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A Multi-Polar Nuclear Middle East – How it Will Operate?

A Working Paper in Preparation for the Herzliya Conference 2010

Shmuel Bachar

Shmuel Bar

Rachel Machtiger

INTERDISCIPLINARY CENTER HERZLIYA
LAUDER SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT, DIPLOMACY AND STRATEGY
INSTITUTE FOR POLICY AND STRATEGY

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Authors: Shmuel Bachar, Shmuel Bar and Rachel Machtiger

Project Coordinator

Dr. Shmuel Bar, Director of Studies, Institute for Policy and Strategy

Project Coordinators; Editors

Ms. Rachel Machtiger, Institute for Policy and Strategy

Mr. Shmuel Bachar, Institute for Policy and Strategy

Project Team Members

Dr. Ephraim Asculai, Institute for National Security Studies

Mr. Alan Baumgart

Mr. Shlomo Brom, Institute for National Security Studies

Dr. Oded Brosh, Institute for Policy and Strategy

Prof. Amatzia Baram, University of Haifa

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Mr. Avi Rosen, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Prof. Yehudit Ronen, Tel Aviv University

Dr. Jonathan Schachter, Institute for National Security Studies

Prof. Zaki Shalom, Ben-Gurion University

The following document summarizes the key points raised in the discussion and the conclusions stemming from it. It does not include everything that was said during the discussion and therefore does not necessarily represent the view of all of those who participated in it or the view of the conference's management

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Executive Summary

The failure of efforts to dissuade Iran from its military nuclear program makes it imperative to study the potential impact on the region if Iran succeeds in becoming a state that possesses nuclear arms. The prevailing opinion today is that the current American administration does not regard the exercise of military force against Iran in an effort to prevent its nuclearization as an option at this time. Against this background, the administration is studying the idea of extending a nuclear umbrella (extended deterrence) to countries in the region if Iran crosses the nuclear threshold, in exchange for a commitment by its recipients to refrain from developing their own nuclear programs. However, precedents on this issue (for example, Eastern Asia), are not applicable in the Middle East, and there is a basis for assessing that such a development would be perceived by the countries of the region (in particular, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey) as something that also requires them to attain nuclear arms. Such a process is indeed complex and takes time, but anticipated trends of proliferation following a collapse of the regime in Pakistan or North Korea are liable to shorten the timeframe – especially for countries like Saudi Arabia, Libya and Syria.

Indeed, we already today see a dynamic of far-reaching significance in which several Arab states are expressing interest in building an array of nuclear reactors for producing energy for civilian use and for peaceful purposes. Though this process does not necessarily entail the intention of building infrastructure for a military nuclear capability, it is liable to serve as a technological springboard for the possibility that these states will seek to develop a military nuclear capability in the future. This process is a source of attraction for countries that lack energy resources (Jordan) as well as states that are rich in energy resources (the United Arab Emirates, Libya), which are interested in both preserving these resources and protecting their economies as the sources oil and gas begin to diminish.

Following the completion of the Iranian nuclear project, it is possible that by the end of the next decade we will witness a multi-nuclear Middle East. One of the immediate dangers is the possibility that nuclear weapons will fall into radical hands, or into the hands of irresponsible non-state entities (for example, in the case of Pakistan's collapse). And this could quickly lead to nuclear escalation and a nuclear disaster. Some assert that the sense of fear and an awareness by states of the limitations of their power are liable to facilitate a process of coalescing into defense pacts – formal and informal – in the face of the Iranian threat (for example, a union of the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan in the framework of a defense alliance under American patronage, and perhaps also with Israel's discreet participation).

This scenario – of nuclear weapons falling into radical hands in a multi-nuclear Middle East in a way that is likely to spark nuclear escalation – raises the question of how the Middle East will operate. There is disagreement between two principal schools: The first, whose leading proponent is Kenneth Waltz and which prevails in the international community, is the school of realism in the study of international relations, which interprets the behavior of states (and this includes Iran) according to "interests" and reasoned, calculated, cautious and rational decisions. According to this approach, while nuclear weapons in the hands of Iran is not something desirable, it is a situation we can live with – because the Iranians can be expected to behave like any other cool-headed and cautious player when it has such weaponry in its hands. And it will be possible to adopt methods of dealing with them – through "containment" and deterrence, as was done in the past vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in the Cold War, generally successfully.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is a less prevalent view that anchors the relations of deterrence between states in the cultural codes of the two sides. This approach, whose proponents include the scholar Scott Sagan, rejects Waltz's thesis and asserts that his arguments do not meet the true test of today. According to this approach, states do not necessarily act only according to rational considerations, but also according to mystical and cultural content and motives. This is particularly evident in extreme regimes like the Iranian regime. This does not say that

these regimes are not "rational," but rather the system of considerations and values used in decision-making is different from those of the West. Between these two opposite approaches, there are also some who argue that while the Iranians can be expected to act in a calculated, measured, rational and cautious way, there still is a significant possibility for errant calculations and wrong assessments that could lead to escalation and confrontation.

The use of nuclear weapons in conventional conflicts is deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Western world. This weapon is perceived as legitimate only as a doomsday weapon – that is, as a response to a massive attack on the American homeland. However, there is a serious question regarding the extent to which the "taboo" on the actual use of nuclear weapons, which has become rooted in Western culture, has taken hold in the Middle Eastern countries that are candidates for acquiring a nuclear capability, or among entities in the region like the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, which are liable to acquire nuclear weapons. In most of the Islamic writings on this subject, nuclear arms are seen as a modern incarnation of "strategic" weapons from the days of the Prophet, and we must take into account the possibility that terrorist organizations will try to acquire non-conventional weapons with relatively broad destructive power, whether for use against the West or against local regimes.

A "multi-nuclear" Middle East, as described in the scenarios above, will not operate according to the rules that characterized the Cold War. We can anticipate more numerous crises, accompanied by threats of nuclear escalation and a greater tendency to consider the use of nuclear weapons in the framework of conventional conflicts. Against this background, there is a possibility that states in the region will try to formulate control mechanisms for preventing a collapse into conflict that is liable to be accompanied by the use of nuclear arms. In such a situation, there would certainly be an effort to also integrate Israel in a regional regime that, at the very least, would have more transparency and restrictions on nuclear capability.

It currently appears that the Iranians are working to acquire a threshold option that would enable them to quickly assemble a significant nuclear force when the time comes. The success of the diplomatic measures planned vis-à-vis Iran, including a sanctions regime, is doubtful. And on the other hand, it seems unlikely that the Obama administration will take military steps against Iran to thwart its nuclear program or that it would support an Israeli action. The image of Iran becoming nuclear without facing resistance would encourage the states of the region to initiate plans to achieve a military nuclear capability for themselves too. Primary candidates for additional nuclearization include Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Libya and even – in the longer term, and depending on the internal situation – Iraq.

If far-reaching economic measures or military steps are not instituted against Iran, and if there is no dramatic change in the regime, it will be impossible to prevent it from reaching the threshold of a military nuclear capability, with all of the ramifications this has for the regional arena.

A. General

The lack of success so far in the efforts to dissuade Iran from its military nuclear program makes it imperative to study the potential impact on the region if Iran attains its wish and becomes a state that possesses nuclear arms. There is a basis for assessing that such a development would be perceived by some of the countries in the region (in particular, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey) as something that requires them to also obtain nuclear weaponry. Proposals/ideas the American administration recently presented to extend a nuclear umbrella ("expanded guarantees") to Iran's Sunni Arab neighbors in the event that the threat of a nuclear Iran materializes further underlines the way in which such a scenario is perceived as possible. The State of Israel and the West will have to contend with a "multi-nuclear Middle East."

B. The Process of the Growth of a Multi-Nuclear Middle East

The prevailing view today is that the current American administration will not act militarily to thwart Iranian nuclear activity in the foreseeable future. There are two reasons for this: It appears that the realistic school, which is reassuring about the ramifications of a nuclear Iran, prevails among the administration's decision makers, and therefore the administration does not see the Iranian threat as sufficiently severe to justify assuming the risks that would ensue from a military operation, and also because the U.S. is already involved in two wars in the region.

Moreover, it appears that there is opposition in the top echelons of the administration to lending a hand to an Israeli operation. (In fact, the moderate Arab regimes are secretly interested in Israel taking action.) An expression of the administration's preparation for an era of a nuclear Iran can be found in the words of the American secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, that the U.S. would consider providing extended deterrence to the states in the region if Iran crosses the nuclear threshold. Implicitly, and based on precedents (such as Eastern Asia and NATO), these guarantees would be granted in exchange for a commitment by the recipients to refrain from developing their own nuclear programs. This does not mean that the U.S. has already accepted the reality of a nuclear Iran or that there is no debate within the administration regarding the intensity of the pressures and threats that should be applied in order to prevent this development. However, it is currently difficult to envision a scenario in which the Obama administration exercises military force to foil the Iranian nuclear program.

Therefore, it seems that what worked in Eastern Asia is not applicable in the Middle East. American guarantees for Japan, Taiwan and South Korea were regarded by the People's Republic of China (the nuclear power these guarantees were aimed against) as preferable to the nuclearization of these states. Moreover, these guarantees were designed to counter a direct threat by China and the Soviet Union against these states. This is not the case in the Middle East, where the U.S. will need to guarantee the countries of the region not only against Iran, but also against Israel – at least *pro forma*. There is a question whether the regimes in the region would be willing to expose their close ties with the U.S. at a time when they are subject to Islamic pressures at home and to Iranian subversion. The question also arises regarding the extent to which these states could rely upon the U.S. after all of its declarations about its determination to prevent Iran's nuclearization turned out to be hollow. Moreover, the cost of American defense of all of the countries of the region would be very high and it is very questionable whether the American agenda would enable such an investment.

In light of all of the above, it is very likely that additional states in the region will follow in the path of Iran and seek to acquire a military nuclear capability. There are indeed a number of stages that a state – and its decision makers – must undergo in order to attain an overt military nuclear capability: First, it must demonstrate the ability to obtain fissionable material; then comes the declaration stage, followed by testing. Anticipated trends of proliferation in the wake of a collapse of the regime in Pakistan or North Korea (and both states are known to have disseminated expertise in the nuclear field, even when they were under a relatively stable central government) are liable to shorten the timetable – particularly for a state such as Saudi Arabia, which was involved in financing Pakistan's nuclear program, or Libya and Syria, which have long-standing and stable procurement relations with North Korea.

It should be noted that we are already witnessing a dynamic of far-reaching significance, in which several Arab states are expressing interest in building an array of nuclear reactors for generating energy for civilian use and peaceful purposes, which is permissible under the NPT. Though this process does not entail at this stage a declared desire to initiate practical steps toward establishing an infrastructure for military nuclear purposes, it is liable to serve as a technological springboard¹ toward the possibility that these states will seek to develop a military nuclear capability in the future (a strategy of nuclear hedging). This process also signals to Iran that its nuclear capabilities are likely to be countered by nuclear development on the part of Arab states. This process serves as a source of attraction for two different categories of states: states that lack energy resources (Jordan), which bear the burden of rising oil and gas prices, and states that are rich in energy resources (the Gulf states, Libya), which are interested in both preserving

¹ It should be noted that Saddam Hussein sent many hundreds of students throughout the 1970s to study chemistry and physics in the U.S. and thus research that does not necessarily focus on nuclear reactors can also contribute to the development of a nuclear capability.

these resources and in protecting their economies as the sources of oil and gas begin to dwindle. Some of the states are liable to engage in collaboration in building nuclear energy reactors in order to ensure a link and supply of electricity generated from nuclear energy among the states themselves. As this process advances, control and monitoring systems will need to be implemented – not only at the state level, but also at the regional or sub-regional level, in order to provide any response required in the event of a malfunction or terror attack on the reactors.

In any case, against the background of the acceleration of the Iranian military nuclear program, it can be assumed that Arab states will aspire to accelerate the nuclear arms race. And it is quite possible that they will look for shortcuts to attaining their objective. They will seek to acquire nuclear arms via a state entity that possesses this weaponry or those who have the know-how for this. It is reasonable to assume that Saudi Arabia would not build an independent infrastructure for nuclear weaponry. Instead, it would rely on agreements with Pakistan or acquire the required components "off-the-shelf" as Syria (and perhaps even Libya) attempted to do by purchasing "turnkey" projects from North Korea. It is reasonable to assume that Libya and Syria will also resume their pursuit of this path. Though the timetable for these states to attain nuclear weaponry is quite long, it can be assumed that this route will take much less than twenty years. At most, we will apparently witness a multi-nuclear Middle East within ten years. It is important to guard against a conceptual failure (which also seems to characterize the Iranians) of regarding the Arab regimes as too weak to be able to rapidly develop a credible military nuclear program. Several years ago, **Libya** succeeded in surprising the West when its nuclear program was revealed – a program that was at quite an advanced technological level.

It should also be taken into account that in circumstances of a rising "supply" of expertise and nuclear materials, nuclear weapons are liable to fall into the hands of non-state entities such as extremist Islamic organizations and non-state players or units that operate on behalf of a state and its leaders, such as the Iranian Revolutionary Guards or the Libyan Revolutionary Committees. Due to their internal strength, such groups are capable of taking control over the development of nuclear arms and managing oversight of the control and command of these weapons. It is true that such a process has not occurred in any of the existing nuclear states, which have generally been careful to prevent the leakage of their capabilities. However, this does not prove that this will not occur in states in the region, which have a different political culture and approach to organizations under their patronage. The fact that Pakistan and North Korea actively engaged in proliferating nuclear capabilities might signal what lies ahead.

One of the most unstable countries in this context is **Pakistan**. If this country collapses, a dangerous situation is liable to ensue in which nuclear weaponry falls into radical Islamic hands. If we add to this the fundamental assumption of radical Salafi-Jihadist Islamic groups that there is full justification for acquiring and using nuclear arms, then the danger is even greater. Al-Qaeda's followers believe that the U.S. seeks to strip Pakistan of its nuclear capability. Thus, they have stated that they are obliged to take control of Pakistan's nuclear weaponry in order to prevent the U.S. from carrying out its scheme. In addition, the possibility that Iran will become a state that possesses nuclear arms frightens Al-Qaeda members. A Shi'ite bomb is intolerable from their perspective and they believe that a Sunni bomb must be deployed in order to counter it.

Algeria also had a nuclear program (in the late 1980s) that was quite advanced. It had all of the required facilities, but it chose not to activate them and they have remained idle during the past decade. It would take a long time to reactivate them. It should not be forgotten that this state has been drawn into a bloody civil war and if the nuclear option is implemented and an Islamist regime then rises to power, this regime would inherit the nuclear capability. This is another indication of the need for including additional factors – besides the state and its official institutions – when assessing future scenarios.

Iraq was also close to attaining a nuclear capability until Israel bombed its reactor, and the first Gulf War interrupted its plans. The new order in Iraq after Saddam Hussein's regime is still coalescing and it is difficult to say where Iraq's identity will be under Shi'ite dominance – whether it will adopt the Arab identity and seek to fill a key role in the Arab world, or whether it will adopt the Shi'ite identity and the connection to Iran. If Iraq seeks to develop a nuclear capability, it will have to start from scratch because most of its equipment was destroyed and there is tight international monitoring of everything it possessed prior to the U.S.-led the invasion. However, most of the personnel that drove Iraq's nuclear program is still present and is ready to mobilize for this effort, even if the Security Council

resolutions imposing severe restrictions on Iraq will remain in effect after the U.S. withdrawal. In addition, Iraq will also be able to purchase nuclear weaponry off-the-shelf.

Syria is incapable of achieving a nuclear capability on its own, but until 2009 it nearly succeeded in clandestinely activating a nuclear reactor purchased from North Korea, and it is not clear whether it also engaged in constructing a facility for enriching uranium for military purposes.

Egypt undoubtedly has the most advanced scientific, technological and industrial infrastructure of the Arab states. It has the best scientific array for operating nuclear reactors and implementing a dedicated nuclear program. In the mid-1990s, the Egyptians were apparently on the threshold of attaining a nuclear capability, but it seems that they put off their decision and no longer have facilities. The danger in regard to Egypt lies in the possibility that the Muslim Brotherhood will gain power in the state and take control of a nuclear program in an advanced stage of development.

There is a basis for assessing that the first state that will attempt to attain a nuclear capability after Iran is **Turkey**, followed by **Saudi Arabia**. The latter will receive Pakistani assistance because it lacks the required capability for developing an independent nuclear program. The Turkish case is complicated: Despite its capability for developing a nuclear program, Turkey is a member of NATO and seeks to become a member of the European Union. Thus, it faces a number of limitations. However, we are speaking here about a future scenario that occurs after the collapse of the global non-proliferation regime. This is a primary concern of those dealing with this subject in the Obama administration: They fear that additional states will follow in the path of North Korea and Iran. And it is clear that if both Saudi Arabia and Egypt become equipped with nuclear arms in the wake of Iran, then Turkey will not remain without this weaponry.

The conclusion from all of the above is that following the completion of the Iranian nuclear project, there is a great likelihood of increasing proliferation of nuclear arms throughout the Middle East. If this becomes the trend, the timetables are liable to be shorter than they were in the nuclear programs of Iraq and Iran because the agents of proliferation are extremely active (The Syrian case demonstrates this). Therefore, we are liable to witness a multi-nuclear Middle East by the end of the next decade. One of the immediate dangers that could befall the entire region if this scenario materializes is the possibility that nuclear weapons will reach the hands of radicals or non-state and irresponsible entities – for example, after the collapse of a state like Pakistan – which could rapidly lead to nuclear escalation and a nuclear disaster.

On the other hand, some believe that a sense of fear and the awareness by many that they cannot cope with the dangers on their own is likely to lead to a process in which states forge defense pacts – formal and informal. In this framework, it is expected that the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan would form a defense alliance and create a security architecture to deter Iran under American patronage (and perhaps also with discreet Israeli participation) in order to counter the Iranian threat. In light of the awareness among all of the entities in the region of the substantial strength of the State of Israel and its deterrent capability, it is not implausible that states in the region would seek to draw close to it and perhaps even informally integrate Israel within the framework of a defense pact. These circumstances are likely to lead to a situation in which the central attention of the states in the region and of the U.S. will turn to defending the moderate and pro-Western regimes. Against this background, it can be assumed that there would be increased pressure on Israel to soften its positions vis-à-vis the Palestinians in order to remove a significant obstacle to a united stance against extremist entities.

The nuclearization of the states in the Middle East would also have an impact on the behavior of various Middle Eastern states against non-nuclear states: A regime that possesses nuclear arms would more readily embark upon conventional military adventures under the assumption that its nuclear weaponry could serve as a deterrent if and when it faces a severe defeat.

C. The Relevant Approaches and Scenarios in Regard to Nuclear Deterrence

The scenario of a multi-nuclear Middle East in which nuclear weapons fall into radical hands in a way that is liable to spark nuclear escalation raises the question of how the Middle East – a region replete with tensions and a rich history of wars that resulted from erroneous assessments by leaders – will operate when nuclear arms are held by a number of countries.

There is an ongoing argument between two main schools: One school interprets the behavior of states (including Iran) in accordance with “interests” and calculated, measured, cautious and rational decisions. According to the assumptions of the “rational player model” as applied to states, particularly in nuclear circumstances, the aim is to maximize the state’s profits and minimize its losses. This is the view held by the overwhelming majority of scholars. It is the view of the West and other parts of the international community, and is also the view of prominent statesmen in regard to the Iranian nuclear question. According to this approach, nuclear weaponry in the hands of Iran is indeed undesirable, but is not “the end of the world” because the Iranians can be expected to act like any other level-headed and cautious player when it comes into possession of such weaponry, and it will be possible to adopt methods of dealing with the Iranians through “containment” and deterrence, as was done in the past vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in the Cold War, generally with success. The American scholar Kenneth Waltz, the leading representative of this school, contends that the very fact that a state possesses nuclear arms leads it to adopt limitations and act in a more cautious and responsible way than it did prior to possessing such weaponry.

At the other end of the spectrum is the second, less prevalent school, which rejects Waltz’s thesis. This school includes Scott Sagan, who asserts that Waltz’s arguments have not met the test of reality, not even during the early days of the Cold War, and certainly will not meet the test in an environment replete with tensions and ideological and religious impulses, and regimes that suffer from internal dissension, brutal power struggles, and systems of command and control that are unlike those which existed in the states that participated in the Cold War. According to this approach, states do not necessarily act according to rational considerations only, but are also driven by mystical and cultural motives and designs. According to this view, mystical content can make interests conditional and impose limitations on acting in accordance with interests. In the most extreme interpretation – as expressed by Bernard Lewis – Iran is portrayed as aspiring toward a messianic objective: expediting the return of the hidden imam by shunting aside rational considerations. According to this approach, even if Iran does act in a calculated and level-headed manner, its messianic objectives always lurk in the background. Thus, there is a significant likelihood that at some future stage Iran’s ideological leaders will believe that their duty is to act based on a consideration that goes beyond an interest or a measured assessment of costs, in order to advance the qualitative contents of their faith.² The Khomeinistic tradition of belligerent activism and jihad – *kharuj* (“going out,” taking action; the opposite of *qa’ud*, passive sitting) and *’adl* (justice) – pushes the regime to constantly initiate crises aimed at realizing “justice,” as they see it – that is: the eradication of Israel. However, even if this description is correct in regard to the Revolutionary Guards surrounding Ahmedinejad, as long as there is input in the decision-making process from the “first generation” establishment of the Iranian revolution, the traditional Shi’ite approach also carries weight. According to this approach, this apocalypse cannot be the work of man; it can be invoked by the hidden imam alone.

Between these two opposite approaches, there are also some who contend that while the Iranians can be expected to act in a calculated, measured, rational and cautious manner, planning their moves according to anticipated profits and costs, there is a significant possibility of erroneous calculation and errant assessments that could unintentionally lead to escalation and confrontation, particularly in a situation of crisis escalation such as a Middle Eastern “Cuban missile crisis.” This scenario is based on the fact that even sober and rational decision-makers have often made wrong decisions and acted contrary to the “rational player model” by actually maximizing costs and minimizing profits, instead of the opposite. Within this middle school are those who describe scenarios of deterioration as resulting from

² In defining rationalism, it seems preferable to use the term “limited rationalism” as employed by Kahneman & Tversky in game theory analysis. Since each side calculates profit and loss, one should examine how they define them because values differ from one state to another and from one society to another. Ahmedinejad is rational in his considerations just like any other person. But if he thinks that his interest is to hasten the return of the hidden imam, he will seriously consider how to do this. The only case in which it is possible to speak about an irrational player is when a psychopathic leader harms himself and his interests.

the fact that “the rational player” is not an individual player on each side who manages the crisis vis-à-vis an opposing “sole player,” but is instead a “complex player” who reflects the diverse and contradictory internal interests of strong internal players and powerful forces within the regime. The result may be rational from the perspective of each of the internal players, but may not be “rational” or “reasonable” at the level of the collective result.³ Thus, while each of the secondary players indeed works to minimize costs and maximize profits for himself, the end result is the opposite for the state.

Lacking clear information about the way in which these states will develop their nuclear doctrine, we can only analyze their patterns of decision-making and their command and control in conventional circumstances and in regard to the strategic weaponry they already possess (primarily missiles, but also chemical weapons). Such recognition is likely to help us to look ahead and already develop relevant views of deterrence and to take action to minimize the negative ramifications of this development.

D. The Attitude toward the Nuclear ‘Taboo’

The prohibition on the use of nuclear arms in conventional conflicts is deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Western world. This weaponry is viewed as legitimate only as a doomsday weapon: that is, as a response to a massive attack against the American homeland. This approach makes it difficult to plan – and even more so to implement – the deployment of nuclear arms against a “junior” enemy that is incapable of threatening the destruction of the United States. This taboo raises questions about the ability of the U.S. to persuade countries in the region that it would indeed grant them a “nuclear umbrella” in the event of a nuclear attack on them by Iran. The rhetorical question of Charles de Gaulle: “Would the Americans risk Washington to save Paris?” is relevant in the eyes of the countries of the region.

While the “taboo” in the Western world regarding the use of nuclear arms is clear to all, it seems that this attitude is not so unequivocal among the entities in the region that are liable to acquire nuclear arms. In most of the Islamic writing on this issue, nuclear weaponry is viewed as a modern incarnation of “strategic” weapons from the days of Muhammad: instruments used to torch the homes of the enemy, rock launchers, and so on. Islamic terror organizations, led by Al-Qaeda, have published religious rulings not only in support of acquiring nuclear arms but also in support of using this weaponry against “the enemies of Islam” – headed by the West and Israel. Based on their “eye for an eye” policy, they regard nuclear weapons as a practical option for retaliating against the West for its “killing of millions of Muslims” by using nuclear weaponry that is capable of inflicting a similar number of casualties on the West. In light of this view, there is great danger in the scenario of radical Islamic organizations taking control of a Muslim state that possesses nuclear arms. The natural “candidate” for such a scenario is Pakistan. The Taliban and al-Qaeda seek to overthrow Pakistan’s regime and are waging all-out war against it. We should also take into account the possibility that terrorist organizations will try to procure non-conventional arms that have relatively broad destructive capabilities, whether for use against the West or against local regimes.⁴

Against this background, we can say that there is a serious question regarding the extent that the “taboo” on nuclear weapons will be assimilated by these entities. It is true that deterring a state from using nuclear arms does not depend solely on its acceptance of the “taboo” principle. Rather, it is based on the cost to be paid by those who use a nuclear weapon against a state that is capable of retaliating in the same coin. However, a state that is considering

³ Robert J. Lieber and Amatzia Baram, “Containment Breach”, *Foreign Policy*, December 2009.

⁴ In this context, it should be noted that during the first half of 2004 the Jordanian security authorities succeeded in preemptively arresting a terrorist group (the Jayyousi group) that had loaded trucks with chemical material that was designed to explode and kill over 100,000 people in the capital city, Amman

bypassing the cost will base its assessment on many complex factors that we cannot control or even know about for certain: the extent of the leader's religious faith that God will protect him and his country, the self-confidence he derives from the military establishment, the intelligence in his hands regarding the enemy's strength or weakness, and his assessment of its intentions. It seems that the fog surrounding these questions will remain.

E. Is it Really 'Cold War 2'?

The approach based on the lessons of the Cold War era suffers significant shortcomings:

- The Cold War was conducted between two superpowers or two nuclear blocs, and the possibility of a secondary player in one of the blocs activating nuclear weaponry on its own accord was not considered plausible.
- During most of the Cold War period, the relations between the superpowers were conducted in the shadow of the MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) doctrine. The reserves of weaponry of the countries in the region will not reach this state of balance during the coming decade. The lack of a "second strike" capability has implications for a state's readiness to put itself at risk and deliver a "first strike."
- Proliferation processes during the Cold War period were slow and localized, compared to the expectation of an accelerated dissemination of information and nuclear materials from Pakistan, North Korea, China and Russia in the event of rising "demand" in the region following Iran's advancement toward a nuclear capability.
- Unlike the situation that prevailed between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, there is no communication between Israel and Iran; there is no trust between the two states, and Iran defines the destruction of Israel as a declared objective.
- The role of religion in decision-making and the impact of public opinion on the regimes' tendencies for brinkmanship are not similar to the situation that prevailed between the two superpowers during the Cold War.
- As of today, the states that are "candidates" for attaining nuclear arms do not have prepared guidelines for the command and control of nuclear arms. They will have great difficulty in implementing guidelines for separating weapons and launching systems, and the small quantity of weapons in the hands of these countries raises questions about their readiness to implement Permissive Action Link (PAL) devices for fear that this would restrict their flexibility in deploying the limited number of arms they possess.
- In the Cold War countries, R&D personnel had no pretensions about maintaining their influence over the weaponry they worked to develop. For example, it was clear to the developers of the Manhattan Project in the mid-1940s that the political echelon (and not the developers) would have the exclusive prerogative to decide what to do with the weapons they developed. We can assume that the R&D personnel and nuclear institutions in the Middle East are liable to act differently (as in the case of A. Q. Khan in Pakistan) and demand a role in the decision-making processes even after completing the development of the weaponry.
- Regimes in the Middle East – even the "autocratic" ones – tend to be "polycratic" in terms of the substantial involvement by centers of power not only in formulating decisions but also in implementing independent or semi-independent policy. This is evident today in the free hand of the Revolutionary Guards in Iran. During the 1970s and 1980s, Libya was immersed in warfare against Uganda and Chad, and these wars eroded the standing of Qaddafi, who nearly lost his hold on the army. Therefore, one can imagine situations in which the weakness of regimes enables power centers within the regimes to strengthen their influence and even take over control of the state's strategic weaponry.

The conclusion is that like the superpower confrontation that occurred in the 1960s, which also entailed a great danger of nuclear war as a result of escalation and mutual miscalculation, the conflict in the Middle East is also liable to similarly deteriorate to the brink of an abyss. Moreover, it does not appear that the Iranians – or the other countries in the region – attribute credibility to the American declarations about extended guarantees, and they do not believe (like De Gaulle in his time) that the U.S. would endanger Washington or New York in order to avenge an attack

against Jerusalem, Cairo or Riyadh. Therefore, a situation may develop in which, from Iran's perspective, an American nuclear response does not receive sufficient weight in their calculation of the risks pertaining to nuclear deterrence. If this happens, there will be no practical credibility to the administration's declarations.

It is expected that the development of strategic arms by Iran (including a program of developing long-range ballistic missiles) will continue to be characterized by secrecy and deception, and ostensible tactical concessions alongside threats. There is indeed a possibility that due to the fear of an unstable situation, the states of the region will try to formulate monitoring mechanisms for preventing the descent into conflict that is liable to be accompanied by the use of nuclear weapons. In such a situation, there will certainly be an effort to also bring Israel into a regional regime that will at least have greater transparency and restrictions on nuclear capabilities.

F. Summary

The success of the diplomatic measures planned vis-à-vis Iran, including a sanctions regime, is doubtful. And it is even less likely that the Obama administration will take military measures against Iran, at the risk of a comprehensive war in the region, in order to thwart Iran's nuclear program. For the same reasons, it should be taken into account that the U.S. would not look kindly upon an Israeli action and would even work to prevent it, fearing that it would be accused by Iran and its allies in the Middle East and in the Muslim world of being responsible for the Israeli action and that their retaliation would be aimed at the U.S. itself.

If far-reaching economic steps or military action are not taken against Iran, and if there is no dramatic change in the regime, it is reasonable to assume that Iran will reach the threshold of a military nuclear capability sooner or later. And the decision whether and when to cross the threshold and begin producing a significant force of nuclear weaponry will be an essentially political decision and will not entail technological obstacles.

Unrelated to the question of how and when the regime in Tehran will choose to exercise such a capability in practice, the very image of Iran galloping unhindered toward a military nuclear capability is sufficient to lead other states in the region to initiate programs to attain a military nuclear capability for themselves too. The picture of proliferation factors in the world today and the image in the region of a lack of firmness on the part of the U.S. indicate that the path of these states to nuclear weaponry will be shorter than it was for other states that have tried to develop nuclear programs. Therefore, Israel must take into account that the strategic environment in another decade will be characterized by a number of nuclear states in constant tension and risks of escalation and conflict that did not characterize the Cold War. Primary candidates for nuclearization include Saudi Arabia (via the Pakistani option and thanks to its ability to finance the procurement of "off-the-self" capabilities), Egypt (which possesses relatively advanced technological, scientific and industrial capabilities), Turkey, Syria, Libya and even – in the longer term and depending on its domestic situation – Iraq.

It should not be assumed that a multi-nuclear Middle East as described above will operate according to the rules that characterized the Cold War. It is more reasonable to expect that we will witness more numerous crises, accompanied by threats of nuclear escalation, and a greater tendency to consider the use of nuclear arms in the framework of conventional conflicts. All this is without taking into account the extreme case of a leader with a religious-messianic worldview who contemplates using nuclear weapons as part of an apocalyptic mood.

This reality requires Israel to reassess the significance of strategic deterrence vis-à-vis a threat of this type, in addition to questions such as Israel's position regarding the demands to transform the Middle East into a "nuclear-free zone," the policy of nuclear ambiguity, and the need to formulate a stance that will promote deterrence against a potential Iranian threat against the State of Israel.