

# **An Extended Deterrence Regime to Counter Iranian Nuclear Weapons**

## **Issues and Options**

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Table 1. Elements of a Possible Extended Deterrence Regime

Threat to be Deterred	Countries/Actors to be Protected			
	<i>CONUS/ Deployed U.S. Forces</i>	<i>NATO/Europe</i>	<i>Israel</i>	<i>Friendly Arab/ Muslim Countries</i>
Nuclear Missile Attack	High priority	High priority/NATO Treaty commitment	High priority/existential threat	High-to-medium priority
Nuclear Terrorism and Proliferation	High priority	High priority/NATO Treaty commitment	High priority/Existential threat	High-to-medium priority
Conventional Military Attack	Low risk/low emphasis	Low risk/low emphasis	Low risk/low emphasis	Medium-to-high priority
Political Coercion	Low risk/low emphasis	Low risk/low emphasis	Medium risk/medium emphasis	Medium-to-high priority
Conventional Terrorism	Low risk/low emphasis	Medium risk/medium emphasis	High risk/high priority	Medium-to-high priority

Table 2. Mechanisms and Instruments of Extended Deterrence

Threat to be Deterred	Strategic Mechanisms for Pursuing Deterrence	Key Instruments for Carrying out Mechanisms of Deterrence
Nuclear Missile Attack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make clear gravity of event</li> <li>• Prevent successful missile attack</li> <li>• Credibly threaten nuclear retaliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong U.S. declaratory policy</li> <li>• Missile defenses of protected countries</li> <li>• Nuclear retaliatory capabilities and options</li> </ul>
Nuclear Terrorism and Proliferation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make clear gravity of event</li> <li>• Prevent nuclear terrorist attack</li> <li>• Credibly threaten nuclear retaliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong U.S. declaratory policy</li> <li>• Homeland security and attribution assets</li> <li>• Nuclear retaliatory capabilities and options</li> </ul>
Conventional Military Attack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make clear U.S. and regime will respond appropriately</li> <li>• Conventional defense against specific threats</li> <li>• Capacity to conduct counter-attacks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diplomatic collaboration among regime members</li> <li>• Allied capabilities to defend borders, airspace, and sea lanes</li> <li>• Conventional forces for spectrum of counter-attacks</li> <li>• U.S. conventional commitments, when appropriate</li> </ul>
Political Coercion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deny Iran opportunities and benefits of political coercion</li> <li>• Protect vulnerable regime members from coercion</li> <li>• Impose political, diplomatic, and economic costs on Iran</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. and regime-wide political support of vulnerable countries</li> <li>• Reduce vulnerabilities of exposed countries through diplomatic collaboration</li> <li>• Wide array of instruments to exert counter-pressures on Iran</li> </ul>
Conventional Terrorism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deny Iran opportunities and benefits of conventional terrorism.</li> <li>• Protect vulnerable regime members.</li> <li>• Impose political, diplomatic, and economic costs on Iran.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homeland security efforts, individual and multilateral.</li> <li>• Diplomatic collaboration among regime members to discourage terrorism.</li> </ul>

## Executive Summary

This paper examines the idea of creating an American-led extended deterrence regime in the Middle East to address potential Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons and missiles. It does *not* focus on how to *prevent* Iran from becoming a nuclear-armed power. Instead it addresses how the U.S. Government can act to deter Iran in a future setting where it *already* possesses these weapons and is trying to employ them to geopolitical advantage. Developing a coherent strategy can lessen the risk that the United States will be surprised, compelled to improvise, and unable to lead effectively in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Even as the Administration employs diplomacy, sanctions, and multilateral cooperation to derail Iran from the nuclear path, it should also develop a clear sense of how it will react if, as is possible, Iran emerges as a nuclear power, led by a radical government with a menacing foreign policy. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently stated that Iran should consider the consequences of a U.S. “defense umbrella over the region.” This paper explores many of the issues related to such an umbrella.

Key questions arise regarding an extended deterrence regime. What Iranian threats would this regime try to deter? Who would it protect, and how would it protect them? How much deterrence is possible, and how much is enough? What shape would a deterrence regime take, how would it operate, and would it be effective? What options are available? This paper addresses these and related questions. Its intent is to illuminate issues and options, not to advocate any single approach.

The recent tumultuous election in Iran has restored President Ahmadinejad to power in a setting of strong dissent and growing government repression. Should Iran verifiably forsake its nuclear weapons program, an extended deterrence regime would be unnecessary. But if Iran continues to pursue development of nuclear weapons and delivery systems, the United States may have little other choice than to seek to create a deterrence regime, because a nuclear-armed Iran would pose serious threats to Europe, Israel, and friendly Arab/Muslim countries in the Middle East. Creating such a regime could serve key U.S. strategic goals and is preferable to the alternatives of going to war with Iran or acquiescing to its menacing strategic designs. This complex and demanding endeavor will require careful analysis and planning that should begin soon.

A plausible estimate is that Iran could start producing nuclear weapons in the near future and eventually field 20–30 nuclear missiles capable of covering the Middle East and Europe. The core idea behind an extended deterrence regime is that the United States would make security assurances and commitments that could deter Iran and establish an umbrella of protection over countries that are endangered by those missiles. If both goals are accomplished, the result could be to lessen regional political temperatures, including the risks of a nuclear arms race and escalating crises. Table 1 (facing page) displays the countries/actors that might need protecting, the different types of Iranian threats that could need deterring, and the priority likely to be given to each combination (represented by a cell of the matrix) based on its importance and associated risks. Top priority would need to be deterring Iran from exploiting its nuclear capability—using its nuclear missiles against protected countries, engaging in nuclear terrorism against them, or proliferating

nuclear weapons to such terrorist groups as al Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah. Iran also must be deterred from employing conventional aggression, terrorism, and political coercion against its Arab/Muslim neighbors.

Deterring a nuclear-armed Iran led by a radical government with high ambitions and risk-taking propensities will be difficult. U.S. strategy would need to make tailored use of such classical deterrence methods as denying Iran the benefits of aggression, imposing unacceptable costs on aggression, and giving Iran incentives to exercise restraint so that peace would always be preferable to war with the United States and its allies. Table 2 displays, for each of the five threats, the types of mechanisms and instruments that could be needed for deterrence. If the U.S. Government opts for a purely political regime, it could pursue deterrence through its own leadership and declaratory policy, plus such other instruments as multilateral cooperation and economic sanctions. If the U.S. Government also opts for a military regime, nuclear deterrence could be pursued through credible threats of nuclear retaliation, layered missile defenses, and enhanced homeland security to guard against nuclear terrorism. Could nuclear deterrence by itself prevent Iranian conventional aggression, political coercion, and terrorism against its nearby neighbors? Perhaps so, but more likely, it would need to be accompanied by such other measures as alliance political collaboration, stronger allied conventional defenses, and U.S. conventional forces.

How could the United States best pursue creation of an extended deterrence regime? Multiple options embodying different permutations and combinations are available: all of them should be examined so that their attractions, liabilities, and tradeoffs can be known. This paper offers six illustrative options that range across a wide spectrum stretching from high political feasibility but relatively low strategic performance (option 1) to low feasibility but high strategic performance (option 6). The six options offer varying mixtures of steadily increasing U.S. commitments and efforts that begin with alternative approaches to pursuing deterrence of nuclear threats and then migrate to include deterrence of conventional aggression, political coercion, and conventional terrorism. Each option has its own strategic rationale as well as pros and cons. The six options are:

1. *Political Deterrence* would strive to pursue nuclear deterrence and other goals purely through such means as U.S. political leadership and declaratory policy coupled with diplomatic and economic collaboration with partner countries. It would make no concrete U.S. military commitments to the regime.
2. *Variable-Geometry Deterrence* would include the measures of option 1, but would also provide concrete military commitments in the form of nuclear deterrence coverage (i.e., missile defenses, retaliatory plans, and homeland security) to Europe and Israel. It would strive to protect friendly Arab/Muslim countries through political assurances: e.g., the type of consultative arrangements that, in Europe, are offered to partner countries not invited to join NATO.
3. *Regime-Wide Nuclear Deterrence* would make concrete nuclear commitments to Europe, Israel, and friendly Arab/Muslim countries, and would strive to protect vulnerable Arab/Muslim countries from conventional aggression and coercion by using security assistance and training to strengthen their own self-defense forces. It envisions a small U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf: less than 25,000 personnel largely composed of air and naval assets.

4. *Full-Spectrum Deterrence* strengthens option 3 by providing a larger U.S. force presence that likely would top 25,000 personnel and would be designed for new-era deterrence and reassurance missions.

5. *Collective Security Deterrence* builds on option 4’s military features by striving to create a region-wide collective security architecture that would bond regime members into tighter political-military collaboration and a common strategic mindset.

6. *Integrated Multi-Theater Deterrence* is the most visionary option: it strives to join Europe/NATO with a Middle Eastern collective security system so that deterrence policies in both regions can be pursued in lockstep.

Table 3 summarizes the ability of these six options to meet key effectiveness criteria and, by implication, the tradeoffs they impose.

Table 3. Strategic Effectiveness of Options

<b>Key Effectiveness Criteria:</b>	<b>Option 1: Political Deterrence</b>	<b>Option 2: Variable-Geometry Deterrence</b>	<b>Option 3: Regime-Wide Nuclear Deterrence</b>	<b>Option 4: Full-Spectrum Deterrence</b>	<b>Option 5: Collective Security Deterrence</b>	<b>Option 6: Integrated Multi-Theater Deterrence</b>
Deterrence Goals and Mechanisms	Low-Medium	Medium	High	High	High +	High +
Reassurance Goals	Low-Medium	Medium	High –	High	High +	High +
Other Goals	Low	Low	Medium	Medium +	High	High +
Meet U.S. Military Requirements	Low	Low-Medium	High –	High	High +	High+
Political Feasibility	High	High	Medium +	Medium	Low	Low
Cost and Difficulties	Low	Low	Medium –	Medium	High	High +

Options 1 and 2 are the easiest to carry out, but their strategic performance may be too low for the goals being pursued. Options 5 and 6 offer the best strategic performance, but their feasibility is too low. Options 3 and 4 are the “sweet spot” on the spectrum; both offer plausible political feasibility and solid strategic effectiveness in terms of strong nuclear deterrence and improved allied self-defense capabilities. The decision between them turns on the size and missions of the U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf, and on the importance attached to conventional deterrence and related goals.

The time to start thinking, planning, and analyzing extended deterrence options is now, not after Iran has produced large quantities of fissile material, or tested a nuclear weapon, or fielded a delivery system. Months or years may pass before Iran has achieved these milestones, if internal developments, diplomacy, or other measures fail to end the Iranian nuclear weapons program. We must use whatever time we have to prepare to deter a nuclear Iran, or risk finding ourselves at a grave strategic disadvantage.





## Introduction

This paper analyzes the idea of creating a U.S.-led “extended deterrence regime” to respond to potential Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons and missiles. It *does not* focus on how to *prevent* Iran from becoming a nuclear-armed power. Instead it addresses how the U.S. Government can act to deter Iran in a future setting where Iran *already* possesses these weapons and is trying to employ them to geopolitical advantage.

This paper supports the Administration’s effort to employ diplomacy, economic sanctions, and multilateral cooperation to derail Iran from the nuclear path. The future will be far safer and easier to handle if this goal can be accomplished. However, the U.S. Government should also develop a clear sense of how it will react if Iran emerges as a nuclear power, led by a radical government in pursuit of a menacing foreign policy. Developing a coherent strategy now can lessen the risk that the United States will be caught by surprise, compelled to improvise, and unable to lead effectively in the Middle East and elsewhere.

The key questions that arise regarding an extended deterrence regime are: What Iranian threats would this regime try to deter? Who would it protect, and how would it protect them? How much deterrence is possible, and how much is enough? What shape would this regime take, how would it be established, how would it operate, would it be effective? What options are available to the United States? This paper addresses these and related questions. Its intent is to illuminate issues and options, not to advocate any single approach.

### **A New and Unpolished Idea: The Need for Careful Analysis**

One of the gravest dangers facing the United States is that during the coming years, Iran may acquire nuclear weapons and long-range missiles capable of delivering them not only across the Middle East but to Europe as well. Much will depend on how Iranian politics evolve. The tumultuous election of June 2009 has returned President Ahmadinejad to power amidst strong dissent and mounting governmental repression. Barring overthrow of Iran’s theocratic regime, which benefits from support by security and police institutions, internal politics seem unlikely to lead Iran to refrain from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Currently the United States is working within the six-country negotiating group (other members of which are Britain, Germany, France, Russia, and China) in an effort to use diplomacy and economic sanctions to derail Iran from nuclear armament. Although this effort will remain a top priority, the likelihood that it will succeed seems to be fading. What is to be done if it fails entirely and Iran is irreversibly headed toward becoming a nuclear power? One idea advanced by some advocates is to launch military strikes against Iran, or even go to war with Iran to destroy its nuclear arsenal before it is deployed. But this step has obvious drawbacks, including risks that military strikes might fail, widespread violence would result, and any attempt to occupy Iran to impose regime change would be costly and perilous. At best, preventive war against Iran is a course of last resort, and an unappealing one even then.

Is there a strategic alternative between going to war with Iran and passively accommodating a nuclear-armed Iran, with all its inevitable consequences? An alternative that has surfaced recently is to create an extended deterrence regime that could protect the Middle East and Europe by deterring Iran from using its nuclear weapons to attack or threaten its neighbors. During her presidential campaign of 2008, then-Senator Hillary Clinton raised the prospect of creating a deterrence umbrella in response to Iranian nuclear weapons. Speaking as Secretary of State in July 2009, she stated that the United States might extend a defense umbrella over the Middle East if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, but she added no details on how this umbrella would be constructed.<sup>1</sup> Secretary of Defense Gates also has spoken about the role that ballistic missile defenses in Europe can play in deterring Iran.

President Obama has publicly warned that if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, this could trigger a nuclear arms race across the Middle East. Moreover, the Administration has said that by late 2009 it will take stock of its current negotiations with Iran, and that it may be willing to pursue stronger measures if Iran does not agree to forsake nuclear weapons by then. During the coming months, the Administration will continue forging its national security and defense strategies, which provides a good opportunity to assess the premises, postulates, and requirements of an extended deterrence regime tailored to Iran. The time has arrived to examine this unpolished idea, which needs careful thought before it can be adopted.<sup>2</sup>

### **Purposes of Paper**

To set the stage for analysis, this paper postulates that Iran will strive to arm itself with nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles with the intent of using them to achieve hegemony in the Middle East and pursue strategic interests elsewhere. There are, of course, other possibilities. Iran might agree not to acquire nuclear weapons—and to verification that it has not acquired them—or it might acquire them but be led by a moderate government with a benign foreign policy in mind. Either outcome could be argued to negate the need for an extended deterrence regime. But if Iran acquires nuclear-tipped missiles and is led by a radical government that threatens its neighbors and other countries, a U.S.-led extended deterrence regime would be prudent.

If an extended deterrence regime is to be established, it must be fitted carefully into the Administration's comprehensive strategy for the Middle East and its efforts to engage Iran peacefully. In addition to protecting the United States and its deployed military forces, it would need to protect as many as three separate constituencies—NATO allies in Europe, Israel (with whom the United States has a special relationship), and friendly Arab/Muslim countries in the Persian Gulf and Middle East—each of which would have to be approached differently. Such a deterrence regime would not be a cure for all of the

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Landler and David E. Sanger, "Clinton Speaks of Shielding Mideast From Iran," *The New York Times*, July 23, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> In 2007, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy issued a study on the deterrence issue. See Patrick Clawson and Michael Eisenstadt, *Deterring the Ayatollahs: Complications in Applying Cold War Strategy to Iran* (Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Studies; July 2007). This study broadly assessed key issues at stake and discussed the importance and difficulty of pursuing deterrence, but did not put forth and evaluate different U.S. options for pursuing extended deterrence. Thus far, little other academic literature has been published on this subject.

many problems confronting the Middle East, but if it solved the troubles uniquely posed by a nuclear-armed Iran, while safeguarding U.S. friends and allies, it would make a major contribution.

The core idea of extended deterrence is that the United States would provide deterrence coverage over vulnerable overseas countries by either directly defending them or threatening to retaliate powerfully against a nuclear-armed adversary that might be tempted to commit aggression against them. The desired effect is to persuade potential adversaries that aggression cannot succeed and extend a reassuring umbrella of U.S. protection over exposed friends and allies. Success in this regard, in turn, presumably reduces the risk of a runaway nuclear arms race, lessens the danger that political crises might escalate into nuclear war, and otherwise helps promote regional stability.

The idea of extended deterrence is nothing new. Throughout the Cold War, it was applied successfully in Europe and Asia, where it remains in effect today. But it has not been applied to the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. The United States has friends and allies in this region, but no nuclear-armed adversaries threaten them. Creating an extended deterrence regime to counter an Iranian nuclear threat would be an entirely new experience not only for the region, but also for U.S. foreign policy and defense planning. The newness of applying extended deterrence to a region known for its political conflicts and violence necessitates that the idea be subjected to careful scrutiny, analysis, and planning. In theory, an extended deterrence regime can be effective in the region, but failure is a possibility that cannot be discounted. Much depends on how such a regime would be constructed and executed.

Could an extended deterrence regime truly deter Iran, whose definition of rational conduct and prudent risk-taking might differ from American adversaries of the past? Would it adequately reassure American friends and allies, including Israel, whose own strategic mindset might be different from the mindsets of allies protected during the Cold War? What would an extended deterrence regime entail in political and military terms? What steps would need to be taken to create it, and are they feasible in light of the constraints and barriers operating against them? If this regime could be created, what mechanisms would it employ and how would it function? What instruments would it employ and what consequences would it produce? Could it be confidently relied on to achieve its strategic goals, which would be multiple in nature and hard to attain? What labors, costs, and risks would this regime generate? What might be its secondary effects and unanticipated consequences, favorable or otherwise? What would be required from the United States to create and sustain such a regime over a period of perhaps many years? What would be required from its friends and allies that would be protected by such a regime? How would the politics, security affairs, and military dynamics of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East need to change? How would the triangular relationship among the United States, Europe, and the Middle East be affected? All of these questions are important, and they will require answers if this idea is to be pursued.

Such questions are addressed by this paper, which strives to create an informative analytical framework. It represents an initial and exploratory treatment of a new, unpolished strategic idea rather than a final analysis intended to drive policy choices or to advocate in any other way. In particular, it does not put forth any fixed blueprint for how an extended deterrence regime against Iran might take shape. Instead, it examines several

of the key strategic, political, and military issues that arise in considering this idea. Likewise, it endeavors to identify and evaluate a spectrum of illustrative options that the United States and its friends and allies might want to consider if they choose to pursue this course. If there are several potentially viable options for creating an extended deterrence regime, all of them need to be examined and compared before one is selected. This paper's examination of them is intended to shed light on their assets, liabilities, and tradeoffs rather than to endorse any of them, or to preclude consideration of other options.

This paper begins by discussing overarching themes that help provide a framework for examining the idea of creating an extended deterrence regime. Then it briefly assesses deterrence lessons from the Cold War that may be applicable to meeting today's challenges. Next, it examines the dangers and threats posed by a nuclear-armed Iran, including the destabilizing impacts across the Middle East. Then it analyzes the ends, ways, and means of an extended deterrence regime targeted at Iran, i.e., the multiple goals that it would pursue, the methods and mechanisms that it would employ to achieve these goals, and the instruments and activities that it would use to make these methods and mechanisms work effectively. Finally, it puts forth six options of varying political feasibility and strategic performance for creating an extended deterrence regime and evaluates them comparatively. At the end, it offers summary conclusions and recommendations.

Readers who know the complex logic of extended deterrence and its historical experiences will find this paper's main arguments to be familiar terrain. Specialists in Middle East politics may be skeptical at the idea of establishing a deterrence regime on the infertile soil of their region. Both reactions are natural and understandable. If this idea is to be pursued by the United States, a central challenge will be to harmonize the logic of extended deterrence with the realities of Middle East security affairs. This paper aspires to provide intellectual capital for this endeavor.

### **Overarching Themes**

The United States has been pursuing a containment strategy against Iran since the mid-1990s, and for the entire period its relations with that country have been marked by hostility interrupted by ephemeral hopes for a thaw. Applying deterrence logic to Iran would usher in a new era. This step would be anchored in the premises that a nuclear-armed Iran would need deterring, that it plausibly could be deterred, and that it would not pose such an existential threat that a disarming strike necessarily must be employed to eradicate its nuclear power. This step would mean that U.S. strategy toward Iran would be guided by both containment and deterrence, and that the latter would have a distinctly harder edge than the former. Whereas containment can be carried out by diplomatic and economic measures, deterrence is a concept that, in the past, has normally focused on an adversary's military power, and it has been heavily pursued by strongly coercive measures, including threatened use of U.S. and allied military forces. It suggests that a willingness to go to war may be the best method, perhaps the only method, to convince the targeted country to keep the peace. Such could be the case again, if the United States decides that it must contemplate how best to deter a nuclear-armed Iran.

The idea of creating an extended deterrence regime has traction only if ongoing efforts to divert Iran from the nuclear path are judged likely to fail. If this judgment is made, creating such a regime to counter Iranian nuclear power seems attractive enough to be considered as a strategy for the United States to pursue. Indeed, steps toward such a regime might themselves help dissuade Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and missiles, or at least exert a restraining influence on the type of Iranian nuclear force ultimately deployed. The idea of creating such a regime is unlikely to find unanimous support among observers. Critics from the “too little” school will assert that this idea is too prone to trying to live peacefully with a nuclear-armed Iran and too unwilling to pursue preventive war or regime change against it. Critics from the “too much” school will argue that creating an extended deterrence regime in the Middle East is an impossible endeavor, that it will further polarize relations with Iran, and that pursuing it will ultimately result in an embarrassing setback for the United States and possibly further destabilize the region. Both positions deserve to be taken seriously. Yet they have nothing better to offer. By steering a middle course between preemptive attack and accommodation, extended deterrence offers a potential strategy for coping with a dangerous future in ways that could both frustrate Iran’s menacing geopolitical ambitions and keep U.S. friends and allies secure. Indeed, strategic affairs in the Persian Gulf may leave the United States with little alternative to pursuing this idea, even though it comes equipped with thorns and bristles.

Creating such a regime and making it work would be anything but easy. Difficult challenges and tough dilemmas would arise in trying to safeguard Europe, Israel, and friendly Arab/Muslim countries at the same time. More is involved than merely deploying ballistic missile defenses to cover the Middle East and Europe, and/or threatening U.S. nuclear retaliation if Iran commits aggression. In this regime, U.S. military power and commitments would need to be carefully designed to achieve peacetime political goals, and to influence multiple national capitals, not just Tehran. The regime also would require a capacity to inhibit nuclear proliferation and to prevent rivalries and crises—inter-state and otherwise—from escalating into nuclear confrontations. Handling the politics and diplomacy of such a regime thus might be fully as important, or more important, than crafting its military dimensions.

The successful experiences with extended deterrence regimes in Europe and Asia during the Cold War cannot readily be grafted onto the Persian Gulf and Middle East. In Europe and Asia, the presence of collective security alliances with multiple allies coupled with well-oiled practices of multilateral and bilateral defense planning significantly aided the task of creating and sustaining extended deterrence. None of these assets exist in the Persian Gulf and Middle East. This unique region would need to be treated on its own terms, with all of its problems in mind, and with the aim of making it susceptible to the stabilizing effects of deterrence mechanisms. The United States would not be starting from scratch, but it would need to establish a solid foundation of appropriate political relations with key countries even as it erects a superstructure of instruments and actions to produce effective deterrence. Such an effort would need to be guided by new-era security affairs policies aimed not only at decisively influencing Iran’s strategic calculus, but also at shaping America’s political and military relations with its friends and allies in the region to support this regime.

Decisively influencing Iran's strategic calculus so that it keeps its nuclear weapons holstered would require carefully tailored deterrence methods and mechanisms that deny Iran any benefits from nuclear aggression, impose severe costs on such conduct, and provide Tehran reasons to exercise restraint. If Iran is led by a radical government with assertive ambitions, deterring it will be difficult. But, as will be argued later, the desire to protect its own safety and interests could provide powerful incentives for Iran to act rationally and prudently. Likewise, assurances to friends and allies would need to be sufficiently tailored and powerful so that these countries have convincing reasons not to attack Iran (in Israel's case) or to acquire their own nuclear weapons (in the case of Arab and Muslim countries). Protecting countries close to Iran's borders could also require efforts to improve their conventional military forces so that they are not vulnerable to local Iranian aggression, bullying, and coercion. Depending on the deterrence strategy chosen, peacetime deployment of modest U.S. military forces in the Persian Gulf might also be needed.

Creating an extended deterrence regime also would require close cooperation with NATO allies in Europe. Europe could be endangered by long-range Iranian missiles in ways requiring NATO to deploy sizable missile defenses and develop plans for retaliation against Iran. The United States would require diplomatic assistance from its European allies in its efforts to deter and contain Iran in the Middle East. Cooperation from Russia would also be highly desirable; restrictions on Russian military sales to Iran coupled with Moscow's diplomatic support of U.S. policies toward Tehran could help appreciably. While Russia would have incentives to gain protection from a nuclear-armed Iran, its recent trend toward a geopolitical-minded foreign policy might place limits on its willingness to collaborate with the United States in dealing with Iran and the Middle East. In addition, Russia might seek to extract diplomatic concessions from the United States in exchange for its cooperation on Iran. For example, it might seek to block entrance by Ukraine and Georgia into NATO. If so, this would add even greater diplomatic complexity to establishing an extended deterrence regime aimed at Iran. Similar complexities could arise in trying to elicit help from China, India, and other major powers.

For good or ill, pursuing this regime would draw the United States more deeply into Middle Eastern security affairs than (Iraq aside) is the case today. If such a regime is to succeed, it must help foster peace in the region, rather than backfire while entangling the United States in dangerous quagmires, traps, and escalatory hair triggers. This is a tall order, and dealing with it would require not only careful thinking, but also effective use of resources. The United States will need to forge well-conceived strategic concepts and adeptly blend hard and soft power. Its array of instruments would need to include military power, diplomacy, economic tools, homeland security, information assets, cyber networks, security assistance, partnership-building, and other tools. Its approach to deploying military power would need to be selective, for Middle Eastern politics likely will not permit the kind of weighty forward presences that have marked U.S. deterrence regimes in Europe and Asia. Reliance on offshore forces and swift power projection from CONUS may need to be important instruments of deterrence. Overall, the United States and its partners would need to commit adequate resources to the task, but owing to multiple constraints, the resources available may be scarce. If so, this would further elevate the importance of using resources efficiently.

Because of the many complex challenges that could arise, the United States would need to make strategic decisions about the exact type of extended deterrence regime that it is striving to create. Before it does so, it would need to weigh carefully the full spectrum of options at its disposal. A wide spectrum of options is needed to provide varying answers to a key question: How much deterrence is possible and how much is enough? The United States would need to make tough decisions that answer this question in concrete ways, and a spectrum of options can help illuminate the different choices and tradeoffs. As a general rule, several options are especially needed when multiple threats are being deterred, multiple allies are being protected, multiple goals are being pursued, resources are limited, and the strategic terrain is not readily malleable. In the case of Iran and the Middle East, the multiple goals being pursued—e.g., deterrence, reassurance of allies, cohesive alliance policies, crisis control, escalation control, arms control, and political feasibility—are all demanding and not readily achievable at the same time. Consideration of multiple options is also needed when, as is the case here, critical strategic decisions must be made about how to allocate roles and missions among such diverse instruments as political declaratory policy, missile defenses, nuclear retaliatory forces, and U.S. and allied conventional forces. In such a setting, multiple options may help enable senior decisionmakers set priorities and practice the art of the possible. As will be argued below, a wide spectrum of options can be identified that offer varying degrees of political and military emphasis, and varying types of multilateralism and collective security. Unfortunately there is no fully effective, risk-free option. While all options offer prospects for success in varying degrees, all also pose liabilities and tradeoffs. Indeed, the options that offer the strongest potential benefits may be the hardest to create, and those that are most susceptible to creation may offer the weakest performance. In confronting the necessity of choice in this arena, the United States will need to strike a workable balance between competing imperatives.

All of these problems and challenges are potentially resolvable, but only if the United States chooses, plans, and executes wisely—perhaps more wisely than sometimes has characterized past policies in the Middle East. Even if this is the case, success likely would not be achievable overnight, but neither will Iran become a full-fledged nuclear power overnight. A sense of navigating the future, marked by a combination of energetic purpose and patience, seems necessary. While a prolonged agenda may sound daunting, the successes in Europe and Asia were achieved only over a long period. Most likely, an extended deterrence regime for the Persian Gulf and Middle East would need to be structured differently, and operate differently, than the regimes in Europe and Asia, but what matters is whether it works effectively, not whether it resembles those of other theaters. A willingness to innovate is thus also needed. In gauging the challenges ahead, it should be remembered that if Iran becomes an unchecked nuclear power, the security politics of the already-unstable Persian Gulf and Middle East will be transformed in multiple undesirable ways that could endanger Europe and have global impact. The promise of an extended deterrence regime is that it could prevent this impending danger from becoming real.

## Lessons from the Cold War

Thinking about how to create an extended deterrence regime for countering a nuclear-armed Iran can best begin by recalling lessons learned during the Cold War about the art and science of deterrence. The specific experiences gained in Europe over 40 years of Cold War cannot readily be grafted onto the Middle East today, but a number of basic lessons can help provide guideposts for judging how to act. Because these lessons are rich in meaning, they rebut any notion that extended deterrence in the Middle East can be pursued in simple-minded terms. Together, they reinforce the judgment that extended deterrence there ideally should be pursued with the goal in mind of creating a true regime—a complex, well-tailored, and multifaceted edifice with firm political foundations and, depending on the option chosen, a strong superstructure composed of U.S. political leadership, military forces, and other instruments.

A common misinterpretation of Cold War history is that extended deterrence in Europe was pursued simply by pointing U.S. nuclear missiles at the Soviet Union and warning Moscow that they would be used if it committed aggression. To be sure, the threat of U.S. nuclear retaliation was important, but it was far from being the only major feature of NATO's deterrence regime. This regime was anchored in close political cooperation between the United States (the main nuclear protector) and European allies (the countries protected) that began in fledgling ways but grew steadily stronger as the Cold War unfolded. Creating this cooperation was not easily achieved, because both the United States and its European allies needed to pass through enough common experiences to learn to trust each other with their lives. Initially, the Europeans were wary of entrusting nuclear deterrence to the United States, a country that before World War II had pursued a policy of isolationism. Likewise, the United States was wary about irreversibly committing itself to full-scale involvement in European security affairs, on a continent long known for its explosive instabilities and violence. Complex negotiations and bargaining were required to create the mutual obligations that made extended deterrence an acceptable proposition on both sides of the Atlantic: each side had to make the types of commitments that satisfied the other of its reliability. Over a period of years, these negotiations and reciprocal commitments produced the Washington Treaty, the NATO political structure, the integrated military command, and NATO's defense posture. The growth of NATO as a multinational institution, in turn, enabled its members to consistently produce coherent security policies that both commanded internal consensus and steadily strengthened deterrence as the Cold War unfolded.

Against this backdrop of growing political collaboration, NATO gradually improved its military posture to make it increasingly capable of meeting the demanding requirements of deterrence. Early on, the United States and Europe lacked coherent strategic concepts for guiding this enterprise, a deficiency that could have resulted in major mistakes and dangers, had it not been corrected by the development of deterrence and its sister concept, containment. Initially, NATO's strategy of deterrence was a purely political concept that was anchored mainly in declaratory policy and lacked the military power for carrying it out. When NATO became aware that it needed to match the USSR's military power with military power of its own, it initially turned to U.S. strategic nuclear forces and a strategy of massive retaliation. Adopted in the 1950's, this strategy left NATO without major



conventional forces for defending its borders. In Central Europe, NATO fielded only about one-half of the ground forces that were needed to defend against the large Soviet army.

Soviet Union acquisition of nuclear-tipped ICBMs of its own undercut the strategy of massive retaliation as an all-purpose deterrent and exposed NATO's weak conventional forces to aggression. Accordingly, NATO reacted by adopting a new strategy of flexible response in the late 1960s that called for undiminished nuclear strength and conventional forces strong enough not only to deter aggression, but also to protect NATO's borders, control escalation, and rebuff invasion in a war. NATO spent the 1970s and 1980s steadily strengthening its nuclear and conventional defenses, while pursuing arms control negotiations and détente with the USSR. The outcome was that the Cold War ended when the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, which had bankrupted themselves in a fruitless quest for military supremacy, collapsed of their own weight, leaving NATO the victor in the contest.

A central lesson of this history is that the United States and its European allies employed collaborative, intra-alliance diplomacy and assertive actions to make extended deterrence work through four troubled decades in the face of a determined, well-armed opponent. During this long period, deterrence was not a static construct, but instead evolved and matured as conditions changed and new requirements emerged. Had the United States and its NATO allies pursued their security solely through political declarations, they likely would not have succeeded in achieving the core goals of extended deterrence. Indeed, they probably would not have succeeded had they limited their defense strategy to nuclear forces and retaliatory mechanisms. Either NATO could have collapsed owing to internal political frictions, or the USSR could have parlayed its nuclear and conventional strengths into political or military victory in Europe. Success at achieving extended deterrence and other key security goals was achieved because NATO: 1) built itself into an elaborate institutional structure; 2) fielded strong nuclear and conventional forces capable of fully counterbalancing Soviet military power; and 3) had the diplomatic agility to act when the opportunity of a favorable political settlement with the USSR offered itself.

Another lesson is that extended deterrence worked successfully because the United States and its NATO partners took the steps that were needed to make deterrence credible not only in Moscow but in allied capitals as well. Pursuing credible deterrence required the United States to station large American military forces in Europe, including over 300,000 personnel and 7,000 tactical nuclear warheads, to avoid appearances of decoupling and, along with large allied forces, provide a full spectrum of military options for deterrence, forward defense, and control of escalation. The presence of large, forward-stationed forces, backed by commitment of U.S. strategic nuclear forces, had the effects of preventing the Soviet Union from judging that aggression could succeed and of reassuring NATO's European members of their security. It also so entangled the United States in NATO defense affairs that American cities were exposed to Soviet nuclear attack in a crisis that might begin in Europe but escalate to full-scale nuclear war. This risk to the United States, however, helped reassure allied countries that the United States would do everything possible to prevent war in Europe from erupting.

Yet another lesson is that the United States and its NATO allies consistently supplemented their defense preparations with a diplomacy of engagement and outreach to the Soviet Union. Their dual-path agenda—defense and détente—began emerging in the late 1960s, grew to maturity in the 1970s, and reached fruition in the 1980s. The byproducts of diplomatic engagement included treaties on Berlin and East Germany's status, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, MBFR negotiations, the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the ABM Treaty, the SALT Treaty capping U.S. and Soviet strategic nuclear force levels, and the LRINF Treaty. These agreements kept lines of communication open to Moscow and lessened several of the Cold War's major frictions. When the Cold War ended, the diplomacy of engagement proved instrumental in reaching the agreements that resulted in Germany's unification and continued membership in NATO as Soviet troops withdrew and the Warsaw Pact was dismantled.

What conclusions from this history seem applicable to designing an extended deterrence regime to counter a nuclear-armed Iran today?

1. Deterrence does not come easily: it must be carefully planned and executed.
2. An extended deterrence regime for the Middle East must be credible—in the eyes of Iran, the United States, and the countries to be protected by the regime.
3. Close diplomatic cooperation is required among the United States and its friends and allies that belong to the regime.
4. An extended deterrence regime must be provided the political-military power and other instruments needed to achieve its core security goals.
5. Deterrence should be accompanied by a diplomacy of engagement aimed at lessening tensions and dangers in relations with Iran.

Finally, a few words about lessons from contemporary security affairs in Northeast Asia are appropriate. Throughout the Cold War, the United States and its Northeast Asian allies faced nuclear threats from the Soviet Union and China. Today, Russia and China still possess nuclear weapons, and America's principal allies (Japan and South Korea) are not nuclear-armed. The latest newcomer to the regional nuclear club is North Korea, which is trying to build long-range missiles to deliver its nuclear weapons and has a well-established reputation for assertive conduct. In this sense, North Korea may be a forerunner of what Iran might become in the future. For the United States, handling the North Korean danger is rendered easier because it already has sizable military forces and naval interceptor missiles deployed to the region, and well-established security treaties with South Korea and Japan, both of which possess modern conventional forces for defending themselves. Also, the United States benefits from open diplomatic contacts with North Korea and leadership of a multilateral body, including Russia and China, that is trying to stem North Korea's nuclear ambitions. Because of these assets, key ingredients of a U.S.-led extended deterrence regime already exist in Northeast Asia, and they make the threat of a nuclear-armed North Korea less dangerous. Comparable strategic assets do not exist in the Persian Gulf and Middle East. Creating them, in ways appropriate to the region, would be a core purpose of establishing an extended deterrence regime there.

## **Strategic Threats and Dangers Posed by a Nuclear-Armed Iran**

The emerging need for an extended deterrence regime is a direct consequence of Iran's apparent nuclear aspirations and their worrisome strategic implications for the entire Middle East and beyond. Public debate thus far has focused mainly on whether Iran is trying to acquire nuclear weapons, and on whether and when it might succeed in doing so. While many controversies still surround these subjects, unfolding events in Iran suggest that attention should now also start focusing on the issue of what will happen if Iran, in fact, succeeds in this endeavor. Today Iran is a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). For years, it has publicly insisted that its research programs are entirely focused on creating nuclear energy for peaceful domestic uses and that it does not aspire to produce nuclear weapons for military purposes. In the eyes of skeptics, however, a different conclusion derives from the often inflammatory and menacing public rhetoric of its leaders, many of whom evidently judge that their country has ample reasons to become a nuclear power. Iran's ongoing efforts to ward off IAEA inspections, Western diplomatic pressures, and economic sanctions further suggest that its nuclear aspirations are serious. Critics of Iran point out that, as an oil-exporting nation, it does not need nuclear energy to power its economy. Perhaps most important, Iran is pursuing scientific and military programs that, to many observers, are solid evidence of nuclear intentions. If these programs gain momentum, they could open the door to Iran's deploying nuclear weapons and missile delivery systems in the coming years. If this development transpires, the future will have arrived in ways that could have dramatic geostrategic consequences for the Middle East and the global security system.

According to press reports, in late 2007 a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) judged that Iran is not pursuing an active nuclear weapons-development program that has imminent prospects for success. But this NIE apparently also judged that Iran's allegedly peaceful nuclear infrastructure and activities could enable Iran to keep open the option of building nuclear weapons someday. The scope of these activities, by any measure, is substantial. Today, Iran has a large network of uranium mines, enrichment plants, centrifuges, conversion sites, and research facilities at more than 20 locations scattered across the country. Recently it tested its first nuclear reactor, and it is building a plutonium reactor. Eventually, and perhaps soon, this infrastructure will enable Iran to produce nuclear weapons-grade materials, either highly enriched uranium (HEU) or plutonium or both. Recently, the IAEA announced that Iran already possesses nearly enough low-enriched uranium (LEU) to make the HEU needed for one nuclear device. If these materials are produced in growing quantities, and parallel progress is made in other areas of weapons design, Iran could start manufacturing nuclear weapons, much as already has been done by North Korea.

Current press reports suggest that, although Iran might be able to produce a single nuclear device in the coming months, a more likely time frame for series production is somewhere during 2010–2015. As time is measured in strategic affairs, this is soon. If Iran succeeds in producing a single nuclear warhead, it should be able to produce more of them as the years unfold. Exactly how many is a matter of debate, but a reasonable estimate is that it should be able to produce enough by 2015–2020 to earn status as a serious nuclear-armed power—especially if it also succeeds in weaponizing its nuclear devices such that they can be delivered by missiles and aircraft. Success is not a sure

thing, but India and Pakistan have both already succeeded in such endeavors, and Iran possesses the combination of political intentions, money, scientific expertise, and industrial infrastructure to follow their lead.

Another important factor in the strategic calculus is that Iran is actively pursuing an effort to create ballistic missiles that could be armed with nuclear weapons and fired to long ranges. Indeed, it publicly pointed to this program when, some months ago, it test-fired several such missiles, displayed the firings on television, and proclaimed their success. In all likelihood, Iran would not be investing the time, money, and effort required by this long-range missile program unless it planned to produce nuclear weapons that can be carried by these missiles, which would lack strategic utility if they only carried conventional warheads. Because Iran's missile program has been shrouded in secrecy, it has given rise to uncertainty and debate among technical experts. The basic elements of this program, however, are publicly known. For some time, Iran has possessed a modest inventory of short-range missiles, including the Shahab 1 and 2, which are derived from the old Soviet SCUD missile and have ranges of up to 500 kilometers (310 miles). An important trend lately is that Iran has been developing the Shahab 3 medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM), which has a range of 1,300 kilometers (800 miles), enough to reach Israel. Beyond this, Iran has been developing the Shahab 3A, with a range of 1,800 kilometers (1,100 miles), and the Shahab 3B, with a range of 2,500 kilometers (1,550 miles). The Shahab 3B, a two-stage missile, has sufficient range to cover not only the entire Middle East, but key parts of southern and eastern Europe as well. In addition, Iran reportedly is working on a Shahab 4 intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM), a Shahab 5, and a Shahab 6, which may be an ICBM with intercontinental range. Recently, Iran demonstrated its growing missile prowess by firing its first satellite into space. While satellites have many peaceful uses, they can also be used for military purposes, notably, to provide precise targeting data so that long-range missiles can be fired with considerable accuracy. In May 2009, Iran reported that it had successfully test-fired a solid-fuel MRBM. Solid-fuel missiles are especially useful for military purposes because they can be kept in a high state of readiness and be deployed on mobile launchers.<sup>3</sup>

A near-term risk, of course, is that Iran might give a nuclear weapon to terrorists, who could smuggle it into Israel (or elsewhere) and detonate it. While this risk is important, an additional strategic threat is that Iran might eventually emerge with an inventory of nuclear-tipped missiles that could endanger not only deployed U.S. military forces, but also a large number of America's friends and allies in the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, and Europe. Iran seems unlikely to be able to deploy a large force of nuclear-tipped missiles, but even a small force of 20–30 such missiles would be capable of inflicting immense damage. To be sure, fielding such a nuclear missile force is not easy. Demanding engineering and maintenance standards must be met if the nuclear weapons and missiles are to be ready, reliable, and effective. A sophisticated command, control, and communications structure must be built. In addition, Iran would be compelled to ensure the survivability of these missiles, probably by making them ground-mobile, so

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<sup>3</sup> For more details, see Steven A. Hildreth, *Iran's Ballistic Missile Programs: An Overview*, (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, February 4, 2009), available at [http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RS22758\\_20090204.pdf](http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RS22758_20090204.pdf).

that they could not be easily destroyed by an Israeli or U.S. air attack. But over a period of time, all these goals could be accomplished by a determined Iran.

What will be Iran's strategic intentions for its national security strategy and foreign policy after acquiring nuclear missiles? Some observers judge that Iran's intentions might be limited to defending itself and deterring attack on its soil. Such an outcome is plausible if Iran acquires a more moderate government than now—e.g., if Ayatollah Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad are replaced by more-temperate leaders—and it could lead Iran to behave in a manner similar to that of India and Pakistan, which view their nuclear missiles as defensive weapons. A less sanguine outcome, however, is equally plausible if Iran does not change its current political stripes. In this event, acquisition of nuclear missiles could inflame Iran's ambition to become the dominant geopolitical power in the Persian Gulf and Middle East. One risk is that Iran might make good on its longstanding threat to incinerate Israel. Even short of this step, Iran might intensify its support of terrorism against Israel and encourage Arab/Muslim countries to oppose it. Elsewhere, Iran might perceive that it now enjoys the latitude to step up its support for terrorism on behalf of causes it favors. If so, al Qaeda and other terrorist groups indirectly could benefit from the radicalized political climate in the Middle East.

If Iran were to launch a nuclear attack on Israel, it would risk nuclear retaliation. The same cannot be said about attacking other Middle Eastern countries, none of which possess nuclear weapons. In absence of such weapons or credible U.S. security guarantees, all of them would be perpetually vulnerable to Iranian nuclear attack. While Iran might refrain from this step, the mere threat of such an attack—indeed, the very existence of Iranian nuclear missiles—could enable Iran to coerce, bully, and intimidate multiple countries into doing its bidding and acquiescing to its ambitions of how regional political, economic, and security affairs should evolve. For example, Iran might use its nuclear missiles as well as its conventional forces and terrorist allies to browbeat Iraq and interfere in that country's internal affairs in order to snuff out democracy and shift Iraq's foreign policy away from partnership with the United States. Because Iran possesses an army of only ten divisions, plus Islamic Revolutionary Guard units, it will not become capable of major invasions against its neighbors in the Persian Gulf. But it could employ these ground forces for offensive purposes against Iraq.

Iran might use its nuclear muscle to bully the Persian Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, to dominate the Strait of Hormuz and related Gulf sea lanes, to try to push the United States out of the Gulf, and to control Gulf oil production. Such local political and diplomatic efforts especially might be pursued if Iran, in addition to acquiring nuclear missiles, succeeds in modernizing its air and naval forces so that they can be used for offensive purposes. Today, Iraq possesses an air force of about 300 combatant aircraft and a navy of patrol combatants and surface-to-surface missiles. In recent years, Iran has been increasing its purchases of sophisticated military technologies from Russia and China. This effort could reach fruition about the same time that Iran deploys a nuclear missile arsenal. Iran could then use modernized air and naval forces to close the Strait of Hormuz, and threaten nuclear retaliation against any military effort to reopen the strait. Beyond this, Iran would be in a better position to encourage radical regimes in Syria and elsewhere, to intimidate Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt, and to squelch democratic tendencies in neighboring countries. Indeed, Iran's political influence over Turkey, Afghanistan,

Pakistan, and India likely would increase, and Iran could be expected to seek greater influence at longer distances, including in Europe, Russia, China, and Central Asia. For all of these reasons, Iranian acquisition of nuclear missiles could cast a political shadow over the entire region and even the global security system, in ways that would seriously endanger U.S. and Western interests.

While such a future seems dark enough, it could darken further if Iran's neighbors react to its nuclear power and assertive political agendas in alarmed ways. One potential response is that some of its neighbors might seek political and military alliances with Iran in ways that would further increase its leverage across the Persian Gulf and Middle East. By contrast, implacable foes of Iran might react by striving to become nuclear powers themselves to counterbalance Iran's nuclear power. Obvious candidates include Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Even though Turkey is a member of NATO, it might react similarly, as might Jordan. Whether Israel would launch preventive air strikes, aimed at disarming Iran before it becomes a nuclear power, is an imponderable as well as a serious risk. Even if Israel chooses to live with a nuclear-armed Iran, it almost certainly would seek enhanced nuclear capabilities, including additional long-range Jericho missiles and Arrow missile interceptors, for deterring Iran and retaliating against it.

Such trends could produce accelerating nuclear proliferation across the Middle East, in a highly polarized setting whose instabilities would be even greater than today's. In turn, a more dangerous Middle East, housing a large portion of the world's oil reserves as well as several nuclear-armed countries, could make the entire global security system less stable.

This worrisome forecast is, of course, a worst-case scenario. But worst-case scenarios have unfolded in the past—World Wars I and II, for example. Even if not all of the bad trends of this scenario unfold, enough of them might transpire to make the Middle East's future far more troubled than now. The key point is not that Iran necessarily would use its nuclear missiles to attack its neighbors, but that it might employ them to provide added muscle to support an assertive geopolitical agenda across the region. A nuclear-armed Iran, led by a radical government, is unlikely to be a status-quo power. Rather, it might seek to overturn the status quo, perhaps in sweeping ways. Regardless of whether it fully succeeds in this agenda, its attempt to remake the Persian Gulf and Middle East could trigger a large set of actions, reactions, and interactions by other countries that, over time, could have a serious destabilizing impact, thereby increasing the chances for conflict and violence. The main risk of nuclear war may not stem from Iran's intention to start one, but instead from unwanted and unforeseen escalation of political crises that spin out of control. Even if nuclear war might not be in the offing, the threats and dangers emanating from a nuclear-armed Iran asserting itself in a setting of multipolar regional rivalries and accelerating nuclear proliferation could be severe. Dampening these risks and dangers would be a key imperative for creating a U.S.-backed extended deterrence regime.

In summary, if Iran is truly aspiring to become a nuclear-armed country, this trend means that a new and dangerous strategic clock has started ticking in the Middle East, one that arguably is creating a requirement for a U.S.-led extended deterrence regime to counteract this threat and its manifold negative consequences. If Iran can be influenced to halt its efforts to build nuclear weapons and long-range missiles, or if these efforts fail in some wholesale way, the need for such a regime will go away or be pushed off into the

far-distant future. But such a hopeful outcome seems problematic. If so, the real issue will be the pace and timing of Iran's progress toward becoming nuclear-armed. Economic conditions partly influence the pace. If the world economy remains in deep recession and oil prices stay low, Iran will have fewer funds for spending on military programs, and its progress will slow. But if the world economy recovers and oil prices rise again, Iran will possess more funds, and thus be able to make faster progress. In any event, Iran seems determined not to let its military aspirations be held hostage to economic trends. For this reason, Iran's progress in the scientific and technological arena seems likely to be the most important variable in determining how fast the future unfolds.

Because Iran likely will not become a full-fledged nuclear power in the next year or two, an extended deterrence regime will not be needed immediately. Even so, the United States cannot afford to act in a leisurely manner if it decides to pursue this fateful course. Within several years, Iran could succeed in deploying initial elements of its nuclear posture, including nuclear warheads and long-range missiles, and in the following years, it may succeed in bringing the entire enterprise to fruition. As Iran makes progress in this enterprise, countries in the Middle East and elsewhere will begin reacting to it in ways that could start triggering destabilizing consequences. Progress on creating an extended deterrence regime will need to be fast enough to counteract these developments. Because designing such a regime, and then erecting its foundations and superstructure, will take time, potentially years, work on it needs to start soon. At a minimum, initial analysis and planning needs to begin soon.

## **Designing an Extended Deterrence Regime—Ends, Ways, and Means**

For the United States, creating an extended deterrence regime aimed at countering Iranian nuclear power, protecting vulnerable friends and allies, and otherwise promoting peaceful regional stability doubtless would be a difficult, labor-intensive undertaking. In addition to creating such a regime, the United States could be required to sustain it for years in the face of security politics and military dynamics that threaten to erode it. This, too, could require considerable effort, as well as patience and persistence. One reason for difficulty is the constraints, resistance, and friction that would arise from the Middle East itself, a region that has long been averse to supporting the strategic designs of outsiders. Another reason is that the United States would need to pursue this regime even as it simultaneously carries out its many other global security responsibilities in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere. Indeed, such big powers as Russia and China might not support such a regime, and could even seek to undermine it. These considerations do not negate the feasibility of creating and sustaining such a regime, but they clearly complicate matters, and they underscore the importance of designing the regime wisely so that it stands a reasonable prospect for enduring success.

Designing an extended deterrence regime would require a three-step process:

- Determining ends: the core security goals of the regime.
- Choosing ways: the methods and mechanism for achieving goals.
- Selecting means: the instruments and activities for implementing ways.

Identifying goals is critical, because they will have a defining impact on determining how the regime should take shape. The necessity of being clear about strategic goals may seem obvious because, logically, goals are required to provide the strategic guidance that enables policies, plans, and programs to be coherently forged. Even so, clarity about goals should not be taken for granted. Sometimes the natural tendency of government bureaucracies is to leap prematurely from vague goals to vigorous actions in ways that can result in flawed policies and even fatal setbacks. Once goals have been selected, ways and means can then be determined in a manner that flows logically from the goals. The ultimate product should be a well-integrated construct of ends, ways, and means that are mutually consistent and internally supportive, so that the United States is not only clear about the goals being pursued, but also confident that the actions being pursued are wisely selected and will have a high probability of attaining the goals. What should be avoided is goals that are not equipped with proper ways and means, or ways and means that are in search of goals. When ends, ways, and means are properly aligned, a coherent strategy for guiding creation of a deterrence regime can emerge,

Clarifying goals is especially important when multiple goals are being pursued, as is the case here. In this event, pursuit of multiple goals can necessitate the forging of quite complex and demanding policies and strategies. Indeed, each goal might require its own separate policy and set of instruments and resources. Moreover, steps to pursue multiple goals must be coordinated so that ideally they are mutually reinforcing or, at a minimum, do not interfere with each other in ways that inflict damage on some or all of them. When goals are in competition with each other, or consume more resources than are realistically available, priorities must be set among them, and setting priorities can impose painful tradeoffs in ways that have a tangible impact on how the strategic enterprise is being pursued.

Designing a U.S.-led extended deterrence regime for a region as complex and turbulent as the Middle East especially requires awareness of multiple goals as well as clarity about their respective roles and priorities. Provided below is a list of 16 strategic goals that an extended deterrence regime might be intended to pursue. Not all of these goals might be pursued by any single deterrence regime. Indeed, as will be argued below, different options for creating a deterrence regime might pursue different combinations of goals and emphasize some goals while de-emphasizing others. The intent here is to gather all of these goals together in a single place so that their overall composition, weight, and thrust can be determined.

While this list is not necessarily exhaustive, it helps illuminate the magnitude and demanding nature of the task that could confront the United States if it decides to pursue this course. This list divides its goals into two broad categories: primary goals and supplementary goals. Primary goals are those that would need to be accorded highest priority. Supplementary goals are those that might be assigned somewhat lower priority, but nonetheless are important enough to affect how the regime is constructed. As the list shows, creating an extended deterrence regime could require considerably more than a singular fixation on Iran. Indeed, it could require a region-wide and global perspective.



## **Primary Goals**

1. Deter Iran from using, or threatening to use, nuclear weapons against its neighbors, and from other predatory behavior, e.g., conventional aggression and political coercion.
2. Reassure friends and allies of their safety and promote common security policies.
3. Maintain sufficient U.S. influence to lead the extended deterrence regime.
4. Mobilize consensual support from member countries.
5. Prevent further nuclear proliferation in the Middle East.
6. Promote crisis control and escalation control.
7. Discourage other dangerous trends and promote stability and progress in the region.
8. Mobilize help globally, including from Russia, China, and India.

## **Supplementary Goals**

9. Avoid unduly provoking Iran, while pursuing engagement and arms control with it.
10. Promote military collaboration and interoperability with friends and allies.
11. Foster regime flexibility and adaptability for reacting to unanticipated events.
12. Lessen uncertainties and vulnerability to adverse second-order consequences.
13. Avoid overloading the political circuits in the Middle East.
14. Minimize dangers to deployed U.S. military forces and the U.S. homeland.
15. Ensure programs are funded, but avoid undue expenses and pursue burden-sharing.
16. Ensure that U.S. leadership is consistent with other global requirements and priorities.

Achieving primary goals 1 and 2 would lie at the core of an extended deterrence regime, for this regime likely would be judged a success if these goals are fully achieved even if attainment of other goals is lacking. Depending on how it is defined by U.S. strategy, goal 1 could be more demanding than deterring Iran from actually attacking neighboring countries with nuclear weapons. It also could include deterring Iran from even threatening to attack its neighbors, or otherwise employing its nuclear power to coerce and intimidate them, or provoking crises that might trigger nuclear confrontations. As such, this is a demanding goal that requires powerful mechanisms that are directly tailored to influencing Iran's decision calculus in multiple ways (discussed in more detail later).

Table 4 helps illuminate the diverse and potentially demanding nature of goal 1. On the vertical axis, it displays five different types of Iranian threats to be deterred, ranging from nuclear attack to conventional terrorism. On the horizontal axis, it displays the countries to be protected by the deterrence regime, including the United States, Europe, Israel, and

friendly Arab/Muslim countries. In each cell of the matrix are displayed three different assessments: the severity of the threat, the importance of deterring it based on its inherent priority and urgency, and the difficulty of the enterprise. Overall, the 20 cells of the matrix highlight the strategic choices facing U.S. strategy, which might choose to cover some, but not all, of these cells. For example, the deterrence regime might be designed to cover only the first two threats on the vertical axis: nuclear missile attack and nuclear terrorism and proliferation. Alternately, the regime might be more ambitious: it might cover the first four threats, and thus include not only nuclear aggression by Iran, but also conventional aggression and political coercion, while not trying to deter conventional terrorism. Another alternative is a regime that provides coverage of all threats to the United States, Europe, and Israel, but provides less-ambitious coverage to friendly Arab/Muslim countries. Two key points arise. Strategies for creating an extended deterrence regime must make conscious choices regarding which cells of the matrix are to be covered, and which cells are not to be covered. For the cells that are covered by the deterrence regime, each of them must be equipped with appropriate ways and means so that the deterrence goal can be accomplished in each case.

Table 4. Countries to be Protected by Extended Deterrence Coverage

<b>Threat to be Deterred</b>	<b>Countries/Actors to be Protected</b>			
	<i>CONUS/ Deployed U.S. Forces</i>	<i>NATO/Europe</i>	<i>Israel</i>	<i>Friendly Arab/ Muslim Countries</i>
Nuclear Missile Attack	Low severity Highly important Low-to-moderate difficulty	Moderate severity Highly important, NATO Treaty commitment Moderate difficulty	High priority/ existential threat	High-to-medium priority
Nuclear Terrorism and Proliferation	High priority	High priority/NATO Treaty commitment	High priority/ existential threat	High-to-medium priority
Conventional Military Attack	Low risk/ low emphasis	Low risk/ low emphasis	Low risk/ low emphasis	Medium-to-high priority
Political Coercion	Low risk/ low emphasis	Low risk/ low emphasis	Medium risk/ medium emphasis	Medium-to-high priority
Conventional Terrorism	Low risk/ low emphasis	Medium risk/ medium emphasis	High risk/ high priority	Medium-to-high priority

Whereas surface appearances might suggest that goal 2, reassuring friends and allies of their safety and security, would be automatically achieved if goal 1 is attained, this is not necessarily the case in the Middle East. As the Cold War experience in Europe shows, actions that seemingly deter an adversary may not be convincing enough to persuade vulnerable allies to take such steps as forswearing nuclear weapons of their own.

Sometimes, the requirements of reassuring allies and promoting common security policies can be different from, and even greater than, the requirements of deterring adversaries. During the Cold War, many of NATO's military preparations had more to do with reassuring nervous allies, calming American apprehensions about entangling commitments, and forging common alliance strategic policies than with deterring the Soviet Union. The key point is that these two goals are not one and the same, and they can necessitate different mechanisms to achieve them—in ways that elevate the requirements of an extended deterrence regime.

Primary goals 3 and 4 identify vital political preconditions for trying to create an extended deterrence regime. As goal 3 suggests, the United States would need to maintain the type of influential profile across the Middle East that enables it to create, lead, and sustain the regime. Preserving such influence may be difficult, because as U.S. military forces withdraw from Iraq, Iran gains power, and the global security system becomes increasingly multipolar, the United States may suffer erosion in its superpower status and the influence that comes with it. Strong U.S. political leadership and effective diplomacy coupled with credible actions would be needed to achieve this goal. Goal 4, mobilizing consensual support from the countries that are to be protected by the regime, is important, because the regime could not be created, or function effectively, in absence of their support. This goal applies not only to the Middle East, but also to Europe, which also would need to be provided deterrence coverage and might be called on to help contribute to deterrence of Iran. In the Middle East, the nuclear threat posed by Iran, coupled with the promise of a protective umbrella provided by the deterrence regime should provide many countries with powerful incentives to support it. Even so, the decision to support the regime could be a wrenching choice for many countries, because it would limit their political maneuverability, impose on them commitments and obligations that they would not normally make, draw them closer into America's political orbit, and unmistakably throw down the political gauntlet with Iran. In many capitals, all of these implications might be seen as serious drawbacks, perhaps enough to make joining the regime a close call. Here again, persuasive U.S. diplomacy and a reputation for credibility, coupled with the bargaining and negotiating that typically marks new coalitions when they are being formed, would be required.

Primary goals 5 through 7 focus on achieving important strategic byproducts of an extended deterrence regime. Their key point is that if such a regime is to be successful, it must not only deter Iran and reassure friends and allies, but also should have other positive features. The goal of preventing nuclear proliferation is important because such proliferation could further endanger and destabilize a region already menaced by a nuclear-armed Iran. The goal of promoting crisis control and escalation control is important because, absent success in this arena, the combination of a nuclear-armed Iran and a U.S.-led deterrence regime could create a bipolar security structure that would be prone to fostering regular crises that might unintentionally escalate into nuclear war. The goal of discouraging other dangerous trends, while promoting stability and progress in the region, addresses the need to influence the fundamentals of Middle Eastern security affairs so that an extended deterrence regime is not placed atop a system of quicksand and volcanoes. This goal could mandate pursuit of such agendas as resolving Israeli conflicts with Palestine and Syria, defusing other tensions and rivalries, and encouraging democratization of traditional Arab regimes in the Persian Gulf and Middle East. As

experience shows, pursuing these goals is hard. In itself, an extended deterrence regime could not achieve them, but if it creates a stable regional security system, it could help foster the conditions that permit parallel U.S. policies to pursue success in this arena.

Primary goal 8 focuses on the global political requirements of an extended deterrence regime in the Middle East. In theory, such a regime could be created without the active support of Russia, China, and India. But the odds of success would increase if these big powers are willing to lend their diplomatic support, and the odds would worsen if Russia and China tried to meddle in this regime in order to weaken and destroy it. All three of these big powers would have an incentive to support this regime because it could help dampen nuclear threats posed by Iran to them. Even so, their own geopolitical aims in other arenas could provide them reasons for opposing this regime. Of the three countries, India seems most likely to support this regime if it enhances stability in South Asia and lessens risks of war with Pakistan. Russia and China are bigger question marks because, in varying degrees, their geopolitical rivalries with the United States, including over influence in the Middle East, could lead them to try to prevent such a regime from being created, and to weaken it if it does come to life. Much would depend on the quality of overall U.S. relations with both countries, especially whether these relations are marked by cooperation and partnership, or instead, by friction and rivalry.

Of the supplementary goals, the first four deal with aims that would influence how an extended deterrence regime is constructed and operated. To the extent possible, such a regime should aspire to avoid unduly provoking Iran into taking further confrontational actions, such as fostering an arms race in the Persian Gulf or giving nuclear weapons to terrorists. Ideally, the regime should provide scope for pursuing arms control negotiations and disarmament with Iran, and it should keep the door open to reconciliation with that country in event that its government and policies change in constructive directions. The regime should also be designed and implemented in a manner that encourages close defense cooperation among its members, including military interoperability, so that common endeavors can be pursued. Another important goal is that the regime should be flexible and adaptable so that it can respond effectively to unanticipated events, including crises and confrontations that are not foreseen by its designers. Likewise, the regime should be designed to lessen uncertainties and vulnerabilities to such second-order consequences as greater terrorism and enhanced Islamic fundamentalist extremism.

The last four supplementary goals focus on dealing with constraints that must be handled as an extended deterrence regime is being constructed and operated. One goal that would need to be kept consistently in mind is that of avoiding overloading the political circuits in the Middle East: the United States would need to be mindful of what is feasible and desirable in the minds of key friends and allies there. Also important, the regime would need to minimize dangers to deployed U.S. military forces in the Middle East and, if Iran eventually acquires nuclear-tipped ICBMs, to the U.S. homeland as well. Although the regime would need to provide adequate resources to permit the full scope of required U.S. activities, it would need to avoid unaffordable expenses, to spend available resources efficiently, and to pursue fair burden-sharing. The same emphasis on limiting budget costs to affordable levels would also need to apply to regime members in the region, who doubtless would be obligated to help finance common security and defense endeavors. Finally, the regime would need to ensure that the United States is not so

encumbered by obligations and involvements that it is prevented from carrying out its security and defense commitments in other regions, including Europe and Asia.

Taken together, these multiple goals have the effect of imposing potentially weighty strategic requirements on an extended deterrence regime. In particular, they illustrate the extent to which such a regime would require more than the mechanical application of U.S. military power. Although pursuing deterrence likely would require commitment of military forces to make it credible, it is inherently a political and strategic undertaking that must be seen in these terms if it is to succeed. At its core, it aspires to influence the political calculations of multiple actors, not only adversaries, but friends and allies as well. If an extended deterrence regime is to operate effectively, its political and diplomatic requirements need to be addressed with the same skill that is applied to meeting its military requirements.

To the extent that an extended deterrence regime is added atop a reasonably stable Middle East made more tranquil by wise diplomacy, and soon brings additional peace and stability in its wake, it will be a success. Conversely, a regime that is added atop a highly turbulent region and introduces additional strains likely will not only fail, but make matters worse. Achieving the former while avoiding the latter helps frame a key political and military challenge of creating an effective regime. At first blush, the demands of meeting this challenge and pursuing so many objectives in the face of potent constraints can make the entire enterprise seem too formidable to be undertaken. But the potential risks of not pursuing this course, and thereby allowing a nuclear-armed Iran to dictate the Middle East's future, could be significantly greater. Moreover, this endeavor should be judged by practical standards, not by the impossible criterion of fully achieving all plausible goals. Provided Iran is deterred and friends and allies are adequately reassured, the need to accept limits, tradeoffs, and priority-setting does not mean that the enterprise is made hopeless. It merely means that the best option among multiple imperfect alternatives should be selected. Not even the long-established deterrence regimes of Europe and Asia operate perfectly. Both of them foster imperfections, inadequately achieved goals in some areas, and troubling tradeoffs. What matters is that they work well enough to get the job done to the satisfaction of the United States and its allies. The same pragmatic standard of workability should be applied to pursuit of an extended deterrence regime in the Middle East, and to options that might be considered for pursuing it.

## **Choosing Ways: Crafting the Methods and Mechanisms of Deterrence**

By itself, an extended deterrence regime cannot be expected to robustly pursue all sixteen goals from the moment of its inception or to attain other aims of U.S. foreign policy in the Persian Gulf and Middle East. For example, it could not solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or quell Hezbollah in Lebanon, or ensure a stable pro-U.S. government in Iraq, or win the war in Afghanistan. Parallel U.S. policies that operate alongside this regime would be needed for these endeavors. But largely on its own, such a regime would need to embrace those security goals that are central to its purposes, including deterring Iran, reassuring friends and allies of their security, and promoting common policies and

collaborative defense ties with them. If these goals are to be successfully pursued, an extended deterrence regime would need to be equipped with appropriate methods and mechanisms, i.e., action agendas that can be relied on to produce favorable strategic consequences that bring about goal-achievement. Making careful choices in this arena is vitally important, for they will define not only how this regime takes shape, but whether it succeeds.

## **Deterring Iran**

Analyzing methods for deterring Iran is best undertaken by first addressing the issue of whether Iran can be relied on to behave rationally, with appropriate restraint and caution, if faced with a potent U.S.-led deterrence regime. In other words, would this regime compel Iran to keep its nuclear missiles holstered? In the worried eyes of some observers, a nuclear-armed Iran would be too radical, arrogant, ambitious, risk-taking, and prone to violent confrontations to be expected to act rationally. Genuine cause for concern comes from the radical nature of Iran's government and many of its leaders, coupled with their support of terrorism and suicide bombers against Israel. But supporting terrorists in distant areas is not the same as being willing to wage nuclear war in a setting where Iran itself might be struck by nuclear weapons. Much will depend on Iran's future political leaders: if radicals remain in power, Iran likely will be more prone to risky behavior than if moderates take power. Even if radicals remain in power, they will be constrained, to some degree, by Iranian society, which tends to focus on its own wellbeing and does not necessarily support nuclear adventurism. After all, nuclear war with the United States is hardly a viable way to build a safe, secure, and prosperous Iran that benefits its citizenry, even if zealots may have apocalyptic visions in mind.

As a general rule, historical experience shows that even nation-states with extremist ideologies tend to value their interests and survival enough to act prudently when faced with credible guarantees that they will be frustrated in pursuing their goals and/or punished severely if they commit aggression or otherwise behave in menacing ways. True, Nazi Germany under Hitler recognized no limits on its aggressive behavior, but when it started on the path of aggression, it was not confronted by a potent regime aimed at deterring it. During the Cold War, both the Soviet Union and China possessed nuclear weapons and were guided by anti-western ideologies, yet they acted rationally when faced with credible threats of U.S. military reprisals. Although the future is uncertain, Iran's fundamentalist Islamic ideology is not prone to committing national suicide, and thus far its government has demonstrated a capacity to calculate carefully in ways suggesting that while its policies are self-interested, they are often guided by rational perceptions of costs and benefits. Making selective use of suicide bombers to target Israel entails limited risks and costs—only the suicide bombers lose their lives, not the people directing them. Exposing the entire country of Iran, including its leaders, to U.S. nuclear retaliation is a quite different, less attractive proposition.

Depending on the strategy chosen, an extended deterrence regime ideally would need to be influential enough to persuade Iran not only to refrain from launching nuclear attacks on its neighbors, but also to refrain from making threats of attacks, or otherwise using its nuclear power as an instrument of political coercion, or using nuclear weapons to provide an umbrella for carrying out conventional aggression with impunity, or provoking crises

that might escalate into nuclear war. If this multifaceted agenda is adopted, it would mean that full-fledged deterrence of Iran would need to operate in more ways than one, and that some ways would be more difficult than others. Deterring Iran from actually using nuclear weapons is one thing; deterring it from employing them as geopolitical instruments in peacetime, crises, and limited wars is something else again. Iran might be more prone to risky adventurous behavior in places near its borders—where its interests and capabilities are greatest—than at longer distances. If so, the Persian Gulf could be a region where a nuclear-armed Iran might prove to be a tough customer.

Motivational tools are available to influence Iran to behave rationally and circumspectly. Politically, isolation from the regional institutions, the global community, key leadership countries, and multinational governing bodies could wield influence in Tehran. Likewise, denial of access to the world economy as well as export, import, and foreign investment opportunities could damage Iran's economic prospects in ways that could affect its strategic decisionmaking. The prospect of U.S.-led military opposition and retaliation could play a major role in discouraging Iranian adventurism. Of course, the extreme threats of regime change, destruction of its economic infrastructure and military forces, and even invasion could be quite influential if they are seen as credible in Tehran. If such motivational tools are combined together and used wisely, they could wield significant restraining influence on Iran, even if it has the mentality of being a tough customer.

An extended deterrence regime could offer no ironclad guarantees that it would compel Iran to behave prudently across the board. But an equal truth is that, if Iran is deemed irrational enough to commit aggression in the teeth of a U.S.-led deterrence regime, it would be much more likely to take risks and act provocatively absent such a regime. All things considered, the ability of a deterrence regime to shape Iran's behavior would depend on how the regime is constructed and operated, and whether its actions are capable of bringing about their desired consequences. The regime would need to be carefully tailored to influence not only Iran's strategic policies, but also its internal politics, decision processes, and cultural predispositions. It would need to be powerful and convincing enough to decisively sway Iran's decision calculus rather than be perceived merely as an irritant that could be brushed aside at the moment of truth. Provided the deterrence regime is equipped with sufficient motivational tools to achieve this purpose, it could aspire to significantly reduce the odds that Iran would act like a nuclear-armed rogue.

In the eyes of DOD planners, modern deterrence theory is guided by three methods that together can achieve decisive influence on an adversary.<sup>4</sup> In their choice of mechanisms, these three methods focus on shaping an adversary's political intentions, strategic calculations, and risk-taking propensities in its decisionmaking, rather than on counterbalancing its nuclear missiles in some mechanical sense or on defeating them in wartime. The three methods are:

- Deterrence by denying the adversary the benefits of aggression.
- Deterrence by imposing painful, unacceptably high costs on the adversary.
- Deterrence by convincing the adversary of the virtues of restraint.

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<sup>4</sup> See Department of Defense, *Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, December 2006).

Deterrence by denial focuses on convincing the adversary that it cannot achieve the strategic objectives or reap the benefits of aggression and other provocative conduct. Deterrence by imposing costs focuses on convincing the adversary that the punishments and costs as a result of aggression or belligerent conduct will be severe, will be certain, and will decisively outweigh, in the adversary's eyes, any anticipated benefits of aggression. Deterrence by encouraging adversary self-restraint focuses on convincing adversary decisionmakers that not committing aggression or belligerent conduct will result in an outcome acceptable to them (although not necessarily desired by them).

These three methods are not mutually exclusive, and they typically work best when they are combined together to form a portfolio of interlocking, interdependent motives and mechanisms that operate in mutually reinforcing fashion. Together, they strive to convince the adversary that aggressive, belligerent conduct will result in outcomes that are decisively worse than could be achieved through alternative, peace-preserving courses of action. Deterrence by denial is especially important when an adversary perceives such high stakes in a confrontation that it is willing to pay a high price and accept significant risks. Deterrence by imposing costs is typically employed when the adversary's strategic calculus is shaped by balancing benefits against costs. It strives to drive up costs to the point where they decisively outweigh any rational sense of expected benefits and gains. Deterrence by encouraging restraint is pursued by convincing the adversary that there are important benefits to refraining from aggression and other menacing conduct, and that the adversary will not lose more by exercising restraint than by committing aggression.

How can these three methods best be pursued in designing an extended deterrence regime focused on Iran? In general, deterrence by denial requires defensive assets for protecting the targets of adversary aggression, deterrence by imposing costs requires offensive assets for retaliation, and deterrence by encouraging self-restraint requires diplomatic engagement and strategic dialogue with the adversary. These, however, are abstract propositions that would need to be given specificity before they could be applied in practical, effective terms. This is especially true for determining how deterrence by denial and deterrence by imposing costs are to be equipped with the necessary strategic tools that can enable them to wield effective influence over Iran's conduct. The following table helps meet this need by portraying the different strategic mechanisms and key instruments that could be applied to deter the five types of Iranian threats discussed above (instruments are discussed more fully in the following section).



Table 5. Mechanisms and Instruments of Extended Deterrence

<b>Threat to be Deterred</b>	<b>Strategic Mechanisms for Pursuing Deterrence by Denial, Cost Imposition, and Restraint</b>	<b>Key Instruments for Carrying out Mechanisms of Deterrence</b>
Nuclear Missile Attack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make clear gravity of event</li> <li>• Prevent successful missile attack</li> <li>• Credibly threaten nuclear retaliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong U.S. declaratory policy</li> <li>• Missile defense of protected countries</li> <li>• Nuclear retaliatory capabilities and options</li> </ul>
Nuclear Terrorism and Proliferation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make clear gravity of event</li> <li>• Prevent nuclear terrorist attack</li> <li>• Credibly threaten nuclear retaliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong U.S. declaratory policy</li> <li>• Homeland security and attribution assets</li> <li>• Nuclear retaliatory capabilities and options</li> </ul>
Conventional Military Attack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make clear U.S. and regime will respond appropriately</li> <li>• Conventional defense against specific threats</li> <li>• Capacity to conduct counter-attacks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diplomatic collaboration among regime members</li> <li>• Allied capabilities to defend borders, airspace, and sea lanes</li> <li>• Conventional forces for spectrum of counter-attacks</li> <li>• U.S. conventional commitments, when appropriate</li> </ul>
Political Coercion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deny Iran opportunities and benefits of political coercion</li> <li>• Protect vulnerable regime members from coercion</li> <li>• Impose political, diplomatic, and economic costs on Iran</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. and regime-wide political support of vulnerable countries</li> <li>• Reduce vulnerabilities of exposed countries through diplomatic collaboration</li> <li>• Wide array of instruments to exert counter-pressures on Iran</li> </ul>
Conventional Terrorism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect vulnerable countries from terrorism</li> <li>• Defend against terrorist strikes sponsored by Iran.</li> <li>• Coerce Iran and provide it incentives to refrain from terrorism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homeland security assets</li> <li>• Multilateral collaboration among regime members</li> <li>• Diplomatic and economic instruments for use against Iran.</li> </ul>

Deterring Iranian nuclear missile attack would be the highest priority goal of an extended deterrence regime. As the table suggests, this endeavor could be pursued through a combination of measures: strong U.S. declaratory policy that makes clear to Iran the gravity of nuclear use; missile defenses that can prevent successful missile attacks; and the threat of decisive U.S. nuclear retaliation if Iran employs its nuclear missiles to attack any member of the regime. Deterring nuclear terrorism—either directly by Iran or by giving nuclear weapons to such terrorist groups as Hezbollah and Hamas—would be an equally high priority. It could be pursued through such measures as enhanced homeland security of protected countries and the threat of U.S. nuclear retaliation if Iran resorts to nuclear terrorism. If these political-military mechanisms and instruments are employed, the odds of deterring Iran from using its nuclear weapons against vulnerable countries seemingly would be high because Iran would stand to gain little and to lose a great deal by taking this fateful step. An accompanying U.S. declaration to refrain from nuclear

attacks on Iran unless it crosses the nuclear threshold or is imminently threatening to do so would give Iran a powerful incentive to exercise restraint because, for it, peace would always be preferable to nuclear war.

Would U.S. nuclear coverage of regime members suffice to deter Iran from committing conventional aggression or employing political coercion to pursue its strategic aims against countries near its borders such as Iraq and the Persian Gulf countries? Perhaps. At a minimum, a credible U.S. willingness to employ nuclear retaliation against nuclear threats likely would make Iran pause before instigating local crises that could escalate into direct confrontation with the United States. Nonetheless, Iran plausibly might judge that the United States would be unwilling to be the first to cross the nuclear threshold in a non-nuclear crisis, or that Iranian nuclear weapons might deter the United States from taking this step. If so, Iran might perceive a conventional power vacuum around its borders as inviting it either to commit conventional aggression with impunity or, during peacetime, to bully, intimidate, and coerce its neighbors. To the extent this threat is judged real, political-military mechanisms are available to directly counter it. As the table suggests, U.S. declaratory policy, alliance collaboration, capable allied conventional forces, and, as necessary, U.S. conventional force commitments would be available to deter this threat. Together, they could deny Iran significant benefits from non-nuclear aggression, impose prohibitive costs on it, and give Iran ample incentives to exercise restraint. Because Iran is unlikely to become an imposing conventional military power anytime soon, deterring it from aggression in this arena is an agenda that could be accomplished with multinational efforts, provided the United States and its regional allies work closely together. The same applies to the endeavor of deterring Iran from intensifying its support of conventional terrorism.

In summary, an extended deterrence regime that effectively employs these methods, mechanisms, and instruments could aspire to reliably deter Iran from multiple different types of threatening behavior. But they must be designed and implemented in ways that are directly tailored to the situation at hand rather than interpreted as generically valid propositions whose details matter little. Because any single one of these mechanisms and instruments may not suffice in individual situations, favorable outcomes likely will be consistently achieved if the extended deterrence regime is regularly able to employ all of them in ways that remove any temptations for Iran to transgress, that ensure any transgressions will not only fail but be punished appropriately, and that Iran is provided positive incentives for respecting U.S. and allied interests. Even then, a nuclear-armed Iran might not be easy to deter, and it likely would take steps aimed at weakening or circumventing the regime. The bottom line is that deterrence of Iran will be achievable only when the deterrence regime and its methods are perceived as highly credible not only in U.S. and allied eyes, but in Iran's eyes in a manner that responds to the personalities, bureaucracies, decision processes, and cultural predispositions at work in Tehran. Achieving such credibility, in ways that would not be mistaken or discounted, would be a core requirement of an extended deterrence regime.

## **Reassuring Friends and Allies, and Forging Common Security Commitments**

Credibly deterring Iran would be a necessary condition for reassuring friends and allies of their safety and security in the face of its nuclear power, but not likely a sufficient condition. A core reason is that regime members would be perpetually uncertain about whether U.S.-led nuclear deterrence efforts are, in fact, influencing Iran's decision calculus in the desired ways. Faced with this uncertainty, and worried about Iran's proclivities, they likely would gauge their security by taking stock of whether the deterrence regime's commitments and capabilities seem solid and satisfactory when judged on their own merits. To the extent this is judged to be the case, members likely would come away satisfied and content. To the extent not, they likely would be left nervous, perhaps to the point of questioning whether membership in the regime is capable of meeting their security requirements. Perhaps generic U.S. political assurances would be enough to satisfy these countries that their security is intact. If the history of deterrence in Europe and Asia is a valid indicator, however, these countries might seek more-ironclad security guarantees from the United States, and even if such guarantees are granted in political terms, to persistently seek tangible assurances that if the deterrence regime is put to a severe test by Iran, its instruments and mechanisms would work effectively in the ways advertised. Owing to such worries and pressures, achieving the goal of adequately reassuring them could be a difficult and complex undertaking that would require more features than merely addressing the requirements of deterring Iran.

In pursuing an extended deterrence regime, the United States likely would have concerns and aspirations of its own that derive not only from Iran's reaction, but also from the reactions of friends and allies that would be protected by this regime. For the United States, providing extended deterrence coverage over major parts of the Persian Gulf and Middle East would be a potentially risky endeavor. This step would deeply and permanently entangle the United States in the turbulent security affairs of this region, and it would mean that in a severe crisis or war with Iran, the United States could not stand aloof on the sidelines. In such a case, the United States would not be able to confine its actions to issuing rhetorical calls for peace and offering to play the diplomatic role of honest broker. Instead, it would be obligated to intervene powerfully on the side of its friends and allies, and to act in ways, perhaps by employing military force, that deter, coerce, and even defeat Iran. For such reasons, the United States likely would aspire to broader goals than just reassuring its friends and allies. To protect its own security and safeguard its interests, it also would want to ensure that its friends and allies consistently act in ways that make this regime a viable, effective, and safe proposition, e.g., by not acquiring nuclear weapons and by acting prudently in daily security affairs as well as crises. Such American requirements would further complicate the demanding nature of constructing an extended deterrence regime that meets the strategic needs of those countries that produce security and those that consume it.

Success at creating a shared strategic mindset that bonds the United States with its friends and allies could spell the difference between a regime that is powerfully effective and one that is little more than a hollow shell. The traditional method for pursuing these purposes is coalition planning and collaborative partnership among members of the deterrence regime. That is, the United States works closely with its friends and allies to define

agreed-upon common goals, commitments, and requirements, to craft plans and programs for carrying them out, to implement those plans and programs effectively, and to monitor their performance closely so that periodic adjustments can be made to them. When common approaches cannot readily be found through analysis of policies, intra-alliance negotiations are typically employed to bridge the gaps between the United States and its partners. Often, bargaining mechanisms and reciprocal exchanges are employed to forge agreements that require all sides to make some concessions to create mutual accords in ways that meet the top priorities of the participants. For example, the United States might agree to provide extended deterrence coverage for a particular country, and in exchange, that country might agree to refrain from acquiring nuclear weapons, to support U.S. regional diplomacy, and to make its military forces available for multilateral missions. As a result of such reciprocal agreements, the United States and its partners can come away satisfied that their core interests have been protected and their key priorities are advanced. When such methods and mechanisms are employed, the ideal result is a shared mindset that faces both inward and outward: inward in ways that produce widespread consensus, and outward in ways that achieve deterrence and other key security goals.

In gauging how these methods might be used, it is important to note that an extended deterrence regime would need to protect not only the Middle East, but Europe as well. Employing these methods would be far easier to accomplish in Europe than in the Middle East. In Europe, NATO provides the well-oiled collective defense institutions and practices that enable the United States to work closely with its allies on common security policies. Even in Europe and NATO, however, political and military challenges are likely to be encountered. There, the United States has already managed to gain support for deploying a limited number of missile interceptors in Eastern Europe to provide protection against Iran, but this step remains controversial in many alliance capitals and is strongly opposed by Russia. If Iran deploys nuclear missiles capable of reaching Europe, presumably opposition to missile defenses will quickly fade away, and NATO might be entrusted with the mission of operating these defenses. Missile defenses, however, are not likely to be the only requirement facing NATO. A nuclear-armed Iran would mean that country posed a serious Article 5 threat to NATO and Europe. Although missile defenses would be part of the solution, they could not provide an impenetrable shield over Europe, and consequently they likely would not be the only solution. NATO would also be faced with the need to develop retaliatory policies and capabilities as part of its deterrence strategy, and this could produce a requirement for targeting nuclear missiles, possessed by not only by the United States but also Britain and France, against Iran.

Faced with a nuclear-armed Iran, European countries likely would be willing to employ NATO to deter and defend against attacks on their own continent. Whether they would be willing to employ NATO to deter and defend against Iranian attacks on Israel or other Middle Eastern countries is less certain. The Middle East is not covered by Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, and no European country maintains the type of close relations in the Middle East that would readily produce a willingness to provide extended deterrence coverage over the region. The idea of Europe and NATO providing such coverage across the Middle East could be expected to generate intense political debate across Europe and potentially major opposition. If this opposition could be overcome, NATO would need to craft a new defense strategy that pivots the alliance to face southward not only in military terms, but in diplomatic terms as well. Creating such a strategy, and forging consensus

behind it, would confront the alliance with the difficult task of politically reorienting itself to handle a new and different type of collective defense planning. If NATO and Europe recoil from deterring Iran in the Middle East, this mission presumably would have to be handled by the United States itself, without Europe's help. Such an outcome could leave the United States presiding over two separate and distinct deterrence missions: protecting Europe and protecting the Middle East.

In the Middle East, fostering the type of coalition planning and collaborative partnership that is needed for extended deterrence would be doubly difficult. Depending on the strategy adopted, deterrence might need to protect both Israel and friendly Arab/Muslim countries. There, no collective security mechanisms exist, much less a collective defense alliance similar to NATO. Nor does the United States currently possess the close relations with many countries that would be required to carry out this endeavor on a multilateral basis. Beyond this, the Arab-Israeli dispute creates a formidable barrier. Another barrier is created by the lack of close political cooperation among many Arab countries. The basis for creating the necessary U.S.-allied relations come closest to existing in the Persian Gulf, where the United States has fairly good political ties, plus a history of defense cooperation with Saudi Arabia and the other GCC countries. Whether cooperative planning can be achieved with Iraq will depend on the outcome as U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq occurs, and as the government of Iraq defines its foreign policy. Close U.S.-Iraqi cooperation could serve as a bulwark against Iranian adventurism. Elsewhere, the United States has good relations with Jordan and Egypt, but these relations have not yet been tested to withstand the new, unique pressures of forging agreement on an extended deterrence regime. Nor have U.S. relations with Israel yet been tested by such pressures. The threat of Iranian nuclear missiles likely would motivate several of these and other countries to welcome the umbrella of a U.S.-led deterrence regime. But whether they would be willing to pursue the necessary entangling ties with the United States and each other is another matter. To the extent progress is achievable in this arena, it likely would come slowly and gradually, rather than emerge instantly in a single big bang of political awakening.

What strategic model should guide this enterprise? The NATO model of collective defense and integrated multilateral planning provides the optimal choice, but it is likely to be well beyond the art of the possible in the Middle East anytime soon. Another model is that of bilateral ties as practiced in Asia. There, the United States pursues deterrence through the vehicle of separate, bilateral security treaties and military partnerships with a number of countries, including Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Although the United States is trying to encourage multilateral planning there, it remains the exception, not the rule. In theory, the United States could pursue a similar model of bilateralism in the Middle East. In this event, it might seek to foster a deterrence regime by forging the necessary ties with several countries on a bilateral basis. This model offers potential feasibility, but it also suffers from a key drawback. Bilateralism works in Asia because key U.S. friends and allies are normally separated from each other by long distances, and in key ways they face dissimilar strategic challenges that can be addressed individually. Such is not the case in the Middle East. There, the key countries are bunched closely together, and they would confront a similar challenge in the nuclear threat posed by Iran. For this reason, some form of multilateral defense ties and collective security could be needed.

The complex conditions in the Middle East suggest that an extended deterrence regime will need to be guided by a new, unique approach to achieving the necessary ingredients of coalition planning and collaborative partnership. While careful attention would need to be paid to real-life political constraints that set limits on the enterprise, ideally such steps as signing appropriate security and defense agreements, forging accords on regime requirements and capabilities, establishing military ties with the United States, and pursuing cooperative defense planning would form a strong foundation of this approach. Such steps might begin on a bilateral basis and then result in creation of a loose and pluralistic collective security system, one that reflects Middle East realities but nonetheless gets the job done. Such a system might be a modular creation; although it would be guided by uniform strategic principles, the exact nature of U.S.-allied relationships might vary from country to country. Such a flexible model could at least help guide initial thinking and planning, and form one of the options to be considered. To the extent possible, efforts to create common security policies could also be needed in such areas as regional stability, non-proliferation, crisis control, escalation control, arms control, and diplomatic outreach toward Iran and other trouble spots. Progress on forging multilateral agreement on such policies would further strengthen the regime's cohesion, enhance prospects for success across the region, and deny Iran opportunity to employ divide-and-conquer tactics aimed at weakening the regime.

In this demanding arena, initial steps might be modest, but over time, perhaps greater progress could be made in ways that eventually result in a tightly integrated collective security and defense architecture for the Middle East, one that might also benefit from collaborative ties with NATO. If so, such an achievement could help transform the region in ways that go well beyond the immediate task of deterring Iran. By promoting regional peace and cooperation, it could help create conditions that enable economic prosperity and democratization to take hold in widespread ways. But this is a distant vision. For the period ahead, the priority would need to be one of laying a solid political-military foundation for the regime, and this is likely to be challenging enough to occupy the energies of the United States as well as its friends and allies. Many skeptics might judge that even limited progress of this sort would be impossible to achieve in light of the many political constraints barring the way. Perhaps so, but an equal truth is that if such progress can be made, an extended deterrence regime would be more likely to succeed than without it. Indeed, such progress could be a key to determining whether Iran—and other countries—take this regime as seriously as it should be taken.

## **Selecting Means—Blending the Instruments of Deterrence**

If a solid foundation for an extended deterrence regime is established, instruments and activities can provide the superstructure in ways that determine how the regime would operate on a daily basis, and how it would respond to crisis confrontations with a nuclear-armed Iran. Today the United States and its partners mainly rely on diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions in their efforts to deflect Iran away from nuclear weapons. If Iran deploys nuclear missiles in the coming years, an extended deterrence regime would need to continue employing these two instruments, but it also likely would need to create other, more powerful instruments. A guiding principle should be that a family of mutually supporting instruments and activities should be chosen, and they should operate

in ways focused on supporting the goals, methods, and mechanisms of the regime. They should also respond to limits on resources and to related constraints on what realistically can be attempted by the United States and its friends and allies.

While detailed plans and programs would need to be designed to support the specific deterrence strategy being employed, the aim here is limited to broadly assessing the types of instruments, activities, requirements, and capabilities that might be contemplated. The analysis especially focuses on the military agenda facing the United States. Its main conclusion is that if the regime is to be militarily prepared, the United States likely would be required to commit a balanced combination of missile defenses, nuclear forces and other retaliatory capabilities, increased security assistance to allies, and some number of U.S. conventional forces. Peacetime use of such military assets would need to be carefully embedded in an overarching diplomatic strategy so that political and military pressures on Iran work in tandem with maximum effect.

**Assertive U.S. Political Leadership.** For the United States, creating and leading an extended deterrence regime focused on Iran would entail worrisome risks. This especially would be the case if Iran acquires ICBMs that could reach U.S. soil and plausibly penetrate U.S. missile defense systems. In this event, the United States could face the dilemma of being compelled to place American cities at risk to safeguard the cities of European and Middle Eastern friends and allies. Even if Iran does not acquire ICBMs, its shorter range missiles could directly threaten U.S. military forces in the Middle East and Europe, and menace other vital American interests. Managing such risks would enhance the premium on wise and effective U.S. foreign policy and defense strategy in the Middle East. Achieving control of events there could spell the difference between a future of unacceptably high risks and a future of manageable risks and safeguarded U.S. interests.

In order to create and sustain an extended deterrence regime in the Middle East, the United States would need to consistently pursue an agenda of strong political leadership and vigorous diplomatic action there. Its diplomacy would need to combine hard power and soft power in ways that, depending on the country, both coerce and persuade regional capitals to follow its leadership and to accept its designs. Above all, a clear declaratory policy that credibly sends its deterrence message would be needed, one aimed at convincing Iran that it truly is deterred, and that it cannot erode or sidestep the U.S.-led deterrence regime. Likewise, U.S. declaratory policy would need to be convincing in the capitals of friends and allies that are beneficiaries of the regime. In order to pursue this goal and to establish a legal basis for the regime, the United States might need to sign security treaties (or at least executive agreements) with many, if not all, regime members. This effort could begin on a bilateral basis and then transition to multilateral approaches and collective security.

Throughout this enterprise, U.S. political leaders and senior diplomats would need to be regularly active in meeting, negotiating, and bargaining with regime members to convince them to pursue policies and activities that support the regime's purposes. Their efforts would go a long way toward determining whether the regime would gain enough traction to take hold with friends and allies. For such reasons, the U.S. diplomatic profile in the Middle East would need to ascend to a high, permanent level aimed at managing a region of vulnerable partners as well as a dangerous Iranian adversary. In this respect, U.S. diplomatic energy in the Middle East would need to resemble that of its diplomacy

in Europe and Asia—a full-time occupation.

Vigorous U.S. political leadership on the world stage would also be required. In particular, successful efforts to mobilize political help from Europe, Russia, China, India, Japan, and other major powers could play a key role in determining whether an extended deterrence regime aimed at Iran can succeed. If a nuclear-armed Iran benefits from support by these actors, or even their passive acquiescence, it would be better-able to weaken the deterrence regime and circumvent its strictures. But if these actors lend their support to the regime, Iran's latitude would be restricted, and it would be better deterred. In all likelihood, the stances of these actors will depend heavily on how the United States approaches them in political and diplomatic terms. In this arena, influence and persuasiveness by the U.S. Government would be a premium quality. The same judgment applies to the task of mobilizing political help from other countries in the Middle East, South Central Asia, and elsewhere.

Creating an extended deterrence regime could publicly brand Iran as an enemy and a nuclear threat. Doing so could run the risk of so polarizing relations that Iran is provoked into the type of menacing and dangerous behavior that the deterrence regime is intended to prevent. To reduce this risk, a dual-track U.S. diplomacy likely would be needed, with one track coercing and deterring Iran, and the other trying to establish stabilizing accords. At stake would be whether a nuclear-armed Iran could be persuaded to temper its geopolitical ambitions and accept being a status-quo power, one that refrains not only from rattling nuclear sabers, but also from supporting terrorism and otherwise promoting destabilizing trends in the region. As long as Iran remains a nuclear power with menacing geopolitical aims, any fundamental reconciliation with it would be improbable. But arms control negotiations with it could be pursued in ways that profit from the leverage provided by the extended deterrence regime. Such negotiations likely would need to be guided by a comprehensive approach aimed at dismantling the deterrence regime only if Iran totally abandons possession of nuclear weapons and missiles. It is hard to see how the quest for a robust deterrence regime could be halted if, for example, Iran dismantles only half of its nuclear missile inventory. Perhaps the painful prospect of facing a U.S.-led deterrence regime, as well as isolation from its neighbors and the world community, might motivate Iran to give up its nuclear missiles. Even short of this outcome, U.S. diplomatic outreach toward Iran potentially could help dampen hostilities with it and enhance prospects for peace, but only if deterrence is not compromised.

**Missile Defenses.** In appraising military requirements ahead, some observers might call for U.S. strategy to focus on fostering a mutual deterrence system in which U.S. and Iranian nuclear missiles checkmate each other to the point of guaranteeing that neither would ever be used. In such a setting, U.S. strategy presumably could forsake the option of deploying missile defenses capable of shooting down Iranian missiles. Closer inspection, however, suggests a more complicated reality. A new mutual deterrence regime for the Middle East might not be as stable as that of the Cold War, and it could not guarantee that Iran would never fire its nuclear missiles. Nor would it necessarily reassure regime members of their security, and in a crisis, it would deny the United States options for responding flexibly in ways that could control escalation.

For these reasons, deployment of missile defenses is attractive; they could help deter an Iranian attack and provide self-protection assets in the event Iranian offensive missiles



were fired in anger. During the Cold War, the idea of deploying missile defenses was examined in the 1960s and the 1980s, but both times technological constraints prevented deployments, and the ABM Treaty of the 1970s ruled out any major missile defense systems for both sides. In today's world, both impediments have faded away to the point where, in theory, missile defenses could be a key part of an extended deterrence regime in the Middle East and Europe. While this idea clearly is worth pursuing, there are technological and budgetary reasons for stopping short of the judgment that an affordable missile defense system could create such an impenetrable shield that it could be the sole military component of the regime. Missile defenses can be part of the military solution, but not the whole solution.

If Iran acquires long-range missiles capable of striking Europe, an expanded missile defense system would be needed there. In 2006, the United States proposed to create a missile shield of ten interceptors based in Poland and a radar system based in Czechoslovakia. In September 2009, the Obama Administration decided to cancel this plan in favor of a different approach initially anchored in sea-based interceptors. As explained by Secretary of Defense Gates, the new plan responds to new intelligence estimates on the Iranian missile threat, i.e., compared to earlier estimates, Iran is making faster progress on deploying MRBMs and slower progress on deploying ICBMs. In addition, Secretary Gates said, the new plan responds to recent progress in U.S. research and development programs. Accordingly, Secretary Gates outlined a new, three-phased plan for missile defense deployments. In Phase 1, beginning in 2011, the United States will deploy a system intended to protect the Mediterranean and Southern Europe from Iranian MRBMs. Phase 1 is to include a distributed sensor system coupled with Standard Missile 3 (SM-3) interceptors based on Aegis cruisers. Phase 2, beginning in 2015, will deploy a land-based SM-3 interceptor intended to provide broader coverage of Europe. Phase 3, beginning in 2018, will include a larger, more capable interceptor missile capable of protecting all of Europe as well as the United States from Iranian IRBMs and ICBMs. Secretary Gates characterized this new plan as providing a faster, more capable, and cheaper response than the old plan. As this new U.S. plan is pursued, it will need to be integrated into ongoing NATO studies on missile defense. For years, NATO has been studying how to employ terminal missile interceptors to protect its deployed military forces. At its recent Strasbourg-Kehl Summit, NATO political leaders approved an intensified effort to determine how such systems and other interceptors could be used to provide territorial defense of Europe.<sup>5</sup> While the results will not be available for a year or two, they may envision eventual coverage of all of Europe. How many interceptors will be needed for this purpose? The answer depends on the number of Iranian missiles to be shot down and the lethality of U.S./NATO interceptors. In general, defense missiles that rely on kinetic-energy, hit-to-kill mechanisms require several interceptors to destroy a single enemy offensive missile. Thus, if Iran deploys 20–30 nuclear missiles, a fairly large number of missile interceptors could be needed to defend against this threat, and even then, some operational failures might occur. Complex politics enter the equation here. Russia complained bitterly about the previous plan to deploy interceptors to Poland. When the new U.S. plan was announced, Russian spokesmen hailed the step, but

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<sup>5</sup> See Declaration on Alliance Security, issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Strasbourg/Kehl on April 4, 2009, available at <<http://www.nato.int/cps/eb/natolive/news-52838.htm>>.

cautioned that Russian interests could be menaced if the three phases of the U.S. plan result in a large missile interceptor force that endangers its own deterrent strategy. In this arena, much will depend on whether steps can be taken to integrate NATO missile defenses with Russian missile defenses in ways that protect both Europe and Russia from Iranian nuclear missiles.

In addition to protecting all of Europe, what missile defense assets would be required to protect the Middle East from Iranian nuclear missiles? In principle, U.S. SM-3 missiles on Aegis ships could provide a foundation for a viable missile interceptor force, but eventually land-based interceptors might be needed as well. To determine ultimate requirements, technical details would have to be studied closely. The geography of the region seemingly could require deployment of two separate missile defense networks to defend both the Persian Gulf (south of Iran) and multiple countries to the northwest of Iran (e.g., Israel and Egypt). In theory, a missile defense network that protects countries to the east of Iran—Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India—might also be needed. The budget costs of a fully capable interceptor force could be substantial and might overwhelm the defense budgets of regional countries and strain the U.S. defense budget. If a large missile defense is unaffordable, and potentially too leaky, a viable proposition could be to field smaller defense networks, e.g., 10–20 missile interceptors each. Such networks could handle limited missile threats, inhibit graduated escalation by Iran, and potentially compel Iran to think twice about the prospect of draining its nuclear missile inventory in any single crisis. As a result, these networks could help strengthen deterrence against Iran, and they would be considerably less expensive than a full-blown missile defense system.

**Offensive Retaliatory Options.** If missile defenses cannot provide airtight protection from Iran, U.S. military strategy could also need to include offensive retaliatory capabilities that could not only deter Iran and reassure friends and allies, but also provide strike options for use in a crisis. The simplest and least expensive approach would be to threaten Iran with U.S. nuclear retaliation in the event it launches a nuclear attack on any regime member. Most likely, many regime members would not feel safe and secure unless Iran is publicly threatened with nuclear retaliation, and this step might be needed to convince Iran to take the regime seriously enough to be deterred by it. Some observers might judge that the threat of nuclear retaliation might be enough to reliably deter Iran, even absent deploying expensive and controversial missile defenses. Perhaps so, but there always would be a risk that Iran might view this threat as a bluff, and in a crisis, sole reliance on nuclear retaliation would provide a one-way path to rapid escalation while denying the United States and its partners any other options for crisis management and escalation control. Missile defenses would help provide such options, and they would allow the United States to choose retaliation only if Iranian missiles actually reach their targets. For these reasons, a combination of missile defenses and retaliatory capabilities seems the best strategic plan.

An argument can be made that retaliation with nuclear weapons might not be necessary, because the same strategic combat missions could be performed by U.S. bombers or missiles carrying precision-strike conventional munitions. In a technical sense, this argument has some validity, because many Iranian targets could be destroyed this way. But relying exclusively on conventional weapons might take away some credibility from

the threat of retaliation. This might be true not only in Iran's eyes, but also in the eyes of regime members, who likely would feel safer if they are protected by U.S. nuclear weapons. Such considerations suggest that the United States would be best served by keeping its retaliation options open. In this approach, it would have both nuclear and conventional options at its disposal for strike missions, it could anchor its declaratory messages on both options, and it could flexibly choose from these options at the moment of truth. Options are especially desirable because, whereas some crises may call for prompt nuclear retaliation, other crises might permit a graduated escalation that begins with conventional strikes and ends before nuclear strikes become necessary.

The need for options also applies to shaping U.S. targeting policy and doctrine for determining the Iranian targets that might be struck in a crisis. The premises of an extended deterrence regime presumably rule out preventive warfare against Iran, but they do not rule out preemptive attacks against an imminent threat of Iranian attack, and they certainly call for second-strike retaliatory attacks. The wide potential range of crises that might erupt could necessitate a capability to strike different types of targets sets. In a limited crisis that does not automatically involve use of nuclear weapons, U.S. military forces could require a capacity to strike military, industrial, command and control, and infrastructure with conventional weapons. In an actual nuclear crisis, U.S. forces might be called on to launch a preemptive attack aimed at destroying Iran's nuclear missiles before they could be used. Doing so could require nuclear weapons in a fast-paced crisis or conventional weapons in a slow-paced crisis. If retaliatory attacks on Iranian urban centers are required, either nuclear weapons or conventional weapons might be needed. The key conclusion is that U.S. strategy would need to have a spectrum of retaliatory options that facilitate flexible responses, calculated actions, and deliberate escalation rather than permit only massive retaliation or any other single-minded response.

Assuming nuclear weapons would be required by the U.S. deterrence strategy, would they need to be physically present on the soil of regime members? In other words, would the United States be compelled to station tactical nuclear weapons and delivery systems in the Middle East, as was done in Europe during the Cold War? An argument for forward stationing is that the presence of nuclear weapons could be needed largely for political reasons: to reassure allies and to warn Iran. Militarily, their presence might help provide faster response times in some crises, especially when tactical weapons are chosen rather than such strategic weapons as long-range bombers. At the same time, their presence on Middle East soil would be controversial and could make them tempting targets for Iranian nuclear strikes, thus might stimulate escalation in a crisis. If a requirement for forward stationing emerges in future deterrence strategy, perhaps it could be met by relying on an off-shore approach that would employ U.S. naval ships to carry nuclear weapons as well as missile defenses.

**U.S. and Allied Conventional Forces.** In today's setting, thoughts about the presence of U.S. conventional military forces in the Middle East are mostly focused on the pace of withdrawing troops from Iraq and sending some of them to Afghanistan. The prospect of having to create an extended nuclear deterrence regime aimed at countering Iranian nuclear missiles introduces a new and critical element into the long-range calculus. Although this regime might rely heavily on missile defenses and nuclear retaliatory options, adequate conventional defenses would also be needed if, as is possible, Iran

emerges as a conventional military threat to regional security. The best way to provide local defense is to enhance the self-defense capabilities of Iraq, the Persian Gulf countries, and other endangered countries. Assuming this goal is pursued, there could be accompanying reasons for maintaining a moderate U.S. conventional presence in the region as well. One reason is to underscore the seriousness of the U.S. commitment to the regime in ways that erase any doubts in Iran or other countries. Another reason is to provide robust U.S. military options for handling non-nuclear crises with Iran that might emerge and directly entangle the United States. Such crises might, for example, involve Iranian efforts to close the Strait of Hormuz, or wage war against Iraq, or launch air strikes against Persian Gulf countries or other regime members. Crises of this sort could mandate the speedy commitment of U.S. conventional forces, which would be needed to perform necessary military missions while reducing the need for unwarranted escalation. Limited crises would require limited force commitments, but U.S. plans could not rule out the possibility that major combat operations might be necessary. Indeed, circumstances plausibly could require a full-scale invasion and occupation of Iran, and the capability to do so might play a significant role in strategy for deterring Iran. While major combat operations would require large reinforcements from CONUS, peacetime-deployed forces would be needed to help maintain the military infrastructure needed to make such operations possible.

How many forces might need to be deployed for normal peacetime missions? Any attempt to forecast a future CENTCOM posture would need to take into account ongoing military operations in Afghanistan as well as residual U.S. missions in Iraq after withdrawal of today's presence is complete. These requirements aside, three options help bound the range of future requirements ahead:

*Posture 1:* A small and symbolic U.S. military presence limited to such missions as security assistance, training with allies, and maintaining a reinforcement infrastructure.

*Posture 2:* A posture similar to that deployed before the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq: i.e., about 25,000 personnel that included small Army ground forces, an air defense unit, one or two USAF fighter squadrons, a Marine battalion aboard amphibious ships, a Navy carrier strike group, headquarters units, and prepositioned equipment.

*Posture 3:* A larger posture that is better equipped for immediate crisis response, and might include one or two Army ground brigades, additional USAF fighters and reconnaissance assets, additional Marine and Navy forces, more prepositioned equipment, larger headquarters staffs, and more assets for security assistance and training. The total number of personnel would be determined by specific decisions, but it likely would be less than one-half the size of the current U.S. postures in Europe and Asia.

The future peacetime U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf and Middle East will be partly determined by operational requirements, but it will also be affected by political incentives and constraints. On the one hand, Arab/Muslim countries threatened by Iran might welcome a significant U.S. military presence. On the other hand, Muslim political sensitivities could place a firm lid on the number of U.S. personnel deployed, perhaps

necessitating a smaller presence than might seem desirable for operational missions. If political realities prevent stationing of an adequate peacetime posture ashore, especially ground forces, the natural alternative would be to shift more heavily to an offshore maritime force. In this approach, deployed Army units would be kept quite small, modest USAF forces would be stationed ashore, and larger Marine amphibious forces and Navy carrier forces would be deployed to the Persian Gulf and nearby waters.

Such an offshore maritime posture might be suboptimal in key respects. Naval forces might not wield enough visible political clout in Tehran and other regional capitals. Even so, this posture would be preferable to having virtually no U.S. forces deployed to the region in peacetime. A principal drawback is that this posture could drain Navy and Marine forces away from other important global missions, including in Asia and the Mediterranean Sea. To avoid this adverse outcome, the Marine Corps and Navy might need to be enlarged. Normally, three new ships must be procured to keep one additional ship deployed overseas. Thus, the offshore posture would require DOD to alter force posture and budget priorities.

Regardless of the number of U.S. military personnel ultimately deployable ashore and at sea, the force likely would not be large enough to provide adequate capabilities for carrying out the full set of missions that might arise in a major crisis with Iran. To meet the requirements of a major crisis, DOD would need to remain capable of speedily sending sizable reinforcements from CONUS. Continued prepositioning of Army and Air Force equipment in the region would help speed reinforcement. Throughout the 1990s, DOD planned to make roughly one-half of its active duty combat forces available for wartime Persian Gulf missions. The invasion of Iraq did not necessitate such a large deployment, but the need for continuing counterterrorism, stabilization, and reconstruction missions elevated the sustained deployment well above what had commonly been expected. Similarly, the need to deter Iran, and to defeat it in a crisis or war, could necessitate demanding reinforcement plans carried out by sizable forces. How many combat forces and mobility assets would be required for potential reinforcement missions is an issue that will need careful analysis, but the major implication is that the U.S. military may need to consider sizable combat operations in the Persian Gulf and Middle East for a long time to come.

**Homeland Security and Other Instruments.** If Iran acquires nuclear weapons, a worrisome risk is that it might provide one or more to terrorist groups. Israel could be highly vulnerable to nuclear terrorism, but other countries and regions, including the United States and Europe, would also be vulnerable. Accordingly, enhanced homeland security almost everywhere would be a compelling requirement to deny Iran the capacity to employ nuclear terrorism. Enhanced homeland security would need to be accompanied by improved attribution assets so that, if nuclear terrorism takes place, the sponsor can be promptly identified and targeted for retaliation. To the extent that such terrorism can be foiled or attributed, the odds would decrease that Iran might resort to this practice. Likewise, strong efforts would be needed to create safeguards against Iran proliferating nuclear weapons to nation-states that share its strategic persuasions.

Other instruments could importantly help empower an extended deterrence regime. In deterring Iran, stiff economic sanctions (tougher than now) would be needed. Use of cyber networks could also help by providing defenses against Iranian cyber attacks and

providing options for taking down Iranian cyber networks, including those that sustain its military command structures and nuclear missiles in a crisis. To the extent that Iran's overall strategic power can be diminished by such steps, Tehran would be less able to translate its nuclear missiles into usable political influence across the Middle East. Likewise, public information campaigns aimed at Iran possibly could weaken its radical government by provoking internal political opposition. If Iran could be influenced to lessen its embrace of Islamic fundamentalism, it would be an easier country to deal with diplomatically, and the importance of its nuclear weapons would decrease.

Parallel instruments could help influence friends and allies in ways that increase the cohesion and effectiveness of an extended deterrence regime. Public information campaigns could be employed to enhance support of this regime among key Arab populations. Security assistance could help modernize the militaries of these countries and make them better able to carry out missions with U.S. forces. A program of defense cooperation activities, including exercises with U.S. military forces, could help encourage the type of multilateral military collaboration and local self-defense that the regime would require. Enhanced military cooperation would be especially possible in the Persian Gulf, where Arab countries already have large defense budgets, possess modern weapons, and have a history of working with the U.S. military. The same applies to U.S. military cooperation with Israel. A more difficult path would need to be followed in pursuing defense cooperation with such countries as Egypt and Jordan, which do not have large defense budgets or a long legacy of close cooperation with the U.S. military. Over time, however, gradual progress might be possible.

**Adequacy of These Instruments.** An extended deterrence regime thus could require a multiplicity of instruments that include assertive U.S. leadership, credible U.S. military commitments and regional presence, coercive political and economic instruments aimed at Iran, and multilateral political and military collaboration with friends and allies that are members of the regime. In theory, all of these instruments lie within the grasp of the United States and its partners. The key question is whether political realities would permit them to be assembled with the necessary strength. Surface appearances suggest that at the outset the regime might be under-resourced and ineffective in many areas. But as time passes and the regime gradually gains maturity, the amount of resources made available to it might grow, and the effectiveness of the regime might increase. This path of gradual growth, after all, is the one that was followed by the deterrence regimes of Europe and Asia, both of which started slowly and then gained momentum. Along the way in the Middle East, steps would be needed to apply scarce resources as efficiently as possible. Provided this is the case, there are realistic prospects that this regime could gain strength and momentum at the pace needed to check Iran as it acquires nuclear missiles and the political leverage that accompanies them. If so, the regime could succeed in accomplishing its core strategic purposes, even if it does not operate perfectly or otherwise conform to ideal textbook standards. This, at least, would need to be a core proposition and goal for the United States if it decides to embark on the demanding and uncertain path of creating an extended deterrence regime for the Persian Gulf and Middle East.

## **Assessing Options—Balancing Political Feasibility and Strategic**

## Performance

Identifying and evaluating alternative options for creating an extended deterrence regime needs to begin by taking stock of the various deterrence missions that might have to be performed as well as the actions needed for performing them. Table 6, which synthesizes tables 2 and 3, presents the overall priority of the various deterrence missions (taking into account the severity of the threat, the urgency of the mission, and its difficulty) and the main associated mechanisms and instruments.

Table 6 conveys three strategic points:

- Deterring Iranian nuclear missile attack and nuclear terrorism against all four categories of protected countries should be the top priority of the regime. Deterrence of nuclear threats could be pursued by purely political and diplomatic means, but it likely is best accomplished by a combination of U.S. declaratory policy, missile defenses, the threat of nuclear retaliation, and homeland security. Whereas Europe/NATO has nuclear weapons, friendly Arab/Muslim countries lack them. As a result, U.S. nuclear assurances would be needed to provide an umbrella of protection over them.
- Only friendly Arab/Muslim countries are vulnerable to Iranian conventional aggression and political coercion. Deterring such threats is less critical than deterring nuclear attack, but nonetheless is important. U.S. nuclear commitments can help strengthen deterrence, but a combination of U.S./allied diplomatic collaboration and conventional military preparedness is also needed to solidify deterrence, provide direct defense, and reduce undue reliance on nuclear escalation.
- Deterrence of conventional terrorism is a high priority for certain regime members, and is important to the homeland security policies of the various countries.

Table 6. Priority and Main Mechanisms/Instruments of Deterrence Missions

<b>Countries to be Protected by Extended Deterrence Coverage</b>				
<b>Threat to be Deterred</b>	<i>CONUS and Deployed U.S. Forces</i>	<i>NATO/Europe</i>	<i>Israel</i>	<i>Friendly Arab/Muslim Countries in Persian Gulf/Middle East</i>
Nuclear Missile Attack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vital priority</li> <li>• Declaratory policy, missile defenses and nuclear retaliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vital priority</li> <li>• Declaratory policy, missile defenses and nuclear retaliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High priority</li> <li>• Declaratory policy, missile defenses and nuclear retaliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-to-medium priority</li> <li>• Declaratory policy, missile defenses and nuclear retaliation</li> </ul>
Nuclear Terrorism/Proliferation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High priority</li> <li>• Declaratory policy, homeland security and nuclear retaliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High priority</li> <li>• Declaratory policy, homeland security and nuclear retaliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High priority</li> <li>• Declaratory policy, homeland security and nuclear retaliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High to-medium priority</li> <li>• Declaratory policy, homeland security and nuclear retaliation</li> </ul>
Conventional Military Attack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low emphasis</li> <li>• U.S. conventional military preparedness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low emphasis</li> <li>• Allied conventional military preparedness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low emphasis</li> <li>• Israeli conventional military preparedness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium-to-high priority</li> <li>• U.S. force commitments</li> <li>• Arab/Muslim conventional preparedness</li> </ul>

Political Coercion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low emphasis</li> <li>• U.S. diplomacy and military power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low emphasis</li> <li>• U.S./European diplomacy and military power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium priority</li> <li>• Israeli/U.S. diplomacy and military power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium-to high priority</li> <li>• U.S./allied diplomatic collaboration and military power</li> </ul>
Conventional Terrorism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low-emphasis</li> <li>• U.S. homeland security and protection of overseas forces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium emphasis</li> <li>• European homeland security</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High priority</li> <li>• Israeli homeland security</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium-to-high priority</li> <li>• Arab/Muslim homeland security</li> </ul>

How can these deterrence demands and priorities best be met? If the United States decides to try to create an extended deterrence regime for dealing with a nuclear-armed Iran, it will need to weigh carefully the multiple strategic options at its disposal. The idea of such a regime does not come with a single, clear blueprint for guiding its creation. Indeed, such a regime can be pursued in diverse ways, and the final product can take one of several different forms. As discussed above, much depends on U.S. decisions regarding the threats to be deterred, the countries/actors to be protected, and the mechanisms/instruments to be employed. Much also depends on U.S. decisions regarding how to mobilize and orchestrate the security activities of regime members, and how the U.S. Government decides to grapple with the art of the possible. Across the Middle East and Europe, a central dilemma will need to be confronted, that of striking a satisfactory balance between feasibility and performance. That is, the option chosen will need to embrace a plausibly achievable outcome taking into account the constraining realities of Middle East politics as well as Europe. At the same time, it will need to pursue an outcome that reliably can achieve the core strategic goals being sought, including deterrence of Iran and reassurance of friends and allies. Achieving both outcomes at the same time promises to be challenging. The task of weighing and balancing these competing imperatives lies at the heart of developing and assessing options for pursuing this idea.

To contribute to this enterprise, the six options below are arrayed across a wide spectrum that stretches from the pole of political feasibility (option 1) to the pole of high strategic performance (option 6). As such, they provide varying answers to a key question: How much deterrence is possible, and how much is enough? The six options provide ascending levels of ambitions, requirements, U.S. commitments, political-military arrangements, and different ways of treating Europe and the Middle East. They begin with alternative approaches to pursuing deterrence of nuclear threats and then migrate to pursuing deterrence of conventional aggression, political coercion, and conventional terrorism.

The first option, *political deterrence*, is minimalist: it seeks to provide nuclear deterrence coverage of the Middle East and Europe through U.S. declaratory policy and other political instruments. The second, *variable-geometry deterrence*, is more demanding militarily, but it accords higher priority to protecting Europe and Israel than friendly Arab/Muslim countries. The third and fourth options are still more ambitious, are military-minded, and treat regime members equally. Whereas option 3, *regime-wide nuclear deterrence*, focuses on U.S. nuclear deterrence and strives for allied conventional preparedness, option 4, *full-spectrum deterrence*, elevates the priority attached to the presence of U.S. conventional forces and related deterrence missions in the region. The fifth and sixth options have a broader political-military mindset. Whereas option 5,



*collective security deterrence*, aspires to create a collective security system in the Middle East, option 6, *integrated multi-theater deterrence*, strives to integrate deterrence coverage of the Middle East and Europe into a single strategic construct. These are not the only options that can be imagined, and indeed, something different may ultimately be chosen. But because these options offer distinct strategic choices, they help frame the judgments that must be made about goals and aspirations, tradeoffs, and priorities that must be set in the coming years if the multiple demands of a deterrence regime are to be pursued in coherent ways.

Although each of these options will be described and analyzed in some detail below, the following table helps portray how they stack up in relation to each other in terms of their performance and other characteristics. The table provides summary evaluations of them according to six key criteria. Overall, the table shows that options 1 and 2 are the easiest and least costly to pursue, but offer relatively low strategic performance in the Middle East. Options 3 and 4 offer medium degrees of feasibility and difficulties, and relatively high performance in achieving deterrence and other key goals. Options 5 and 6 offer the highest potential performance, but would be highly difficult and costly to pursue, and might not succeed, even then. As will be argued below, all of these options have attractions, liabilities, and tradeoffs, including reasons for supporting them and reasons for not favoring them. But if this table has a “sweet spot,” it lies in the range of options 3 and 4, because they perform well in terms of both feasibility and performance.

Table 7. Strategic Effectiveness Of Deterrence Options

Effective-ness Criteria	Deterrence Options					
	Option 1: Political Deterrence	Option 2: Variable-Geometry Deterrence	Option 3: Regime-Wide Nuclear Deterrence	Option 4: Full-Spectrum Deterrence	Option 5: Collective Security Deterrence	Option 6: Integrated Multi-Theater Deterrence
Deterrence Goals and Mechanisms	Low-Medium	Medium	High	High	High +	High +
Reassurance Goals	Low - Medium	Medium	High -	High	High +	High +
Other Goals	Low	Low	Medium	Medium +	High	High +
Meet US Military Requirements	Low	Low – Medium	High -	High	High +	High+
Political Feasibility	High	High	Medium +	Medium	Low	Low
Cost and Difficulties	Low	Low	Medium-	Medium	High	High +

Option 1, *Political Deterrence*, is the least ambitious and demanding of the six options. It calls for extended deterrence to be pursued through the vehicle of U.S. political commitments and actions. That is, the United States would employ declaratory policy and private diplomacy as well as economic sanctions to warn Iran against aggressive conduct, and to reassure friends and allies that if Iran tries to victimize them, the United States will come to their rescue. It also would employ a political engagement strategy in an effort to

build constructive relations with Iran and close political collaboration with friends and allies that are protected by the regime. This option would seek support from the United Nations, other international bodies, and other countries, but U.S. declaratory policy would provide the regime's main deterrent mechanism. Using diplomacy, the United States would endeavor to keep Iran adequately deterred while maintaining the kind of political relations with friends and allies in Europe and the Middle East that preserve harmonious consensus with them. But the United States would not sign any new security agreements with them that create concrete obligations, and would not specify exactly how its promised rescue mission would be performed in a crisis. In particular, this option makes no formal U.S. military commitments, and would not deploy missile defenses or offer to protect friends and allies with nuclear weapons. It would continue to deploy a small U.S. conventional military posture in the region, but that force would not be designed to deter Iran or defend against it. Nor would the United States offer increased security assistance to upgrade the military forces of friends and allies.

The United States thus would refrain from pursuing any special arrangements to create a militarily prepared regime that provides pre-packaged response capabilities if Iran misbehaves in ways necessitating a military reaction. In essence, this option would be empowered by U.S. political and diplomatic instruments, but it would not seek new treaty arrangements, and it would not provide powerful military instruments. It would rely only on improvised and ad-hoc military responses if the moment of truth arrived. In essence, this option provides a minimalist approach to creating an extended deterrence regime, one that relies on U.S. political actions to achieve its purposes and lacks powerful military teeth and other instruments. It makes sense if the U.S. Government judges that deterrence, reassurance, and other key goals can be accomplished by this strategy, or if political constraints prohibit a stronger U.S. stance. But if these conditions do not apply, its attractions fade. Judged against the criteria outlined above, this option's pros and cons are as follows:

Pros:

- Its declaratory policy can be pursued by the United States unilaterally, and can be done quickly and easily. It is a highly feasible option.
- It makes clear U.S. opposition to Iranian nuclear missiles and its support of friends and allies, while not unduly provoking Iran.
- It allows for mobilization of global political support for the deterrence regime, and for such steps as diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions against Iran. These steps would stand a good chance of being supported by Russia, China, and other major powers.
- It is inexpensive in budgetary terms, imposes no new requirements on U.S. military forces, and would not interfere with U.S. global involvements elsewhere.

Cons:

- While it could irreversibly entangle the United States in the Middle East, it lacks potent U.S. military instruments, and it does not mobilize major military help from friends and allies.

- It may be too weak to be credible in Iran’s eyes or those of friends and allies.
- It might not accomplish the deterrence and reassurance missions or such other goals as preventing further nuclear proliferation.
- It could leave the United States unable to control crises and escalation, reliant on ad-hoc military responses in a crisis, and lacking flexibility and adaptability for adjusting to surprising developments.

Option 2, *Variable-Geometry Deterrence*, includes the measures of option 1, but it is more ambitious and demanding because it also provides nuclear deterrence coverage to two of the three key constituencies—Europe and Israel—while providing only political deterrence for friendly Arab/Muslim countries in the Middle East. To reassure Europe, it would make unequivocal U.S. military commitments to NATO allies and would deploy a sizable force of missile interceptors to cover the entire continent. It also would reconfigure NATO to treat Iran as a potential Article 5 threat, and it would seek to prepare NATO to conduct retaliatory strikes against Iran if it employs nuclear weapons against Europe. Option 2 recognizes the special U.S. relationship with Israel and the likelihood that Israel would be a main target of Iranian nuclear strategy. Accordingly, option 2 would strengthen security and defense ties with Israel, deploy U.S. missile interceptors to protect that country if necessary, and make clear that an Iranian nuclear strike against Israel would trigger devastating U.S. nuclear retaliation against Iran. While option 2 would use U.S. declaratory policy to help protect friendly Arab/Muslim countries in the Middle East, it would enter into no formal security treaties with them, or deploy missile defenses to protect them, or make unequivocal nuclear commitments to them, or otherwise tailor forward-deployed U.S. forces to enhance deterrence coverage of them. It might, however, employ the type of consultative arrangements that are used in Europe to help reassure Partnership for Peace (PFP) members and other partner countries that are not invited to join NATO, e.g., Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

Variable-geometry deterrence is motivated by a combination of strategic reasoning and diplomatic practicality. Whereas strategic reasoning guides its treatment of Europe and Israel, practicality guides its treatment of friendly Arab/Muslim countries. Essentially, option 2 calculates that purely declaratory commitments to Arab/Muslim countries are as much as the political traffic in the Middle East will bear, that such commitments will be adequate to warn Iran to refrain from aggressive conduct toward them, and that special U.S. military commitments to them would unduly provoke Iran. It could make sense if U.S. political commitments are sufficient to reassure friendly Arab/Muslim countries, but if this is not the case, its attractions fade. Its pros and cons are as follows:

Pros:

- It is highly feasible and strongly enhances extended deterrence coverage of Europe and prepares NATO for potentially conducting military strikes against Iran.
- By assertively reassuring Israel, it greatly reduces the risk that Israel will be tempted to conduct preventive strikes against Iran.
- Aside from Israel, it avoids pursuit of disruptive changes to Middle East and Persian Gulf security affairs.

- Compared to more-ambitious options, it lessens provocation of Iran and is more likely to elicit support from Russia, China, and other big powers.

Cons:

- It creates two separate tiers of U.S. partners. Critics will allege it treats friendly Arab/Muslim countries as not entitled to the same protection as Europe and Israel.
- Israel aside, it might not be adequately deter Iran from aggressive conduct in the Persian Gulf and Middle East.
- Friendly Arab/Muslim countries might judge that they are not adequately protected and either pursue acquisition of nuclear weapons or seek accommodation with Iran.
- It could leave the United States lacking adequate military forces and preparations for defending friendly Arab/Muslim countries in a crisis with Iran.

Option 3, *Regime-Wide Nuclear Deterrence*, is more ambitious and demanding than option 2. It includes the steps of the first two options, but goes beyond them by also providing unequivocal U.S. nuclear guarantees to friendly Arab/Muslim countries that seek protection from the deterrence regime. Under its auspices, the United States might pledge not to be the first to use nuclear weapons, but it would declare clearly that if Iran fires nuclear missiles (or is imminently threatening to do so) or employs nuclear terrorism against any regime member, it would definitely retaliate with nuclear strikes against Iran in devastating ways. This option also would deploy missile interceptors to help protect not only Europe and Israel, but also friendly Arab/Muslim countries, from Iranian missile attack. The combination of missile interceptors and credible threats of nuclear retaliation would be intended to strongly achieve the two highest-priority goals of a deterrence regime: deterrence of Iranian nuclear attacks or threats to employ such attacks.

Although focused primarily on nuclear deterrence, this option also includes provisions for deterring Iranian conventional attacks or political coercion of vulnerable countries around its borders. It pursues this goal through a strategy of devolution aimed at enhancing the conventional militaries and political resolve of such endangered countries as Iraq, Persian Gulf friends and allies, and others. It would increase U.S. security assistance to those countries, including sales of advanced conventional weapons that might be needed, as well as U.S. training and exercises with their forces. Its goal would be to create allied forces that are strong enough to defend their borders, but not strong enough to threaten Iran. This option would not specially deploy, design, and configure U.S. conventional forces for the deterrence regime. But depending on strategic requirements in general, it would deploy modest U.S. forces to the region. The U.S. posture could range from a small presence for security assistance, training, and exercises, to a larger posture of about 25,000 personnel that would include air, marine, and naval forces to provide a credible military presence as well as initial crisis response options.

This option makes sense if the main U.S. goal is to deter Iranian nuclear attacks and reassure friendly Arab/Muslim countries that they are protected by U.S. extended nuclear deterrence coverage. It also makes sense if the accompanying strategy of devolving conventional defense responsibilities and capabilities onto the shoulders of friendly Arab/Muslim countries can be relied on to succeed. This option's main potential liability

is that a strategy of conventional devolution might not succeed, and that deployed U.S. conventional forces, if kept too small, might not be powerful enough to make up the difference. Its pros and cons are as follows:

Pros:

- It provides strong mechanisms for achieving the highest priority goals of a deterrence regime: deterrence of Iranian nuclear use and reassurance of allies that they are protected from this threat.
- It avoids the political onus of a two-tiered regime by assuring friendly Arab/Muslim countries that they are provided U.S. nuclear deterrence coverage equal to that offered to Europe and Israel.
- Pursuing devolution, it provides a potential strategy for bolstering the capacity of friendly Arab/Muslim countries to resist Iran conventional threats and associated political coercion, while keeping the U.S. military profile in the region low.
- Although implementing it could encounter difficulties, overall it is a feasible option, while scoring high on performance criteria.

Cons:

- Compared to option 2, it creates unequivocal and demanding U.S. commitments to countries in the Persian Gulf and Middle East. If Iran were to conduct a nuclear attack, the United States would have little choice but to retaliate with nuclear strikes of its own.
- Compared to option 2, it would be more controversial globally, and it could be hard-pressed to elicit support from Russia, China, and other major powers. Indeed, some of them might actively oppose the regime and attempt to undermine it or curry favor with Iran.
- Its strategy of conventional devolution could require significant increases of U.S. military sales to the Persian Gulf and Middle East, which could generate controversy.
- If devolution fails, this option might provide too few deployed U.S. military forces to achieve some key goals and respond quickly to crises. This especially could be the case if no U.S. combat forces are deployed to the region.

Option 4, *Full-Spectrum Deterrence*, contains all of the nuclear provisions of option 3. But in addition to seeking better allied conventional forces, it also provides for a larger U.S. conventional military presence in the Persian Gulf and Middle East, contemplating that a strategy of conventional devolution might not fully succeed or could be too controversial to implement. In any event, it judges that the United States might want a significant, combat-capable military presence for reasons of its own. Such reasons could include a desire to enhance U.S. influence and control in a region where it has nuclear commitments, and a desire to have already-deployed forces for reacting swiftly to crises that might erupt suddenly and have the potential to escalate quickly.

The key feature of this option is that, in addition to its nuclear guarantees, it aspires to specifically design deployed U.S. conventional forces and reinforcement plans to serve

the purposes and requirements of the extended deterrence regime. How large would these forces need to be and how would they be composed? This issue would need to be addressed by technical analyses. The force posture likely would need to include enough air, air defense, marine, and naval forces to meet peacetime requirements and contingency needs. It likely would not need significant ground combat forces unless such a requirement emerges in Iraq. That country aside, one or two Army brigades likely would be enough to meet normal peacetime training requirements with allied forces and provide early response options in a crisis. Total manpower requirements would be knowable only when the posture is decided, but they likely would be more than 25,000 personnel. How much more would depend on not only operational requirements, but also constraining political realities. Arab/Muslim sensitivities likely would place a firm lid on the total forces that could be deployed on Persian Gulf/Middle East soil.

Compared to option 3, this option performs equally in pursuing nuclear deterrence and reassurance missions, and potentially does a better job of safeguarding against conventional aggression and political coercion by Iran. Also, it is less vulnerable than option 3 to strategic failure if efforts to bolster allied conventional forces do not succeed, or if crises erupt in which sizable U.S. forces are required. However, it could be harder to implement, because it would encounter greater political controversies in the region and elsewhere, and would entail higher costs and burdens on the U.S. military. The outcome would be a U.S.-led regime that is configured for a full spectrum of military multilateralism, even if its members are not politically bonded together in ways that create a true collective security architecture. Its pros and cons are as follows:

Pros:

- Similar to option 3, option 4 performs well at achieving nuclear deterrence and reassurance.
- Compared to option 3, it potentially performs somewhat better at pursuing conventional deterrence and defense, as well as other regional security goals.
- It is less vulnerable than option 3 to failure of local allies to bolster their conventional defenses to the degree required.
- It provides better military assets for maximizing U.S. political influence and improved options for crisis control and escalation control.

Cons:

- Compared to option 3, it would more deeply and permanently entangle the United States in Middle East security affairs, and cause disruptive changes there.
- It would be harder to implement than option 3. It could place unwelcome pressures on Arab/Muslim friends and allies, further inflame relations with Iran, and provoke opposition by Russia and China.
- It would create a militarized deterrence regime that may lack adequate high-level political institutions to guide it.
- It would impose significant U.S. budget costs and would constrain U.S. force commitments and diplomacy elsewhere.

Option 5, *Collective Security Deterrence*, is more farsighted, ambitious, and demanding than the first three options. It includes the measures of options 1 through 4, but it would seek to elevate the extended deterrence regime onto a higher plateau of political preparedness and capability. It would do so by striving to create a collective security system in the Middle East that would work closely with the United States to operate the deterrence regime. It would treat Europe and the Middle East as separate entities, but it would seek to provide the Middle East with security assurances vis-a-vis Iran that are comparable to those provided to Europe. Compared to option 4, it would require similar U.S. military commitments, but would seek to create a stronger multilateral political framework for guiding the regime's military and defense practices in the Middle East, including those of Israel and friendly Arab/Muslim countries. In addition, it would seek to forge multilateral consensus behind a wider set of security policies and instruments than only defense preparedness. For example, it would seek widespread consensual support in such policy arenas as nonproliferation, security assistance, crisis management, arms control negotiations with Iran, and diplomatic outreach to other regions. Initially, this collective security system would depend heavily on U.S. guarantees and commitments, but as it gained strength in the Middle East, this dependency would gradually lessen.

This option would be pursued by forging enhanced security and defense ties with Arab/Muslim friends and allies on a multilateral basis, i.e., these agreements would provide uniform strategic principles for covering the entire regime. If desirable and possible, a single omnibus collective security treaty might be signed that covers the entire Middle East regime, as was done by NATO in 1949. Initially, collective security likely would be pursued through flexible, modular mechanisms that enable the various countries to participate in ways that are suited to their special circumstances. But over time, common institutions might be created to provide multilateral political and military leadership for the regime. For example, this option might result in committees of foreign ministers and defense ministers that meet regularly. Option 5 does not envision a NATO-like alliance for the Middle East, with big bureaucracies similar to those in Brussels and Mons, plus integrated military commands. It does envision enough collective security collaboration to accomplish deterrence and other common missions and provide a flexible capacity to gradually strengthen the regime in both political and military terms. Option 5 would enable pursuit of a broader set of goals, stronger institutional arrangements, more instruments, and a larger set of common security policies than options 3 and 4. It also would mandate more challenges, complexity, and difficulty for U.S. policy and strategy—not only in the Middle East but also globally, because Europe, Russia, China, and other powers likely would take a keen interest in the enterprise.

Pros:

- It provides the United States a powerful vehicle for asserting its influence and leadership across the Middle East through collective security activities.
- It provides a potent political-military instrument for deterring Iran and otherwise limiting its influence in the region.
- It can provide strong, regime-wide political leadership for pursuing defense planning and common security policies toward proliferation and other issues.

- It can create a framework for pursuing unity, stability and progress across the entire Middle East and for acting responsibly on the global stage.

Cons:

- It would entangle the United States in regional security affairs in ways that go beyond options 3 and 4.
- If pursued unwisely, it might so overload Middle Eastern political circuits that it would fail or even backfire in ways producing adverse, second-order consequences.
- It could be viewed by Russia, China, and other powers as a U.S. effort to control the Middle East to their exclusion.
- It would require greater U.S. diplomatic efforts, impose larger budget costs, and affect global policies elsewhere to a greater extent than options 3 and 4.

Option 6, *Integrated Multi-theater Deterrence*, is the most visionary and demanding of the six options. Whereas the first five options view the Middle East in terms separate from Europe, option 6 seeks a fusion of extended deterrence activities in both theaters. Under its auspices, NATO would be brought into close contact with the emerging Middle East deterrence and collective security regime. The two bodies initially would remain different entities, but they would endeavor to develop collaborative ties with each other that, while starting slowly, could grow over time. For example, the NAC might meet regularly with the foreign and defense ministers of the Middle East regime, and their staffs would conduct ongoing dialogue and cooperation. One goal would be to confront Iran with stronger deterrence barriers to committing nuclear aggression against either the Middle East or Europe. Another goal would be to commit NATO and European countries to performing important security missions in the Middle East. A third goal would be to foster close military and security collaboration among the United States, Europe, and the Middle East.

This option would enable the United States to view both regions through a similar strategic lens, and it could help empower NATO and the Middle East so that both are made more secure against a nuclear-armed Iran, as well as other dangers. Eventually, it could result in a strategic bonding of Europe and the Middle East in handling common security affairs. Initially option 6 would require a strong U.S. military presence and commitments in the Middle East, but as this option gains maturity, it could enable European and local military forces to perform a broader set of missions in ways that provide more partners for U.S. forces and lessen long-term U.S. military requirements in the Middle East.

Pros:

- It could enhance U.S. ability to exert leadership in both Europe and the Middle East.
- It could provide a framework for creating integrated missile defenses of both regions, as well as other forms of common defense planning.
- It could encourage Europe and NATO to perform a widening scope of strategic



missions in the Middle East in partnership with the United States.

- It could foster a powerful triangular relationship among the United States, Europe, and the Middle East in ways that have positive global impacts.

Cons:

- It would create a highly demanding political agenda for the United States that may exceed the art of the possible..
- Some Middle Eastern countries might view it as a new form of Western imperialism aimed at controlling their region for economic purposes.
- Should it fail, the effort could damage NATO cohesion and U.S. leadership in Europe and the Middle East.
- Russia and China likely would oppose this option and try hard to frustrate it.

How do these six options compare and contrast in terms of opportunities, challenges, and likely strategic performance in meeting demands for deterrence coverage? In a nutshell, they offer different combinations of political feasibility and strategic performance. At one extreme, option 1 opts for high feasibility at the expense of performance, because it lacks many of the military mechanisms that are commonly thought necessary to make extended deterrence succeed against a nuclear-armed adversary. Option 2 also scores well on feasibility, and offers a better strategy for making Europe and Israel secure from Iranian nuclear threats, but leaves friendly Arab/Muslim countries lacking concrete U.S. nuclear guarantees. At the other extreme, options 5 and 6 are visionary in ways that opt for high performance at the expense of feasibility. Whereas they offer the best approaches for powerfully pursuing extended deterrence and other strategic goals in both Europe and the Middle East, they may be infeasible, indeed implausible, in both regions in the years immediately ahead. In the middle of these extreme alternatives are options 3 and 4. Option 3 provides for strong nuclear deterrence coverage of all regime members, including friendly Arab/Muslim countries, as well as a devolution strategy for improving allied conventional forces so that they can defend themselves without U.S. military help. Option 4 adds significant U.S. conventional combat forces to the strategic equation, thereby potentially adding greater confidence that deterrence of Iranian conventional aggression and political coercion will succeed.

Together, options 1 and 2 offer approaches for pursuing extended deterrence while not making concrete U.S. nuclear commitments to friendly Arab/Muslim countries. If the United States decides that such nuclear commitments must be offered, then focus naturally turns to options 3 and 4. Both options offer similar nuclear guarantees. Their principal difference lies in how they treat conventional deterrence and preparedness. Whereas option 3 relies heavily on Persian Gulf allies to defend themselves, option 4 places greater emphasis on the U.S. military presence. If the “sweet spot” lies in the range of options 3 and 4 because both strike a sensible balance of feasibility and performance, the choice between them turns on decisions for U.S. security assistance to allies and on the size and composition of U.S. conventional forces that are deployed to the region in peacetime, and on the relative priority attached to conventional deterrence and related goals.

Other analyses, of course, might reach different conclusions, as might senior decisionmakers. Regardless of how these six options are appraised individually, a key point is that each of them has a distinct rationale, yet all of them are imperfect. All have significant attractions, but all also pose significant liabilities. Together, they illustrate that there is no fully satisfactory, risk-free, or cheap solution to deterring a nuclear-armed Iran. Tough choices will need to be made among options that pose difficult tradeoffs. The options that are easiest to implement likely would offer the lowest strategic performance, and those that offer the highest strategic performance likely would be the hardest to implement. The good news, nevertheless, is that the threat of a nuclear armed Iran is not impossible to counter peacefully. All six of these options provide strategic approaches for deterring Iran short of war, and for reassuring friends and allies short of their acquiring nuclear weapons of their own.

In the near term, the United States could face the necessity to choose among these six options. Over the long term, these six options may not be so different from each other that they are mutually exclusive. In theory, they could be pursued sequentially. That is, the United States could begin by pursuing option 1, and as success is achieved, shift gears to pursue option 2. As the military and defense measures of option 2 take hold, the United States could then start pursuing option 3 and, if necessary, option 4. Option 5 could then provide a way to start building a collective security system in the Middle East by first attending to the regime's military requirements and then adding an institutional political architecture. This is the opposite of how NATO emerged—it started with the political architecture and then added the military power—but this approach might accord better with Middle Eastern political realities. As the collective security measures of option 5 gain momentum, the United States could then begin pursuing option 6, which seeks to fuse Europe and the Middle East in strategic terms. If such a sequential path proves possible over the long haul, it would help transform an emerging crisis with Iran into a golden opportunity for its neighbors, the United States, and Europe. This, at least, could be the upside of danger.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

In summary, the idea of creating an extended deterrence regime in the Middle East is a formidable undertaking, but if Iran acquires nuclear missiles, the United States may have little alternative but to pursue some version of a deterrence regime. If the United States decides to do so, it will need to think and act with its eyes wide open. Although such regimes have long track records of success in Europe and Asia, there is no guarantee of comparable success in the Middle East. Much depends on how such a regime is assembled and operated. Here, coherent concepts and mastery of details both matter hugely. This paper has provided an initial appraisal of the subject, but before the United States is able to contemplate action, a great deal more thought—careful thought—will be needed.

If the United States decides to develop potential policies and plans for creating an extended deterrence regime, this effort will need to be placed at the core of the Administration's national security strategy and defense strategy, rather than be confined to the periphery. This agenda is one that will need to be carried out by the entire interagency community, not by any single department or agency. To lay the intellectual

groundwork, there is considerable analytical and planning work to be done by DOD, CENTCOM and EUCOM, the State Department, the NSC staff, the Intelligence Community, and other agencies. The time to start performing this work is now.