

A Nuclear Iran: The Spur to a Regional Arms Race?

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One of the main arguments for stopping Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, beyond the direct danger of its using them or transferring them to terrorist elements, is that Iran's possession of a nuclear military capability will undermine the nuclear nonproliferation regime and spur the nuclearization of other states in the Middle East. The Obama administration has voiced this argument to justify its opposition to Iran's nuclear program.¹ Other analysts, however, contend that Iran's development of a nuclear bomb will not lead to a regional arms race,² as Iran's three chief rivals in the region, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt, lack the economic and technological capabilities and the necessary motivation to develop nuclear weapons. This argument, which lessens the gravity of the Iranian threat to the region, implies that statements by senior Saudi, Turkish, and Egyptian officials, whereby an Iranian bomb would propel their governments to achieve a balance of power among the states, should be ignored.

In our assessment, the conclusion that a nuclear Iran would not lead to an arms race is based on an inadequate analysis of the relevant countries and their motivation and ability to acquire nuclear weapons once Iran has obtained them. This flawed analysis results from an approach suited to the old Middle East – before Iran acquired a nuclear bomb, before the rise of Sunni political Islam as a result of the upheaval in the Arab world, and before the United States lost some of its regional influence, a trend that will only intensify if Iran succeeds in acquiring military nuclear capabilities in spite of the US policy of prevention.

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An examination of Middle East states that are likely to develop a military nuclear program requires a look at four key factors: motivation and strategic rationale; the states' ability to bear the economic burden of a military nuclear program; the infrastructure and technological capability required for developing nuclear weapons; and the political constraints that would influence and perhaps dissuade them from acquiring military nuclear weapons – mainly relations with the United States and commitments to the nonproliferation regime. A look at these four factors with respect to three regional powers reveals that the possibility of a regional arms race is not low at all.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's leaders state openly and explicitly that a nuclear Iran will force them to act to maintain the balance of power. Turki al-Faisal, who served as head of Saudi intelligence and as Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Washington, claimed that "the Gulf states must acquire nuclear power if the efforts fail to persuade Iran to give up its nuclear program."³ Dennis Ross, President Obama's former envoy to the Middle East, even quoted the threat he heard from the Saudi king during a meeting in April 2009: "If they get nuclear weapons, we will get nuclear weapons."⁴ Documents published by WikiLeaks reinforce this statement.

Strategic Rationale

Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran are based on rivalry and hatred that has existed for many years between the Shiites and the Sunnis and between the Arabs and the Persians. The suppression by the Saudi Wahhabi regime of the Shiite minority, which lives in the country's eastern oil region, is emblematic of relations between the Wahhabi stream of Islam and the Shiites.

This religious and ideological rivalry compounds the conflict of interests between the two states, which seek to expand their influence in the region and export their respective ideologies: the Shiite revolution for Iran, and Wahhabism for Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Iran has long threatened Arab aspirations to expand Arab control in the Middle East and south central Asia. Therefore, Saudi Arabia, which aspires to lead the Sunni Arab bloc, sees Shiite Iran as a major threat to its interests in the region. Iran's entry into the nuclear club will force the Saudi royal house to attain a strategic balance of power. Indeed, Saudi officials have

of late deviated from former practice and begun to work overtly to foil the Iranian nuclear program by pressuring Western countries to act against Iran and by increasing their oil output as an alternative to Iranian oil, in order to tighten the sanctions on Tehran.

Economics and Resources

Saudi Arabia is a regional and even world economic and financial power. It is the largest oil exporter in the world, it is third in the world in foreign currency reserves, and it has the largest economy of the Arab states. In April 2010, the Saudi king ordered establishment of a “nuclear city” at a cost of over \$100 billion. The declared goal of the project is to examine all aspects of nuclear development.⁵ The scope of this project illustrates that the economy of oil-rich Saudi Arabia would enable it to build a nuclear program if it wished. Furthermore, the resources that the royal house could allocate for such a venture, if deemed necessary, could greatly shorten the process of advancing the project.

Technological Infrastructure

Saudi Arabia’s capabilities in the nuclear realm are not clear, and there are some hints that Saudi Arabia has attempted to develop an independent nuclear program for military purposes. After his defection to the United States, for example, the first secretary of the Saudi Arabian mission to the United Nations claimed that in the early 1970s, Saudi Arabia established a military nuclear program.⁶ While Saudi Arabia cooperates with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it is not a signatory to the Additional Protocol of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which mandates rigorous and frequent testing of non-nuclear states or states whose nuclear activity is limited. In addition, Saudi Arabia has never relinquished its right to enrich uranium independently.

However, Saudi Arabia also has alternatives to its own technological capabilities. If the Saudi regime decides to achieve military nuclear capability, it can simply purchase it. The royal house’s close connections with the regime in Pakistan have prompted a number of reports on Saudi involvement in funding Pakistan’s nuclear program. Saudi Arabia can take advantage of these connections in order to purchase ready-made weapons.⁷ Aharon Zeevi Farkash, former head of IDF Military Intelligence, addressed this possibility already in 2003 in the Knesset’s Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee: “The Saudis are

conducting negotiations with Pakistan over buying nuclear warheads for their surface-to-surface missiles...They have decided that they will tip the balance of fear in light of Iran's armament, and intend to station the Pakistani warheads on Saudi soil."⁸ That same year, the *Guardian* reported on an official Saudi document showing that the kingdom was considering acquiring nuclear weapons in order to deter threats from Iran.⁹ The document likewise revealed a fear of dependence on the US nuclear umbrella. There are also reports that the issue arose in meetings between Saudi and Pakistani leaders.¹⁰ Those who claim that Iranian nuclear weapons will not bring about an arms race do not address these considerations with the requisite seriousness.

In the early 1990s, unbeknownst to the United States, Saudi Arabia purchased 36 CSS2 surface-to-surface missiles from China, which are capable of carrying nuclear warheads up to 3,000 kilometers. Just as it purchased these missiles, Saudi Arabia can also acquire nuclear technologies in any of three ways: purchase of operational nuclear weapons; purchase of technological support that would significantly reduce the time required to produce a bomb; or purchase of services by the Pakistani military, which would deploy nuclear weapons in the kingdom for purposes of deterrence. Since Pakistan is a Muslim country, such a move would help deflect criticism leveled at the regime for its dependence on US support and criticism of the international pressure, and in turn could lead to a Saudi violation of the NPT.

Political Constraints

Iranian military nuclear capability would pose a dilemma for Saudi Arabia, namely, reconciling the Saudi interest in maintaining ties with Washington with the interest in maintaining a strategic balance of power with Tehran. The document revealed by the *Guardian* shows that the Saudis fear dependence on decisions by the White House. Indeed, a widely accepted theory assumes that extended deterrence by means of a third party significantly harms threat credibility.¹¹ Furthermore, any attempt to adopt models of extended deterrence for the Middle East will encounter two main problems: the guarantees lack credibility among the recipient countries, and there is a limited willingness on the part of the providers of the guarantees to realize the threat.¹²

In theory, two models of extended deterrence are relevant to the Saudi case: a bilateral US commitment to the Saudi regime and the

establishment of a Gulf security system. However, various analysts point out that a regional system is not relevant in the Saudi case because of the need for increased integration among Gulf states; at the same time, it is difficult to see how the bilateral model can offer a credible guarantee.¹³ There is very little willingness on the part of the American people to go to war in order to defend an ally. US policy, with its declared focus on East Asia rather than the Middle East, also dilutes the guarantees that the United States can provide to the Saudi regime. American policy in connection with the so-called “Arab Spring,” and in particular, President Obama’s abandonment of Mubarak and Ben Ali and their pro-Western regimes, has further undermined the reliability of the American umbrella in Riyadh’s eyes. In addition, there is much opposition in Saudi society to the regime’s willingness to rely on Western forces when it comes to maintaining Saudi interests. These shortcomings indicate that even if Washington proposes expanding its bilateral nuclear umbrella, Riyadh is liable to limit its dependence on the United States. Unlike various analysts who propose an American umbrella as a solution to an Iranian nuclear bomb, Riyadh does not consider an American umbrella to be reliable.

An international failure to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear bomb is likely to reduce American opposition to possession of nuclear weapons by US allies in the region. This does not mean that the United States will seek to promote such a move, but US opposition is likely to diminish, as is the price that the Saudi regime will be asked to pay for its policy. In any case, in the past Saudi Arabia has proven its determination to promote its interests even in the face of US pressure, for example toward operations against global terror, in its ties with China, and in suppressing the uprising in Bahrain. The Saudi regime reportedly made clear in private talks with US and British officials that it was prepared to harness all its economic, diplomatic, and security resources for an international campaign to confront Iranian regional aspirations, and if the campaign failed, for an independent effort.¹⁴ Given the importance that the Saudis attribute to their regional interests, it

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would appear that the Western threat to Saudi Arabia is secondary in the kingdom's considerations.

If Iran succeeds in developing nuclear weapons, even though it is a party to the NPT, Riyadh is likely to consider the treaty superfluous. If Iran obtains nuclear weapons in spite of the international campaign against it, Saudi Arabia will contend that it has the right to maintain its security and a balance of power with Tehran and might no longer consider itself committed to the NPT. Saudi Arabia's sense of its legitimate right to purchase military nuclear capability would increase, and international deterrence of violations of the nonproliferation regime would ebb. Moreover, frustration with the international community and the erosion of the motivation and ability of Western states, headed by the United States, to stop such a move, are likely to enhance the Saudi drive to a nuclear weapon.¹⁵

Overall, then, the attempts to minimize the proliferation that might occur in connection with an Iranian military nuclear capability are not persuasive. There is no satisfactory explanation why the Saudis would act differently and against their declared interests in a scenario in which they face such a significant threat, precisely when the political constraints are of themselves shrinking: the American leverage for preventing regional proliferation of weapons is weaker, and the future of a weakened nonproliferation regime hangs in the balance. Saudi Arabia also has the resources to purchase the technology or the nuclear weapons themselves within a short time. Therefore, it appears that for the Saudis, a nuclear weapon in Tehran's hands would realize the scenario described by Mitchell Reiss, who warns that the nonproliferation regime in the Middle East might collapse as a result of a single state arming itself.¹⁶

Turkey

Strategic Rationale

Turkey, a rising state whose leadership openly aims to restore Turkey to a regional power with global influence, will likely be a principal rival of Iran for leadership, hegemony, and influence in the Middle East and the entire Muslim world. Seeking to disseminate the "Turkish model" as a framework that allows the "proper integration" of Western values and the values of moderate Islam, Turkey proposes a model of political Islam that brings East and West closer, thereby strengthening both its own stability and the stability of the region. Turkey's aspiration challenges the Iranian

drive to disseminate the “Shiite revolutionary model,” which advocates the undermining of existing regimes in most Middle East states because of their secular or Sunni character; Iranian support for the rule of clerics; and opposition to Western values and influence in the Middle East. At a time when the so-called “Arab Spring” has demonstrated the failure of the existing models in the Middle East and undermined attitudes toward the West and its values, competition over which ideology will be the dominant successor has become more acute than in the past. Compounding this ideological clash are the rivalry between Sunna (Turkey) and Shia (Iran), and the conflict of interests between the states regarding energy markets and trade routes in the Middle East and the Caspian Sea basin. Differing attitudes toward the slaughter by Bashar Assad in Syria, and toward the governments of Iraq, Armenia, and Azerbaijan embody other conflicts of interests that fuel the rivalry between the two regional powers.

An Iranian nuclear bomb will likely both lead to Iranian strategic superiority and harm Turkish interests in the region. Predictably, therefore, Turkish government officials have publicly opposed the Iranian military nuclear program.¹⁷ In December 2010 the Turkish Foreign Minister underscored that if Iran withdrew from its international commitments as set out in the NPT, Turkey would oppose it even before the United States would.¹⁸ In private, some Turkish officials even threatened that Iranian nuclear weapons would force Turkey to launch its own military nuclear program: in 2009, a Turkish Foreign Ministry official claimed that once Iran acquires nuclear weapons, Turkey will be forced to arm itself with a nuclear bomb.¹⁹ Although this was not an official statement by the Turkish government, it is consistent with the results of a survey by a Turkish research institute in late March 2012, which revealed that 54 percent of Turks believe that if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, Turkey must develop them as well, rather than relying on NATO.²⁰ This sense in the government and on the Turkish “street” indicates that Iran’s possession of nuclear weapons would force Turkey to consider developing its own capabilities.

Economics and Resources

The Turkish economy can undoubtedly shoulder the costs of a nuclear program, as have states in a much worse economic situation, such as Pakistan, North Korea, and Iraq. Turkey’s economy is among the twenty strongest in the world, and the largest in the Middle East. It is expected

to continue to grow because of its large work force, which is cheap and young, relative to Europe, and because of its central location between Asia and Europe.²¹

Technological Infrastructure

While cooperation between NATO and the Turkish military has provided Turkey with nuclear weapons experience relating to storage, equipment, and military training, Turkey lacks nuclear experience and the necessary technological infrastructures to develop its own nuclear program. It launched a civilian nuclear program in 2010 after signing an agreement with Russia to construct a nuclear reactor in southern Turkey. Today the Turkish government is conducting negotiations to build its second nuclear reactor to produce electricity. After negotiations with South Korea and Japan were unsuccessful, the Turkish Minister of Energy announced at the April 2012 G-20 summit in Seoul that a Canadian company is interested in the project.²² He added that Turkey is planning to promote nuclear energy cooperation with China. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has declared that Turkey will invest over \$100 billion in the coming decade to build nuclear reactors (Turkey's GNP is over \$1 trillion) in order to reduce the import of energy from Iran and Russia.

In recent years Turkey has also strengthened its ties with Pakistan. The two Islamic states maintained good relations when the Turkish army was the main political force in the country. Erdoğan's visit to Pakistan last month and the significant increase in trade between the countries in the past five years²³ are an indication of these close ties between Ankara and Islamabad, which could be used by Turkey if it seeks to take advantage of Pakistani knowhow or weapons in order to convert its civilian nuclear program into a military program.

Political Constraints

The Turkish political dilemma regarding a nuclear program will mainly involve the question of relations with NATO in general and the United States in particular. According to assessments, there are some ninety US-NATO nuclear weapons stored today in Turkey.²⁴ Many claim that if the Turkish government proves to have a military nuclear program, Turkey will be deprived of this privilege. Therefore, Turkey will seek to avoid harming its relations with NATO, and especially the United States, and will choose not to develop a military nuclear program.²⁵ The Turkish

response will be closer relations with NATO and increasing the US commitment to the security of Turkish interests.²⁶

However, development of independent Turkish nuclear capabilities would reduce the Turkish government's dependence on US policy in the region and prevent significant damage to Turkey's regional prestige if the US government decided to withdraw its weapons from the country. Such a decision is not expected to be made before Iran's military nuclearization. Nonetheless, a heated debate is underway on this issue in both Washington and Istanbul,²⁷ and there is liable to be a reversal in certain scenarios, especially if policy differences between Washington and Ankara are sharpened. Turkey is highly suspicious of the Western and NATO commitment; it has even criticized NATO's attitude to Turkish interests a number of times in the context of deployment of defensive systems for Turkey and Kurdish terrorist activity in the country. In a public opinion poll, only 8 percent claimed that NATO could be depended on if Iran acquired nuclear weapons. As in the Saudi case, suspicions among Turkey's decision makers, academics, military leaders, and the civilian populations are liable to constitute a significant obstacle to a US attempt to implement extended deterrence.

However, Turkey is a signatory to the NPT and the Additional Protocol. Its relations with the United States and Europe and its policy supporting the use of soft power will also be major considerations for the Turkish government when it confronts an Iranian nuclear bomb. In other words, this constraint will have greater significance in Turkey's case than in Saudi Arabia's, and any decision regarding nuclear ambitions will be shaped by the relationship between Turkey and the West, and in particular, the United States; by the deterrent power of the nonproliferation regime on the "day after" the Iranian bomb; and by Turkey's perception of its interests in the region.

Even so, in certain scenarios the Turkish aspiration to independence and regional hegemony would be a significant impetus to develop nuclear capabilities, while taking controlled risks. The competition with Iran for hegemony and influence in the Middle

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East and the Muslim world, Turkey's impressive economic capabilities, its alienation from Europe, and its suspicion toward Washington's policy, along with the loss of the rationale of cooperation with NATO vs. the Soviet Union, will allow Turkey to overcome its lack of a nuclear infrastructure with relative ease and consider the strategic benefit of building a nuclear force against its adversary, Tehran.

Egypt

In 2010, the Egyptian foreign minister warned that a nuclear bomb would drag the Middle East into an arms race, and that Egypt would like to prevent Iran "from forcing the Arabs to engage in a [nuclear arms] race with it."²⁸

The following analysis of the Egyptian case is based primarily on the Egyptian approach during the old regime, given that the military is still a central player in Egypt's strategic considerations and its national defense policy, and the new regime has not yet stabilized and formulated an updated policy on the issue. The Egyptian government is expected to deal mainly with domestic challenges, not foreign challenges. However, the caustic speech by Egyptian President Morsi at the Non-Aligned Movement meeting in Tehran, and the clarification by his spokesman that Egypt does not intend to renew ties with Iran, which were cut in 1979,²⁹ indicate that relations between Cairo and Tehran cannot be expected to warm significantly in the near future, in spite of Egyptian declarations calling for renewed relations with Tehran. When required to confront the Iranian issue, the new regime will likely base its position on strategic assessments deeply ingrained in Egypt from past decades.

Strategic Rationale

In 1992, the Egyptian Defense Minister claimed that the Iranian nuclear threat was worse than the threat from Israel. In 2010, according to WikiLeaks, Egyptian Deputy Defense Minister Mohamed al-Assar stated that "Egypt views Iran as a threat to the region."³⁰ Why did Egypt under Mubarak consider the Iranian nuclear program to be a serious strategic threat? As in the Saudi and Turkish cases, the answer to this question involves a mix of diplomatic-political and ideological-historical considerations. First, the interests of Egypt, which considers itself a leading Sunni Arab country with regional influence, have not infrequently clashed with the interests of Shiite Iran, with its own

aspirations to regional hegemony. Like Saudi Arabia and Turkey, Egypt fears that nuclear weapons in Tehran's possession would mean the loss of its leadership position within the Arab world, the loss of seniority within the Muslim world, and a risk to Egyptian interests in the Middle East. The competition for regional hegemony between Egypt and Iran has resulted in a bad relationship between the two, to put it mildly.

Egypt was troubled not only by Iranian influence in the Arab world, but even more so by Iran's influence near Egypt's borders. In 2009, Abu al-Gheit, Mubarak's Foreign Minister, declared publicly that Egypt was disturbed by Iran's increased influence in the region.³¹ For this reason, Egypt under Mubarak worked against Hizbollah and Hamas, which were seen as subversive Iranian proxies in a region under Egyptian influence, and even in Egypt itself. Likewise since the fall of the Mubarak regime, Egypt has not freed itself of its suspicions toward organizations financed and directed by Iran.

The rise of radical Islam after Mubarak's fall is not expected to improve relations between the two countries. On the contrary: the increased political power of the radical Islamic parties is expected to strengthen religious identity in Sunni Egypt. The hard line taken by some representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt against Tehran is a sign of this trend.³² Therefore, the continued strengthening of religious identity in Egypt will further highlight the gaps between the Sunni character of the Egyptian government and Iranian ambitions to export the Shiite revolution. When asked in an interview about his position on the Iranian nuclear program, Egypt's President responded that the problem can be solved, and not through war.³³ In other words, Egypt under Morsi is still opposed to the Iranian nuclear program. Morsi's willingness to speak out publicly against Iranian policy in Syria on the podium in Tehran last month could be a sign of things to come in relations between Cairo and Tehran.

Economics and Resources

If Egypt's development of a military nuclear program depended on its economic situation, the prospects would seemingly be slim. Egypt's economy has experienced an ongoing crisis since the change in government, which has caused foreign investors to flee and led to large government expenditures. Unemployment in Egypt is currently over 25 percent (in a country in which 60 percent of the citizens are under the

age of 30), the tourism industry has been severely damaged by the events in the country, the national debt has skyrocketed, and foreign currency reserves are low.³⁴ Nonetheless, it was recently reported that President Morsi, in meetings with the Egyptian community in China, announced³⁵ his intention to revive the plan to build nuclear reactors in Egypt and even asked for Chinese assistance in building four reactors by 2025.³⁶ Indeed, in 2006 the Muslim Brotherhood spokesman stated that the Egyptian people are prepared to die of hunger in order to obtain nuclear weapons.³⁷ North Korea has proven that a regime that adheres to its goal and impoverishes an entire population can obtain nuclear weapons even if international sanctions are imposed on it.

Technological Infrastructure

The Egyptian nuclear program was launched in 1954 after President Gamal Abdel Nasser signed a cooperation agreement with the Soviet Union to build a number of reactors in the country. During the 1960s, Nasser invested significant resources in developing nuclear technological knowhow and attempted to build advanced infrastructures for a nuclear industry. Over these years, Egypt also developed ballistic capabilities for carrying weapons.

However, after its defeat in the 1967 Six Day War, Egypt began to promote a policy of a Middle East free of nuclear weapons, a policy that gained full expression in the early 1980s and continues to this day. As part of this policy, Egypt signed the NPT and reduced its investment in its existing infrastructures.³⁸ Anwar Sadat sought to promote a limited civilian nuclear program together with his new allies, the Americans, but he encountered many obstacles. Mubarak also failed to advance the Egyptian nuclear program, and after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, he froze the program entirely. As a result, advisors and nuclear experts left Egypt for Iraq and Canada. In 2004, the IAEA declared that after examining the nuclear research in Egypt, it

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concluded that Egypt had not carried out nuclear testing. In 2006, the Mubarak government announced that it wished to revive the nuclear program for peaceful purposes. However, the program did not progress,

in spite of declarations to that effect by Mubarak's son Gamal from the podium at the party conference.³⁹ Nevertheless, in 2007, Jordan's King Abdullah claimed that he feared a nuclear Iran would cause Egypt to develop its nuclear program.⁴⁰

Of the three states discussed here, Egypt has the most advanced infrastructure for a civilian and military nuclear program. Egypt today has two research nuclear reactors and possesses considerable nuclear knowledge and experience. Experts believe that it is one of the most advanced countries in the region in its nuclear knowledge. For this reason, already a decade ago it was argued that "if Egypt were to make the political decision to go nuclear, it would find the means of overcoming these obstacles [technological and economic], as other proliferators have done."⁴¹ Therefore, if Morsi does in fact revive the Egyptian nuclear program, as he declared he would last month, he will find a better infrastructure than in Saudi Arabia or Turkey.

Political Constraints

The changes Egypt is currently undergoing are liable to undermine the three factors that have prevented it from choosing the nuclear path thus far: relations with the United States, the peace treaty with Israel, and its power in the region. First, US pressure since the signing of the Camp David accords has served as an impetus for the Egyptian regime to abandon its nuclear ambitions. Leaders of the protest in Egypt opposed and continue to oppose not only the Mubarak regime, but also its allies and its pro-American policy. The negative attitude of the Egyptian "street" and the Islamist elites toward Washington is reflected in pictures of the American flag burned in Cairo and harsh statements by Egyptian members of parliament on the regime's relationship with Washington. A poll conducted in Egypt in late March 2012 revealed that 56 percent of the Egyptian public opposes improved relations with the United States.⁴² The deterioration in bilateral relations was reflected in the temporary freeze on US aid to Egypt, and the United States fears that a continued deterioration in relations will lead to reduced US influence over Egyptian foreign policy. Limited US influence will harm the ability of the United States to prevent Egypt from engaging in an arms race if its Iranian adversary achieves superiority in this area.

Second, the rise of radical Islam has also damaged Egypt's relations with Israel, and those who advocate annulling the Egyptian-Israeli peace

treaty are gaining power. For decades, Egypt has coped with the strategic assumption that Israel possesses nuclear capabilities. However, the peace treaty and the responsible behavior of Israel, which maintains a non-threatening policy of ambiguity, allowed Egypt to avoid a nuclear arms race. If the peace treaty is annulled, or even if it is watered down and there is renewed hostility and suspicion between Cairo and Jerusalem, this could encourage the Egyptian government to work to acquire military nuclear capabilities in order to maintain a balance of power with Israel and with Iran, Egypt's main rivals in the region.

Ultimately, one of the main factors in Egyptian policy under the Mubarak regime was the fear of risks that would threaten Egypt's economy and its regional power. However, the events of the past year and a half have already led to serious damage to Egypt's economy, status, and power in the region. Analysts who claim that Egypt will not abandon its current nuclear policy argue that in light of this difficult situation, Egypt will not incur further risks by deciding to develop military nuclear weapons. However, it is precisely when the power of the Egyptian regime has been undermined both in Egypt and abroad, and its relations with its allies are unstable, that it is more likely than in the past to take risks because it currently has less to lose. Furthermore, military nuclear capability is likely to be seen as an element that could restore Egypt's prestige, as an Egyptian Foreign Ministry official suggested during the discussion of the need for Mubarak's nuclear initiative in 2006.⁴³ In other

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words, it is because of its weakness that Egypt is likely to see a nuclear Iran as an unprecedented threat that requires a decisive strategic move.

One expert on the history of the Egyptian nuclear program has pointed to the connection between the future of Egypt's nuclear program and the head of the government.⁴⁴ The argument reasons that just as it was mainly Mubarak's decision to adhere to the non-nuclear track that shaped Egypt's nuclear policy, the identity of Egypt's next leader will be a major factor in

shaping Egyptian policy. Therefore, although it still appears unlikely that Egypt will decide to develop nuclear capabilities for military purposes, changes in the unstable Egyptian system that undermine the current military approach guiding Egypt's decision makers are liable to increase

the likelihood that this will occur in the short term, notwithstanding Egypt's difficult economic situation.

Conclusion

Daniel Pipes has argued that public statements by Arab leaders in the Middle East must be analyzed in order to predict their policies.⁴⁵ A similar approach is reflected in the analysis presented here, leading to conclusions shared by Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton⁴⁶ on the chances of a regional nuclear arms race (table 1). Thus the clear Saudi threats of an arms race in response to the development of Iranian nuclear weapons were found to be credible, with the most likely scenario being the purchase of outside nuclear technology. The Turkish opposition to Iran's military nuclear program is consistent with the conclusion that Turkey will face a strategic dilemma, that its decision will be influenced mainly by its relations with Washington, and that there is a reasonable threat that it will become a proliferator in the short term. Egypt's vacillation shows that there is a reasonable threat that it too will become a proliferator if the current trends continue: a regime weakened internally and regionally, undermined relations between Cairo and Washington, and increased hostility between Egypt and Israel. Since the situation in Egypt is still not stable, this threat can certainly not be dismissed.

Table 1. Key Factors in Developing a Military Nuclear Program

	Saudi Arabia	Turkey	Egypt
Motivation	Very high	Medium (subject to relations with the United States)	High (vis-à-vis Israel as well as Iran)
Resources	No problem	No problem	Problem
Technology	Apparently external	Under construction	Existing
Political Constraints	Little influence	Major influence on relations with United States	Erosion of inhibiting factors
Bottom Line	Immediate threat	Probable threat, subject to the nature of relations with the United States	Today, low level of threat, but significant threat if there is an extremist Islamic regime

Those who seek to minimize the threat of an Iran with military nuclear capability are mistaken in their assessment that the nonproliferation regime in the region will likely not be undermined. It would appear that they are hostage to the old approach – antedating a nuclear Iran, the upheavals in the Arab world, the tectonic changes that have occurred in the Middle East, and the weakened regional United States stature. The United States will be further weakened if its government fails to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, in spite of its public statements.

The race could also encourage other countries that were not discussed in this article but that have taken steps toward military nuclearization in the past to arm themselves, such as Iraq, Syria, and Libya. The ramifications of Iran's military nuclearization extend beyond the Middle East, increasing the likelihood that the global nonproliferation regime will be undermined and that an unplanned, uncontrolled, and uncontrollable nuclear confrontation will take place. The gravity of a regional arms race in response to Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons makes it necessary for the relevant decision makers to devote serious attention to the issue, even if there were little likelihood of its realization. However, as indicated by this analysis, it is not at all unlikely that this scenario will take place. Therefore, those who deal with confronting the Iranian military nuclear threat must include the grave consequences of a regional arms race in their considerations.

Notes

- 1 For example, the testimony of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton before the Senate on May 20, 2009. See "Clinton: Middle East May Start Arms Race if Iran Gets Nukes," *Voice of America*, May 20, 2009.
- 2 See for example Yair Evron, "They're Not Running to Acquire Nuclear Capabilities," *Haaretz*, August 22, 2012; Steve Chapman, "The Arms Race that Won't Happen: Iran and the Phony Proliferation Scare," *Chicago Tribune*, July 8, 2012; Steven A. Cook, "Don't Fear a Nuclear Arms Race in the Middle East," *Foreign Policy*, April 2, 2012.
- 3 Ran Dagoni, "Saudi Arabia vs. Iran: We'll Use the Oil Weapon because of the Nuclear Program," *Globes*, June 22, 2012.
- 4 Chemi Shalev, "Dennis Ross: Saudi King Vowed to Obtain Nuclear Bomb after Iran," *Haaretz*, May 30, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/dennis-ross-saudi-king-vowed-to-obtain-nuclear-bomb-after-iran-1.433294>.
- 5 Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Country Profile, Saudi Arabia," <http://www.nti.org/country-profiles/saudi-arabia/nuclear/>.

- 6 Yoel Guzansky, "Nuclear Programs in the Gulf," in Uzi Rabi and Yoel Guzansky, eds., *The Gulf States: Between Iran and the West* (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2012), p. 34.
- 7 Yoel Guzansky details the nature of relations between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, including the Pakistani commitment to assist Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in confronting the uprisings in their countries in the spring of 2011. See Yoel Guzansky, "Saudi Arabia's Nuclear Options," in Emily B. Landau and Anat Kurz, eds., *Arms Control Dilemmas: Focus on the Middle East*, Memorandum 122 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, September 2012), pp. 73–90, <http://www.inss.org.il/upload/%28FILE%291346905935.pdf>.
- 8 Ibid., p. 86.
- 9 Ewen MacAskill and Ian Traynor, "Saudis Consider Nuclear Bomb," *Guardian*, September 18, 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/sep/18/nuclear.saudi-arabia>.
- 10 Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Country Profile, Saudi Arabia."
- 11 Various reserachers address the problem of extended deterrence credibility. See P. K. Huth, "Deterrence and International Conflict: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Debate," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 25-48; Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 19; Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 35.
- 12 Carlo Masala, "Extended Deterrence in the Middle East: A Fuzzy Concept that Might Work?" *Strategic Assessment* 14, no. 4 (2012): 115-22, <http://www.inss.org.il/upload/%28FILE%291329721373.pdf>.
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