 63 percent of government revenue.[1] Yet, due to aging oil fields and general insecurity, Yemen's oil production has steadily declined—falling from 440 thousand barrels per day in 2001 to just 132 thousand barrels daily last year.[2] A further deterioration of the oil industry, without any plans in place for diversification or further exploration, would effectively pull the carpet out from under the national economy.

Just as importantly, Yemen's aquifers are being depleted at an alarming rate. Some areas, including the nation's capital, are expected to run out of water within ten years.[3] Yemen's interior ministry estimates that 4,000 deaths each year are due to water- and land-related conflicts,[4] which can be expected to intensify as water supplies diminish.

Conditions are ameliorated at least somewhat by remittances. Yemeni expatriates contribute an estimated $1.4 billion (nearly 4 percent of GDP) each year back into the country to support their friends and families.[5] Parts of the Yemeni economy have come to rely on this income, but a recent severe shock has cut deeply into this money supply. Between June 2013 and February 2014, Saudi Arabia deported over 300,000 people back to Yemen, and Saudi deportations continue to flood Yemen's regions—adding to the hundreds of thousands who have been displaced as a result of the government's conflict with the Houthi tribe between 2004 and 2010.[6] As a result, the government faces the momentous task of reintegrating nearly one million displaced people into Yemen's overall population of 26 million, nearly half of which is already food insecure and 12 million of which already live in poverty.[7]

That Hadi's government continues to cling to power, therefore, is a reflection of a stark reality: that the costs to most Yemenis of the disintegration of the government would simply be too high. Hadi's government maintains a centrist position, and has been backed by billions of dollars of foreign assistance. Even as terrorists strike targets across the country and militant sects vie for influence, it appears to be the best hope for addressing the country's myriad security and economic problems.

STABILITY… FOR NOW

Today, Yemen inhabits what can best be described as an interim political state. The National Dialogues

Conferences have ended, while presidential and parliamentary elections have yet to take place. This interim process is marked by an absence of political pluralism. The current legislative body is still a product of Saleh-era politics, and the new government will be forged amid decades-old political and military agendas.

The government faces the momentous task of reintegrating nearly one million displaced people into Yemen's overall population of 24 million, nearly half of which is already food insecure and 12 million of which already live in property.

Yet Yemen isn't likely to revert to its former *status quo*. In the wake of the Arab Spring, the country's politicians recognize the need to contend with new groups and political formations—forces that the central government can no longer contain or suppress the way it had in the past. This holds out the promise—albeit a slim one—of the eventual emergence of a more pluralistic polity in Yemen. ■

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REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE WAR IN SYRIA

MATTHEW LEVITT

Three-and-a-half years into the civil war in Syria, the conflict has become a humanitarian and strategic catastrophe. It threatens to tear the region apart along sectarian lines. It has injected new oxygen into groups and movements driven by violent Islamist ideologies, including but by no means limited to groups formally associated with al-Qaeda. Indeed, we are now faced with a sharp rise in violent extremism from within both the radical Sunni and Shiite camps. As Director of National Intelligence James Clapper recently noted, we can expect an increase in political uncertainty and violence across the region in 2014.[1] There are many reasons this will be the case, not all of which are directly tied to the war in Syria.

Three types of fallout from the war in Syria in particular are certain to cause significant spillover of one kind or another. The first is the flow of foreign fighters to Syria from across the Middle East and the impact this dynamic is certain to have on regional stability. The second is the especially pernicious sectarian nature of the conflict at hand. The third is the sharp increase in dangerous macro trends, from refugees and population displacement to poverty, hunger, and lack of adequate health care, that create conditions conducive to violence and instability.

WHEN THE BOYS COME HOME

A rereading of a declassified August 1993 report, "The Wandering Mujahidin: Armed and Dangerous," written by the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) foreshadows that, some two decades hence, we might find ourselves dealing with a laundry list of difficult problems stemming from actions taken, or not taken, today.[2] The report's subject was the possible spillover effect of Afghan *mujahedin* fighters and support networks moving on to fight in other *jihad* conflicts, alongside other militant Islamic groups worldwide. Much of the report could be applied equally well to the themes we find ourselves facing today.

Consider how fighters are traveling from around the world to go fight on either side of the increasingly sectarian war in Syria. Much of the discussion about foreign fighters traveling to Syria has focused on radicalized Muslim youth coming from Western countries, but the greatest numbers of foreign fighters, on both the Sunni and Shi'ite sides of the equation, have come from the Middle East. Indeed, it must be noted that while most people focus on the Sunni foreign fighter phenomenon, there are at least as many Shi'ite foreign fighters in Syria today. Most are from Iraq, but others have come from as far afield as Yemen, Afghanistan, and even Australia.

This spring, DNI Clapper estimated that more than 7,000 fighters have traveled to Syria from more than fifty countries.[3] In an independent study conducted in December 2013, Aaron Zelin of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy estimated the numbers to be some 8,500 foreign fighters from seventy-four different countries. His estimates of the range of foreign fighters from across the region who have

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come to fight on the Sunni side of the war in Syria are equally telling:[4]

RANGE OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS FROM ARAB WORLD		
Country	Low	High
Kuwait	54	71
Lebanon	65	890
Tunisia	379	970
Jordan	175	2,089
Libya	330	556
Iraq	59	97
Algeria	68	123
Egypt	118	358
Palestine	73	114
Saudi Arabia	380	1,010
Sudan	2	96
Yemen	13	110
Morocco	76	91
United Arab Emirates	13	13
Mauritania	2	2
Qatar	14	14
Bahrain	12	12
Oman	1	1

The number has since increased to about 12,000 total fighters, exceeding the high-end estimates from the end of last year even amongst rebel in-fighting. While much of the focus on increasing numbers has been on western fighters, Arab fighters have increased as well. Some Middle Eastern security officials have even released official numbers: Algeria now estimates about 200 of its citizens have traveled to Syria, Morocco 1,500, Saudi Arabia 2,500, and Tunisia about 3,000.

On the Shi'ite side of the equation, Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi Shi'ite militants from groups like Asaib Ahl al-Haqq and Kataib Hezbollah make up a majority of those fighting in support of the Bashar al-Assad regime. Some estimate that as many as five thousand members of Lebanese Hezbollah have been active in Syria, on a rotational basis.[5] Iraqi Shi'ites fighting in Syria are also estimated to number as high as five thousand.[6] Iranians are present as well in smaller support and advising roles. Shi'ites from Saudi Arabia, Côte d'Ivoire, Afghanistan, and Yemeni Houthi fighters have also gone to Syria to fight on behalf of the regime.

In Syria, these foreign fighters are learning new and more dangerous tools of the trade in a very hands-on way, and those who do not die on the battlefield will ultimately disperse to all corners of the world, better trained and still more radicalized than they were before. The majority of radicalized fighters are likely to return home and attack their own homelands even before they seek to strike the United States, in large part because the events that have followed the Arab Spring have created conditions favorable for militant Islamist revival.

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Consider just a few regional reverberations of the Syrian *jihad* already being felt today:

- For many in the region and beyond, going to fight in Syria is a natural and unremarkable decision; the fight in Syria is a defensive *jihad* to protect fellow Sunni Muslims—women and children—from the Assad regime's indiscriminate attacks on civilian population centers. And so it is that Ahmed Abdullah al-Shaya, the poster boy for Saudi Arabia's deradicalization program—which boasts a tiny 1.5 percent recidivism rate from among its 2,400 graduates—has now turned up on the battlefield in Syria.[7]

- "Tunisia's revolution and those in Syria, Egypt and Yemen, and Libya gave us a chance to set up an Islamic state and sharia law, and in the Maghreb first," explained a young Tunisian Salafist in Tunis, Abu Salah. "We want nothing

less than an Islamic state in Tunisia, and across the region. The first step must be Syria. I am proud of our brothers in Syria, and I will go there myself in a few weeks."[8]

- Another young Tunisian, Ayman Saadi, who was raised in a middle-class family with a secular tradition, was stopped from going to fight in Syria several times by his parents before he finally snuck out of the country to Benghazi. He trained there for a short time, but instead of going on to Syria, he was instructed to go back to Tunisia to carry out a suicide attack at a presidential mausoleum; when he proceeded to do so, Saadi was tackled by guards before he could trigger his explosives.[9]

- In August 2013, a new, fully Moroccan *jihadist* organization called Harakat Sham al-Islam was created in Syria. The group reportedly aims not only to recruit fighters for the Syrian war but also to establish a *jihadist* organization within Morocco itself: "Although the [group's] name refers to Syria and its theater is Syria, the majority of group members are Moroccans. The group's creation was also announced in the Rif Latakia, where most Moroccan *jihadists* who go to Syria are based."[10]

- In Egypt, the government is facing high levels of violence largely in reaction to the ouster of former president Muhammad Morsi. The Sinai militant group Ansar Beit al-Maqdis attracts many returnees and has claimed responsibility for a number of attacks in recent months. In September 2013, following his return from Syria, Walid Badr, a former Egyptian army officer, conducted a suicide attack that narrowly missed Egyptian interior minister Muhammad Ibrahim, instead injuring nineteen others.[11]

- In February 2014, an Israeli court convicted an Israeli Arab citizen of joining Jabhat al-Nusra. The presiding judge expressed concern over the danger posed by Israeli citizens who join the war in Syria and return home, where "they could use the military training and ideological indoctrination acquired in Syria to commit terror attacks, indoctrinate others or gather intelligence for use in attacks by anti-Israel organizations."[12]

- Also in February, an Iraqi newspaper ceased publishing after receiving death threats from the Iranian-backed Shiite militia Asaib Ahl al-Haqq. Two bombs were placed in its office in Baghdad, and protestors carrying photographs of Asaib Ahl al-Haqq's leader demanded the paper be shut down. Members openly admit to "ramp[ing] up targeted killings."[13] The militia has been active in Iraq since the American-led war, in which it carried out thousands of attacks on U.S. soldiers, and currently has forces in Syria.[14]

In Syria, these foreign fighters are learning new and more dangerous tools of the trade in a very hands-on way, and those who do not die on the battlefield will ultimately disperse to all corners of the world, better trained and still more radicalized than they were before.

None of this should surprise. Twenty-one years ago, INR's study of Afghanistan's spillover similarly reported that "the support network that funneled money, supplies, and manpower to supplement the Afghan Mujahidin is now contributing experienced fighters to militant Islamic groups worldwide." When these veteran fighters dispersed, the report presciently predicted, "their knowledge of communications equipment and experiences in logistics planning will enhance the organizational and offensive capabilities of the militant groups to which they are returning." A section of the 1993 report, entitled "When the Boys Come Home," noted that these veteran volunteer

fighters "are welcomed as victorious Muslim fighters of a successful *jihad* against a superpower" and "have won the respect of many Muslims—Arab and non-Arab—who venerate the *jihad*." [15]

A SECTARIAN PROXY WAR IN THE LEVANT

The Syrian war is also a classic case of a proxy war, in this case between Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Gulf states on the one hand, and Iran on the other—with the additional, especially dangerous overlay of sectarianism. The sectarian vocabulary used to dehumanize the "other" in the Syrian war is deeply disturbing, and suggests both sides view the war as a long-term battle in an existential, religious struggle between Sunnis and Shiites.[16]

Furthermore, the war in Syria is now being fought on two parallel planes: one focused on the Assad regime and the Syrian opposition, and the other on the existential threats the Sunni and Shi'ite communities each perceive from one another. The former might theoretically be negotiable, but the latter almost certainly is not. The ramifications for regional instability are enormous, and go well beyond the Levant. But they are felt more immediately and more powerfully in Lebanon to the west and Iraq to the east than anywhere else.

TRENDING TOWARD INSTABILITY

The humanitarian crisis resulting from the Syrian civil war is a catastrophe that grows worse by the day. In a region long known for its instability and sparse resources, Syria's neighbors are simply not equipped to handle 2.4 million registered refugees. Lebanon has taken in Syrians equal to at least one fifth of the country's population, a refugee camp is now Jordan's fourth-largest city, and on average 13,000 new refugees are registered with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) every day. Within Syria itself, more than 6.5 million have been displaced and more than nine million need humanitarian assistance.

Such numbers are more than just a depressing snapshot of the situation on the ground; they suggest a long-term outlook that is no less dire. Taken together, the Syrian crisis and its secondary and tertiary effects create a set of "looming disequilibria," to borrow a phrase from the National Intelligence Council's (NIC's) excellent study entitled *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*.[17] Consider, for example, the combined impact on the region of a years-long conflict, exacerbated by sectarianism and fueled by funds and weapons from the backers of respective proxies. From education, health, poverty, and migration patterns to humanitarian assistance needs and the economic impact on fragile economies, the consequences of the Syrian war for the region would be massive even if the war itself ended tomorrow.

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Refugee migrations have long been noted as factors that increase the likelihood of militant disputes.[18] In today's migration displacements, the vast majority of refugees are Sunni Muslims, posing a serious threat to the sectarian balance of the region, especially in Lebanon. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have moved into Jordan's cities and put a heavy strain on local economies. Neither country can sustain for long the added burden to public services, from water and electricity to health care and education. This stress can open doors for externally financed terrorist organizations to take the place of the state, as was the case with Hezbollah in Lebanon in the 1980s. Without considerably more international aid, the entire region could well be facing increased instability and opportunities for extremists for the foreseeable future. Indeed, according to one study, "hosting refugees from neighboring states significantly increases the risk of armed conflict."[19] Refugee camps provide militant groups with recruits and supplies, and refugee flows include within them fighters, weapons, and radical

ideologies. In the case of Syria, these researchers found, refugee influxes to Lebanon raise its risk of civil war by 53.88 percent, and raise Jordan's conflict risk by 53.51 percent.[20]

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DOWNWARD SPIRAL

There is no question that the ongoing, deeply sectarian proxy war in Syria will undermine regional stability, and do so in ways that are both predictable and unexpected. But even before the current conflict became as severe as it is today, it was possible to envision the general—negative—direction of regional trends. As the NIC put it:

> Chronic instability will be a feature of the region because of the growing weakness of the state and the rise of sectarianism, Islam, and tribalism. The challenge will be particularly acute in states such as Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Syria where sectarian tensions were often simmering below the surface as autocratic regimes co-opted minority groups and imposed harsh measures to keep ethnic rivalries in check. In [the] event of a more fragmented Iraq or Syria, a Kurdistan would not be inconceivable. Having split up before, Yemen is likely to be a security concern with weak central government, poverty, unemployment [and] with a young population that will go from 28 million today to 50 million in 2025. Bahrain could also become a cockpit for growing Sunni-Shia rivalry, which could be destabilizing for the Gulf region.[21]

That assessment has, sadly, proven all too prescient. ■

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THE STRATEGIC LOGIC OF IRAN'S NUCLEAR DRIVE

EMANUELE OTTOLENGHI

It would be fair to say that history has not been kind to Iran. The gap between its glorious imperial past and its present status as an isolated and vilified power has only widened in the decades since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Iran's grievances have been compounded by its Shi'a system of Islamic governance, which chafes at being denied its rightful place in Islamic history. The doctrinaire founders and leaders of the Islamic Republic view themselves not just as repositories of the righteous form of Islamic governance, but also as the custodians of a political order that by Islamic standards should guide other Muslim societies.

This combination of historical grievances and religious competition goes a long way toward explaining tensions between Iran and its Sunni Arab neighbors. After all, the centuries-old rivalry between Arabia and Persia predated Persia's embrace of Shi'ism in the sixteenth century. But, in and of itself, it would not be enough to trigger a radical escalation of the competition between regional powers—were it not for the revolutionary nature of Iran's regime. The Islamic Republic is not just the latest expression of historical ambitions and theological disputation. It is also a revisionist regime driven by an ideology that aspires to alter not just the fabric of its own society, but the entire international order, beginning from its own region.

REVOLUTIONARY ZEAL

Much of Iran's foreign policy can be explained as an attempt to fill the colossal gap between what Iran sees as its own rightful place in history, and how history has actually turned out. Iranians have a keen sense of their civilization and their past glory—a past that harkens back to before the advent of Islam. Persians can look back to millennia of cultural, scientific, literary achievements, to say nothing of imperial conquest and political sophistication. This glorious past, they believe, commands a respect that for too long has been denied to Iran—and much of Iran's ambition to play a hegemonic role in the Middle East no doubt emerges from that sense of historically nurtured grievance. Iran, in other words, would aspire to shape the future of the region in its own image even if it was still ruled by the Pahlavi dynasty.

But it is the Islamic component of Iran's ideology that drives Iran's revisionist ambitions in the most explosive way. Iran's revolutionary ideology postulates that the Islamic Republic exists as a tool, in scholar Ray Takeyh's words, for "the realization of God's will on earth."[1] In this formulation, Iran's Supreme leader is "God's shadow on earth" and, as such, his word is final on what constitutes the realization of divine will on earth. Thus, opposing the will of the current Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, on the nuclear issue—which he has repeatedly endorsed—is equivalent to opposing God.

What, then, are the goals that God supposedly bestowed on Iran, which nuclear weapons would serve? Iranian leaders are convinced that their country must become the beacon of Islam and reassert Shi'a dominance over the Sunni world. The Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini himself explained that, "we shall export our revolution to the whole world. Until the cry, 'There is no God but God' resounds over the whole world. There will be struggle."[2]

Khomeini's worldview was profoundly anti-Western, markedly post-colonialist, doggedly "third-world-ist" and notionally Marxist in foreign policy, though not necessarily in economic terms. And much of his urge

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to reshape the world in his own radical image remains with his epigones. The Islamic Republic is thus bent on changing the world in its own image and ensuring that America, with its despised cultural influence and its reviled foreign policy, can be cut down to size. Iran wishes to assault America's role in the world, and gradually substitute it with an alternative—led by Iran. No tool is precluded to the achievement of this goal—over the decades, Iran has pursued its ambitions with diplomacy and violence alike—politely when possible, violently when necessary. Sooner or later, any revolutionary power aims to export its revolution, both as an instrument of radical change and as a tool to establish its hegemonic role. As a result, the revolutionary power sooner or later will find itself at war with its neighbors or other regional and global powers that see themselves as guarantors or beneficiaries of the *status quo*. In the case of Iran, the objective is to export Khomeini's revolutionary vision. Such acts will sooner or later set Iran on a collision course and drag the Islamic Republic into conflict wherever Iran sees fertile territory for intruding its vision. If that were to happen under a nuclear umbrella, Iran would be able to act with far more impunity than it can at present.

Iran would use its acquired nuclear capability as a force-multiplier in order to project its power across the region and beyond in unprecedented ways in pursuit of its imperial and revolutionary ambitions.

Iran's ambitions to elevate itself to the role of uncontested regional power, beacon of Islam, and bulwark of resistance against what the regime labels as "Western arrogance" have been largely stymied by three decades of sanctions, war, and containment. But Iran remains determined to tilt the balance in its favor—and the relentless drive toward nuclear weapons serves the purpose of giving Iran that kind of strategic edge. Iran's ideological push toward the bomb rests on an explosive combination of the divine and subversive—a recipe that makes Iran a country constantly searching for a new regional *status quo*. The new world that Iran seeks to create will be dominated by Tehran. It will be characterized by fierce competition with the U.S. for hegemony over the Gulf and by efforts to cement alliances to confront Iran's ideological antagonists: America and Israel firstly, and then Saudi Arabia and the Sunni monarchies of the Persian Gulf. Iran would use its acquired nuclear capability as a force-multiplier in order to project its power across the region and beyond in unprecedented ways in pursuit of its imperial and revolutionary ambitions.

DIPLOMACY AND THE BOMB

Over the past decade, Western diplomats have engaged in protracted negotiations with the Islamic Republic of Iran over its nuclear program. Though a diplomatic deal has proven elusive, Western policymakers remain adamant that an agreement is in fact possible. Much of their optimism is driven by a willingness to test the proposition, put forward by their Iranian counterparts, that Iran does not seek nuclear weapons on religious grounds. Some also tend to downplay the country's radical history, because, they assume, Iran's misdeeds are the offshoots of a bygone era—the revolutionary convulsions of a regime that has since settled into the region and only wishes to be recognized. This optimism is misplaced, however, because Iran remains, in both rhetoric and action, a revolutionary power.

What Western diplomats all too often fail to understand is that Iran is not putting forward its nuclear achievements as a negotiating chip in some sort of a "grand bargain" with the West that would serve as the prelude to accommodation and coexistence. Nor is Iran pursuing a nuclear option for purely defensive purposes. Iran does not simply aspire to obtain weapons that will deter enemies and guarantee its survival. Rather, Iran is seeking instruments of coercion and intimidation to help advance its ideological agenda. Iran, then, is less likely to drop nuclear weapons on the heads of its enemies, and more likely to use them as a way of expanding and consolidating its influence.

Beyond conflict and confrontation, the enhanced regional status as a nuclear power would confer Iran a place at any negotiating table dealing with regional problems—from the Middle East peace process to Iraq, from Afghanistan to Syria. Equally, the prestige acquired from successfully resisting Western pressure while cracking the complex scientific algorithm of the atom's secret would elevate Iran to heroic status among emerging countries and galvanize its push to fundamentally alter the international legal order that emerged at the end of World War II.

EYES WIDE OPEN

Iran's march toward nuclear weapons is not necessarily the end of the world. Iran's economy is still heavily battered by three decades of war, sanctions, and ideological incompetence. Iran's infrastructure is obsolete, and its ability to project power cannot be compared to a Cold War-era Soviet Union, even if it had nuclear weapons. It is this reassuring logic that informs the argument for containment over prevention. After all, such heavy burdens will remain in place. In fact, once Iran goes nuclear, they could weigh more heavily on Iran as a result of a tightening of sanctions—to prevent even a nuclear Iran from fulfilling its global ambitions.

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Nevertheless, even if a comparison with present-day Russia may be more suitable in terms of the scope and level of threat, it is useful to remember that even a diminished Russia can count on relative impunity in the international arena thanks to its nuclear capability. Much like today, as Russia eats away at Ukraine without serious consequences and with little cost (at least so far), Iran will be able to consolidate its hold over Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, and expand its influence or undermine its adversaries elsewhere, once it crosses the nuclear Rubicon.

Iran will be able to consolidate its hold over Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, and expand its influence or undermine its adversaries elsewhere, once it crosses the nuclear Rubicon.

Whatever else may be true about the limits of Iranian power, the fragility of its economy, the solidity of its regime, and its propensity to engage in adventurous behavior, once Iran crosses the nuclear weapons' threshold, it raises the risk and the price of escalation in response to its actions.

A nuclear umbrella deters enemies from taking steps they would otherwise contemplate to contain, neutralize and reverse hostile action. Russia would undoubtedly pay heavier penalties today were it not for its vast nuclear arsenal. The same will be true in the Middle East under Iran's soon-to-be acquired nuclear weapons capability. In fact, Iran's leaders appear to be counting on just such a development. ■

ENDNOTES

1 Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic* (New York: MacMillan, 2008), 35.

2 As cited in Robin Wright, *The Last Great Revolution* (New York, Vintage Books, 2001), 66.

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