

Deter and Contain: Dealing with a Nuclear Iran

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Feb 1, 2006

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Conclusions

Efforts to deter and contain a nuclear Iran would likely encounter significant challenges. The nature of the Islamic Republic, regional politics, and Iran's involvement in terrorism make establishing a stable deterrent relationship with a nuclear Iran risky and uncertain. The experience of the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and of India and Pakistan since then, demonstrate that both preventive diplomacy and luck may be necessary to avert some kind of nuclear crisis involving Iran, and Israel or the United States, should Iran become a nuclear power in the coming years. Managing the uncertainty and instability created by a nuclear Iran is likely to pose major challenges for U.S. policy makers.

Iran may, however, emerge as the driving force behind the creation of a new regional security architecture in the Persian Gulf and southwest Asia. While it is in the long-term U.S. interest to create a free-standing balance of power in the Gulf that obviates the need for a permanent forward U.S. presence, for the foreseeable future, the stabilization of Iraq, the Global War on Terrorism, and ongoing efforts to counter the nuclear ambitions of Iran will draw the United States deeper into the affairs of the region. Enhancing the military capabilities of regional allies threatened by Iran, deepening bilateral cooperation with these countries, and encouraging multilateral cooperation in the areas of air- and missile-defense and beyond may be the best way to lay the basis for future regional collective defense arrangements. For the near term, however, the United States will remain the 'indispensable nation' when it comes to formulating a response to the possible emergence of a nuclear Iran, and to achieving security and stability in a proliferated region.

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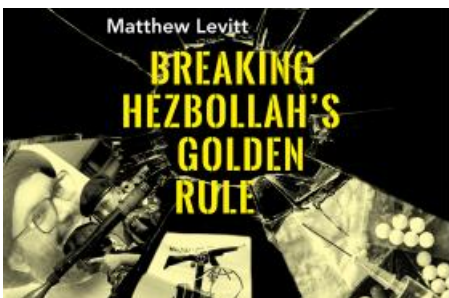
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