



Arab Reactions to a Nuclear-Armed Iran

Tariq Khaitous

Policy Focus #94 | June 2009

Arab Reactions to a Nuclear-Armed Iran

Tariq Khaitous

Policy Focus #94 | June 2009

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

© 2009 by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Published in 2009 in the United States of America by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy,
1828 L Street NW, Suite 1050, Washington, DC 20036.

Design by Daniel Kohan, Sensical Design and Communication

Front cover: An Emirati man passes air defense weapons at the 6th International Defense Exhibition and Conference (IDEX), Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, March 16, 2003. (AP Photo/Kamran Jebreili)

Contents

About the Author	v
Acknowledgments	vii
Executive Summary	ix
Introduction	1
1. Cascade of Arms	2
2. Arab Alternatives to Going Nuclear.	10
3. What Can Arab States Do about the Iranian Nuclear Issue?	20
Conclusion: Why Arab States Should Care about Iranian Nuclear Progress	23

Illustrations

Military Expenditure in the Middle East, 1988–2007 (graph)	5
Locations of U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe, 2008 (map and table)	17

About the Author

Tariq Khaitous is a visiting fellow at The Washington Institute, focusing on Arab reactions to Iran’s nuclear program. He was most recently a postdoctoral fellow at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies in Monterey, California, where he led research on nuclear proliferation and security issues in the Middle East and North Africa. He earned his doctorate from the Academy of Versailles, University of Cergy-Pontoise, France, with his dissertation “The Paradoxes of Nuclear Proliferation since the End of the Cold War.”

Previously, Dr. Khaitous worked at UN headquarters in New York, where he was attached to the Department of Disarmament Affairs. He also worked at the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) headquarters in Paris, contributing to the preparation of briefings and reports concerning the political and socio-logical status of the Arab states.

Dr. Khaitous’s work has appeared in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, the *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, *Confluences Méditerranée* (France), and elsewhere. He has also published numerous editorials for the premier daily Moroccan newspaper, *Le Matin*, on international relations and nuclear issues.



The opinions expressed in this Policy Focus are those of the author and not necessarily those of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, its Board of Trustees, or its Board of Advisors.

Acknowledgments

MY RESEARCH WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE without the insight and support of Dr. Patrick Clawson, whose helpful comments helped greatly in honing this piece. It was a pleasure to work so closely with him during my fellowship.

The staff of The Washington Institute, in particular my editor, Paul Morro, were of invaluable assistance in bringing this publication to fruition.

I also wish to thank the many individuals who kindly agreed to be interviewed as part of this research project; and finally, I am grateful to my better half, Nell, for her unstinted moral support.

Executive Summary

ARAB REGIMES SHARE A BELIEF that Iran is using its civilian nuclear program as a pretext to develop a nuclear military capability. Since the end of the Cold War, Iran's sense of security has been in constant flux. Iran has been wary of the growing U.S. presence in the region, first with the removal of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001 and then with the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Arab countries understand Iran's security concerns and recognize that the Islamic Republic faces numerous challenges. However, with the exception of Syria, none of the Arab regimes has expressed support for Iran's nuclear ambitions.

The Arab world's relations with Iran are marked by deep mistrust following centuries of religious and political rivalry. Iran, the birthplace of Shia Islam, has competed over the leadership of Islam with Arab states, most of which are majority Sunni. Some Arab states consider Iran to be an occupying power in Arab lands: the United Arab Emirates has claimed sovereignty over the three disputed islands located at the entrance of the Persian Gulf since its independence in 1971, and Iraq has a long-standing dispute with Iran over control of the Shatt al-Arab waterway. Arab states also disapproved of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, fearing it would spread Shiism to their territories.

During the Iran-Iraq War, which lasted through most of the 1980s, all Arab states, with the exception of Syria, sided with Saddam Hussein, himself a Sunni, in order to curb the spread of Shia Islamic ideology. More recently, after the removal of the Taliban in Afghanistan and of Saddam in Iraq, Iran's influence in the region has increased considerably at the expense of major Arab states like Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In the Arab view, an emboldened Tehran has become more involved in Arab domestic affairs in Iraq, the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, and Syria. This shift has led Sunni Arab governments to fear a loss of both legitimacy in their own countries and—more broadly—political influence in the region. In their view, Iran's strategy appears to be linked to the regime's intent to pursue the regional hegemony that it proclaimed after

the Islamic Revolution and the establishment of the theocratic republic in 1979.

Given Arab concerns over Iran's power in the region, this paper poses an obvious question: if Iran succeeds in becoming a military nuclear power, transparently or opaquely, how would the Arab regimes react?

A nuclear-armed Iran would lead to a cascade of conventional arms buildup in the Middle East, a trend that has already begun. Arab regimes would fear that Iran would become the most influential country in the region and, as a result, they might seek to modernize their military capabilities in order to mitigate the acceleration toward Iranian hegemony. Since 2003 and the beginning of the Iranian nuclear crisis, Arab military spending has increased to unprecedented levels. Future actions by Arab states might include attempts to diversify their military cooperation to include members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. They will probably seek support from Western powers to ensure their security and supplement the U.S. presence. The lack of military experience, the modest sizes of their respective populations, and the limited geographic size of most Arab countries near Iran mean that Gulf states will continue to take the wise step of seeking out extraregional security guarantors.

If conventional Arab military responses do not diminish Iran's sphere of influence, it is possible that Arab states would seek another counterweight. Because Arab states presently lack nuclear technology and expertise, they would have a difficult time engaging in a nuclear arms race in the near future. None of them has an advanced nuclear program that could be used for weapons purposes. Alternatively, Arab states of the region could seek shelter under a U.S. nuclear umbrella rather than go nuclear themselves. The United States has always been the guardian of security in the Persian Gulf, and it is unlikely that it would leave its Arab allies on their own. However, if the United States does not offer security guarantees, then Arab regimes might purchase nuclear weapons or develop other types of weapons of mass destruction such as chemical or biological weapons.

To avoid such escalation, Arab states should intensify their involvement in multilateral discussions with Iran. Arab states have political and diplomatic avenues to help contain the Iranian nuclear program, and these states could also use their economic leverage to exploit Iran's interest in their financial and economic markets. Iran wants to strengthen its relationships with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states to promote economic relations and avoid international isolation. GCC states could also leverage their growing economic relationship with China and Russia to bring the needed support from Beijing and Moscow regarding

the Iranian nuclear issue. The involvement of the Arab regimes might make Iran more likely to take negotiations seriously. If Arab states remain on the sidelines and Iran succeeds in acquiring a nuclear weapon, this would have major consequences for the future of the Arab world. It would serve as a tool to intimidate Arab regimes and envelop them in Tehran's sphere of influence. The Iranian regime would take a significant step forward in establishing itself as a regional power, and it would have more leverage to interfere in Arab issues. This only underscores the need for joint Arab action against Iran's nuclear threat.

Introduction

SAVE FOR SYRIA, which supports the Iranian nuclear program because of its strategic alliance with Tehran,¹ all Arab regimes have expressed their concerns regarding this issue. Arab leaders have urged Iran in several meetings to curb its nuclear ambitions and, apparently in private, have called on the West to deal more firmly with Iran's nuclear activities. Many Arab governments fear that a nuclear-armed Iran would gain influence at their expense and challenge the existing order in the region.

One of the more open official expressions of these concerns came on December 16, 2008, when Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and representatives of the six nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which includes Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), met with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany to address Iran's nuclear program for the first time.² Following these discussions, then U.S. secretary of state Condoleezza Rice declared, "All there expressed their concern about Iran's nuclear policies and its regional ambitions.... What really did come through here is that these are countries that have very deep interests in how

this issue gets resolved, and they want to continue consultations with the [permanent UN Security Council members and Germany] on how this is all going to come out."³

Arab concerns about Iran's nuclear program give rise to many questions, such as the following: If Iran succeeds in becoming a military nuclear power, transparently or opaquely, how would the Arab regimes react? What security measures would Arab regimes take to counter an Iranian nuclear bomb? Would a nuclear-armed Iran undermine the Arab leadership and tip the balance of power in the Middle East? Could nuclear weapons provide Tehran with more leverage against the United States at the expense of the Arab states? Would a nuclear-armed Iran lead to further proliferation in the region and maybe to the erosion of the non-proliferation regime? What are appropriate measures that Arab states could take to avoid such an escalation?

This study addresses these questions by exploring the different options available to Arab governments to counter a nuclear-armed Iran and the factors that would influence their decisions.

1. Ahmed al-Hawari, "Nawawi Iran...man maa...man dedd...?!" (Iran's nuclear program...who's for...who's against...?!), *Ichriniat* (Egypt), February 16, 2006. Available online (<http://20at.com/archive/1776.html>).
2. In December 2005, at a summit held in Abu Dhabi, Gulf Arab leaders considered a plan to declare the Gulf region a nuclear weapons-free zone. This was an attempt to convince Tehran to join with them and to reduce tensions over Iran's nuclear program. Amr Mousa, secretary-general of the Arab League, criticized the idea for undermining the possible establishment of a similar zone that would include Israel.
3. Global Security Newswire, "Arab States Back Pressure on Iran, Rice Says," December 17, 2008. Available online (http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20081217_2217.php).

1 | Cascade of Arms

A NUCLEAR-ARMED IRAN would significantly affect the balance of power in the Middle East, causing Arab regimes to fear that Iran would become the most influential country in the region. Therefore, it is possible that Iran's Arab neighbors would seek to modernize their military capacities in order to mitigate the acceleration toward Iranian hegemony. They could also diversify their military cooperation to include members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), including France and Turkey, to supplement the U.S. military presence in the region.

Arab Military Purchases

A common perception is that Persian Gulf Arab military purchases are largely unrelated to security threats, being instead determined by the availability of financial resources, desire for prestige, admiration for advanced weaponry, efforts to improve relations with weapons-selling countries, or corruption associated with arms sales. However accurate that view may have been in past decades, considerable evidence suggests that for many years now Gulf Arab arms procurement has taken place on a more professional level. For at least a decade, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) arms procurement has been characterized by cautious buyers demanding cost-saving measures and insisting that weapons systems meet local needs.¹ A notable example is the largest GCC arms purchase in the decade 1995–2005: the purchase by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) of sixty F-16 aircraft from the United States. The UAE engaged in tough negotiations to obtain good terms and invested substantially in training and infrastructure to make effective use of the planes once they arrived.

Defense markets now reflect the reality of several years of U.S. military engagement in the region. Almost every regional military, with the exception of “rogues” such as Syria and Iran, is somehow influenced,

trained, or supplied by the U.S. military. Formerly closed regimes such as Libya and Algeria are opening up to U.S. military engagement. The United States is building a set of counterinsurgency armies across the region at this very moment: in the Palestinian territories, in Lebanon, and most significantly in Iraq. It is providing billions of dollars in military aid and equipment grants to sustain the region's two most capable militaries, in Israel and Egypt, as well as smaller allies such as Jordan, Bahrain, and a number of North African states. Most relevant to the Iranian issue, the U.S. military feeds concepts and doctrine directly into the force development programs of the highest-spending Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait through bilateral military committees and the Gulf Security Dialogue, a U.S. initiative launched in 2006 to revive U.S.-GCC security cooperation.

More generally, GCC military purchases have corresponded very loosely with Gulf oil income, indicating that purchases are driven by more than just a surplus of funds that need to be spent. Periods of high purchases have not necessarily been periods of high oil income, and periods of low purchases have not necessarily been periods of low oil income. Instead, GCC arms purchases have tracked much more closely with threats to Gulf states: significant purchases have occurred when countries are faced with acute threats such as from Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iraq post-1991, or Iran recently, with its high-handedness and nuclear progress; purchases waned when the Iranian revolutionary threat faded, as the Iran-Iraq War dragged on, and when Iraq was weakened by the mid-1990s.² An instructive episode involved Saudi Arabia's procurements from the United States in the mid-1990s, which the former viewed as necessary even though paying for the arms required first obtaining an international loan and then renegotiating the

1. Michael Knights, *Troubled Waters: Future U.S. Security Assistance in the Persian Gulf* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2006), pp. 133–140, analyzes the changes in GCC procurement, especially regarding the UAE purchase of F-16s.
2. See *ibid.*, pp. 125–132, for an analysis of how GCC purchases in the 1990s were shaped by strategic developments rather than resource availability.

loan to stretch out the payment terms. This, in turn, exposed the kingdom to considerable negative publicity regarding its economic problems. The entire story is not consistent with the view that Saudi arms purchases are a function of oil income. In short, the crude “toys for boys” theory of GCC arms purchases is not consistent with the facts.

As a result of better-structured procurement and more appropriate use of defense resources, the GCC militaries have become more-effective forces. This fact is often missed by analysts who dismiss the GCC militaries as weak compared to those of major powers, rather than asking the more pertinent question of whether the GCC militaries are sufficient to make an important contribution to defending against the external threats GCC states are likely to face. In fact, the GCC militaries could play a major role in defense against aggressive moves by Iran.³

In recent years, while Iran has been challenging the international community with its uranium enrichment activities, Arab states’ military spending has increased to unprecedented levels. Their military budgets have increased steadily since 2003 and have surpassed the level of spending reached during the wave of arms purchases after the 1991 Gulf War. According to the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, Arab states’ military expenditure hit \$82 billion in 2008. Gulf countries in particular have boosted their conventional weaponry purchases. Even smaller Gulf states such as Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain have been upgrading their military arsenals, with purchases totaling an estimated \$300 million in 2006.⁴

In the naval sphere, the Gulf states remain focused on short-range protection of so-called exclusive economic zones and coastlines. Each Gulf state is investing in muscular and versatile offshore patrol vessels

(OPVs) with helicopter decks. Though the name suggests defensiveness, and thus seems well suited to the Gulf market, the OPV class of ships provides a lot of “bang for the buck” for these small and midsize nations, which seek to protect and patrol their large coastal sovereign zones. Well-armed, fast, modular, and built cost-effectively to meet commercial standards, OPVs of all sizes are being purchased by the Gulf states. The Baynunah-class corvettes produced by Abu Dhabi Ship Building are an example of the powerful vessels that are now being designed by regional states to fulfill regional missions. With six Baynunah-class vessels scheduled for launch by 2013, the UAE will operate the most capable combat vessels in the Gulf.

In the field of air and air defense forces, some of the wealthier regional states (particularly the UAE) have stepped forward and displayed a commitment to playing a credible role in the air defense network. In September 2008, the UAE agreed to purchase a U.S. missile defense system for \$7 billion, including the Theater High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) system.⁵ According to *Defense News*, “The proposed sale of the weapons will strengthen the effectiveness and interoperability of a potential coalition partner, reduce the dependence on U.S. forces in the region, and enhance any coalition operations the U.S. may undertake.”⁶ In December 2008, the UAE ordered its first shipment of U.S. Patriot-3 missiles. According to the clauses in the contract, “The agreement...includes technology, training, and supply of the medium-range missile system, which is part of a multi-tiered defensive shield the UAE Armed Forces is building to protect the nation from perceived threats in the region.”⁷ Kuwait has already established a Patriot-2 missile defense system and is seeking to purchase the

3. Ibid., pp. 143–155, lays out in detail the role that GCC militaries could play in realistic threat scenarios in the naval and aerial arenas within the Gulf.
4. Hassan M. Fattah, “Arab States, Wary of Iran, Add to Their Arsenals but Still Lean on the U.S.,” *New York Times*, February 23, 2007. Available online (<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/23/world/middleeast/23gulf.html>).
5. *Space Daily*, “Pentagon Proposes Sale of Missile Defense System to UAE,” September 12, 2008. Available online (http://www.spacedaily.com/reports/Pentagon_proposes_sale_of_missile_defense_system_to_UAE_999.html).
6. Agence France-Presse, “Pentagon Proposes Sale of THAAD to UAE,” *Defense News*, September 13, 2008. Available online (<http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=3722961>).
7. Reuters, “UAE Buys U.S. Missiles in \$3.3 Billion Deal: Report,” December 21, 2008. Available online (<http://armoredd.com/home/uae-buys-us-missiles-in-33-bn-deal-report/2008/12/20>).

much more advanced Patriot-3,⁸ while Qatar is in negotiations with U.S. officials to purchase the older Patriot-2 system.⁹ Both of these defense systems are able to counter ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and aircraft. In combination with strong sales of low-level air defense systems, the regional states are preparing to contribute significantly to ballistic and cruise missile and antiaircraft defense efforts.

Alongside passive defense initiatives, the region's big spenders such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE are beginning to procure long-range strike fleets, refueling capabilities, and standoff weapons that will form the cornerstone of conventional deterrence against Iran and other potential aggressors. Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil producer, has signed agreements to acquire at least seventy-two state-of-the-art fighter aircraft, after years of stagnation by the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF).

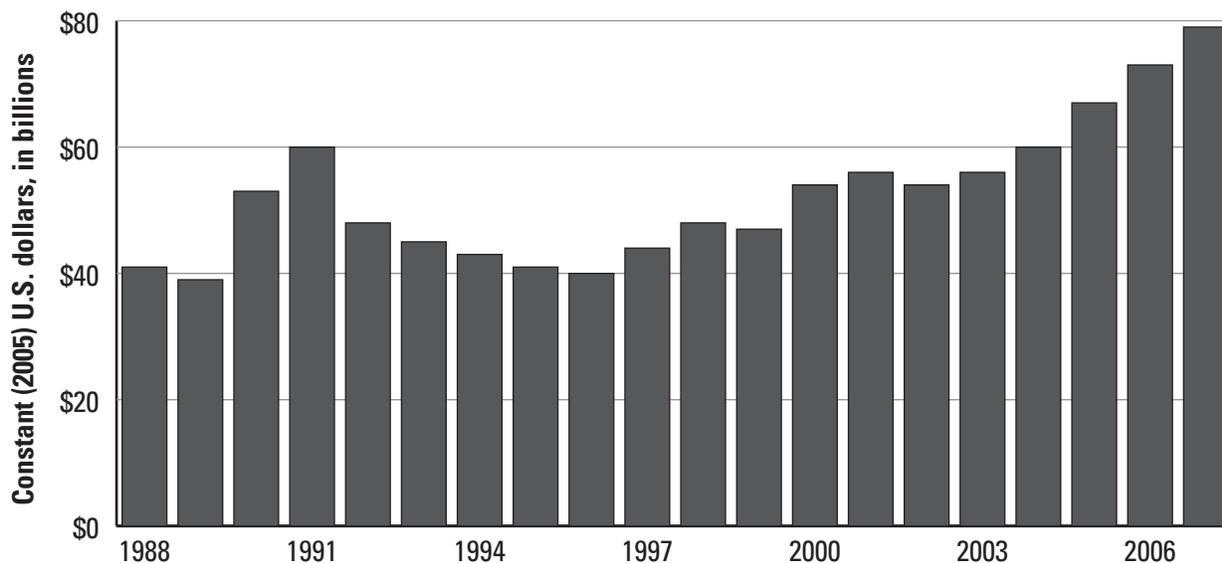
What explains these large-scale GCC weapons purchases? Certainly they were facilitated, in part, by the dramatic increases in oil revenues after 2003. However, there are many demands on those resources in light of the nations' rapidly growing populations and the high expectations for improved living standards. Vast sums are needed to modernize infrastructure and create jobs for the many educated young people counting on high-paying employment when they join the labor market. Given the character of the weapons systems purchases, the best explanation is the Iranian threat. Consider the UAE's \$7 billion THAAD purchase. There is only one threat the UAE could have had in mind, namely, Iranian attacks on U.S. interests in the region. Iran has been developing its missile program in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions.¹⁰ In the last five years, Iran test-fired several missiles, a process that has

sent warning messages to its neighbors. For the UAE, the U.S. missile defense system is a necessity to counter Iran's advanced missile capabilities. Although the THAAD purchase is the clearest example, the pattern of procurement by other GCC states indicates that the weapons are well suited to counter Iranian threats and hard to explain from other perspectives. For instance, the RSAF for years was starved for resources, at a time when senior Saudi officials made clear that they saw potential domestic troubles as their main security threat, but is now making major combat aircraft purchases that do not seem well designed to counter any threat other than that from Iran.

Despite domestic security issues, Iraqi officials are aware that they need to have a strong military not only to establish internal security but also to defend against regional threats, particularly Iran. Tehran's ambition to dominate a vulnerable Iraq after the departure of U.S. troops is clear, and Iran is already a factor of instability in Iraq. The two countries share long national borders, and Iraq's Shiite majority has strong affinity with Iran as a Shiite state. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) supports and funds Shiite militants, leading to more violence in Iraq. If Iran obtains a nuclear bomb, Iraq would be the first country to be politically dominated by the Iranian regime. As a result, Iraq has shown an interest in acquiring modern military supplies. In July 2008, the Pentagon responded by delivering a \$10.7 billion arms deal that included M1-A1 tanks built by General Dynamics.¹¹ Two months later, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the Iraqi government was seeking to buy thirty-six F-16 advanced fighter aircraft from the United States, with total planned inventory likely to reach ninety-six F-16C/D Block 50/52 aircraft by

8. Pierre Tran, "UAE to Hold Steady on Defense Spending Despite Global Turmoil," *Defense News*, February 22, 2009; available online (<http://defensenews.com/blogs/idx/2009/02/22/199>). See also *Space Daily*, "Kuwait—PAC-3 Missiles, PAC-2 Missiles to GEM-T and PATRIOT System Upgrade," December 7, 2007; available online (http://www.spacedaily.com/reports/Kuwait___PAC_3_Missiles_PAC_2_Missiles_To_GEM_T_And_PATRIOT_System_Upgrade_999.html).
9. *Xpress*, "UAE Signs Dh15.4b Military Contracts," February 25, 2009. Available online (<http://www.xpress4me.com/news/uae/abudhabi/20012080.html>).
10. UN Security Council Resolution 1835, the most recent, was adopted in September 2008. The four preceding resolutions are 1696 (July 2006), 1737 (December 2006), 1747 (March 2007), and 1803 (March 2008), with each requiring Iran to constrain the development of its sensitive technologies in support of nuclear and missile programs.
11. *Annabaa*, "Milaf attaslih: Silah Aljaw Aliraki wa Mandoumate Addifaa al-Imaratia" (Iraqi air weapons and the UAE defense system), October 6, 2008. Available online (<http://www.annabaa.org/nbanews/71/846.htm>).

Military Expenditure in the Middle East, 1988–2007



Source: SIPRI Yearbook 2008, Table 5A.1. Available online (http://www.sipri.org/contents/milap/milex/mex_graph_me.html).

the end of 2020.¹² The fledgling government is aiming to reduce dependence on U.S. airpower and to prepare for U.S. withdrawal from the country.¹³ Iraqi self-confidence has been bolstered by recent security improvements, and the country aims to prepare against any potential threats from Iran.

Along with Iraq and the Gulf states, Egypt also recently has been engaged in large-scale arms purchases. In August 2007, the United States announced its ten-year plan to increase military assistance to Egypt at a cost of \$13 billion.¹⁴ Egypt’s military acquisitions do not appear to be designed to respond to threats from an immediate neighbor, be it Israel, Sudan, or Libya. According to Agence France-Press, former U.S. secretary of state Condoleezza Rice said that the U.S. increases directed to Egypt “will help

bolster forces of moderation and support a broader strategy to counter the negative influences of al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran.”¹⁵ To be sure, Iran is only one part of this picture. And perhaps more significant for the Egyptian leadership than any direct threat from Iran is the indirect impact of Iran’s ambitions. In particular, this involves the cascading effect of Iranian actions in leading the GCC states, particularly Saudi Arabia, to bulk up their militaries. While Cairo maintains a strong relationship with Riyadh, the two governments compete for influence in the Middle East. Some in Egypt hold the view that great nations have great armies and that the sign of a great army is modern weaponry. Therefore Cairo could interpret Saudi military upgrades as an attempt to tip the balance of power between the two heavyweight

12. Iraqi order of battle expert D. J. Elliott noted that financial constraints mean the initial purchase has been reduced and stretched out to eighteen per buy instead of the thirty-six discussed previously. See D. J. Elliott, “Iraq Announces Plan to Expand the Air Force,” *Long War Journal*, November 6, 2008. Available online (http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/11/plans_for_iraqi_air.php).
 13. *Defense Industry Daily*, “Iraq Seeks F-16 Fighters,” April 2, 2009. Available online (<http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/Iraq-Seeks-F-16-Fighters-05057>).
 14. Nathan Hodge, “U.S. Plans Greater Military Assistance for Gulf States,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, August 3, 2007.
 15. *Al-Bawaba*, “Rice: New Arms Sales to Counter ‘Negative’ Influences by al-Qaeda, Hizbullah, Iran, and Syria,” July 30, 2007. Available online (<http://www.albawaba.com/en/countries/Iraq/215598>).

Arab nations. Egyptian officials could expect Saudi Arabia to exploit Iran's weapons buildup as justification to seek greater power and an even stronger alliance with the United States. In this context, Cairo may consider ways to leverage great-power competition to build a more powerful military than Washington alone would finance. The Egyptian army has signed a military contract with Russia to purchase the Shilka-Strelets air defense system. It also has agreed to send Egyptian military personnel for training at Russian military colleges.¹⁶

The arms buildup continues despite the downturn in oil prices. During the 2009 International Defence Exhibition and Conference (IDEX), held February 22–26 in Dubai, GCC countries signed several arms deals with U.S., British, and French companies. Despite the world economic crisis and the decrease in oil prices, GCC states did not show any intent to limit their military expenditure. Maj. Gen. Obaid al-Ketbi, chairman of the military committee organizing the 2009 IDEX, said, "I don't think the financial crisis will have any fundamental effect on the defense and security segment. This is priority number one for any nation."¹⁷ The 2009 UAE federal budget has been increased from last year by 21 percent to 42.2 billion dirham (\$11.49 billion). According to WAM, the Emirates News Agency, "The budget forecast [is] that there will be no shortfall."¹⁸

Historically, Arab states have been tight-lipped about their military expenditure, but because they now fear Iran's growing strength, these regimes have shown more transparency in order to send a warning message to Tehran to stay within its borders. During the 2007 IDEX fair, UAE president Sheik Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan said, "We believe there is a need for power to protect peace, and strong people with the capability to respond are the real protectors of peace. . . . That is why we are keen to maintain the efficiency of our armed forces."¹⁹

More Military Cooperation with Western Powers

No matter how much Arab states, particularly those in the Persian Gulf, spend on their militaries, they will probably seek support from Western powers to ensure their security. The lack of military experience, modest population totals,²⁰ and limited geographic size of most Arab countries near Iran mean that Gulf states will continue to seek out extraregional security guarantors. Although the United States has been the main Western power involved in Gulf security in recent decades, several Gulf states have been eager to develop stronger security relations with European powers as well. The diversification of security relations had been an important factor in GCC security thinking before the mid-1990s, with major arms purchases from European countries and even some limited procurement by Kuwait and the UAE from Russia and China broadening the scope of the GCC's military suppliers. However, from the mid-1990s, the GCC states began focusing much more on the United States, partly because of better terms and partly because of better access to U.S. technologies.²¹ Other nations, however, continue to be important arms suppliers and defensive allies to the GCC.

The UAE has already begun opening its territory to new Western powers. On January 15, 2008, French president Nicolas Sarkozy and Emirati officials signed an agreement to establish a new permanent military base in Abu Dhabi, close to the strategic Strait of Hormuz and facing the Iranian coast. The military base is expected to have begun operations in May 2009 around the Abu Dhabi trade port.²² Five hundred French military personnel are to be based there to ensure the transit of French ships and also to strengthen the military cooperation between France and the UAE.

16. *BBC Monitoring*, "Russia Sells Missile Systems to Egypt, Trains Servicemen," September 21, 2007.

17. Mahmoud Habbouch, "Gulf Defense Spending Likely to Defy Downturn," *The National*, February 12, 2009. Available online (<http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090212/NATIONAL/786392446/1010>).

18. Inal Ersan, "UAE Approves 2009 Budget of \$11.5 Billion," *Arabian Business*, October 21, 2008. Available online (<http://www.arabianbusiness.com/535410-uae-raises-2009-expenditure-to-115bn>).

19. Fattah, "Arab States, Wary of Iran."

20. The population of the Gulf states is 35 million while that of Iran is 70 million.

21. Knights, *Troubled Waters*, especially pp. 134–135.

22. Nissar Hoath, "French Military Base in UAE to Open in May," *Business24/7*, February 23, 2009. Available online (http://www.business24-7.ae/articles/2009/2/pages/02232009_7f69dec0ed3a4dc99b4385d91c2ff7e1.aspx).

According to Sarkozy, the opening of the military base was requested by the UAE “so that France takes part in the stability of this area of the world.”²³ The Emirates have asked the French to “transfer some of their forces which are based in Djibouti to operate in the essential area of the Gulf.”²⁴

This agreement is part of the UAE’s response to Iran’s activities, as well as its efforts to diversify its military partnerships. According to a UAE Foreign Ministry official, a nuclear-armed Iran “will inevitably try to assert itself economically and politically on a global scale, from Argentina to Indonesia to Africa... [It] would bring Tehran into economic competition with the UAE’s international business ventures.”²⁵ Moreover, Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons would increase tension between the two states over the three Persian Gulf islands that were forcibly occupied by Iran in 1970 but that the UAE still considers part of its territory. In this context, France, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, could be useful in boosting UAE claims over the Gulf islands. Iran Foreign Ministry spokesman Muhammad Ali Hosseini, denouncing the establishment of the French military base located only a few miles from Iranian waters, said, “We are opposed to the military presence of foreigners in the region because we believe their ... presence would not only [fail to] help the regional security but ... would be the cause of instability in the region.”²⁶

In addition to the opening of the new permanent military base, the UAE and Qatar have engaged in large-scale military exercises with France. On February 23, 2008, a month after the base was established, military units of the UAE, Qatar, and France

conducted a week of military training in the Persian Gulf.²⁷ The operation was dubbed “Shield of the Persian Gulf I” and was aimed at strengthening military cooperation between France and the two Gulf nations, as well as optimizing the UAE’s and Qatar’s combat capacities. In the past, these kinds of exercises were conducted only between France and the UAE. However, because of the growing threat posed by Iran, Qatar joined in the military training for the first time. Moreover, Qatar also agreed to open a French-funded military school in Doha in 2011 in order to train officers from Qatar as well as other Gulf states.²⁸ By opening a new era of military relationships with France, Qatar is demonstrating its interest in diversifying its military partnerships with Western powers to maintain its position in the region and to defend its interests. The country hosts the largest U.S. military base in the Persian Gulf, and it is also perceived by Iran’s IRGC to be a “friend” of Israel.

In addition to France, Turkey could be a potential military partner for Iran’s Arab neighbors. Concerns about Iran’s nuclear capacities and its regional ambitions have led the six Persian Gulf Arab monarchies to declare Turkey as their first strategic partner outside the Gulf. On September 2, 2008, GCC states and Ankara signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) intended to strengthen their military and political relationship.²⁹ According to the foreign minister of Qatar, Hamad bin Jassem al-Thani, “The signing of the memo is a step on the way to strategic relations, and it is vital for both the GCC countries and Turkey.”³⁰ A large part of the meeting was devoted to Iran’s opening of two offices on the disputed Gulf island of Abu Moussa. GCC states, particularly the

23. Philippe Leymarie, “La France, puissance du Golfe” (France, power of the Gulf region), *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Paris), January 17, 2008. Available online (<http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/carnet/2008-01-17-Golfe>).

24. Ibid.

25. Dalia Dassa Kaye and Frederic M. Wehrey, “A Nuclear Iran: The Reactions of Neighbours,” *Survival* 49, no. 2 (Summer 2007), pp. 111–128.

26. *Middle East News*, “Iran: French Military Presence in the Gulf ‘Not Helpful,’” February 3, 2008. Available online (http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/middleeast/news/article_1389614.php).

27. Center for Research on Globalization, “France Holds War Games with Qatar, UAE,” (Montreal), February 23, 2008. Available online (<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=8162>).

28. Agence France-Presse, “France Takes on Strategic Role in Key Gulf Oil Route,” January 16, 2008, Available online (http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5iNRb4x5cgXA2Nt_S_iOZuf3Z3VpA).

29. Mariam al-Hakeem, “GCC Names Turkey First Strategic Partner Outside the Gulf,” *GulfNews*, September 3, 2008. Available online (<http://www.gulfnews.com/news/gulf/gcc/10242265.html>).

30. Ibid.

UAE, chided Iran and identified the action as a violation of international law and UAE sovereignty. In an official statement, the meeting participants condemned the step and requested that Iran dismantle the offices on Abu Moussa. GCC secretary-general Abdulrahman al-Attiyah called on Iran to “respond to the UAE’s sincere and repeated calls for resolving the issue through direct negotiations or recourse to the International Court of Justice.”³¹

The signing of the MoU with Turkey comes at a time when Turkey’s role in the Middle East has grown increasingly significant. Turkey conceives of its more active role primarily as that of a mediator, not a military partner. Ankara is involved in peace negotiations between Israel and Syria, and on the development of Iran’s nuclear capacity, Ankara has offered to help seek a resolution through diplomacy. As U.S. president Barack Obama declared that he is willing to meet with Iranians and talk about the nuclear program, Turkey has expressed an interest in hosting such talks in order to take advantage of its growing role as a prominent mediator between the West and East.³² Given Ankara’s focus on its mediating role, Turkey may well be reluctant to be cast as a security partner for Gulf countries if that role is seen as deterring its Iranian neighbor.

Besides bilateral relations with NATO members such as France and Turkey, Iran’s Arab neighbors could seek a more active relationship with NATO as a whole in the event that Iran develops nuclear arms. The 2004 Istanbul Cooperation Initiative declared that NATO would promote dialogue and practical cooperation with countries of the region to enhance security. So far, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain

have agreed to join the initiative, and Saudi Arabia and Oman are expected to follow. These states are seeking to use NATO to strengthen the stability and security of the region.³³

Kuwait was the first Gulf state to sign a military agreement with NATO. On December 12, 2006, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, secretary-general of NATO, welcomed the Kuwaiti step and expressed his desire to expand the cooperation to cover all countries of the region.³⁴ In this context, the Kuwaiti navy, in cooperation with NATO forces, conducted a military exercise in the Persian Gulf in November 2008 to strengthen Kuwaiti naval capabilities. The exercise included “fast inshore attack training, an anti-piracy demonstration, an air defense exercise, and a demonstration of firepower.”³⁵ Sheikh Thamer Ali al-Sabah, vice president of the Kuwaiti National Security Bureau, added that the military training was a “completion of solid cooperation between Kuwait and NATO.”³⁶ He also expressed his desire to deepen the cooperation between the organization and his country to include military information exchanges.

To counter a nuclear-armed Iran, NATO and Arab states could go beyond the 2004 Istanbul Initiative to address the potential dangers posed to both sides. According to a NATO Parliamentary Assembly report, NATO has already begun encouraging Saudi Arabia, Oman, and other countries in the region to work more closely with the organization by signing bilateral agreements in order to exchange information, conclude joint trainings, and develop common strategies to address potential risks.³⁷ NATO and regional Arab states also intend to broadcast dialogues and television programs to announce publicly that cooperation with

31. *Iran Focus*, “GCC Chides Iran over Facilities on UAE-Claimed Island,” August 17, 2008. Available online (<http://www.iranfocus.com/en/iran-general-/gcc-chides-iran-over-facilities-on-uae-claimed-island.html>).

32. *Hurriyet Daily News* (Istanbul), “Turkey Willing to Host U.S.-Iran Talks,” November 25, 2008. Available online (<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/domestic/10344701.asp>).

33. Shehata Mohammed Nasser, “Turkey and Arab Gulf Ties: Prospects and Difficulties” (Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, September 21, 2008). Available online (<http://www.ecssr.ac.ac/CDA/en/FeaturedTopics/DisplayTopic/0,1670,907,00.html>).

34. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer (secretary general of NATO) (speech at the NATO-Kuwait Public Diplomacy Conference), December 12, 2006. Available online (<http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2006/s061212a.htm>).

35. *Kuwait Times*, “Kuwaiti Navy, NATO Conclude Drills,” November 11, 2008. Available online (http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=MjE0NTQ5ODc2).

36. *Ibid.*

37. NATO Parliamentary Assembly, “177 PCTR 05 E—NATO and Persian Gulf Security” (Annual Session Committee Reports, 2005). Available online (<http://www.nato-pa.int/Default.asp?SHORTCUT=676>).

the organization would promote stability and security in the region.³⁸

The involvement of NATO would not only benefit the Arab states, it would also facilitate cooperation between the United States and its European allies in addressing Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Since the beginning of the Iranian nuclear crisis in 2003, Europeans have been involved in diplomatic efforts with Iran.

Such involvement should not be viewed as a setback for the U.S. presence in the region. On the contrary, European countries are filling a diplomatic gap caused by the severing of U.S.-Iran ties at the time of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. If NATO is used as an instrument to maintain security in the region, Washington’s European allies could similarly play an important role in guarding against Iranian provocation.³⁹

38. Fars News Agency (Tehran), “NATO yas’a littamaddod fi dowel alkhalaj al farici limowajht Iran wa Rousia” (NATO seeks to extend role in Persian Gulf states to counter Iran and Russia), November 8, 2008. Available online (<http://arabic.farsnews.com/printable.aspx?nn=8708181503>).

39. For instance, in Afghanistan, where Iran is heavily involved in efforts to destabilize the country, the United States and its European allies are cooperating within NATO. During the last G-20 summit, European leaders supported President Obama’s Afghanistan strategy calling for the deployment of more troops to fight against al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

2 | Arab Alternatives to Going Nuclear

IF ARAB CONVENTIONAL military responses do not limit Iran's growing sphere of influence, it is possible that Arab states would seek their own counterweight. Because Arab states presently lack nuclear technology and expertise, it would be difficult for them to engage in a nuclear arms race in the near future. None has an advanced nuclear program that could be used for weapons purposes. Moreover, Arab nuclear weapons programs would harm relationships between the United States and the Arab regimes. Alternatively, Arab states of the region could seek a U.S. nuclear umbrella rather than go nuclear themselves. Since the early days of the Cold War, the United States has been the guardian of security in the Persian Gulf, and Washington is unlikely to leave its Arab allies on their own, although both sides may be more comfortable with an implicit arrangement rather than treaty commitments. However, if the United States does not offer security guarantees, then Arab regimes might develop other types of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) such as chemical or biological weapons. Syria and Egypt have not yet ratified the chemical and biological weapons conventions (to be discussed later), and they do not necessarily need advanced technology or expertise to produce such weapons.

Arab States: A Long Way from Developing Nuclear Weapons

In April 2006, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad declared that his country had joined the "nuclear club of nations" because it had gained the capability to produce nuclear fuel on an industrial scale.¹ Middle Eastern media reports have indicated periodically that Iran's nuclear program would lead to a nuclear arms race in the region. Some editorials have alleged that

major Arab countries of the region, for example Saudi Arabia or Egypt, would seek to develop or acquire nuclear weapons to counter an Iranian bomb,² the argument being that the nuclear nonproliferation regime is not serving Arab interests. Israel is not a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and it is assumed to have a military nuclear program. Israel also has a nuclear reactor that was never inspected by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The nuclear nonproliferation regime also failed to prevent Pakistan, India, and North Korea from proceeding with nuclear testing. Therefore, some Arab sources are pessimistic that the nuclear nonproliferation regime will thwart Iran from becoming a military nuclear power even though Iran is a signatory of the NPT.

However, if we examine the nuclear capabilities of the Arab states, we see clearly that these states are far from attaining an advanced nuclear fuel cycle capability. They have neither the nuclear expertise nor the infrastructure to produce nuclear weapons. In January 2005, IAEA investigations raised concerns about Egypt's nuclear intentions, with the agency announcing that it had found evidence that Egypt had conducted nuclear experiments that could be used to develop a nuclear weapon.³ In particular, various fission products were discovered by IAEA inspectors near a nuclear facility, a possible indication that work on plutonium separation had been conducted.⁴ Egyptian officials denied the allegations and noted that the activities were legal but that they simply had neglected to declare them. The IAEA investigation ultimately concluded that Egyptian nuclear activities conformed to the NPT regime. However, the failure to declare activities to the IAEA raised doubts about Egypt's nuclear intentions, the extent of its nuclear activities, infrastructure, and

1. Associated Press, "Ahmadinejad: Iran Has Joined Club of Nuclear Nations," *Jerusalem Post*, April 9, 2007. Available online (<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1173879276262&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>).
2. Al-Jazeera TV online, "Alkhiyarat al-Arabia amam al barnamej anawawi al irani" (Arab choices regarding Iran's nuclear program), April 24, 2006. Available online (<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/65F2A5AB-B785-4F6E-8C07-546E3A19EC47.htm>).
3. Tariq Khaitous, "Egypt and Saudi Arabia's Policies toward Iran's Nuclear Program," Issue Brief (Nuclear Threat Initiative, December 2007). Available online (http://www.nti.org/e_research/e3_96.html).
4. Ibid.

capabilities, and whether it had pursued other undeclared activities related to the development of nuclear weapons.⁵ Egypt has a 2-megawatt research reactor and a 22-megawatt light-water research reactor, supplied at the beginning of the 1960s by the Soviet Union and Argentina, respectively.⁶ Egypt is a signatory of the NPT and has always called for the establishment of a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East. Because Egypt has been unable to challenge Israel directly regarding its assumed nuclear program, it has instead emphasized the need to remove nuclear weapons from the region.

As noted earlier, Egypt's military doctrine holds that powerful nations are those that have powerful armies. However, under current economic and security circumstances, it would be risky for Egypt to pursue a military nuclear program in response to Iran's efforts. Such a decision would have great political consequences for the Egyptian regime. To begin with, the United States might cut its military assistance and annual financial support to Cairo. Moreover, Egypt would lose its credibility with African nations⁷ that aim to implement the Pelindaba Treaty, signed in Cairo in 1996 to establish a nuclear weapons-free zone in Africa, including Egypt. As of March 2008, the treaty had been ratified by twenty-six countries and required only two more ratifications to enter into force.⁸

Saudi Arabia is also far from developing a military nuclear program. The kingdom lacks the technological capability, natural resources, and scientific know-how to develop a military nuclear apparatus.⁹ Neither does Saudi Arabia have research reactors, or uranium deposits in its soil. And Saudi scientists do not have the technical knowledge to enrich uranium or operate a nuclear

reactor. In recent years, Saudi Arabia, like many Arab countries, has shown interest in nuclear energy. On the one hand, Saudi Arabia's desire to develop its nuclear sector could be justified by the surge in demand for water and electricity caused by growth in the Saudi population. Large-scale water desalination could alleviate the water shortage but at the same time would increase electricity shortages because of the huge amount of power needed in the desalination process. Despite its enormous oil reserves, Saudi Arabian leaders are aware that the country's oil supply will run out eventually, leaving it unable to meet the needs of its subjects. Saudi officials think that nuclear energy could be an alternative to satisfy these demands. On the other hand, it would not be a stretch to see nuclear development occur, in part, as a strategic response to Iran's nuclear program.¹⁰ Saudi Arabia signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the United States to cooperate in the peaceful use of nuclear energy through a series of complementary agreements.¹¹ The kingdom also aspires to expand its nuclear cooperation with France.

Saudi Arabia has also encouraged the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes in the Gulf. The Saudis and other GCC countries made a commitment not to enrich uranium in isolation of one another, and agreed to create a regional consortium for all users of enriched uranium to prevent misuse of fissile materials. Gulf officials, particularly Prince Saud al-Faisal, the Saudi foreign minister, encouraged Iran to accept the GCC proposal, which would have stopped Iran's enrichment activities and thus strengthened security in the region. On November 2007, during the Riyadh meeting of

5. IAEA Board of Governors, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Arab Republic of Egypt: Report by the Director General," February 14, 2005. Available online (http://www.carnegieendowment.org/static/npp/Egypt_Feb_2005.pdf).

6. Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Egypt Profile," November 2008. Available online (http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/Egypt/index.html).

7. See footnote 3.

8. It was reported in 1996 that no African Arab state would ratify the treaty until Israel joins the NPT. However, Algeria, Libya, and Mauritania have since ratified the treaty.

9. Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Saudi Arabia Profile," August 2008. Available online (http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/Saudi_Arabia/Nuclear/index.html#fn23#fn23).

10. U.S. Senate, Report to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Chain Reaction: Avoiding a Nuclear Arms Race in the Middle East*, 110th Cong., 2d sess., February 2008, p. 11. Available online (http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/2008_rpt/chain.pdf).

11. Saudi-U.S. Relations Information Service, "President Bush in Saudi Arabia: Agreements Bolster Regional Security," May 16, 2008. Available online (<http://www.saudi-us-relations.org/articles/2008/special-reports/080516-strengthening-ties.html>).

GCC foreign ministers, defense ministers, and military experts, Saud said,

We have proposed [to Iran] a solution, which is to create a consortium for all users of enriched uranium in the Middle East. The consortium will distribute according to needs, give each plant its own necessary amount, and ensure no use of this enriched uranium for atomic weapons. . . . I hope the Iranians will accept this proposal. . . . We urge them to look at this also from the point of view of security of the region.¹²

Although Saudi Arabia is far from developing a military nuclear program, the possibility that it could acquire nuclear weapons from another source, such as Pakistan, raises concerns among Western powers. Former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia Chas M. Freeman declared, “Senior Saudi officials have said privately that, if and when Iran acknowledges having, or is discovered to have, actual nuclear warheads, Saudi Arabia would feel compelled to acquire a deterrent stockpile.”¹³ Along these lines, Saudi Arabia has a strong relationship with Pakistan and helped finance the initial stages of the Pakistani nuclear program. Moreover, Pakistan was involved in illegal nuclear activities in Libya and Iran and was also involved in illegal trafficking of nuclear technology through the network of Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadir Khan. Providing more basis for concern, Saudi Arabia, without Washington’s knowledge, purchased some thirty-six CCS-2 ballistic missiles from China in 1986. These missiles have a 1,500-mile range, with the capability to carry nuclear warheads.¹⁴ Finally, the worry that Riyadh might acquire nuclear weapons from Islamabad became especially serious when the *Guardian* reported in 2003 that Saudi Arabia had launched a strategic security review that included the possible acquisition of Pakistani nuclear weapons.¹⁵

However, no hard evidence has emerged to prove that Saudi Arabia is interested in purchasing nuclear weapons from Pakistan. Even if such a scenario could be possible, it would be highly risky for the Saudis and Pakistanis to engage in such a venture. Nonproliferation specialists who study Pakistan and the Middle East, such as Gawdat Bahgat of Indiana University of Pennsylvania and Thomas Lippman of the Middle East Institute, believe that a deal between the Saudis and Pakistanis is unlikely to happen. The Pakistani nuclear arsenal is designed to maintain the balance of power in South Asia and offset its conventional inferiority against India. Moreover, Saudis as well as Pakistanis might jeopardize their vital strategic relationships with the United States. The political impact would be significant. As long as the U.S.-Saudi relationship is strong, Saudi Arabia seems unlikely to go nuclear in the face of Iran. A nuclear-armed Iran more likely would push Saudi Arabia to lean on its relationship with the United States for security.

The same theory could be applied to the smaller states of the GCC—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE—which lack their own nuclear technology and expertise. As part of the GCC initiative to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, these states also accepted the creation of a consortium for all users of enriched uranium in the region. The UAE and Qatar have signed a nuclear agreement with France to oversee nuclear cooperation in power generation, water desalination, research agronomy, medicine, earth sciences, and industry. During the signing ceremony for the agreement between the UAE and France, UAE foreign minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan referred implicitly to Iran when he declared, “It is the UAE government’s hope that the final policy may also serve as a replicable model for non-nuclear countries to evaluate and potentially

12. APS Diplomat News Service, “The GCC Uranium Enrichment Proposal to Iran,” November 5, 2007. Available online (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb6506/is_ai_n29385870).
13. Thomas Lippman, “Saudi Arabia: The Calculations of Uncertainty,” in Mitchell Reiss, Robert Einhorn, and Kurt Campbell, eds., *The Nuclear Tipping Point* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Press, 2004), p. 129.
14. See footnote 15. See also Simon Henderson, “Chinese-Saudi Cooperation: Oil but Also Missiles,” *PolicyWatch* no. 1095 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 21, 2006). Available online (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2460>).
15. Ewen MacAskill and Ian Traynor, “Saudis Consider Nuclear Bomb,” *Guardian*, September 18, 2003. Available online (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/saudi/story/0,11599,1044402,00.html>).

implement a peaceful domestic nuclear program with full support and backing of the international community.”¹⁶ Moreover, the UAE has adopted a national strategy to regulate and institutionalize the domain of nuclear energy, for which the newly created Authority of Nuclear Safety will be in charge of evaluating and developing nuclear energy in conformance with IAEA standards.¹⁷ Even if the country has ample financial resources, there is an economic motivation behind the UAE’s interest in nuclear energy. The growth of the Emirati population has increased demand for electric power. Unlike Iran and Qatar, which have enormous natural gas resources, the UAE does not have sufficient natural gas to power the electricity plants needed to serve its population. The UAE, therefore, sees nuclear energy as an alternative source of electric power.

On January 15, 2009, in the Bush administration’s final week and after two years of diplomatic consultation, the UAE also signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with the United States. According to former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice, “The UAE also would return all spent nuclear fuel rather than attain the technical capability to reprocess it.”¹⁸ The UAE will lack for many years the capability to build a nuclear device. The fastest route, which there is no reason to believe the UAE is considering, might be to build a nuclear power plant and then renege on past commitments by reprocessing spent fuel. Yet even this process would take longer than a decade.

A major reason to doubt that the smaller Gulf countries would develop their own nuclear weapons is that a nuclear-armed Iran would push these countries even closer to the West, and to the United States in particular. On the other hand, their security relationships with the United States would be put in serious jeopardy were they to pursue nuclear weapons capability in response to Tehran.

In addition to Arab states’ lack of nuclear expertise and infrastructure, these states are aware that Israel would not allow any Arab nation in the region to acquire nuclear weapons. Any attempt by Arabs to pursue nuclear weapons would almost certainly prompt an Israeli military action. The latest evidence of this eventuality came in September 2007 when Israeli aircraft destroyed the secret Syrian nuclear facility at al-Kibar.

Potential for Chemical and Biological Weapons

Unlike the NPT, which all Arab states have signed and ratified, other nonproliferation treaties, including the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), in effect since 1997, and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC), effective for more than thirty years, have not been signed by some Mideast powers. Egypt and Syria, like Israel, have neither signed nor ratified the CWC. The two Arab nations are not committed to the principles of the convention, and they have no legal obligations that could persuade them against developing chemical weapons. In regard to the BWC, Damascus and Cairo have signed the convention but have not yet ratified it, which raises questions about Egypt’s and Syria’s chemical and biological weapons intentions. Israel never signed the BWC, and its nuclear program provides the main rationale for the refusal of Egypt and Syria to join the other nonproliferation treaties.

However, an Iranian nuclear bomb would put greater pressure on Arab officials, particularly in Egypt, to reconsider their respective security strategies. Aware of its inability to pursue a nuclear military program, Egypt might consider chemical or biological military options to provide a strategic counterbalance in the region. Egypt’s effort to create a united Arab front against Israel’s nuclear capabilities has failed. In the last few years, many Arab states joined the CWC without

16. *China View*, “UAE, France Sign Nuclear Cooperation Agreement,” January 15, 2008. Available online (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/15/content_7427608.htm).

17. Agence France-Presse, “Les Emirats Arabes Unis sur la route du nucléaire civil” (The UAE is en route to nuclear energy), March 25, 2008. Available online (<http://www.enerzine.com/2/4496+les-emirats-arabes-unis-sur-la-route-du-nucleaire-civil+.html>).

18. Robert Burns, “U.S. Signs Nuclear Cooperation Deal with Gulf Ally,” *Guardian*, January 15, 2009. Available online (http://www.blnz.com/news/2009/01/15/nuclear_cooperation_deal_with_Gulf_8449.html).

making any link to Israel's nuclear arsenal. In June 2008, the UAE ratified the BWC,¹⁹ and the new Iraqi regime is in the process of joining the CWC.²⁰ Even if most Arab states are now members of the chemical and biological weapons conventions, Egypt might not change its position and follow suit. In a September 2008 interview with the Arms Control Association, former Egyptian ambassador to the United States Nabil Fahmy, when asked about the chances of Cairo joining the CWC, responded,

Very little, if any. Not because we are against the CWC. Quite the contrary, we were the first to make proposals to pursue the prohibition of chemical weapons. If, on the other hand, we saw some movement on the Israeli side regarding the NPT or the zonal agreements, we would review our position quite quickly. We do not have a commitment to chemical weapons. We have a commitment to equal standards for all in the Middle East, and we don't believe that this commitment has been respected by others.²¹

Egypt was the first country in the region to acquire chemical weapons, and when intervening in the Yemeni civil war of 1963–1967, it was also the first to employ them, using phosgene and mustard bombs. Even if there is no evidence that Cairo might be pursuing a chemical or biological weapons program, it is believed to still have biological agents that might be used for military purposes, particularly anthrax, plague bacteria, botulinum toxin, and Rift Valley fever virus.²² During the 1993 Chemical Convention Conference in Paris, Egypt

defended the right of Arab nations to have chemical weapons to counter Israel's nuclear arsenal. Egypt has two major sites that could be used to produce chemical weapons—the Abu Zaabal Company for Chemicals and Insecticides and the Abu Zaabal Company for Specialty Chemicals.²³ According to the Federation of American Scientists, the Abu Zaabal Company for Specialty Chemicals is a part of the Ministry of Military Production and holds military material that includes explosives, propellants, mortar chargers, and rocket motors.²⁴ The company is also reported to have been involved in the Iraqi chemical weapons that Saddam Hussein used against the Kurdish population of northern Iraq and against the Iranian forces during Iran-Iraq War.²⁵

Unlike Egypt, Syria—an ally of Iran—has little to fear from an Iranian nuclear bomb. Syria is also known to have an advanced chemical weapons program. Unable to confront Israel on the level of conventional warfare, Damascus has been undertaking sustained efforts to achieve a chemical weapons capability. In a 1990 speech, former Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad said, “Israel is still superior technologically; and it is capable of inflicting on the Arabs human disasters in case of war. But the Arabs can, with what they have, inflict the same disasters on it.”²⁶ Syria took advantage of its pharmaceuticals industry as a cover for expanding its chemical weapons program.²⁷ In 2001, a Central Intelligence Agency report stated that

Syria sought CW-related precursors and expertise from foreign sources during the reporting period.

19. This document is available on the website of the United Nations Office at Geneva ([http://www.unog.ch/unog/website/disarmament.nsf/\(httpPages\)/F1FAF68390F1A54BC125747800467832?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/unog/website/disarmament.nsf/(httpPages)/F1FAF68390F1A54BC125747800467832?OpenDocument)).

20. Markus K. Binder, “Iraq Moves toward CWC Accession,” *WMD Insights*, December 2007/January 2008. Available online (http://www.wmdinsights.com/I21/I21_ME1_IraqMovesToward.htm).

21. Peter Crail and Miles Pomper, “The Middle East and Nonproliferation: An Interview with Nabil Fahmy, Egypt's Ambassador to the United States,” *Arms Control Today*, September 2008. Available online (http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2008_09/Fahmy).

22. Richard Yilmaz, “Les armes de destruction massive au Moyen Orient” (Weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East), *Outre-Terre: Revue française de géopolitique* (Overland: French journal of geopolitics) 1, no. 14 (2006).

23. Ibid.

24. Federation of American Scientists, “Abu Zaabal Company for Specialty Chemicals,” October 22, 1999. Available online (<http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/egypt/facility/abu-zaabal-18.htm>).

25. Dany Shoham, “Chemical and Biological Weapons in Egypt,” *Nonproliferation Review* (Spring–Summer 1998). Available online (<http://cns.miis.edu/npr/pdfs/shoham53.pdf>).

26. Zuhair Diab, “Syria's Chemical and Biological Weapons: Assessing Capabilities and Motivations,” *Nonproliferation Review* (Fall 1997). Available online (<http://cns.miis.edu/npr/pdfs/diab51.pdf>).

27. GlobalSecurity.org, “Chemical Weapons [Syria]”; available online (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/syria/cw.htm>). See also Dany Shoham, “Guile, Gas, and Germs: Syria's Ultimate Weapons,” *Middle East Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (Summer 2002).

Damascus already has a stockpile of the nerve agent sarin, and it would appear that Syria is trying to develop more toxic and persistent nerve agents. Syria remains dependent on foreign sources for key elements of its CW [chemical weapons] program, including precursor chemicals and key production equipment. It is highly probable that Syria also is developing an offensive BW [biological weapons] capability.²⁸

Currently, Syria has an estimated two hundred Scud missiles armed with sarin warheads.²⁹ It is also assumed to have “stockpiled several hundred tons of sarin and mustard agents for tactical uses in the form of artillery shells and air-dropped munitions.”³⁰

Even if Israel’s nuclear program offers the primary rationale for Syria’s chemical weapons capabilities, the instability sparked by a nuclear-armed Iran could entice Syria to increase its chemical weapons capability. If Egypt decides to develop chemical weapons in response to Iran, Syria could follow suit. Syria’s relationship with Cairo is tense. For both prestige- and security-related reasons, Damascus would be poised to maintain its quantitative and qualitative chemical superiority in the Arab world. Syria would not accept challenges in the area of chemical weapons capability from another Arab country, particularly Egypt, or accept for such a country to become a potential security threat in addition to Israel.

If Syria comes to feel that its chemical weapons program is inadequate, Damascus could take advantage of its strategic alliance with Iran to strengthen what is already, in effect, a military nuclear partnership with the Islamic Republic. While U.S. Arab friends in the region have upgraded their conventional weapons arsenals and seek to reinforce their military cooperation with Western powers to counter Iran, Syria has instead strengthened its military cooperation with Iran. The

relationship between the two nations has become even stronger in recent years, especially since the removal of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. In June 2006, the London-based *Jane’s Defence Weekly* reported that Iran and Syria had “signed a strategic accord meant to protect either country from international pressure regarding their weapons programs.”³¹ It added reports from Syrian diplomatic sources that Syria had agreed to hide Iranian weapons and materiel in the event that Iran was subject to military aggression or United Nations sanctions. Furthermore, *Jane’s* reported that under the same accord, Iran also agreed to support the Syrian military with the technology needed to develop WMD, as well as conventional arms, training, and logistics. On March 10, 2009, a UN Security Council committee reported that Iran was violating the UN embargo by trying to transfer military materiel to Syria via Cyprus.³² According to the French ambassador to the United Nations, Jean-Maurice Ripert, the shipment was of “explosives and...arms.”³³ With this strategic alliance, the Iranian regime appears to be including Syria in its nuclear plans to enhance Tehran’s influence in the Middle East. In turn, Syria would gain from Iranian nuclear capabilities, which would boost its position in the Levant and ensure the survival of its own regime.

Seeking a U.S. Nuclear Umbrella

Under the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran, it is likely that America’s Arab allies would seek to expand military cooperation to include de facto U.S. nuclear deterrence in the region. So far, no Arab leader has discussed this possibility. It might be premature for Arab countries to consider a U.S. nuclear umbrella in the region because this would give the impression that Arab states have already accepted that they will have to live with a nuclear Iran.

28. GlobalSecurity.org, “Chemical Weapons [Syria]”

29. Nuclear Threat Initiative, “Syria Profile: Chemical Overview” (updated March 2009). Available online (http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/Syria/Chemical/2973.html).

30. Ibid.

31. Robin Hughes, “Iran, Syria Sign a Further Defense Co-operation Agreement,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, June 27, 2006. Available online (http://www.janes.com/defence/news/jdw/jdw060627_1_n.shtml).

32. Allison Hoffman, “UN Demands Answers on Iran Arms Ship,” *Jerusalem Post*, March 10, 2009. Available online (<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1236676911098&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>).

33. Ibid.

In the United States, officials including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates have expressed their opinion that Arab states need more protection against Iran's nuclear program. While still a presidential candidate, Clinton was the first U.S. official to declare that America should extend its nuclear umbrella to protect Israel and U.S. Arab friends from an Iranian nuclear bomb. During an ABC News–hosted debate with Obama, Clinton said that she would “provide a deterrent backup that would extend U.S. nuclear protection beyond Europe and Japan to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Arab countries, guaranteeing massive retaliation.”³⁴ Obama answered that the United States should prevent Iran from gaining nuclear arms but without supporting or countering Clinton's proposal. Recently, an Israeli press report indicated that the Obama administration plans to provide a nuclear umbrella to Israel to prevent any nuclear attacks from Iran, but no concrete strategy has been announced.³⁵

Gates has said that U.S. allies could rely on the U.S. nuclear deterrent in response to an Iranian nuclear threat. During a conference hosted by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace last October, he stated, “As long as other nations have or seek nuclear weapons—and can potentially threaten us, our allies, and friends—then we must have a deterrent capacity that makes it clear that challenging the United States in the nuclear arena, or with weapons of mass destruction, could result in an overwhelming, catastrophic response.”³⁶

One issue surrounding a nuclear umbrella is whether its Arab beneficiaries—and Iran—would find the U.S. declarations credible. There are many potential problems associated with establishing such credibility for the deterrence. For one thing, the United States might be reluctant to take many visible and specific steps to demonstrate that Washington is committed to carrying through such a policy. There is a concern among

some U.S. officials that in this unstable region, military alliances are only temporary solutions, since states that are now friendly to the United States may not always be so. Previous alliances have shown that military cooperation between the United States and the region's regimes can turn sour. Both Saddam Hussein and Afghan rebels were once U.S. military allies. The shah of Iran served as the U.S. policeman for the region before he was overthrown, only to be replaced by a violently anti-American revolution. Given this difficult history, how could the United States provide nuclear deterrence to its Arab allies, and what would be the implications of such a decision?

Bilateral security agreement between the United States and its Arab allies. The extension of the U.S. nuclear umbrella to the Middle East could be done informally through declaratory policy or in the framework of a formal bilateral security agreement between the United States and its Arab friends, similar to the security arrangements between the United States and Japan and South Korea. Getting such a formal agreement approved by Congress could prove difficult. The U.S. president would need to make a strong statement to endorse the agreement by declaring that Arab states would be backed by U.S. nuclear deterrence and any Iranian attack against them would be considered an attack against U.S. interests and allies in the region. While such an agreement could reassure Iran's Arab neighbors about their security with respect to Iran, it also has disadvantages for these nations. For one thing, they may not like openly acknowledging the depth of their reliance on the United States, which could prove unpopular at home. In addition, the United States presumably would ask Arab governments to make some commitments of their own. At the very least, they would need to commit to not develop or seek any kind of WMD. Another complication would be determining which countries would be covered by

34. Glenn Kessler, “Analysts Divided on Clinton's Arab Defense Plan,” *Washington Post*, May 4, 2008. Available online (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2008/05/04/ST2008050400117.html>).

35. Aluf Benn, “Obama's Atomic Umbrella: U.S. Nuclear Strike If Iran Nukes Israel,” *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv), December 12, 2008. Available online (<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1045687.html>).

36. Donna Miles, “Gates Calls Nuke Capability Critical to Deterrence, Reassuring Allies,” American Forces Press Service, October 28, 2008. Available online (<http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=51690>).

any commitment or treaty. Should such an arrangement be made available to all U.S. Arab friends in the region—particularly Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq—as well as the GCC? If the United States agreed to defend only GCC states, then other countries of the region such as Egypt would surely protest. Although Egypt is less threatened by Iran's nuclear capabilities than the GCC states, it would almost certainly insist on being included under any special security arrangement the United States might make, in order to maintain the balance of power between Cairo and the GCC capitals and even strengthen relationships with the United States. As declared by Amr Moussa, the Egyptian secretary-general of the Arab League, “[We] will do whatever it takes to maintain [Egypt’s] position in the Middle East and the Arab world.”³⁷

A nuclear umbrella based on an international arrangement. Arab states presumably would prefer that any security guarantees involve all Western powers rather than only the United States, whether those guarantees are informal or treaty based. During the 1991 Gulf War, the United States and its allies were able to rely on the support of the UN Security Council for their actions to save Kuwait from Saddam Hussein's invasion and, by extension, to save other Gulf nations from the Iraqi leader's hegemonic ambitions. None of the permanent members of the Security Council opposed the use of force against Iraq. In the case of Iran's nuclear program, Arab states would find it challenging to convince Russia or China to cooperate fully with the European Union and the United States against Iran. Russia and China share strong political, economic, and military relations with Iran. The two countries have repeatedly opposed UN economic sanctions against Iran and the use of force against its nuclear facilities.

One option would be an international arrangement under NATO, which has the military might to back up any deterrent pledge to those threatened by Iran. Indeed, one way to read the continuing nuclear role of NATO is as a check against potential proliferators. The United States has an estimated 150–240 nuclear weapons deployed in Europe.³⁸ These weapons were delivered by the United States to its European allies during the Cold War in order to defend European countries from the Soviet Union. Even though the Cold War is over, the United States, in coordination with its NATO allies, still maintains its weapons in Europe, not only to contain Russia but also to face potential threats coming from the Middle East and beyond. According to Hans M. Kristensen, an expert at the Natural Resources Defense Council, U.S. nuclear bombs in Europe are intended “to persuade countries such as Iran and North Korea from developing nuclear weapons.”³⁹

However, it might be too difficult for the United States to organize a united front of all NATO members against Iran. Past NATO out-of-area experiences have shown the difficulty of involving all members in an extraregional crisis. In Afghanistan, for instance, where Iran is heavily involved in supporting the guerrillas, NATO is struggling to establish peace and security. Some NATO countries have restricted their cooperation with the organization and have refused to send more troops or limited their roles. In February 2009, during a major international security conference in Munich, NATO secretary-general Jaap de Hoop Scheffer criticized Europe for not doing enough to support the U.S. military effort in Afghanistan. Without mentioning any particular country, Scheffer said, “I am frankly concerned when I hear the United States is planning a major commitment for Afghanistan, but other allies ruling out doing more.”⁴⁰

37. Kathleen J. McInnis, “Extended Deterrence: The U.S. Credibility Gap in the Middle East,” *Washington Quarterly* (Summer 2005), pp. 169–186. Available online (http://www.twq.com/05summer/docs/05summer_mcinnis.pdf).

38. Hans M. Kristensen, “U.S. Nuclear Weapons Withdrawn from the United Kingdom,” FAS Strategic Security Blog, June 26, 2008. Available online (<http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2008/06/us-nuclear-weapons-withdrawn-from-the-united-kingdom.php>).

39. Hans M. Kristensen, *U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe: A Review of Post-Cold War Policy, Force Levels, and War Planning* (Washington, D.C.: Natural Resources Defense Council, 2005). Available online (<http://www.nukestrat.com/pubs/EuroBombs.pdf>).

40. France 24, “NATO Chief Chides Europe for Refusal to Send Troops,” February 7, 2009. Available online (<http://www.france24.com/en/20090207-nato-chief-chides-europe-not-sending-more-troops-afghanistan-jaap-hoop-scheffer>).

Locations of U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe, 2008



Withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from three European bases since 2001 means that at least three-quarters of the arsenal is now on the southern flank, which includes Turkey and Italy.

Source: Hans M. Kristensen, Federation of American Scientists, June 26, 2008.

COUNTRY	AIR BASE	ESTIMATED WEAPONS*
Belgium	Kleine Brogel	10–20
Germany	Büchel	10–20
Italy	Aviano	50
	Ghedi Torre	20–40
Netherlands	Volkel	10–20
Turkey	Incirlik	50–90
TOTAL		150–240*

* All weapons previously stored at Royal Air Force Lakenheath in the United Kingdom and Ramstein Air Base in Germany have been withdrawn. Past estimates have been provided in “USAF Report: ‘Most’ Nuclear Weapon Sites in Europe Do Not Meet U.S. Security Requirements” (FAS Strategic Security Blog, June 19, 2008) (available online at <http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2008/06/usaf-report-%E2%80%9Cmost%E2%80%9D-nuclear-weapon-sites-in-europe-do-not-meet-us-security-requirements.php>); “United States Removes Nuclear Weapons from German Base, Documents Indicate” (FAS Strategic Security Blog, July 9, 2007) (available online at http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2007/07/united_states_removes_nuclear.php); and *U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Natural Resources Defense Council, 2005) (available online at <http://www.nukestrat.com/pubs/EuroBombs.pdf>).

Caveats to deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons to the region. Were the United States to extend its nuclear umbrella to Gulf states, the question would arise as to whether the United States should consider deployment of nuclear weapons to the Persian Gulf. The United States, in coordination with its Arab allies, could use the Arab-controlled waters of the Persian Gulf to deploy nuclear-armed submarines to respond to Iran’s shows of power. The United States might also deploy nuclear weapons to the territories of its Arab allies in the region. A similar strategy was already pursued successfully during the Cold War, when U.S. actions reassured European allies facing the nuclear threat posed by the Soviet Union.

However, such a decision would raise security and political concerns. There could be objections raised by those hostile to the United States about the environmental dangers created by the presence of nuclear-armed submarines in the Persian Gulf, expanding a

long-standing Iranian campaign to complain about the frequent presence of nuclear-powered submarines and aircraft carriers in the Gulf waters.

As far as the deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons to Arab territories is concerned, such an option would also raise political, security, and strategic concerns. First, if Arab states accept U.S. nuclear weapons on their soil, it will contradict their calls for the creation of a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East. Gaining the support of Arab public opinion on such a matter would also be highly difficult. Many Arab communities have supported Iran’s nuclear program because Iran has been viewed as the only country in the region to challenge Israel and the United States. Moreover, the U.S. failure to find WMD in Iraq and the release of a national intelligence estimate showing that Iran stopped its nuclear weapons design program in 2003 have cut down U.S. credibility in its efforts to target WMD.⁴¹ Second, the deployment of U.S. nuclear

41. GlobalSecurity.org, “National Intelligence Estimate: Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities,” November 2007. Available online (http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/library/reports/2007/nic_iran-nuclear_20071203.htm).

weapons to the Middle East might raise concerns about nuclear terrorism in the region. Terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda might create panic among Arab populations by declaring that they will target the U.S. nukes if the United States refuses to withdraw them from “Muslim lands.”

There is some small risk that the deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons to the Middle East could lead Russia or China to offer to do the same with Iran. While

not likely, such an option might be more attractive to a China or Russia in a hostile standoff with the United States. Consider how Russia has used the issue of U.S. efforts to establish anti-Iran missile defense systems in Poland and the Czech Republic as an instrument to express its disquiet with U.S. policy. In the unlikely event that Russia or China decides to provide a nuclear umbrella to Iran, this would present a major problem for U.S. interests globally.

3 | What Can Arab States Do about the Iranian Nuclear Issue?

WHILE THE EUROPEAN UNION, United States, Russia, and China are heavily engaged in negotiations with Tehran, the Arab states of the region are nearly absent from the talks on the Iranian nuclear crisis. Other than a few meetings between Arabs and Americans, and also between a few Arab leaders and Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad, the Arab states' role—at least publicly—has not been noticeable. Arab states have yet to formulate a diplomatic strategy supporting global efforts to hinder nuclear proliferation in their region. On March 9, 2009, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Mohamed ElBaradei, urging the Arab states to help resolve the Iranian nuclear issue, said, "I find it surprising that the Arab countries are not engaged in dialogue between Iran and the West. The neighbors so far have been sitting on the fence. Any solution to the Iranian issue has to engage the neighbors."¹ While there are real limitations to what Arab states can do, these states could make more of a contribution than they are at present on the Iranian nuclear issue.

Limits to the Arab States' Role

The limited possibilities for Arab intervention can be explained by several factors. The first is that the Arab states do not have good alternatives to offer to Iran. There is no incentive package that Arabs can bring to the table that would persuade Iran to follow international demands and halt its uranium enrichment. Regarding nuclear energy, unlike the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany, none of the Arab states can supply nuclear technology. All are members of the nuclear nonproliferation regime, but none is a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group or the Zangger Committee, also known as the Nuclear Exporters Committee. In contrast to Russia,

which offered to enrich Iranian uranium on its soil and deliver nuclear fuel to Iran, the Arab states have no enrichment alternatives for Iran. Their own nuclear capacities are basic, and they lag behind many nations in nuclear technology and expertise.

Additionally, Arab states are unable to provide security to Iran in exchange for stopping the nuclear program. The security of the Arab states, particularly the Gulf countries, is very much dependent on U.S. military assistance. On December 3, 2007, during the annual meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Ahmadinezhad eschewed mention of Iran's nuclear program, even as Arab leaders expected him to offer reassurance that it was entirely peaceful.² Rather, Ahmadinezhad showed condescension by offering security cooperation with the Gulf states but emphasizing that the cooperation should be "without foreign intervention,"³ a reference to Iran's ability to garner power without U.S. support versus the weakness of the Arab states due to their dependence on the United States for national security.

Another reason behind the Arab absence from global diplomacy efforts toward Iran is the complexity of these states' political and religious relationships with the Iranian regime. In this sense, when considering the nuclear issue, we must also account for other unresolved disputes between Iran and its Arab neighbors that started long ago. The three Persian Gulf islands that were occupied by Iran in 1970 are still claimed by the Arab League, and particularly by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Moreover, Arab regimes have not yet forgotten their opposition to the Islamic Revolution. After the shah's removal in 1979, all Arab states but Syria supported Saddam Hussein in his unsuccessful war against Iran. Iran survived

1. Iran Focus, "Arab States Could Help Solve Iranian Nuclear Standoff: ElBaradei," March 10, 2009. Available online (<http://www.iranfocus.com/en/nuclear/arab-states-could-help-solve-iranian-nuclear-standoff-elbaradei-17364.html>).
2. Talal Saleh Binan, "Almifrah alarabi lihal azmate iran annawawi" (The Arab key to resolving Iran's nuclear crisis), *Akkad*, June 13, 2006. Available online (<http://www.okaz.com.sa/okaz/osf/20060613/Con2006061324946.htm>).
3. Agence France-Presse, "Wary Gulf Leaders Host Iran's Ahmadinejad at Summit," December 2, 2007. Available online (<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5hQ0jJ92OECJV9YrSI7MH1kg1ElQ>).

and was able to establish itself as a force in the region despite Arab hostility. As it stands, diplomatic relations between Iran and the Arab states are difficult and tense. For instance, Egypt, a heavyweight Arab country, has not had any kind of ambassadorial representation in Iran since the shah's departure.

Arab involvement is also limited by inter-Arab political tensions that impede the states' ability to stand together to negotiate with Iran. Personal and political differences make Arab unity more rhetorical than real. Iran is already taking advantage of the Arab world's dividedness and its leaders' inability to satisfy their own populations, and the popularity of Iran's hard-line leaders among Arab populations is quite high. In the view of some Arab circles, Arab leaders are traitors and Iran is the only country that stands up for the Palestinians, defends Islam, and challenges U.S. and Israeli hegemony in the region—a populist viewpoint that bears little relation to reality but that is nonetheless influential.

Still, the involvement of Arab regimes might make Iran more likely to take negotiations seriously. They should define and implement a multipronged strategy to enhance the prospects for resolving this crisis.

Diplomatic Engagement

Diplomatic relations between most Arab states and Iran are strained, and some major Arab states do not have full diplomatic representation in Tehran. For instance, Egypt has only an interest section instead of a full embassy in the Iranian capital.⁴ Furthermore, Arab states have not been able to present a common front against Iran on many important issues, as symbolized by the small role, at best, played by the Arab League in Arab-Iranian relations.⁵ The Iranian nuclear issue is a matter on which the United States and EU are already seeking Arab support and would presumably welcome a more active Arab role, especially since such a role

might facilitate consensus with Russia and China.⁶ In addition to usual negotiation sites in the European capitals, the Arab League could offer to bring the talks on Iran's nuclear program to the Middle East. The responsibility of stabilizing the Middle East should be shared between the nations of the region and the rest of the world. Such a shift in venue could boost the regional efforts and give Arab regimes an opportunity to use their diplomatic influences together to convince Iran to halt its program.

Economic Leverage

The Gulf states could affect the regional dynamic by exploiting Iran's interest in their financial and economic markets. Iran wants to strengthen its relationships with the GCC states to promote economic relations and avoid international isolation. It is also interested in creating a free-trade zone in cooperation with the GCC countries.⁷ Especially since the imposition of United Nations sanctions, Iran increasingly has focused its investments in the growing Arab economies of the Persian Gulf. Long an important trading partner with the UAE regardless of the territorial dispute over the Persian Gulf islands, Iran has economic ties with Qatar and Oman that also have grown in recent years and could grow further. For instance, Iran is well placed to provide natural gas to Oman, which has developed industries and gas liquefaction facilities that could profitably use more gas than Oman appears able to readily produce on its own.

Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, could take advantage of its growing economic relationship with China to bring needed Chinese support regarding the Iranian nuclear matter. Beijing's bilateral trade with Riyadh dwarfs that with Tehran, with its investments in the Saudi market estimated in the hundreds of billions of dollars, including oil supplies, power generation, water desalination, and transportation.

4. See chapter 2, footnote 3.

5. Mehr News Agency, "Arab States Seeking to Improve Ties with Iran: Amr Moussa," Payvand News, February 25, 2008. Available online (<http://www.payvand.com/news/08/feb/1233.html>).

6. Abdul'aziz Sager, "EU Must Involve GCC in Resolving Iran Nuclear Crisis," Iran Press Service, December 6, 2005. Available online (http://www.iran-press-service.com/ips/articles-2005/december-2005/iran_uae_nuclear_71205.shtml).

7. Lynne Roberts, "GCC Considers Free Trade with Iran," ArabianBusiness.com, September 1, 2007. Available online (<http://www.arabianbusiness.com/property/article/498874-gcc-considers-free-trade-with-iran>).

Avenues outside the GCC

Alongside GCC states, Iraq could play a role in regional talks by helping resolve Iran's disputes with the West. The new Iraqi regime should take advantage of its post-Saddam status to bring the United States and Iran closer. U.S. and Iranian representatives have met in Baghdad to talk about the security of Iraq. Such discussions should also include the nuclear issue. The fight against terrorists and efforts to reduce sectarian violence are priority number one for the Iraqi government; however, the development of the Iranian nuclear program should not be ignored. The national security of Iraq and Iran are interdependent because of a long border and the shared Shia religious belief.

Were it so inclined, Syria would be well positioned to take advantage of its strong alliance with Tehran to sway Iranian officials to halt their nuclear program. Such an initiative would be well appreciated by the international community, which wants Syria to become a positive player in the region. Were Syria to help resolve the Iranian nuclear impasse, Damascus would reap great benefits with the West and Israel, both of which are very concerned about Iran's nuclear program. Such participation by Syria would greatly facilitate a peace agreement with Israel involving the return to Syria of the Golan Heights, which would be accompanied by economic assistance and enhanced trade opportunities with the West. During his visit to Syria in September 2008, French president Nicolas Sarkozy called on Damascus to exploit its relations of "trust" with Iran in order to resolve the nuclear issue,⁸ but so far this prospect remains quite theoretical. There are no indications that Syrian president Bashar al-Asad is interested in going down such a road.

The North African states are geographically far from Iran, but they can also participate in international efforts to sway the Islamic Republic from its push to acquire

nuclear weapons. As an example to the Iranians, Libya has noted the 2004 dismantling of its own program. In a 2008 visit to Tunisia, Libyan president Muammar Qadhafi criticized Iran's defiance of Western demands over the nuclear program, declaring, "What Iran is doing stems simply from arrogance.... In the event of a decision against Iran, this country will suffer the same outcome as Iraq.... Iran is not any stronger than Iraq and won't have the means to resist (a military attack) on its own."⁹ Since Libya dismantled its nuclear program, its relations with the international community have improved remarkably. The country has become powerful and more secure. In January 2008, Libya was elected without any opposition to chair the UN Security Council for one calendar month, after decades of being treated as a pariah state by the United States and EU. Moreover, many international companies are competing to invest in the Libyan market and take advantage of its growing energy sector.

Algeria's diplomacy has in the past been constructive in resolving problems with Iran. In 1975, Algeria mediated the territorial disputes between Iran and Iraq that led to the signing of the historic Algiers Agreement. Since the Islamic Revolution, Algeria has managed Iranian interests from the Algerian embassy in Washington, D.C. The North African state also played a prominent role in gaining the release of the hostages from the U.S. embassy in Tehran. Iran's attitude toward Algeria is mixed. In 2003, Iran offered to share its nuclear expertise with Algeria in order to develop Algeria's substantial uranium deposits, an offer that Algeria accepted. Given the current administration in Tehran, however, Algeria's relations with Washington have become close especially regarding military and energy issues, and the fight against terrorism. In this light, it is not clear how much of a diplomatic role Algeria could play, but at the very least it might urge Iran to negotiate more seriously and offer its services as a potential mediator.¹⁰

8. *Le Nouvel Observateur*, "Sarkozy veut 'constituer une relation de confiance' avec la Syrie" (Sarkozy wants to "build a relationship of trust" with Syria), September 5, 2008. Available online (http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/actualites/international/proche_moyenorient/20080904.OBS9952/sarkozy_veut_constituer_une_relation_de_confiance_avec_l.html).
9. Agence France-Presse, "Kadhafi Warns 'Arrogant' Iran of Military Humiliation," August 5, 2008. Available online (<http://www.prisonplanet.com/kadhafi-warns-arrogant-iran-of-military-humiliation.html>).
10. *Akbbbar Makroub* "Norahino Ala aljazayer litakouna halifa lana fi almintaka" (We want Algeria to be our ally in the region), August 4, 2007. Available online (<http://news.maktoob.com/forum/news3047>).

Conclusion: Why Arab States Should Care about Iranian Nuclear Progress

IT IS WORTH SPELLING OUT why Arab states should care about Iranian nuclear progress, and therefore why they should make more of an effort to help resolve the impasse over Iran's nuclear program. An Iranian nuclear bomb would have major consequences for the future of the Arab states. It would serve as a tool to humiliate Arab regimes and envelop them in Iran's sphere of influence. Iran would take a major step forward in establishing itself as a regional power, and it would have more leverage to interfere in Arab domestic issues, particularly in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories. Iran, as a military nuclear power, would also gain popularity on the Arab street, having achieved a goal that the Arab regimes did not.

The policies of a nuclear Iran toward Arab regimes would almost certainly turn more aggressive. Iran might aspire to dictate oil policy, for instance, coercing Gulf Arab states to restrain their production (to keep prices high) while Iran continues to produce at capacity. Iran's rise might also embolden extremist groups such as Hamas and Hizballah and become the pride of radical Islam in the world. Saudi Arabia would fear a proclamation by Iran asserting its right to share in the guardianship of the holy sites of Islam, Mecca and Medina, which many Shiite Iranians consider to have been stolen by Sunnis after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Iranians might also claim a similar right to share in the administration of Jerusalem's holy sites, which could include encouraging more violence against Israel. Such policies would undermine Egypt's role in the region as the leader of the Arab world and a major mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Egyptians have long warned Iranians to stay away from Palestine. This issue became more acute during and after the 2009 Israeli incursion into Gaza, when Egypt vented its rage regarding Qatar's efforts to convene an Arab summit that would also include Iran.

Iran's nuclear arsenal would cause Arab regimes to spend more money on military technology. Though Iran is not yet a nuclear power, Arab governments have

already been engaged in a conventional weapons arms race that siphons funding from their domestic programs. With the exception of the wealthy Gulf monarchies, most Arab nations have frail economies. From both an economic and a sociological perspective, it might be prohibitively costly for these countries, especially Egypt and Jordan, to be involved in a conventional arms race. Regardless, they would need to react swiftly and profoundly in the face of a nuclear Iran. And if they did not, the governments in Cairo and Amman would look even weaker in the view of their populations.

It is possible that a nuclear-armed Iran would divide the Arab world and elicit support from some Arab regimes. Qatar, for instance, has already started to seek friendly relationships with Iran even as, and perhaps because, it fears Iran's nuclear progress. Recent political developments have demonstrated that Qatar is improving its bilateral relations with Iran. Qatar, in coordination with Iran and Russia, seeks to create an international organization of gas producers to take advantage of its enormous gas reserves and play a role in the leadership of the world gas market. Qatar's actions could be read to indicate a belief that Iran will win its nuclear standoff against the United States and that, therefore, the time has come to befriend Iran before it is too late to build bridges.

Broadly speaking, Iran's nuclear weapons could have a major impact on the state of nonproliferation in the Middle East. Arab regimes are already unhappy with the nonproliferation regime because of Israel's military nuclear capability, and Iranian nuclear progress would only deepen the discontent of these states, which might well consider following Iran's initial steps, at the least by developing their nuclear energy sectors and putting pressure on nuclear suppliers to hasten the delivery of nuclear technology. It is also possible that Arab regimes would limit their cooperation with the IAEA and, thus, hinder the nuclear organization's effectiveness, which is already in question. Finally, a small risk exists that some Arab regimes might reconsider their

stance on chemical and biological weapons, either by withdrawing from the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention or, in the Egyptian and Syrian cases, going public with their weapons programs.

In sum, Arab states have many reasons to become more active in seeking a satisfactory resolution to the Iranian nuclear issue. Rather than expecting the West to resolve the matter, Arab states would serve their interests well if they got more involved.

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Board of Directors

President

Howard P. Berkowitz

Chairman

Fred S. Lafer

Chairman Emeritus

Michael Stein

Founding President and Chairman Emerita

Barbi Weinberg

Senior Vice Presidents

Bernard Leventhal

James Schreiber

Vice Presidents

Charles Adler

Benjamin Breslauer

Walter P. Stern

Secretary

Richard S. Abramson

Treasurer

Martin J. Gross

Board Members

Richard Borow

Maurice Deane, *emeritus*

Robert Fromer

Shelly Kassen

Peter Lowy

Daniel Mintz

Fred Schwartz

Dimitri Sogoloff

Merryl Tisch

Gary Wexler

Next Generation Leadership Council

Jeffrey Abrams

Jill Abramson

Anthony Beyer, *cochair*

David Eigen

Adam Herz

Viki Rivkin

Zachary Schreiber, *cochair*

Jonathan Torop

Board of Advisors

Warren Christopher

Lawrence S. Eagleburger

Alexander Haig

Max M. Kampelman

Henry A. Kissinger

Samuel W. Lewis

Edward Luttwak

Michael Mandelbaum

Robert C. McFarlane

Martin Peretz

Richard Perle

James G. Roche

George P. Shultz

R. James Woolsey

Mortimer Zuckerman

