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EDITOR'S NOTE

I am proud to present to you the seventeenth edition of the Sigma Iota Rho Journal of International Relations. From an impressive submission pool representing a diverse array of higher education institutions in the United States and abroad, the outstanding articles selected for this year’s Journal exemplify the most innovative and insightful international relations research now being conducted by undergraduate students. Accordingly, this edition continues the Journal’s longstanding tradition of serving as a premier publication for undergraduate research in the field of international studies. This reputation also extends to our online presence, as we have redesigned our website (sirjournal.org) to provide even more access to articles, blogs, and other online features. These changes will allow the Journal to provide high-quality content to a greater number of readers.

This year, the Journal is incredibly honored to feature Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize who served as National Security Advisor and also Secretary of State for two Presidents. Dr. Kissinger negotiated the Paris Peace Accords to end the Vietnam War, led the opening of diplomatic relations with China, and helped achieve détente with the Soviet Union. Dr. Kissinger deftly crafted American foreign policy in a world of great upheaval and crises. As the U.S. currently grapples with a newer set of challenges abroad, Dr. Kissinger’s views and insights remain very influential for today’s policymakers and scholars. In his article, Dr. Kissinger reflects on a variety of foreign crises and how they represent a manifestation of an increasingly shifting international order. He argues that a strong American role is necessary to confront regional upheaval around the world because “…the consequence of American disengagement is greater turmoil.”

Following Dr. Kissinger, the ten student authors featured in this edition provide some of the most promising research out of the rising generation of young scholars. For example, Brooke Tenison studies how gender relations may influence the revival of civil wars, an intriguing association that has not received much prior scholarly attention. Eduardo Gonzalez’s timely article identifies the factors which increase an individual’s inclination to participate in a form of protest within a democratizing country like Turkey. Lastly, the Journal is debuting the Culture & Society Corner in which we aim to highlight the interdisciplinary nature of international studies. Overall, this edition crisscrosses geographic regions, thematic areas, and theories to highlight the wide range of study by students in international relations.

I would like to recognize the important contributions of numerous individuals to this year’s Journal. I would like to thank Dr. Walter McDougall, Director of the International Relations program at the University of Pennsylvania; Dr. Frank Plantan, National President of SIR; Ms. Donna Shuler, Administrative Director of SIR; Mr. Mark Castillo, the Senior Liaison Officer of SIR; and Ms. Arielle Klepach, the Journal’s Editor-in-Chief last year, for their consistent support and advice throughout the production cycle. I also want to thank my fellow Executive Board members and the entire Journal staff for devoting countless hours to ensuring the highest quality Journal possible - congratulations on a job well-done.

Sincerely,

Matt Rublin
Editor-in-Chief, Journal of International Relations

Spring 2015 | Volume 17
One of my favorite teaching anecdotes concerns a former student of mine, Noah Rosenkrantz, who was required to do a comparative abstract of three authors representing a school of thought or a theoretical perspective in international relations as part of the requirements for a course on IR Theory and Practice. He chose realism and in the course of his studies he became enamored with George Kennan. When he was asked to report out in class on his work he enthusiastically declared “Kennan is the Jedi Master of IR!” In conversations since (as an alumnus he would be a successful entrepreneur working with allied navies and the Department of Homeland Security to track and interdict rogue state arms shipments) when things turned to geopolitics invariably we would talk about “What would Henry do?” rather than “What would Kennan think?” The moniker in time seemed more appropriate to Kissinger than to Kennan, but to make the Hollywood analogy complete we must think of Kennan more as Yoda: an aloof recluse, but when called upon, a teacher and a philosopher with the ability to see beyond the immediate threat to the big picture and the generational consequences of the actions and reactions of interstate politics and conflict. Likewise, Kissinger was equally wise and attuned to the larger systemic order but understood that maintenance of that order and the requirements of peace would require the exercise of power; and while negotiation is preferred to conflict, at times there is no choice but to fight. I suspect that while he might differ on the details and strategy, Dr. Kissinger would approve of the negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program and the effort to bring the Iranians back into the international community as a normal power rather than to continue to consign them to the margins as a rogue state. At the time of President Nixon’s bold move at rapprochement with the People’s Republic of China, it was Kissinger’s guidance and strategic conception of the need to draw China into a “constructive relationship with the world community” that drove the process.1 His framing of this policy was classic Kissinger, arguing, “an international order cannot be secure if one of the major powers remains largely outside it and hostile toward it.”2

It was this characteristic of his writing—the offering of maxims of foreign policy or of how to understand and make sense of (and bring order to) an anarchic international system—that first attracted me to his work as a young student of international relations. Flipping through my collection of his works I find margin notes throughout the books labeling a passage or a quotable vignette as a “maxim” or “principle.” One could do worse in designing a training program for diplomats than to have them internalize these prescriptions for creating and maintaining a stable world order offered by Kissinger in all his works throughout his career. Consider these excerpts from three of his more notable works:

“To rely on the efficacy of diplomacy during a revolutionary period is to invite disaster; but to rely on power with insufficient means is suicide.”3

“…perfect flexibility in negotiations is the illusion of amateurs. To plan policy on the assumption of the equal possibility of all contingencies is to confuse statesmanship with mathematics.”4

“Moderation in an hour of triumph is only appreciated by posterity, rarely

1 Henry Kissinger, United States Foreign Policy for the 1970s: Building for Peace, 1971, 106.  
4 Ibid., 74.
by contemporaries to whom it tends to appear as a meaningless surrender.”

“A revolution cannot be mastered until it is understood. The temptation is always to seek to integrate it into familiar doctrine: to deny that a revolution is taking place.”

“…even the wisest military policy will prove sterile, if our diplomacy cannot elaborate a concept of aggression which is directed to the most likely dangers.”

“Confused leaders have a tendency to substitute public relations maneuvers for a sense of direction.”

“Statesmen always face the dilemma that, when their scope for action is greatest, they have a minimum of knowledge.”

The academic and diplomatic worlds in which Kissinger has operated throughout his career are realms of endeavor where ideology, politics and envy color interpretations of scholarship and policy. There is a sense to which he is happy to let history be the judge, but he has never avoided debate of his ideas or his policies, or his interpretation of foreign policy across centuries.

I want to thank Dr. Kissinger for agreeing to serve as this year’s headliner for the Journal of International Relations. His support helps us advance Sigma Iota Rho’s mission of promoting the study of international affairs on campuses throughout the world, as well as fostering a better understanding of the complexities of international politics and their impact the day-to-day lives of all. Despite the empirically compelling arguments made in Steven Pinker’s *The Better Angels of Our Nature* that the world is becoming more peaceful when measured by the number of casualties and conflicts we see today (as compared historically), the need for world order today is as great as it has ever been. There is certainly less confidence in the structures and organizations that have evolved since World War II and the founding of the United Nations in managing international transactions, international peace and security and the eradication of the political, economic and social conditions that give rise to the forms of radicalism, revolution, ethnic and religious conflict, and other threats to peace and stability and order afflicting our planet today. This alone makes *World Order* a must read today.

I want to thank this year’s editorial board, staff, and Editor-in-Chief Matthew Rublin for the excellent job they have done in maintaining and extending the high standards we demand for a journal representing Sigma Iota Rho. And as always, a special thanks goes out to all the faculty advisors on our member campuses for their support of SIR and for the leadership they provide to their students throughout the year. On May 28-29, 2015 we will be holding our first

5  Ibid., 111.
7  Ibid., 267.
9  Ibid., 294.
National Student Research Conference at North Park University in Chicago and I am hoping for widespread participation in this event that I know will become a new tradition within the honor society. Finally, we will begin recruiting a new editorial board soon and issuing a call for papers for next year’s edition of the Journal and for SIR’s Online Journal that I hope will attract interest in participation across the entire country. Thank you.

Frank Plantan, Jr.
President, Sigma Iota Rho
Nuclear Proliferation Realities: Iran, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia

BY THOMAS J. TREE
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ABSTRACT

The fear of horizontal nuclear proliferation has been present since the creation of nuclear weapons. The controversy over Iran’s nuclear program has intensified this fear in that if Iran were to become a nuclear-armed state, a nuclear arms race might ensue in the Middle East. Among the potential dangers of a nuclear-armed Iran, this is the least likely to occur. Egypt and Saudi Arabia are the two states in the Middle East most likely to pursue nuclear weapons should Iran ever become a nuclear-armed state. However, analysis of statements made by government officials shows that these two powers currently do not perceive Iran’s nuclear program as enough of a threat to pursue nuclear weapons of their own. Even if they did, their nuclear infrastructure is not developed enough to produce an arsenal of nuclear weapons in the near future, let alone participate in a nuclear arms race.

INTRODUCTION

One of the primary reasons Western leaders are so opposed to Iran procuring a nuclear arsenal is that a nuclear-armed Iran would destabilize the region. More specifically, a nuclear-armed Iran could be the catalyst for a regional nuclear arms race, which could increase the possibility of nuclear war between these states or a terrorist organization obtaining nuclear materials. However, these are unfounded speculations.

To determine whether Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons would be regionally destabilizing, the following questions must be answered: How serious of a security threat do Egypt and Saudi Arabia consider Iran’s nuclear program to be, and how capable are they of competing in a nuclear arms race? The answers will demonstrate whether such strong actions against Iran and its nuclear program, such as the imposition of economic sanctions and the threat of military force, are justifiable reactions or are rendering the Middle East more unstable and insecure. The answers will point towards a better way of handling Iran’s current nuclear
program and of dealing with the potential problems that could arise from Iran becoming a nuclear-armed state.

Western countries, especially the United States, typically examine the issue of nuclear weapons in the Middle East from Israel’s perspective. Since this study is concerned with the spread of nuclear weapons throughout the region, Israel’s response is not applicable because Israel is known to already have a nuclear arsenal. However, if Iran does develop nuclear weapons, it is certainly possible these two states could and would engage in a nuclear arms race, and this is a subject that requires further research. Nevertheless, this paper investigates the issue of nuclear weapons in the Middle East from the perspective of the two most populous Arab states in the region in order to more broadly understand the implications of Iran’s nuclear program.

This study analyzes Egypt and Saudi Arabia because, given their statuses within Middle Eastern politics in relation to Iran, they are the two states that would be most inclined to pursue nuclear weapons in response to Iran. Of course, in consideration of how consequential Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons would be and how much its nuclear program has already impacted the world, it would be worthwhile to research each Middle Eastern state’s position and response to Iran’s nuclear program. However, this study exclusively examines Egypt and Saudi Arabia for several reasons.

Primarily, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are the two most populous Arab countries in the region and are the leaders of the Arab world. In addition, they are natural rivals with Iran for political and religious reasons, and in Saudi Arabia’s case, for economic reasons as well. Third, Egypt has had a nuclear program for decades and is therefore technically capable of acquiring nuclear weapons. Saudi Arabia does not have and has never had a nuclear program, but it is one of the wealthiest countries in the world and is financially capable of building a nuclear weapons program. Lastly, given the circumstances of every other state in the region, none is likely to seek or acquire nuclear weapons before Egypt or Saudi Arabia if Iran does indeed develop a nuclear arsenal. Consequently, in order to determine whether Iran could trigger a nuclear arms race in the region, studying Egypt and Saudi Arabia would be the most worthwhile.

This study employs a qualitative research design, analyzing statements made by Egypt’s and Saudi Arabia’s state leaders as well as the status of their relations with Iran and their energy infrastructures. Qualitative analysis proved particularly useful for understanding threat perceptions, which primarily receives the focus of this study. The data is evaluated from a realist theoretical worldview by beginning with the assumptions that states are the primary

1 “Profile for Israel,” NTI: Nuclear Threat Initiative.
2 Israel already has a nuclear arsenal and has made its threat perceptions well known. Turkey is a NATO ally and currently holds American tactical nuclear weapons at its airbases. Iraq certainly feels threatened by the possibility of a nuclear-armed Iran, but it is currently experiencing too much internal strife to do much about it, as are Syria and Yemen. The other smaller Arab states in the region, such as Jordan and the Gulf States, would also be impacted by a nuclear-armed Iran. However, their responses would be largely influenced by Egypt and Saudi Arabia—the two largest Arab nations in the region.
actors in the international system, they desire power to ensure their security, their security concerns outweigh international obligations, and that security is a zero sum game, so one state satisfying its security interests renders surrounding states insecure. This study also focuses on the importance of regional power balancing—a central theme of realism. Using a realist perspective proves useful for better understanding the implications of Iran’s nuclear program for Egypt and Saudi Arabia’s security interests.

This study begins with a review of the literature on the topic that leads to the thesis statement. Then, I provide a summation of Iran’s nuclear program, including a brief timeline of its history, the known and unknown information about the program, and the factors that surround it with suspicion. Next follows an analysis of both the spoken and unspoken responses to Iran’s nuclear program by Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Their responses will be considered within the context of their political and economic relations with Iran. This analysis will reveal whether these states consider Iran’s nuclear program a legitimate security threat and their plans for dealing with this potential threat. Lastly, the conclusion summarizes the findings and provides a policy recommendation.

**Literature Review**

Much of the literature on the topic of the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons in general and Iran’s nuclear program in particular is focused on whether such proliferation is good or bad for international security. On one side of the debate stand the structural realists who promote the idea that the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons, specifically paired proliferation, creates a stable balance of power and minimizes violent inter-state conflict. Kenneth Waltz championed this idea in his piece, “The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better.” Waltz believed basing international security on nuclear deterrence would lead to a more stable system because nuclear weapons escalate the costs of war beyond a level any state would ever risk incurring, making states exceedingly cautious towards one another and reducing the need for conquering territory to ensure security. Thus, they eliminate the point of arms races. Waltz supported this hypothesis by citing history. He observed that, since World War II ended and the acquisition of nuclear arsenals by all of the world’s major powers, no conventional wars occurred between any major powers, coinciding with a decrease in wars in general. Waltz’s idea that “power begs to be balanced,” which he developed in his 2012 article “Why Iran Should Get the Bomb,” acts as his justification for permitting Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon. Israel is the only nuclear-armed state in the Middle East and has been so for decades. This has led to an imbalance of power, and Waltz argues that a nuclear-armed Iran should rebalance the system.

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3 The horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons means nuclear weapons are spread from one actor to another. This is distinct from vertical proliferation, which is the increase in the arsenal size of a single actor.


On the opposing side of the debate are those who believe horizontal nuclear proliferation directly threatens international security. Scott Sagan, an organizational theorist, challenged Waltz’s hypothesis that “more may be better.” Sagan argued that international security should not be based upon the principle of deterrence because it is not as infallible as its historical record. While the realists consider deterrence strong enough to devalue the purpose of examining a state’s internal decision-making processes, Sagan believed analyzing a state’s internal decision-making processes are crucial because they determine whether a nuclear weapon will be used or not. Although nuclear deterrence has never failed, since the only direct violence between two nuclear-armed states has been very rare and limited, nuclear catastrophe has nearly occurred numerous times, either from accidents or inadequate civilian control over the nuclear weapons. If nuclear proliferation continues, particularly with states like Iran, Sagan believed the chances of nuclear catastrophe will rise beyond a tolerable level.

In his study, Gawdat Bahgat discussed the typical motives for states to acquire nuclear weapons and to give up their pursuit of nuclear weapons. He then applies these motives to the case of Iran to reveal the best way to lessen or eliminate Iran’s alleged demand for nuclear weapons. Bahgat explains that states seek nuclear weapons to defend vital national interests, to increase their prestige or status, or to acquire more political leverage. Correspondingly, Bahgat observes that the best way to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons is to convince states that owning or pursuing nuclear weapons does not serve national interests. This occurs through “diminishing the values of NW [nuclear weapons] or making the price of pursuing them too high,” lessening states’ perceptions of insecurity, and by “preventing nuclear proliferators from acquiring the necessary raw materials and know-how.” Bahgat then applies this knowledge to Iran. He concludes that U.S. influence in the region, particularly its alliances with Arab states and Turkey, the U.S. history of hostile rhetoric and aggressive foreign policy, Israel’s ownership of a nuclear arsenal, and the Middle East’s vulnerability to conflict and violence are all reasons why Iran might find assurance in nuclear weapons. The solution, therefore, is to alleviate Iran’s security concerns and to provide incentives for curbing further development of its nuclear program.

The still elusive nuclear deal with Iran, combined with the suspicions that it is trying to develop a nuclear arsenal, has led to the widespread belief that regional nuclear proliferation is inevitable. Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran challenge this perception in their 2012 article “Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran: Is Regional Proliferation Inevitable?” They initially break down the security concerns that a nuclear-armed Iran would create for other
states in the region. These include the possibility of a regional nuclear cascade, Iran using its nuclear arsenal to support an emboldened foreign policy and more aggressive paramilitary action, and Iran dispersing nuclear material to terrorist groups. Hobbs and Moran then analyze how Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey would respond to these security implications. For each of these states, Hobbs and Moran conclude that they “would have little to gain and much to lose by embarking on nuclear weapons programs.” They also explain that, “Tehran would gain no real tactical or strategic advantage by proliferating to terrorists, an act which would most likely invite massive retaliation against Iran by the West.” The triggering of an immediate nuclear cascade by Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons is therefore preventable.

While Hobbs and Moran show that the security implications of a nuclear-armed Iran are not great enough to convince the other major powers of the Middle East to pursue their own nuclear weapons, Dalia Dassa Kaye and Frederic M. Wehrey argue in their article that a nuclear-armed Iran still has the potential to undermine the current balance of power in the region. They accomplish this by detailing the answers from their interviews with scholars, diplomats, military officers, and journalists throughout the region about their perceptions of Iran’s nuclear program. Their findings show that states in the Middle East are less worried about receiving a direct nuclear strike from Iran; rather, they are more concerned about the secondary consequences: a regional nuclear arms race, a nuclear accident, a more aggressive Iran, and a preventive military strike led by the U.S. or Israel. Kaye and Wehrey conclude that a nuclear-armed Iran “under the current regime is a dangerous and destabilizing force in the Middle East, fully capable of undermining stability in a variety of spheres.”

This study contributes to the literature by comparing recent statements made by Egypt’s and Saudi Arabia’s state officials with each country’s nuclear capabilities. It puts these observations in the context of their economic and diplomatic relations with Iran to determine whether a nuclear-armed Iran would or could create a regional nuclear arms race. This study proves that a nuclear-armed Iran would not be as destabilizing as suspected for two reasons. First, Egypt and Saudi Arabia’s national interests do not conflict with Iran’s national interests enough to be concerned about receiving a direct nuclear strike should Iran acquire nuclear weapons. Yet a nuclear-armed Iran would threaten their national security interests in other ways—Iran could develop a more aggressive foreign policy and could diminish their statuses as regional powers. Egypt and Saudi Arabia might pursue nuclear weapons in response to these threats, but engaging in a nuclear arms race with Iran would be unnecessary. Second, Egypt and Saudi Arabia currently lack the capabilities to compete in a nuclear arms race, let alone develop nuclear weapons.

11 Ibid., 132.  
12 Ibid.  
14 Ibid., 123.
Iran’s Nuclear Program

Iran’s history with nuclear energy began in 1957 under the Shah’s regime with the construction of the Tehran Research Reactor, which was completed a decade later and was used to generate electricity. The United States provided Iran with highly enriched uranium to fuel the reactor. Iran became a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) upon its creation in 1968 and ever since has remained a member state.  

Semira Nikou from the U.S. Institute of Peace notes that when the Iranian Revolution succeeded in overthrowing the Shah and establishing an Islamic Republic in 1979, the U.S. stopped supplying the Tehran Research Reactor with highly enriched uranium. Yet before the Revolution, with the help of a West German company named Kraftwerk Union, Iran constructed two light water reactors at Bushehr for generating electricity in 1974. In 1984, China helped Iran build another nuclear research center at Isfahan. In 1987, Iran paid Argentina $5.5 million to provide the Tehran Research Reactor with a new core that can only operate with 20 percent enriched uranium, along with a hefty supply of low enriched uranium. Tehran then made an agreement with the Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy in 1995 to rebuild the reactors at Bushehr, which had been badly damaged during the Iran-Iraq war. Two years later, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) added the Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement, which is a voluntary agreement designed to help the IAEA ensure non-nuclear weapon state parties to the NPT do not pursue nuclear weapons. Iran signed the Additional Protocol in 1997 but still has not ratified it.

The real controversy over Iran’s nuclear program began in 2002 when an exiled opposition group called the National Council of Resistance of Iran exposed two nuclear sites Iran had been keeping a secret from the IAEA: the Natanz uranium enrichment plant and research lab and the Arak heavy water production plant. Iran was secretly enriching uranium. In 2003, President Khatami proclaimed Iran’s legal right to enrich uranium for civilian use, provided the United Nations with information on the nuclear sites at Arak and Natanz, and opened these sites to IAEA investigation. The investigations persisted through 2004, during which time Iran temporarily suspended all uranium enrichment. The IAEA discovered small traces of highly enriched uranium (above 20 percent enrichment) and some plutonium production but found no evidence that Iran’s programs were devoted towards creating nuclear weapons. However, it is unknown whether Iran declared all of its nuclear materials. Suspicions that Iran was hiding some of its nuclear materials grew in January 2005 when Iran limited the IAEA’s inspections to specific areas of a military base near Tehran called Parchin. Later that year, Iran notified the IAEA it was resuming its enrichment of uranium at its Isfahan uranium conversion center, and the IAEA installed cameras to monitor the facility.

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15 Semira N. Nikou, “Timeline of Iran’s Nuclear Activities,” United States Institute of Peace: The Iran Primer (October 2014).
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
Soon afterwards, the IAEA issued a report claiming Iran was not in compliance with the NPT Safeguards Agreement. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) convened and issued its first set of economic sanctions against Iran in 2006. The UNSC went on to impose five more sets of sanctions with the intention of dissuading Iran from continuing its enrichment of uranium. Iran has consistently refused this demand because it interprets the NPT to mean enriching uranium stands as its sovereign right. Negotiations between the permanent members of the UNSC along with Germany (the P5+1) and Iran have continued until this day but have not satisfied either side. Iran’s stalwart defense of its right to enrich uranium conflicts with the determination of the Western powers to end Iran’s enrichment activities. While these activities are necessary for the development of nuclear energy, they are also a major step towards developing nuclear weapons.

Iran claims to need nuclear energy because although it “holds the world’s fourth-largest proved crude oil reserves and the world’s second-largest natural gas reserves...Iran's oil production has substantially declined over the past few years, and natural gas production has slowed.”  

This has coincided with a more than 50 percent increase in energy consumption in the last decade.  

Using highly enriched uranium to fuel the country would free up more of its oil and natural gas reserves for export, therefore making the possession of a nuclear program economically advantageous. Then again, Iran secretly enriched uranium for 18 years before the world discovered its activities, allegedly purchased nuclear weapons designs from A.Q. Khan in the 1980s, received a grade of non-compliance with the NPT Safeguards Agreement, and now has a nuclear program consisting of around 20 known facilities, a number larger than needed to produce nuclear energy for civilian purposes.  

No definite evidence exists that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons. While Iran has good reasons for developing nuclear energy for civilian use, these factors give credence to the suspicion that Iran seeks nuclear weapons.

**Egypt**

Relations between Egypt and Iran have been strained since Iran’s Islamic Revolution in 1979, but ties are steadily improving. Iran and Egypt are on opposite sides of the region from each other, and they are also on opposing sides of some important issues. According to the United Nations’ country data, Egypt and Iran have comparable population sizes, with Egypt numbering nearly 81 million people and Iran having over 76 million people in 2012. Egypt contains the highest number of Sunni Muslims in the region, and Iran is the bastion of Shia Islam. Egypt has a peace treaty with Israel and Iran supports two militant groups—Hamas and Hezbollah—in their fight against Israel. Egypt is currently ruled by President al-Sisi, a former military general who favors the secularization of politics and receives the military support of the U.S. Iran, on the other hand, has a theocratic government and strongly opposes American influence in the Middle East.

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20 “U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA),” EIA...
21 Ibid.
22 “Profile for Iran,” NTI: Nuclear Threat Initiative.
Despite these conflicting interests, Iran and Egypt are taking steps to renew a diplomatic relationship for the sake of regional stability and security. Diplomatic relations ended in 1979 with the Iranian Revolution. According to Egypt’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, they resumed in 1991 at the level of “Interests Sections.” In 2011, Iranian foreign minister Ali Akbar Salehi told the Islamic Republic News Agency, “The expansion of diplomatic ties between Iran and Egypt to ambassadorial level will be beneficial to regional peace and security, as both sides desire stability and tranquility in the region.” This has coincided with increased bilateral trade, which rose from $10 million in 2011 to $51 million in 2012. The West’s concern over Iran’s nuclear program is evidently not shared by Egypt. If it is shared, Egypt apparently thinks the best way to handle a nuclear weapons-ambitious Iran is to engage with it rather than to isolate it.

Egypt and Iran are both parties to the NPT and favor creating a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East. At the UN General Assembly in 1974, Iran and Egypt both supported a resolution calling “for establishing a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free-zone in the Middle East, submitting all the nuclear facilities in the region under the comprehensive IAEA Safeguards System, and declaring the abandonment of developing or industrializing nuclear weapons.” Since Israel is the only nuclear-armed state in the region, this resolution was clearly aimed at Israel, revealing both Egypt’s and Iran’s older concerns over Israel’s nuclear capabilities. Both states repeatedly point out the unfairness of the nonproliferation regime’s acquiescence of Israel developing nuclear weapons and its harsh crackdown on Iran for merely doing what is legally permitted as a party to the NPT. Even after regime changes in both countries, as well as the ending and restarting of diplomatic relations, Iran and Egypt maintain this common conviction today.

Egypt made its nuclear security concerns clear at the meetings for the Third Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in May 2009. First, Egypt stated that parties to the NPT are legally permitted “to make use of the developmental benefits of nuclear energy,” thereby supporting Iran’s “sovereign decision” to enrich uranium. Egypt then drew attention to how the NPT’s verification system is implemented selectively, with Iran being subject to extensive investigations while hardly any pressure is put on Israel to join the NPT. From Egypt’s perspective, Iran’s nuclear program is not as much of a threat as “the lack of the universality of the Treaty,” which is not ensuring the security of its parties. In other words, Egypt thinks a nuclear cascade in the Middle East would undermine the value of the NPT and seriously threaten the security of the region.

25 “Arab Republic of Egypt - Ministry of Foreign Affairs.”
26 The next NPT Review Conference will take place from April 27th to May 22nd in 2015.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
Egypt is convinced that if a nuclear cascade occurs, it would result from Israel’s initial development of nuclear weapons rather than Iran’s secondary development of nuclear weapons, which would simply be a response to the insecure situation created by Israel. As Egypt stated at the Second Session of the Preparatory Committee to the 2015 NPT Review in 2013: “Indeed, history has shown us that as long as nuclear weapons exist for some countries, others will stop at nothing to acquire them, and that the only true guarantee that nuclear weapons are never used is their total elimination.”

In addition, Egypt explained that it signed the NPT along with other Arab states “with the understanding that this would lead to a Middle East completely free of nuclear weapons. However, more than 35 years later, one country in the Middle East—namely Israel—remains outside the NPT.”

In this statement, and as a leader of the Arab world, Egypt condemns Israel’s acquisition of nuclear weapons as a threat to regional stability and shows its dissatisfaction with the NPT.

Although Egypt is concerned about Israel’s nuclear arsenal, Egypt also perceives Iran’s nuclear program as a potential threat to its own national security and to regional security, even if it is in response to Israel. At the 2009 conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Egypt’s foreign minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit explained that “the Egyptian perception of the perils in the region does not differentiate between the threat of the Israeli nuclear capabilities, and the potential threat the Iranian nuclear dossier poses to national security.”

This sentiment is not unique to Iran—Egypt would feel threatened by the acquisition of nuclear weapons by any state in the region to the same degree that it feels threatened by Israel. Egypt’s statement at the Second Session of the Preparatory Committee to the 2015 NPT Review Conference further explains this sentiment: “…there is no such thing as a nuclear weapon in good hands versus nuclear weapons in bad hands. It is a bad weapon in any hand. It has to be eliminated from all hands.”

Therefore, it is not necessarily Israel or Iran that Egypt perceives as a threat to its national security; rather, it is the possibility of the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East.

Despite its long and loyal commitment to nonproliferation in the region, Egypt understands that a failure to prevent proliferation in the Middle East would compromise Egypt’s national security, and so would drive it to pursue nuclear weapons for itself. WikiLeaks revealed a cable from 2009 in which Egypt’s former president, Hosni Mubarak, told U.S. officials that Egypt might begin its own nuclear weapons program if Iran became a nuclear-armed state.

In addition, Egypt’s ambassador to the UN, Maged Abdel Aziz, stated on the last day of the 2010 NPT review conference:

31 Ibid.
32 “Arab Republic of Egypt - Ministry of Foreign Affairs.”
33 Badr, Statement by H.E. Ambassador.
We in Egypt are against even the presence of nuclear weapons in our region. But if others will acquire nuclear weapons—and if others are going to use these nuclear weapons to acquire status in the region of the Middle East—let me tell you, we are not going to accept to be second-class citizens in the region of the Middle East.\(^\text{35}\)

Egypt sees itself as a major player in Middle Eastern politics, and if maintaining its status and national security requires either leaving or violating the NPT in order to pursue nuclear weapons, then it will attempt to do so.

If Iran does acquire nuclear weapons, Egypt would have a difficult time accomplishing the same feat and certainly will not become a nuclear-armed state in a short amount of time, at least not without significant foreign aid. According to Nuclear Threat Initiative’s country profile, Egypt’s nuclear program began in 1955 under President Nasser with the creation of the Egyptian Atomic Energy Commission, which is currently the Egyptian Atomic Energy Authority.\(^\text{36}\) Egypt pursued nuclear weapons in the 1960s, but this pursuit ended after Egypt’s defeat in the Six Day War of 1967. In 1968, Egypt signed the NPT. Sadat became president in 1970, and Egypt ratified the NPT and its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA in 1981.

Since then, Egypt has maintained two small research reactors near Cairo. Egypt has “a pool of universities capable of training scientists in fields related to nuclear physics and engineering,” and it “possesses one of the most advanced nuclear infrastructures in the Middle East,” so Egypt is technically capable of developing a robust nuclear program.\(^\text{37}\) However, Egypt “does not have nuclear power reactors or large-scale enrichment or reprocessing capabilities,” and its inability to fund further development itself or “secure sufficient external loans” blocks progress.\(^\text{38}\) Consequently, competing in a nuclear arms race “will require help from foreign investors and financial institutions.”\(^\text{39}\) The high costs Egypt would incur for developing a nuclear arsenal, including the strains on its economy and the possible deterrence of much-needed foreign investment, explain why Egypt chose to work towards creating a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction rather than developing a nuclear arsenal in response to Israel.

Does Egypt consider Iran’s nuclear program a threat to its national security? Yes, Egypt is worried about having to compete in a regional nuclear arms race to maintain its status in the region. The possibility of receiving a direct nuclear attack from Iran is not a concern because of their expanding diplomatic and trade relations, and since “Egypt has never faced Iran in a


\(^{36}\) “Profile for Egypt,” *NTI: Nuclear Threat Initiative*.

\(^{37}\) Ibid.

\(^{38}\) Ibid.

\(^{39}\) Ibid.
major military conflict, nor is Cairo involved in any territorial disputes with Tehran.” For this reason, Egypt does not believe putting pressure on Iran is the best way to ensure its national interests and regional security. Instead, Egypt believes the only way to ensure the security and stability of the Middle East is to force Israel to denuclearize and to join the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapons state, thereby terminating any possibility of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. If Iran acquires nuclear weapons, Egypt has made clear that it will attempt to become nuclear-armed as well, but its limited finances would seriously constrain this endeavor. Knowledge of its inability to compete in a nuclear arms race is a primary motivation for Egypt to doggedly pursue the establishment of a regional nuclear weapons free zone.

**Saudi Arabia**

Iran and Saudi Arabia are historic rivals due to their comparable sizes, close proximity, and competition in the energy market in which they are both major exporters of oil and natural gas. Iran’s Islamic Revolution of 1979 has only intensified their rivalry. Their differences are clear: Saudi Arabia is Arab and Iran is Persian; Saudi Arabia is a Sunni monarchical theocracy and Iran is a Shiite republican theocracy; Saudi Arabia is an American ally and Iran opposes American influence in the region; Saudi Arabia favors the status quo of the region while Iran is a revisionist power. Both share the Persian Gulf, which is a crucial outlet to the rest of the world, and both have rentier economies based on exporting oil, so influence in the Gulf has great significance for both. Despite this rivalry, “neither is likely to confront the other on the conventional battlefield” and both “have maintained an outward tone of cooperation in the interest of threat management.” The two states prefer to battle through proxies, particularly in Iraq now that U.S. troops have withdrawn and left behind a power vacuum. They are also backing opposite sides in the Syrian civil war. The idea that the Middle East is currently in a Cold War-like period largely stems from the current relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Saudi Arabia’s geopolitical location forces it to perform “a delicate balancing act” in regards to Iran’s nuclear program. Due to their rivalry, the possibility of Iran owning an arsenal of nuclear weapons threatens Saudi Arabia’s national interests. Indeed, this would grant Iran more political leverage in the region and could embolden it to push for more influence in Iraq, which historically has been necessary for balancing Saudi-Iranian relations but is now vulnerable to influence since the U.S. withdrawal. Saudi Arabia is less afraid of receiving a direct nuclear strike from Iran. Rather, Saudi Arabia perceives a more aggressive Iran as a greater threat to its national security interests.

Yet even more than this, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states fear Iranian retaliation in the aftermath of an American or an Israeli military strike intended to destroy or set back Iran’s

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40 Hobbs and Moran, “Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran,” 133.
41 Frederic M. Wehrey et al., *Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam: Rivalry, Cooperation, and Implications for U.S. Policy* (Santa Monica, California: Rand Corporation, 2009), xii, 71.
42 Ibid., 67.
43 Ibid., ix.
nuclear program.\textsuperscript{44} This is because the U.S. has 15 military bases throughout the Persian Gulf, including in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.\textsuperscript{45} If the U.S. or Israel attacked Iran to damage its nuclear program, and if Iran thought Saudi Arabia or the Gulf states supported this attack, Iran could respond by launching a ballistic missile at one of these bases.\textsuperscript{46} Iran has not publicly stated what its retaliation would be after an American or an Israeli attack, but Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States do not want to risk suffering this retaliation. Since these countries’ economies have flourished thanks to foreign investment, receiving a ballistic missile strike from Iran could have a calamitous economic impact.

Based on these perceived threats to national security, Saudi Arabia decided to handle Iran’s nuclear program “through accommodation rather than confrontation, publicly voicing their disapproval of a U.S. strike, [and] making calls for a WMD-free zone in the Gulf and the Middle East.”\textsuperscript{47} In his speech to the United Nations General Assembly’s 69\textsuperscript{th} Regular Session, Ambassador Abdallah Al-Mouallimi, Saudi Arabia’s permanent representative to the UN, stated, “all types of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction...pose a primary threat to international peace and security.”\textsuperscript{48} He continued by saying the only way to minimize this threat is through the “political will and strong determinations from all countries, particularly those possessing nuclear weapons, to dispose of the reliance on nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction as instruments of national security.”\textsuperscript{49} Saudi Arabia is clearly concerned about nuclear weapon proliferation in its region and thinks the best way to prevent this is to explore the international community, especially the major powers, to minimize the generally perceived importance of nuclear weapons for national security.

Like Egypt, Saudi Arabia thinks the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East would be a response to Israel’s initial acquisition of nuclear weapons. In his same speech to the UN General Assembly, Al-Mouallimi stated, “It is really unfortunate that the available international consensus, and a regional urgent desire to make the Middle East a zone free of nuclear weapons, are barred by Israel who prevents the desire for the people of the region to live in a zone free of nuclear terror.”\textsuperscript{50} This statement demonstrates Saudi Arabia’s perception that Israel’s refusal to join the NPT and to denuclearize directly threatens regional stability.

In consideration of the Iranian nuclear program, Saudi Arabia takes a middle-of-the-road stance, which makes its real concerns about Iran’s program difficult to determine. The purpose of this moderate approach is to avoid backlash either from the U.S. or from Iran.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 115.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Ben Piven, “Map: US bases encircle Iran,” Al Jazeera, May 1, 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Iran has “the largest and most diverse ballistic missile arsenal in the Middle East.” Michael Elleman, “Iran’s Ballistic Missile Program,” United States Institute of Peace: The Iran Primer (2011), 86.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Wehrey et al., Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam, 67.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Abdallah Y. Al-Mouallimi, Statement of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Before The First Committee During the works of The United Nations General Assembly 69\textsuperscript{th} Regular Session (New York: The Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations, October 2014).
\item \textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
At the UN General Assembly’s 68th Regular Session in 2014, Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Saudi Arabia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, explained, “…the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia still attaches importance to address this crisis by peaceful means through negotiations between group P5+1 and Iran, in a manner to ensure Iran’s right to peaceful use of nuclear energy in accordance with the standards and procedures of the International Atomic Energy Agency.”\(^{51}\) He follows this statement by saying, “Moreover, we stress the necessity of enforcing these procedures and controls on all countries in the region,” once again referencing Israel and pointing out that the controversy over Iran’s nuclear program is inseparable from Israel’s arsenal of nuclear weapons.\(^{52}\)

Saudi Arabia does not want to antagonize Iran, so it “reaffirms the inherent right of all states to obtain nuclear technology for peaceful purposes” and advocates a peaceful solution to the issue.\(^{53}\) Saudi Arabia does not want to anger its American allies, so it also “stresses the importance of continuing the negotiations between the P5+1 over Iran’s nuclear program.”\(^{54}\) Lastly, Saudi Arabia addresses its national security concerns and the security concerns of the wider region by pressuring Iran to “reassure the countries in the region and the international community that its nuclear program is peaceful, and to ensure the program’s safety and security by allowing the inspectors from the IAEA to carry out their mandates during their visits.”\(^{55}\) Being allied to the U.S. and being across the Persian Gulf from Iran puts Saudi Arabia in a tricky position. This justifies its use of official statements to demonstrate that it is sympathetic to the concerns of all the stakeholders in the matter.

Looking beyond the rhetoric reveals Saudi Arabia’s perception that a nuclear-armed Iran would shift the region’s balance of power and is therefore a future that must be anticipated. Due to Israel’s nuclear-armed status and refusal to join the NPT, the Saudis also do not entirely trust the international community, specifically the nonproliferation regime, enough to rely on and ensure their national security interests.

In 2003, very soon after the discovery of Iran’s clandestine nuclear program, an article published in The Guardian revealed that Saudi Arabia’s top policymakers discussed three possible ways to handle Iran’s nuclear enrichment program and its potential ambitions for developing nuclear weapons. These three options included: “to acquire a nuclear capability as a deterrent; to maintain or enter into an alliance with an existing nuclear power that would offer protection; [and] to try to reach a regional agreement on having a nuclear-free Middle East.”\(^{56}\) As previously demonstrated, Israel has stonewalled any attempt to create a nuclear weapons free Middle East. Regardless, Saudi Arabia has maintained the pressure on Israel.

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\(^{52}\) Ibid.

\(^{53}\) Al-Mouallimi, Statement of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

\(^{54}\) Ibid.

\(^{55}\) Ibid.

Saudi Arabia is already allied with the U.S., which is the premier military power in the world and provides the Saudis with conventional weapons in exchange for oil. However, since the perceived threat of receiving a direct nuclear strike from Iran is very low, the U.S. has no reason to place nuclear weapons in Saudi Arabia as a deterrent. Additionally, no known deal has been made between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia officially putting Saudi Arabia under the U.S. nuclear umbrella—this has only been assumed since the two states are allies.

Yet this apparently is not enough of a guarantee for Saudi Arabia. In 2009, King Abdullah told former U.S. diplomat Dennis Ross during a meeting that, “If they get nuclear weapons, we will get nuclear weapons,” in reference to the Iranians.57 The likelihood of Saudi Arabia creating an indigenous nuclear program to develop nuclear weapons in the near future is unlikely. First, Saudi Arabia is a member of the NPT and has a Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA. Although Saudi Arabia is one of the wealthiest countries in the region, defying the NPT and trying to develop nuclear weapons would certainly come with numerous unwanted economic costs imposed by the international community, such as economic sanctions. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has the opposite problem as Egypt. Whereas Egypt has the building blocks of a robust nuclear program but lacks the funding, Saudi Arabia has adequate funding but “lacks the natural resources, technological capability, and scientific community necessary to develop an advanced nuclear weapons program.”58 To simply build a civilian nuclear energy program, Saudi Arabia would have to start from scratch. If Saudi Arabia wanted to acquire nuclear weapons in a relatively short amount of time to counterbalance Iran, it would require the aid of a state that already owns nuclear weapons.

This state could be Pakistan, but no reliable evidence supports this suspicion. Even if Saudi Arabia and Pakistan did set up a deal that would provide Saudi Arabia with nuclear weapons if Iran became a nuclear-armed state, Pakistan would not be able to supply Saudi Arabia with enough nuclear warheads to compete in a nuclear arms race. In addition, knowledge of this deal could threaten Saudi Arabia’s relations with the U.S. and would invite retaliation from the international community. Regardless of whether or not Saudi Arabia wants to acquire nuclear weapons, the country would not be capable of competing in a nuclear arms race in the near future.

CONCLUSION

How serious of a security threat do Egypt and Saudi Arabia consider Iran’s nuclear program to be, and how capable are they of competing in a nuclear arms race? Since Egypt and Saudi Arabia side with Iran on the fact that the enrichment of uranium is a sovereign right according to the NPT, and because they believe the international community should respect this right for all states, Egypt and Saudi Arabia do not perceive Iran’s nuclear program to be as much of a threat as the international community has voiced. They have not assumed that the main

purpose of Iran’s nuclear enrichment program is to develop nuclear weapons.

However, Egypt and Saudi Arabia have noted that if this is Iran’s intention, then their state interests would certainly be threatened. The possibility of Iran launching a nuclear weapon at Egypt or Saudi Arabia is not high on either’s security concerns. Instead, as previously articulated, they are more worried about Iran developing a more aggressive foreign policy and having a higher status as a regional power. Since Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea proved the nonproliferation regime as incapable of preventing states from acquiring nuclear weapons, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are aware of the possibility that Iran could become a nuclear-armed state. In response, certain state leaders have made it clear they will take initiative and acquire nuclear weapons of their own if Iran does.

These statements, combined with the perceived necessity of counterbalancing a nuclear-armed Iran with their own nuclear arsenal, have given rise to fears that a nuclear-armed Iran could trigger a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. While it is true Egypt and Saudi Arabia claimed they would pursue nuclear weapons if Iran develops a nuclear arsenal, their current capabilities could not support a nuclear arms race, let alone the indigenous development of a nuclear weapon. Moreover, their interests with Iran do not conflict enough to warrant engaging in a nuclear arms race, even if Iran became nuclear-armed. Power does indeed “beg to be balanced” as Waltz claims, but as the saying goes, “beggars cannot be choosers,” so power sometimes remains unbalanced.

Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and likely the rest of the world prefer limiting the proliferation of nuclear weapons and keeping this proliferation out of the Middle East—a region infamous for its vulnerability to instability. However, it also appears that having a multipolar balance of power where one state owns nuclear weapons and the others do not is an imbalanced system because it creates perceptions of insecurity in the other regional powers, thereby resulting in a security dilemma. This is evident in statements made by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran in response to Israel’s nuclear arsenal. These perceptions of insecurity are likely to persist, and as they persist, these states will lose more confidence in the international community to help make the Middle East a balanced and stable system. They will rely on themselves to ensure their own security and will do so by seeking a deterrent against the perceived threat of a nuclear-armed Israel.

Thus far, it was been widely assumed that Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons would trigger a regional nuclear cascade. The effort of the international community, in the form of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany, has been focused on stopping Iran’s nuclear program in its tracks. Very little effort, if any, has been placed on mitigating the security concerns of Iran, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. They have clearly stated their security concerns originate with Israel’s nuclear weapons and policy of opacity. For these reasons, and based on the conclusions of this study, the international community must pressure Israel to end its policy of nuclear opacity, to open its nuclear facilities to IAEA investigations, to work towards denuclearization, and to sign the NPT as a non-nuclear weapons state. This will

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significantly mitigate the perceived insecurities of the other states in the region and diminish the need to find a deterrent.

If Israel still resists these demands even with additional pressure from the international community, and if Iran does develop nuclear weapons, the U.S. must strengthen its military and economic relations with the other states in the region, particularly Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Augmenting economic relations, possibly through expanding trade and investment, will reassure Egypt and Saudi Arabia that the U.S. is committed to their overall well-being. The U.S. should be willing to offer extended nuclear and conventional deterrence if these states confirm that doing so would indeed satisfy their need for a deterrent. This would also dissuade them from breaking away from the international community to guarantee their own national security interests. Lastly, and most importantly, neither the U.S. nor Israel should attempt to destroy Iran’s nuclear program. While doing so might temporarily prevent Iran from developing a nuclear arsenal, this will only provide Iran with an even greater incentive to become a nuclear-armed state in the long-term.

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**About the Author**

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