



## From Confrontation to Selective Cooperation Reconciling U.S. Extended Deterrence, Iran's Security Concerns, and the Goal of a WMD/DVs Free Zone

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Given its deep and lasting involvement in the security affairs of the Middle East, any attempt at arresting the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery vehicles (DVs), and advancing the long-term goal of turning the region into a WMD/DVs Free Zone critically depends on the involvement of the United States. This is especially true with a view to Iran's nuclear and missile programs, which currently form the most immediate – if hardly the only – hurdle to a regional arms limitation and disarmament effort. While the exact nature and extent of the nuclear program in particular is still a matter of debate, few observers would dispute that it has become a driver of conventional arms acquisition in the region.

In this regard, Washington has acted as the main supplier of advanced armaments including combat aircraft and missile defenses. The long-standing nuclear crisis has also resulted in a strengthening of U.S. air and naval forces in and around the Gulf. These developments have highlighted and, in all likelihood, reinforced the current trend towards heightened security competition. This further complicates the setting in which the now postponed Helsinki Conference on a WMD/DVs Free Zone must take place. It is thus apparent that sustainable progress in the arms control arena will require a relaxation of U.S.-Iranian tensions and the adoption of a less confrontational approach in those actors' bilateral relations.

Within the framework of this POLICY BRIEF, we examine the current U.S.-centered security architecture and propose some

initial steps towards a more cooperative paradigm of regional security provision. This analysis will subsequently be augmented by two additional POLICY BRIEFS devoted to the impact of U.S. sanctions and missile defense (MD) policies on the Conference's mandate of establishing "a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by the States of the region, and with the full support and engagement of the nuclear-weapon States."<sup>1</sup>

### The Organizing Principles of U.S. Policy towards Iran: Containment versus Roll-back

The limitation of Iran's regional influence has long been a pivotal element of the United States' strategy of regional pre-eminence in the Gulf region. Almost from the outset, Washington's dealings with the Islamic Republic have been guided by the same principle of "vigilant application of counter-force,"<sup>2</sup> that had been the central tenet of America's Cold War grand strategy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, often reduced to the concept of *containment*. In keeping with this principle, the U.S. has imposed a broad range of economic and political measures, designed to keep in check the revisionist impulses of the revolutionary elites and to weaken their grip on power. The ultimate aim of these measures was to foster processes of politico-economic erosion, which – it was hoped – would eventually lead to regime collapse.

However, in the past decade or so, the approach of comprehensive containment

### Abstract

*In recent years, the United States has sought to bolster its regional security arrangements by means of massive arms transfers to its Arab partners and Israel, as well as an increased presence of naval and air forces in the Gulf region. While it would seem that these measures have had a reassuring and restraining effect on Washington's allies, they have also served to accentuate Iran's threat perceptions, thus contributing to an increased level of security competition in and around the Gulf.*

*In this POLICY BRIEF, we examine the logic of the United States' strategy for regional security provision, its main pillars, and its impact on Iran's security concerns within the overall context of the envisaged Helsinki Process for a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems in the Middle East. We then highlight opportunities for selective cooperation between the two main protagonists in the smoldering nuclear crisis. By proposing a number of concrete measures designed to lower tensions without alienating the United States' regional allies or increasing the likelihood of additional proliferation attempts, we seek to outline an incremental path towards a less polarized regional security architecture that is compatible with the long-term goal of a WMD/DVs Free Zone. ■*

*This POLICY BRIEF draws on exchanges involving ORCHESTRA members from the United States, Iran, Israel, the Arab states, and Europe, which principally took place at an APOME workshop held in Barcelona, Spain, from January 24-26, 2012.*

**Box No. 1: Extended Deterrence Defined**

*Formalized in a Cold War setting, the concept of extended deterrence refers to a course of action in which “policymakers [...] threaten military retaliation against another state (the potential attacker) in an attempt to prevent that state from using military force against an ally (or protégé) of the defender.”<sup>1</sup> This may involve, but is no way limited to, the threat of nuclear use.*

*The posture of the United States with regard to its Middle Eastern allies is best described in terms of extended-general (as opposed to extended-immediate) deterrence. This is defined as a course of action in which “a defender allocates resources and deploys military forces for the contingency of an armed attack by an adversary even though there is no imminent [...] threat of attack.”<sup>2</sup> As is the case with other forms of deterrence, “the requirements for implementing [its implementation] are much less a matter of acquiring, proving possession of, or using raw military capabilities than a matter of demonstrating concern, motivation, and commitment,”<sup>3</sup> and it is to this end that military capabilities are allocated.*

*Like other forms of deterrence, extended deterrence can involve threats of punishment (the infliction of unacceptable damage in response to unwanted actions) as well as denial (the negation of whatever profit an opponent might draw from the initiation of unwanted actions).<sup>4</sup> The threats involved in U.S. extended deterrence towards Iran are framed primarily in terms of the denial of a nuclear, or other military, advantage the Islamic Republic might gain vis-à-vis the Gulf states and Israel.*

1. Paul K. Huth (1988) *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, p. 16.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

3. Alexander George and Richard Smoke (1974) *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, p. 52.

4. Lawrence Freedman (2004) *Deterrence*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 36–40.

»Washington is seeking to increase the level of conventional extended deterrence provided to its allies in the region.«

has been complemented by a series of initiatives which are better described in terms of the *roll-back* of Iran’s nuclear program. While roll-back in the nuclear arena is an outgrowth of the long-standing containment of Iran, to which it is intimately related, this second approach is aimed specifically at the prevention and reversal of Iranian progress in the field of nuclear technology with potential military applications. Within the context of this more narrow policy imperative, containment itself is now often redefined in less favorable terms: the concept is increasingly being associated with scenarios involving the passive acceptance and mere management of an Iranian nuclear capability, as opposed to more proactive approaches up to, and including, the preventive use of force.

This shift is evident in President Barack Obama’s March 2012 speech before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, in which he emphatically assured his audience that “I do not have a policy of containment; I have a policy to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.”<sup>3</sup> The president has since re-emphasized this point in several major foreign policy speeches, including before the United Nations

General Assembly in September 2012. It is against the backdrop of this dual approach of politico-economic containment wedded to nuclear roll-back, and focused increasingly on the latter, that we must assess U.S. efforts at providing an enhanced security umbrella to its regional friends and allies.

### The Logic of Extended Deterrence

As the key provider of security assurances and defense-related goods to both Israel and the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and as a major pole of power in its own right, the United States has long occupied a pivotal position in the security architecture of the Middle East. As a result of the nuclear crisis, the U.S. contribution to the defense of its regional allies has further increased, with arms transfers reaching an all-time high in 2010. While the United States’ overall military presence has decreased as a result of the withdrawal from Iraq, a substantial increase in forward-deployed naval and air forces has also occurred.

Both developments point to the fact that Washington is seeking to increase



the level of conventional *extended deterrence* provided to its allies in the region (for a definition of the concept, see Box No. 1).

Extended deterrence, as it is currently practiced by the U.S. in the Middle East, is based on a system of regional security commitments backed up by the threat of initiating actions to offset any advantages Iran might gain from its nuclear program or conventional military modernization. The strategy's main focus is therefore on deterrence *by denial*. This assessment is supported by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's 2009 statement in which she laid out the logic and the key elements of extended deterrence in the Gulf: "We want Iran to calculate what I think is a fair assessment that if the United States extends a defense umbrella over the region, if we do even more to support the military capacity of those in the Gulf, it's unlikely that Iran will be any stronger or safer because they won't be able to intimidate and dominate as they apparently believe they can once they have a nuclear weapon."<sup>24</sup> In terms of the strategy's ways and means, it involves the provision to Washington's regional partners of advanced weaponry, military equipment, and training as well as a strong U.S. military presence in the region. As these measures have the potential to stoke the regional arms dynamics and increase the level of security competition, they deserve to be examined in some detail. It is appropriate, however, that we first provide a brief overview of the political framework of security partnerships upon which extended deterrence ultimately rests.

### The Political Framework of U.S. Security Provision: Alliances and Security Commitments

As much as its military reach, it is a network of security partnerships that forms the critical prerequisite of America's regional security strategy. In the Gulf, the U.S. depends upon the cooperation of its partners for access to military installations and other strategic points, such as ports, as well as for a base level of legitimacy which its regional presence would otherwise lack. In turn, the members of the GCC – including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – expect the United States to deliver both economic and security benefits. Washington does

not maintain any formal alliances or fully-fledged mutual defense treaties in the region, but has committed itself to the defense of Kuwait (in a ten-year bilateral pact signed in 1991 and renewed in 2001), Qatar (in a twenty-year Defense Cooperation Agreement signed in 1992 and extended in 2002), and the United Arab Emirates (in 1994). The details of all three agreements remain classified, but it is clear that they involve provisions for access to military facilities, pre-positioning of equipment, and the deployment of significant numbers of U.S. forces. In addition, Kuwait and Bahrain have both been named Major non-NATO Allies (MNNAs) of the United States. This special status does not, in and of itself, involve a defense commitment but entails a far-reaching relaxation of military export controls. The U.S. commitment to the security of Saudi Arabia is more implicit and has been established by a series of precedents, including that of *Operation Desert Shield* in 1990 and a string of massive arms sales culminating in a \$60 billion deal concluded in 2010 and discussed in more detail below. American-Arab cooperation in the fields of security provision and armaments was further enhanced by the launch, in May 2006, of the Gulf Security Dialogue (GSD), now the "principal security coordination mechanism between the United States and the six countries of the GCC [...] to meet common perceived threats."<sup>25</sup> Besides synchronizing policies to manage regional security threats such as the situation in Iraq and the proliferation of unconventional weapons, the initiative is mainly aimed at strengthening the GCC's military capabilities.

With regard to Israel, the bargains underlying the alliance are somewhat more difficult to grasp, in that Washington's provision of security-related goods and commitments often does not yield commensurate benefits for the United States in terms of political legitimacy or strategic access. Nonetheless, it is clear that – for reasons both strategic and domestic – Israel is seen as an indispensable partner in the region. A long-standing MNNA, Israel has been granted privileged access to advanced military technology, so as to allow it to maintain its 'qualitative military edge' for the indefinite future. Since 1976, it has also been the largest recipient of U.S. military aid, with annual contributions now exceeding \$3 billion. As is elaborated in



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the next section, the recent sales of U.S. armaments to the region, while in some cases unprecedented in volume, largely follow the established patterns described above.

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### Ways and Means (I): Recent Major Arms Transfers

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In 2006, against the backdrop of the escalating dispute over Iran's nuclear program, the Bush administration not only initiated the GSD, but also promised to increase American military aid to the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council to about \$20 billion over a ten-year period. Meanwhile, the United States also completed the delivery of 80 F-16E multi-role fighters to the UAE, as agreed upon in an earlier accord. Following the official announcement of the Bush decision in mid-2007, a series of far-reaching arms transfers was negotiated, eventually leading to a major bilateral arms deal with Saudi Arabia under which Riyadh is authorized to import weapons for an estimated total of \$60 billion over ten years. When the agreement was first presented to the public and the U.S. Congress in autumn 2010, both sides were said to have focused on the sale of multi-role fighters and helicopters, but also tackled upgrading Saudi Arabia's naval forces. In addition, Washington was said to have encouraged Riyadh to purchase missile defense systems such as Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), which is able to cover a much larger swath of territory than previous systems.

After congressional approval had been assured, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia reached an agreement on the transfer of 85 F-15SA strike fighters and related technology in December 2011, at a time of rising tensions in the Gulf, fueled by Iranian missile tests days earlier. As the aircraft clearly affect the regional military balance and can – in principle – carry a WMD payload, they are also relevant in the context of a WMD/DVs Free Zone. In addition to the procurement of the new fighters, Riyadh will also import technology required to upgrade 70 aircraft of the older F-15S type, thereby bringing these systems to a common standard with the newly acquired F-15SA version. Saudi Arabia will be supported logistically and its personnel will be trained by the United States. According to American officials,

the modernization of the older F-15S strike fighters will commence in 2014, while the first newly-built F-15SAs are expected to be transferred the following year.

In much more modest deals, the U.S. is also transferring a dozen more F-16s in the widespread Block 50/52 configuration to Oman and a slightly downgraded version of the same aircraft – designated the F-16IQ – to Iraq. In the latter case, the intention is “to give Iraq an air defense force that can handle aging threats from Syria or Iran relatively well, and perform strike missions within Iraq, without being a serious threat to more advanced air forces in the region.”<sup>6</sup> The Nuri al-Maliki administration's request for 18 fighter jets, later expanded to 36, was quickly approved by the U.S. It is currently expected that the transfer of the first batch of fighter jets will take place only in 2014. In addition, recruiting pilots and training them – as in the Saudi case – presents another challenge that will have to be overcome.

While the total volume of the Saudi deal is unprecedented, the transfer of missile and air defense systems has in recent years taken on even greater significance for the American-Arab security partnership than the sale of combat aircraft. Shortly after the announcement of its decision to enhance the GCC's military capabilities, the United States was asked by Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates to provide them with a massive increase in their MD potential and related technology. Kuwait and the UAE both set their sights on Patriot PAC-3 technology. Kuwait ordered missiles, launchers, and modification kits to upgrade its existing PAC-2 fire units. The United Arab Emirates requested the entire PAC-3 system. The Emirates also asked for the highly-advanced THAAD system. Most recently, Qatar has joined its neighbors with requests for both PAC-3 and THAAD transfers.

These armaments are not directly affected by the mandate of the envisioned Conference on a WMD/DVs Free Zone. However, Iran's reading of the MD transfers is that they pose a threat to its security, because these defensive technologies might well be used as part of an offensive strategy directed against it.<sup>7</sup> The delivery of missile defense systems could therefore contribute to Tehran's determination to further strengthen its missile capabilities, thus reinforcing the

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**Box No. 2: Recent U.S. Sales of Relevant Major Weapon Systems**

System	Type	Number	Recipient	Initiated
MGM-168 ATACMS	Tactical ballistic missile	30	Bahrain	2010
F-16IQ	Multi-role fighter	36	Iraq	2010
F-35A	Multi-role fighter	20+	Israel	2010
Patriot GEM-T	Upgrade for PAC-2	200+ (missiles)	Kuwait	2010
Patriot PAC-3	Missile/air defense system	60 (missiles)	Kuwait	2012 (requested)
F-16C/D	Multi-role fighter	12	Oman	2011
Patriot PAC-3	Missile/air defense system	11	Qatar	2012 (requested)
THAAD	Missile defense system	2	Qatar	2012 (requested)
F-15SA	Strike fighter	85	Saudi Arabia	2011
F-15SA	Upgrade for F-15S	70	Saudi Arabia	2011
Patriot PAC-3	Upgrade for PAC-2	--	Saudi Arabia	2011
MGM-168 ATACMS	Tactical ballistic missile	100	UAE	2010
Patriot PAC-3	Missile/air defense system	9	UAE	2008
THAAD	Missile defense system	2+	UAE	2011

Sources: SIPRI Arms Transfers Databank; Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA); 'Gulf States Requesting ABM-capable Systems', Defense Industry Daily. Online, available at <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/gulf-states-requesting-abm-capable-systems-04390/> (December 3, 2012).

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offense-defense arms race that already seems to be under way in the region. As Ronald L. Burgess, the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, stated before Congress, the Islamic Republic has already taken some steps in this direction: "Iran continues to improve the survivability of [its short-range missile] systems through technological advances, such as solid-propellant and the use of anti-missile defense tactics."<sup>8</sup> The United States, for its part, has supplied the advanced MGM-168 ATACMS tactical ballistic missile system to the UAE and Bahrain, adding an additional facet to the armaments dynamic.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the above-mentioned military exports to the Gulf, the United States is determined to supply its long-standing ally Israel with even more advanced weaponry. Particularly noteworthy is Israel's 2008 request to import the F-35 Lightning II, a stealthy fifth-generation fighter aircraft. This request was for the procurement of an

initial 25 aircraft, with an option for 50 more. Meanwhile both sides have agreed on a somewhat more circumscribed deal, finalized in 2010, according to which Israel will initially obtain 20 F-35s in the 2015-2017 time frame. The transfer will be financed in its entirety by American military grants.

All of the transfers described above are subject to complex political considerations, and calibrated to maintain a precarious balance among Washington's regional allies. Perhaps most importantly, American concerns about Israel's security and the explicit commitment to support their main ally in maintaining a 'qualitative military edge' have often put into question the wisdom of providing the Gulf states with advanced weaponry as well. However, given the threat perceived to be emanating from Tehran, it appears that these concerns are currently outweighed by the determination to prevent Iran from gaining a regional advantage as a result of its sensitive nuclear activities.

**U.S. Military Installations in the Gulf**


EMDE GRAFIK

Sources: DoD Base Structure Report FY 2012 Baseline. Online, available at <http://www.acq.csd.mil/ie/download/bsr/BSR2012Baseline.pdf> (December 3, 2012), GlobalSecurity.org.

### Ways and Means (II): U.S. Military Deployments

The other main pillar of extended deterrence is the United States' military presence in the region, mainly in and around the Gulf. Publicly available information on America's strategy of extended deterrence suggests that the provision of a 'defense umbrella' does not currently rely on the storage or deployment of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. Therefore, the following assessment does not consider U.S. nuclear forces in any detail,

even though their availability may in itself have a significant impact on the security considerations of regional actors. As far as conventional capabilities are concerned, the U.S. relies primarily on a substantial naval and aerial presence in the region to back up its security commitments. While significant ground force components are also present in the wider region, these are for the most part committed to operations in Afghanistan and unavailable for other missions. The remaining forces are tasked with maintaining a permanent forward presence, so as to enable the U.S. to surge additional combat forces into the



region if and when this should become necessary. Overall, few major force components are permanently forward-deployed, and these are predominantly naval and Marine expeditionary forces. The main organizational unit tasked with maintaining the regional military posture is the United States Central Command (CENTCOM), based at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, with its forward headquarters at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar.

The naval component of America's forward presence is organized under the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, headquartered in Bahrain. Its principal force elements include a Carrier Strike Group (CSG) and an Amphibious Ready Group, which are supported by a range of other force components, including submarine and mine warfare task forces. A Carrier Strike Group is usually made up of a Nimitz-class supercarrier with its Carrier Air Wing of 60-70 combat aircraft, one or more guided-missile cruisers, a destroyer squadron, a nuclear-powered fast attack submarine, and several support vessels. Together, these assets possess a considerable land-attack capability. An Amphibious Ready Group will usually consist of an amphibious assault ship, which carries a number of combat aircraft and helicopters, a 2,200-strong Marine Expeditionary Unit, and several support vessels. The Fifth Fleet's usual combined personnel strength is approximately 25,000 afloat and 3,000 ashore. However, in the light of Iran's repeated threats to close the Strait of Hormuz to international shipping, the U.S. and allied naval presence in and around the Gulf has been substantially strengthened since early 2012. Additional force elements now in place include a second CSG (CENTCOM commander Gen. James Mattis's request for a third was turned down by President Obama), a doubling of mine counter-measures ships from four to eight, and the deployment of the amphibious transport dock USS Ponce as an Afloat Forward Staging Base in the Gulf.

The U.S. aerial presence is centered on the Air Forces Central (AFCENT), which has its Combined Air and Space Operations Center at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar. It currently has a total of seven Air Expeditionary Wings (AEWs) under its command, only three of which are stationed in the Gulf region. While the 379th AEW at Al Udeid is a combat wing, other Air Force formations in the region

are mainly equipped for supporting roles. However, it has been reported in mid-2012 that U.S. air forces in the Gulf region have been augmented by F-22A and additional F-15C air superiority fighters. The Air Force also has a contingent in Saudi Arabia, but does not maintain any combat forces there at this writing. Outside AFCENT's immediate area of responsibility, U.S. Air Forces Europe maintains a large non-flying presence at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey.

The major pre-deployed ground force element of the United States' regional posture is the Third Army, or U.S. Army Central, with its forward headquarters at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. This formation is also in charge of coalition ground forces in Afghanistan, where almost all of its combat forces are currently concentrated. More than 13,000 Army personnel are stationed in Kuwait, and a possible expansion of this presence in the wake of the U.S. exit from Iraq has been discussed. Forces inside Kuwait also include two Patriot PAC-3 air defense battalions. The Army has much smaller contingents – ranging from little over 100 to about 400 – in a number of other countries in the region, with Qatar, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia being the largest. These forces are deployed to ensure a permanent military presence in the region and do not possess major combat capabilities. The Army also aims to maintain two Heavy Brigade Combat Teams worth of equipment in Kuwait and Qatar as part of its strategic war reserves (Army Prepositioned Stock Southwest Asia, or APS-5). These stocks, along with those of the Army Prepositioned Stock Afloat (designated APS-3), have been depleted several times over during combat operations in the region and are to be re-constituted by 2015.

A precise assessment of the combat power of the above-mentioned elements of the U.S. military posture would present a number of challenges. It is, however, apparent that the American forces deployed in and around the Middle East are not currently configured for major combat operations outside Afghanistan, with the partial exception of a limited naval engagement in or around the Strait of Hormuz. Extensive preparations have been made for such a scenario since early 2012. In the light of these developments, the Fifth Fleet is clearly the most formidable and flexible element of the posture, capable of dealing with a variety

*»For any extended military operation in the region the U.S. depends on its ability to project power into the region in a timely and decisive manner.«*

of smaller contingencies, even without immediate reinforcements. However, for any extended military operation in the region – including an air campaign against Iran’s nuclear facilities, which would probably necessitate several thousand combat sorties – the U.S. depends on its ability to project additional elements of its superior military power into the region in a timely and decisive manner.

While it is not currently configured to pose a major threat to Iran’s physical security, America’s regional military posture can nonetheless be expected to loom large in Iranian strategic thinking, as Tehran has constantly felt threatened by the prospect of an American intervention. In particular, there has always been a pervasive anxiety about possible attempts at regime change. Against this backdrop, one can expect Tehran to view any presence of U.S. forces in the region with great skepticism, and insist on the relevance of U.S. troops in the context of the envisioned WMD/DVs Free Zone. Since regime security seems to be the core concern of the Islamic Republic’s leadership and U.S. military deployments are somewhat flexible, there might be room for an agreement that takes this central aspect of Tehran’s strategic thinking into account.

*» It will be necessary to identify opportunities for confidence and security building even while the basic parameters of the current confrontation endure.«*

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### **Extended Deterrence and Regional Stability: What Prospects for Adaptation?**

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While some aspects of the policy will probably have to be reconsidered if Iran and the United States are to move towards improved relations, our assessment of the overall impact of extended deterrence on regional stability and arms control is ambivalent. On the one hand, both arms transfers and a strong military presence may have negative consequences with regard to *ongoing* proliferation dynamics, in that they are buttressing Tehran’s sense of encirclement and contributing to the high level of security competition currently observed in the region. On the other hand, it appears highly likely that adequate levels of extended deterrence will have a restraining influence on *future* horizontal proliferation. A number of Saudi diplomats, including former intelligence chief and ambassador to Washington, Prince Turki bin Faisal, have pointed to Riyadh’s determination to follow suit if the Islamic Republic were to achieve a break-out capability or actually build nuclear weapons.

Against this backdrop, enhancing the Saudis’ conventional capabilities and GCC-U.S. military cooperation probably contributes to nuclear restraint, as these initiatives limit Riyadh’s (and the GCC states’) vulnerability vis-à-vis Tehran. Therefore, abandoning or significantly weakening extended deterrence would not seem advisable, unless a significant change in political circumstances allows for such a step to be taken without major negative repercussions for the security needs of the GCC. Thus, if the goal of a WMD/DVs Free Zone is taken as the main point of reference, the integrity of the current security arrangements should be maintained until the core concerns of the United States’ regional allies have been adequately addressed.

While there are clear incentives for modifying the present approach to extended deterrence so as to mitigate its negative impact on the level of security competition, the practical possibilities of doing so without putting U.S. commitments into question are rather limited in the short term. As foundational research on extended deterrence clearly indicates, arms transfers and local military strength are among the most important variables in making extended deterrence work – historically, a low value on either variable has made deterrence failure much more likely.<sup>10</sup> If we assume that the deterrent and reassuring effects of the policy are directly related, it would thus seem likely that a weakening of either pillar would also have a negative effect on allies’ restraint concerning WMD acquisition. We conclude that, with a view to the viability of a future Helsinki Process for regional disarmament, the integrity of the current security arrangements should be maintained while Iran continues to progress towards a latent nuclear capability. However, as the leadership in Tehran is unlikely to abandon its nuclear efforts in the absence of significant changes in Iran’s external and internal conditions, it will be necessary to identify opportunities for confidence and security building even while the basic parameters of the current confrontation endure.

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### **Moving towards Selective Cooperation**

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Having discussed the main elements of the United States’ extended deterrence policy and the prospects for its adaptation, we propose several avenues for selective



cooperation between the United States and the Islamic Republic with regard to both regional stability and arms control. In the following, we outline what an attempt at reconciling both states' security interests, as well as those of America's regional allies, with the goal of establishing a WMD/DVs Free Zone may look like. We recognize that even the most gradual efforts to improve the U.S.-Iranian security relationship are currently facing very significant obstacles. While a renewal of some diplomatic contacts is not improbable, key leadership figures in Tehran remain committed to an adversarial view of the relationship, with some notable parallels in Washington. In addition, within the Islamic Republic's elite, the ultra-conservative faction and the influential Revolutionary Guards Corps, which are both skeptical of any agreement with the U.S., have expanded their influence at the expense of more pragmatic voices in recent years. In 2009, even the leading voices of the opposition Green Movement joined the nationalist chorus by rejecting a fuel swap deal that had already won the approval of President Mahmood Ahmadinejad, reflecting an increasingly hostile approach to nuclear accommodation pursued by all relevant domestic actors. Hence, the possibility that a negotiation process might be instrumentalized by reactionary forces in Tehran to camouflage the intention of proceeding with the nuclear and missile projects cannot be ruled out. This is why we suggest a strictly incremental 'give-and-take' approach that would allow the United States to initiate effective counter-measures in case of Iranian non-compliance, lest its allies gravitate towards reactive proliferation.

This assessment of the obstacles to cooperation notwithstanding, we believe that it is possible to partially reconcile the security interests of both countries in such a way as to allow for improved regional stability. This assessment is in keeping with the following, fundamental considerations: (1) that the United States' main regional interest is to maintain its pre-eminent position in the face of Iran's expansion of its nuclear activities, employing arms transfers and military presence to prevent a crumbling of the current security architecture; and (2) that the Iranian leadership will generally prioritize regime survival over the expansion of its regional influence. The following suggestions for an incremental approach to cooperative security and arms control take into account these core interests on both sides of the current confrontation.

### Preparing the Ground For U.S.-Iranian Détente

We believe that the success of any broader, bilateral agreement – let alone a region-wide disarmament agenda – would ultimately depend on Iran's willingness to accept some limits on its nuclear aspirations. However, while the successful enactment and implementation of an accord on Iran's nuclear activities would be a vital step in stabilizing U.S.-Iranian relations and furthering a regional arms control and disarmament agenda, any such outcome is highly unlikely unless the parties involved manage to overcome the poisoned atmosphere and build some level of trust. To this end, modest efforts in areas not directly related to either side's core security concerns probably stand a better chance of succeeding than attempts at constructing a 'grand bargain.'

Nonetheless, discussions about a more sustainable security relationship should be initiated at an early date. The impending withdrawal of (most) American combat forces from Afghanistan might open a window of opportunity in this regard. The Islamic Republic, fearful of encirclement and armed attack, is probably most worried about the U.S. military presence in its immediate environment. The termination of major ground force deployments in the region could thus serve as a catalyst for a re-examination of U.S.-Iranian security relations and their re-definition in less confrontational terms. A re-configuration of the regional posture along these lines would not have an adverse impact on the security of the Gulf states, as current U.S. land force dispositions contribute little to their defense, and the remaining elements of the posture would be sufficient to signal firm U.S. commitment, and keep in place the foundations of America's military pre-eminence. The same is true with regard to Israel.

As far as the nuclear issue is concerned, a preliminary accord that institutes a partial freeze on Tehran's uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities in exchange for a U.S. declaration to forego covert action and/or overt military aggression (for as long as the freeze is in place) would still appear to be an attractive modus of addressing both countries' most salient concerns. Iran might, of course, insist on additional measures that contribute to the credibility of such security assurances. From an American point of view,

*»Modest efforts probably stand a better chance of succeeding than attempts at constructing a 'grand bargain.'«*



symbolic steps in this direction should be acceptable if a verifiable freeze is implemented and key U.S. foreign policy goals are not put in jeopardy.

### Further Steps towards a More Sustainable Relationship

At a later stage the complex issue of curtailing the Islamic Republic's nuclear activities would have to be addressed in a more sustainable fashion, as a temporary and reversible freeze on enrichment might not, in itself, be sufficient to prevent increased security competition and arms racing. In this regard, encompassing limitations on Iran's production of bomb-grade material would have to be negotiated. Furthermore, the re-enactment of the Additional Protocol, allowing the International Atomic Energy Agency to conduct far-reaching inspections of suspicious facilities, would be an obvious step. In return, Washington would provide a more comprehensive set of negative security assurances, addressing a demand that Iran has often voiced in past negotiations.

This still begs the question whether any security guarantees will be viewed as adequate from Tehran's perspective or whether the Islamic Republic will insist on additional steps regarding the American military presence. As the U.S. armed forces rely primarily on their strategic mobility, rather than the capabilities of forward-deployed forces in themselves, such measures would seem difficult to conceptualize. As was indicated above, any across-the-board military retrenchment would surely alienate America's allies and make them look for additional military partners or unilateral assurances in the form of increased military capabilities. This might leave the region far more unstable and, indeed, prone to proliferation than is currently the case.

Hence, it is imperative that attempts at reassuring Iran be carefully balanced with America's security commitments even as relations between the main protagonists slowly improve. Secondly, while major steps such as the withdrawal of CENTCOM forward headquarters from Qatar or of the Fifth Fleet headquarters from Bahrain would have a negative impact on the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence, they would not, in themselves, change the material reality of American military dominance and capacity for power projection. However, research on extended deterrence and threat perceptions points to the fact that *local* military balances

matter far more than *overall* military potential.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the strategic mobility of U.S. forces might not loom as large in the minds of the Iranian leadership as an examination of overall military capabilities might lead one to believe. The main challenge, then, would be to re-configure the United States' regional military posture in such a way as to render it emphatically non-aggressive, possibly by reducing the number of offensive strike systems (e.g. strike fighters, cruise missiles) in theater while keeping adequate defensive assets (e.g. air superiority fighters, mine countermeasures vessels, air and theater missile defenses) in place. This might eventually result in a more offshore-oriented posture that preserves a potential for timely power projection even in the absence of a sizeable regional presence.

Any military measures would have to be complemented by political initiatives designed to convince Iran that the U.S. accepts the current regime as interlocutor and does not harbor aggressive intentions. Symbolic measures such as a partial re-establishment of diplomatic relations and a high-level statement of recognition could be important signals in this regard. The gradual retraction of unilateral sanctions that are relatively unrelated to non-proliferation concerns might constitute another avenue for confidence building.

### Tackling Regional Concerns about Delivery Vehicles

In another important step, the transfer of additional delivery systems to America's regional allies would also have to be brought in line with the overall aim of establishing a WMD/DVs Free Zone. The supply of combat aircraft and missile defense systems has so far provided Iran's Arab neighbors with an incentive for nuclear restraint in spite of their fears with regard to Iran's nuclear activities and future non-compliance with any agreement that might be reached. If the Islamic Republic were to accept limitations on its nuclear program and allowed for far-reaching verification measures, the main rationale for the conventional arms transfers as outlined above would slowly wane. Other concerns about Tehran's military inventory mainly relate to its missile programs and would have to be tackled multilaterally. This might initially take the form of a flight test ban on medium- and long-range missiles (i.e. those with ranges exceeding 1,000 km),

»It is imperative that attempts at reassuring Iran be carefully balanced with America's security commitments.«



which would limit Tehran's ability to further expand its missile projects. To convince Tehran to comply with such an agreement, which would effectively freeze any further development of such systems, Iran's regional adversaries could offer to limit or phase out their own longer-range missile capabilities.<sup>12</sup> While Israel will be unwilling to sacrifice its missile-based deterrent, it might still be persuaded to forego the deployment of the projected intermediate-range Jericho-3. Furthermore, it might be willing to phase out some of its aging Jericho-2 missiles in a deal that would also involve Saudi Arabia's DF-3s, which are probably becoming unserviceable, and Iran's Sajjil-2. As the Jewish state mainly relies on its superior air power for deterrence and possesses alternative methods of delivery, expanded U.S. security guarantees might convince Israel to accept a freeze and/or limitation agreement that would have a commensurate effect on Arab and Iranian missile capabilities. It must be noted that a freeze on longer-range missiles would not necessarily address the concerns of the GCC member states, which are threatened mainly by Iran's short-range arsenals. However, as these missiles are merely a substitute for the conventional

air power which Iran lacks (unless, of course, they were nuclear-tipped), and as the Gulf states may retain substantial missile defense capabilities, this impediment appears manageable. An accord on longer-range missiles might eventually be incorporated in a regional arms control regime, capping missile ranges and related arms procurement, and culminating in the realization of a WMD/DVs Free Zone in the Middle East further down the road.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Having examined U.S. security provision efforts in and around the Gulf in considerable detail, we arrive at the following findings and policy recommendations:

- We assert that the adoption of a more cooperative paradigm of regional security provision will be a crucial precondition of a successful arms control and disarmament process in the Middle East, including the ambitious goal of establishing a WMD/DVs Free Zone. Unless the current trend towards heightened security competition is turned around and regional security arrangements are adapted

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9. This sale is in compliance with the guidelines of the Missile Technology Control Regime. While the system could in principle be adapted to carry a WMD payload, this would require very significant know-how and engineering skills not currently found in the UAE's or Bahrain's industrial base.
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accordingly, substantial arms reductions will remain elusive.

- We conclude that the U.S. policy of regional extended deterrence is contributing to the negative security dynamics currently observed in the region. However, we state with confidence that a U-turn on arms transfers or forward deployment of American forces would have a far more destructive impact on regional security. Major changes to the U.S.-centric security architecture would thus seem premature.
- We conclude that there is considerable potential for adapting the U.S. military posture and armaments policies to a more cooperative security relationship with Iran, if the Islamic Republic is prepared to make substantial concessions in the nuclear and missile realm in exchange for increased regime security.
- We propose a gradual path towards a more cooperative security relationship between the United States and Iran even while the current security arrangements remain in place. This would entail several rounds of bargaining designed

to address Western concerns over the production of fissile material, on the one hand, and Iranian regime security concerns, on the other. With regard to enrichment, we judge that there are few alternatives to its limitation as a critical step in overcoming the current impasse, and its partial acceptance as part of a longer-term solution. It is, however, unlikely that elites in Tehran will acquiesce in such an arrangement unless political and military steps are taken to alleviate Iranian threat perceptions. These measures should be preceded, and at later stages complemented, by confidence building in other areas, and should be viewed as initial efforts to be built upon, rather than an end in itself.

- While any improvement of relations will eventually require substantial concessions on both sides of the divide, we emphasize that the opportunities inherent in such an approach – in terms of both arms control and regional security more broadly – are considerable, and the nature of the alternatives should give pause to all involved. ■

**About the ACADEMIC PEACE ORCHESTRA MIDDLE EAST (APOME)**

The ORCHESTRA is the follow-up project of the "Multilateral Study Group on the Establishment of a Missile Free Zone in the Middle East". The ACADEMIC PEACE ORCHESTRA MIDDLE EAST is a classical Track II initiative: it consists of some 70 experts – mainly from the Middle East/Gulf, one of the most conflict-ridden areas of the world. The ORCHESTRA is meeting regularly in working groups (CHAMBER ORCHESTRA UNITS) on specific topics in the context of a workshop cycle from 2011-2014. The main goal of this initiative is to shape the prospective Middle East Conference on the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles agreed upon by the international community in May 2010.

For this reason, these experts develop ideas, concepts, and background information in a series of POLICY BRIEFS which are the results of intense discussions within the CHAMBER ORCHESTRA UNITS. In this framework, the broader normative Cooperative Security Concept will be further developed, embedded, and institutionalized in the region. At the same time, the ORCHESTRA meetings serve as venues for confidence building among the experts. The networking activities of PRIF's Project Group are documented by the ATLAS on Track II research activities in or about the Middle East/Gulf region.

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