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## IMPACT OF NUCLEAR IRAN ON GCC STATES

Lt Col A.L. Alrashdi

### JCSP 41

#### *Exercise Solo Flight*

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

**IMPACT OF NUCLEAR IRAN ON GCC STATES**

By Lt Col A.L. Alrashdi

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## IMPACT OF NUCLEAR IRAN ON GCC STATES

### INTRODUCTION

Ever since the world got hint of Iranian nuclear aspirations, international community has been involved in every possible way to deny Iran's entry into nuclear club. Despite combination of unprecedented sanctions, international seclusion, persuasion and dissuasion by a very broad international coalition led by United States, their efforts have generally proved to be frustrating. There now is an emerging likelihood that a weaker, poorer and isolated Iran is more determined to acquire nuclear capability, despite the costs. Question of Middle Eastern security has therefore, not only become increasingly complex, but also gave birth to new dimensions about peaceful coexistence with nuclear Iran as a viable option.

Since Iranian leadership has been proved more tenacious than expected, it is logical to assume that they have a notion of 'unacceptable risk', unclear to outer world. Purely due to high threshold of pain and resilience demonstrated by Iranian leadership in response to international strategies of compellence and denial<sup>1</sup>, there is emerging debate as to whether they would behave as 'rational actors'<sup>2</sup> in future nuclear scenario. Fear of Iranian bomb thus poses existential threat to regional and international security<sup>3</sup>, which not only could target Saudi oil fields and international trade in Gulf, but might also extend circle of their misadventure to Israel and Southern Europe<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Shashank Joshi, *The Permanent Crisis* (Whithall Paper 79, Routledge Journals, UK, 2012), 56-60.

<sup>2</sup> Jacquelyn K. Davis and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr, *Anticipating a nuclear Iran : Challenges for US Security* (Columbia University Press, New York. 2013), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Whether the fear is unfounded or not, and whether the threat is existential, potential or assumed; itself is a topic of another debate and falls outside the purview of this paper. Kenneth Waltz in his paper, "Why Iran should get the bomb", has dismissed it as an unqualified fear, generally contrary to the popular western opinion. Kenneth Pollack on the other hand in his book, "Unthinkable" writes, "There is no question that Iranian leadership is paranoid, xenophobic, conspirational and oblivious..." on page 70.

<sup>4</sup> Roger Howard, *Iran Oil : The New Middle East Challenge to America* (I.B Tauris, London, 2007), 2.

Aim of this paper is to ascertain implications of strategic rapprochement between Tehran and Washington for Middle East and, in particular, GCC states. It argues that acquisition of nuclear power by Iranian regime would entail destabilization of Middle Eastern chessboard and increased vulnerability for GCC countries. The paper will focus on the genesis of Arab-Iran tensions and its contemporary manifestations, Washington's strategic redefinition of relations in the Middle East and security implication of nuclear Iran in the region in general and GCC states in particular.

## **PART-I**

### **GENESIS / MANIFESTATION OF ARAB-IRAN TENSIONS**

The troubled relations between Iran and Arab world can be understood in backdrop of ethnic, religious and historic background. Iran is a Persian Shia state whose philosophy is vitally different and opposing in nature to the Sunni Arab ideology; both in ethnic and sectarian dimensions. Despite the location of major holy sites in Arab world being a source of religious epicenter for Muslim world, Iran believes that it has a key politico-religious role to play as guardian of Muslims' interests, a notion intensely opposed by Arabs<sup>5</sup>. A noticeable determination of Iranian leadership has been empowerment of Shias, especially in Middle Eastern region<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, Arabs' mentality of 'Single Ummah' fundamentally differs from Iranian ideological source of strength: Persian glorification of pre-Islamic era<sup>7</sup>. These rival ideologies have faced each other in numerous proxy wars. Iranian support of Shia population in

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<sup>5</sup> Mahboubeh Sadeghini, *Security Arrangements in the Persian Gulf: With Special Reference to Iran's Foreign Policy* (UK: Ithaca Press, 2011), 200-201 as quoted in Mohammed El-Katiri, *The future of the Arab Gulf monarchies in the age of uncertainties* (Strategic Studies Institute, June 2013), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Peter Roell, *Iran: Foreign and Security Policy Aspects* (Institut für Strategic-Politik-Sicherheits and Wirtschaftsberatung, Berlin. Oct 2010), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *International Politics of the Persian Gulf: a Cultural Genealogy* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2006), 16-17.

Arab world<sup>8</sup> is seen as unwarranted interference in their internal affairs by GCC states. Iranians have tried to overthrow house of Sauds at least 4 times, most-notably in 1987 in which at least 400 Saudis were killed<sup>9</sup>. Same year, Iran attempted to mount major naval operation to destroy Saudi oil facilities in Gulf, which was countered by US naval involvement<sup>10</sup>. The fact that 10-15 percent Saudi population is Shia<sup>11</sup>, they have more reason to be wary of Iranian subversive efforts.

In Bahrain, where Shia are in majority, Iran maintained close links with shia opposition party Al-Wifaq<sup>12</sup>, and influenced youth to conduct targeted attacks on government personnel<sup>13</sup>. Iran also conducted unsuccessful coup in Bahrain in 1981<sup>14</sup>, frequent bombings and sabotage activities in Kuwait with an attempt to assassinate its ruler in 1985<sup>15</sup>. Iranian annual military support to Hizbullah is guessed at about 100 Million USD<sup>16</sup>. Despite enormous rift for influence, an optimistic shift in Middle Eastern atmosphere was expected when Iranian President attended the 2007 GCC summit. Dream of peaceful regional aspirations were soon dispelled, when Iran made a clumsy assassination attempt on Saudi ambassador in Washington<sup>17</sup> and Al-Quds made an attempt to bomb Saudi embassy in Argentina not much later<sup>18</sup>. Even now support to Houthis

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<sup>8</sup> Alan Salehzadeh, *Iran's domestic and foreign policies* (Juvenes Print, Tampere. 2013), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Pollack, *Unthinkable : Iran, the bomb, and American Strategy* (Simon & Schuster, 2013), 84.

<sup>10</sup> David Christ, *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty year conflict with Iran* (Penguin Press 2012, New York), 300-10.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Pollack, *Unthinkable : Iran, the bomb, and American Strategy* (Simon & Schuster, 2013),85.

<sup>12</sup> Mitchell Belfer, *Unequal Power, Unequal Reach: Reflecting on Iran-Bahrain Relations* (Nov 2014) Available at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?id=185197&lng=en>

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Jamal S. al-Suwaidi, *Iran and the Gulf : A search for stability* (Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research. Abu Dhabi, UAE. 1996), 143.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Peter Roell, *Iran: Foreign and Security Policy Aspects* (Institut für Strategic-Politik-Sicherheits and Wirtschaftsberatung, Berlin. Oct 2010), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Jacquelyn K. Davis and Robert L.Pfaltzgraff Jr. *Anticipating a nuclear Iran : Challenges for US Security* (Columbia University Press, New York. 2013), 132.

<sup>18</sup> Alan Salehzadeh, *Iran's domestic and foreign policies* (Juvenes Print, Tampere. 2013), 18.

in Yemen and Bashar Al Assad in Syria, can be linked to Iranian bent of Shia empowerment – fundamental cause of rift between Iran and GCC states.

## **PART – II**

### **WASHINGTON’S STRATEGIC REDEFINITION OF RELATIONSHIP IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

Ever since the hostage crisis in Tehran in 1979, USA tried different methods to counter Iranian threat. It included sanctions to prevent Iran from becoming economically or militarily powerful, diplomatic isolation, clear demarcation of American ‘red lines’, stationing military forces in Arabian Gulf to enforce red lines and covert actions supporting internal Iranian subversive groups that politically oppose their own regime<sup>19</sup>. During Iran–Iraq war, historical suffering from Iraqi chemical warfare munitions, wherein the whole free world maintained a stunning silence, developed a background perspective of realism of Iranian leadership: Tehran cannot count on anyone for its own help in future<sup>20</sup>.

The US policy of countering Iranian threat however underwent a strategic mistake, presumably owing to lack of thorough understanding of Iranian leadership, which indirectly undermined American policy of compellence against Iran. When USA declared Iraq, Iran and North Korea as “axis of evil<sup>21</sup>” and followed by invasion on the first, it was just a question of survival for the other two. The neo-conservative Bush doctrine of preemption<sup>22</sup> gave clear signal to rogue states to seriously consider their existence. Building conventional military power to match that of USA is next to impossible; the only practical way to avert US threat of aggression

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<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Pollack. *Unthinkable : Iran, the bomb, and American Strategy* (Simon & Schuster, 2013), 284.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>21</sup> President George Bush speech on 29 Jan 2002. Nathan Gonzalez, *Engaging Iran, The rise of Middle East Powerhouse and America’s strategic choice* (Praeger Security International, USA. 2007), 79.

<sup>22</sup> Kylie Baxter and Shahram Akbarzadeh, *United States Foreign Policy in the Middle East* (Routledge, USA, 2008), 165.

on their soil was to start or hasten their journey on nuclear road. The non-nuclear rogue states (Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan) suffered taking the message lightly, while Iran and North Korea did not<sup>23</sup>.

In Sep 2012, the US Senate voted 90-1 in favour of rejecting the policy to ‘containing Iran’ as an option<sup>24</sup>. President Obama had time and again insisted that containing Iran is neither his policy, nor Intent<sup>25</sup>. Despite all US measures, Iranian leadership survived international pressure, accepted discomfort in times of crisis and continued pursuit of their national agenda and perceived regional interests. During recent time, it somehow has evolved that United States would assent to Iran’s slow development of nuclear capability and be able to adjust to Iranian ambitions in passive acquiesce –against declared policy of non-containment<sup>26</sup>. The motive behind the swing can possibly be linked to two factors. American strategic shift in the region and renewed understanding of Iran by the West. The shift in American strategic thought can be linked back to 9/11, when US-Saudi relations suffered a decline in mutual trust<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, as per Saudi perspective, US misadventures in Afghanistan and Iraq weakened its military might<sup>28</sup>, while Iran gained its regional influence at the same time by appearance of Shia government in Iraq, staying of Bashar Al Assad in Syria, American reluctance to support Syrian rebels, Hezbollah’s rising power in Lebanon, Iranian interference in Bahrain and Yemen, symbolic victory won by Iran and its Hezbollah’s proxy against Israel, fall of Mubarak in Egypt; which all

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<sup>23</sup> The other grave error was a suggestion by US and European states during talks in Moscow in June 2012 that Iran would not receive sanctions relief even after it shuts down Fordow reactor and stops enrichment at 20%. This overt Western resolve smashed their bargaining chips, only to be successfully restored later by positive engagements in continued dialogue with Iran. Shashank Joshi, *The Permanent Crisis* (Whithall Paper 79, Routledge Journals, UK, 2012), 68.

<sup>24</sup> US Senate Joint Resolution 41, text available at : <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-112sjres41es/pdf/BILLS-112sjres41es.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Kenneth Pollack, *Unthinkable : Iran, the bomb, and American Strategy* (Simon & Schuster, 2013), 279.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>27</sup> Jacquelyn K. Davis and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr. *Anticipating a nuclear Iran : Challenges for US Security* (Columbia University Press, New York. 2013), 132.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

are indications of a tilting balance in favour of Iran and away from American led regional order.<sup>29</sup> The idea has been further reinforced when Barack Obama showed a lot of patience since last 15 months, took stand against the King and Netanyahu's wishes, and went all out to finalize nuclear deal with Iran, likely to be inked by 30 Jun 2015<sup>30</sup>. The fading American resolve to play regional security sponsor and compliancy to Iranian growing domain of influence is an unmistakable signal of American strategic shift for Saudis. In addition, Western powers seem to have reached an understanding that nuclear Iran might be delayed in longer run, not denied. So it is better to positively engage Iran and bring her back to international stage as a responsible state rather than continue making unwarranted expectation – rouge state submitting to regional imbalance of power – against the lessons of over three decades. The earlier it is, the better and easier it would be.

### **PART – III**

#### **SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF NUCLEAR IRAN ON MIDDLE EAST AND GCC STATES**

After applying all sorts of compellence and denial, it probably became clear to six world powers that a nuclear Iran can only be deferred nor stopped. The understanding perhaps reinforced Iranian victory to secure a nuclear deal in Switzerland this month, that brings tremendous implications for GCC states. The deal besides gradual lifting of sanctions also allows Iran to develop centrifuges after 10 years,<sup>31</sup> which would raise Arab security issues manifold. Moreover centrifuge developing Iran would be financially stronger due to her oil sale during the

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<sup>29</sup> Dalia Dassa Kaye and Jeffrey Martini. *The days after a deal with Iran: Regional responses to a final nuclear agreement* (RAND Corporation, 2014), 12.

<sup>30</sup> BBC News, *Iran nuclear talks: 'Framework' deal agreed*, 3 Apr 2015. Available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32166814>

<sup>31</sup> The Wall Street Journal, *Nuclear Deal Allows Iran Significantly to Boost Centrifuges After 10 Years*, 4 April 2015, Available at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/nuclear-deal-would-allow-iran-to-boost-centrifuges-after-10-years-1428170903>



decade and corresponding decrease in nuisance value of Arab oil. An economically and diplomatically more viable Nuclear Iran, is therefore a future threat, which Arabs cannot afford to ignore.

### **Arguments for Regional Stability**

The optimistic point of view about prospects of nuclear Iran is that it would guarantee a much safer region. This perception fundamentally stems from philosophy that nuclear weapons are not meant for employment but for deterrence, and hence ensure regional safety. Professor Kenneth Waltz believes that since power begs to be balanced, nations become more responsible and cautious after acquiring nuclear weapons, resultantly they balance out each other's power. According to this logic, a single nuclear monopoly (Israel) is the cause of regional instability, which will logically end when the balance of military power is restored<sup>32</sup>, by acquisition of Iranian nuclear capability. Vital basis of this theory is the assertion that "whoever gets nuclear weapons behaves with caution and moderation<sup>33</sup>". According to this school of thought, risks of conflict without mutual deterrence are much more than the risk that nuclear weapons would actually be used.

Michael Horowitz, in his study of implications of nuclear Iran has argued that nuclear imbalance induces greater chances of military disputes, while odds of war precipitately drop with both sides possessing nuclear capability, evolving a regional balance<sup>34</sup>. Proponents of optimistic nuclear ideology argue that in 1991, two traditional rivals in subcontinent, Pakistan and India reached an agreement wherein they decided not to attack each other's nuclear facilities. Besides fighting three wars, they still realized that far more annoying than their adversary's nuclear

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<sup>32</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Why Iran should get the bomb* (Foreign Affairs 91, issue 4, Summer 2012: 2-5)

<sup>33</sup> Scott Sagan, Kenneth Waltz, Richard K. Betts, *A nuclear Iran : Promoting Stability or Courting Disaster?* (Journal of International Affairs 60, No. 2 Spring / Summer 2007), 137.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Horowitz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons and International Conflict: Does Experience Matter* (Journal of Conflict Resolution Vol 53, No 2, April 2009)

deterrent is regional instability produced by challenges to nuclear deterrence<sup>35</sup>. By signing this treaty, they decided to comfortably live with mutual deterrence exerted on each other, and opted out of atmosphere of military imbalance. The key to instability is imbalance which must be replaced by a balance of power and balance of deterrence.

### **Arguments Against Regional Stability: Why Nuclear Iran is Unsafe for the Region**

#### Historical Perspective

It is wrong to declare that states with nuclear weapons behave responsibly as there is a lot of historical evidence to the contrary. Quoting that USA and Russia did not exchange nuclear weapons on any battlefield during cold war, e.g. despite nuclear brinkmanship during Cuban missile crisis, as they had become responsible by virtue of possessing nuclear weapons, would be an incorrect deduction led from a correct premise. Concluding that nuclear states become responsible is tantamount to drawing a wrong historical lesson, by cherry-picking selective facts. China, immediately after testing a nuclear weapon, demanded return of land from USSR which Mao had claimed that Russians stole centuries ago<sup>36</sup> – a reckless initiative from China. Heated rhetoric led to Chinese and Russian mobilization, followed by violent skirmishes. It only was fear of American response that halted Russia against launching preemptive strike on China's nuclear arsenal<sup>37</sup> – certainly not the 'responsibility' born out of Russian possession of nuclear capability. Similarly, one may argue that Israeli restraint of not responding to 42 Scud missiles launched during Gulf War from Iraq, a responsible and mature step, should be ascribed to overwhelming American pressure, not the 'caution' that Israel learnt by mere possession of nuclear capability<sup>38</sup>. Similarly, Pakistan and India fought a dangerous war on Kargil in 1999,

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<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Why Iran should get the bomb* (Foreign Affairs 91, issue 4, Summer 2012: 2-5)

<sup>36</sup> Kenneth Pollack. *Unthinkable : Iran, the bomb, and American Strategy* (Simon & Schuster, 2013) ,75

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*,74

underwent full scale mobilization in 2001-2 and were on the brink of war in 2008, are yet to show any ‘nuclear’ maturity. It again was American influence which forced subcontinent rivals to withdraw their nuclear arsenals in July 1999<sup>39</sup>. North Korea after acquiring nuclear weapons in 2009 was involved in sinking Korean naval vessel and attacking its neighbor by shelling in 2010. Pyongyang again tangled itself in heightened nuclear crisis with Korea and USA in 2013<sup>40</sup>, which does not suggest cautious attitude by any standards. With historical evidence to the contrary, it would be erroneous conclusion that possession of nuclear weapon induces any self-restraint or cautious attitude.

#### Probabilistic Issue

Concluding that odds of war get dropped with possession of nuclear weapon - underlying basis to argue for stability due to nuclear Iran - has two issues. One, it depends upon possession of credible second strike capability<sup>41</sup>, not by mere possession of nuclear capability.

Hypothetically if Iran acquires nuclear weapon but doesn’t possess capacity to respond back with a nuclear blow, in case it suffers preemptive strike by Israel<sup>42</sup>, then lack of second strike capability would invite act of aggression rather than deterring it. The odds would increase – and not decrease – in this case. Secondly, and more importantly, even if the odds of war would decrease when Iran would acquire credible second strike capability, the conclusion that ‘odds of war would drop’ cannot be seen in isolation. For every logical decision making process, the odds

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<sup>39</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Day A Nuclear Conflict Was Averted* (YaleGlobal, 13 September 2004), <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/day-nuclear-conflict-was-averted> See Also Clinton’s interview available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6QH91XIJRU>

<sup>40</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack. *Unthinkable : Iran, the bomb, and American Strategy* (Simon & Schuster, 2013) ,74

<sup>41</sup> Credible second strike capability is the ability of a nuclear state to absorb a nuclear attack and be able to respond back with a nuclear blow on the aggressor state. Credible second strike capability does not automatically transcend from mere possession of nuclear capability but a complex parameter that depends upon dispersion of nuclear weapons, robustness in nuclear command and control, flexibility in means of delivery, stockpiles and yield of weapons, letting the aggressor state believe that capacity to absorb nuclear strike exists, besides various other psychological and political factors.

<sup>42</sup> It is pertinent to mention here that Israel has a military history of preemption against threatening states, which struggle to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

of risk have to be weighed with the consequences which would result, if the risk materializes. While probability of nuclear states fighting each other does drop, the consequences shoot up to precarious level that overall it becomes astronomically dangerous. For example, purely from a probabilistic perspective, the odds of getting a cancer are much less than catching a flu, but it would be illogical to term cancer as ‘safer’ disease, in comparison to flu, simply because odds are less. In view of immense consequences of cancer, despite being much improbable than flu, cancer logically outweighs flu and qualifies to be more dangerous disease.

#### Geographical Issue

The argument that two nuclear rivals are safer than a single nuclear hegemon (Israel) monopolizing the region – if supposed correct – has a basic geographical issue: it does not apply to Arab world and in particular GCC states. While it may work for Israel versus Iran stability, the converse would be true for KSA and other Gulf states. Since power begs to be balanced, as argued earlier by Waltz, it would now logically demand KSA to proliferate so as to balance against Iran, according to the supposition. There is no reason to assume that the supposition – nuclear rivals are safer than single nuclear hegemon – would not work for GCC states. Nuclear Iran would mean dangerous imbalance with non-nuclear GCC states, as nuclear coercion against Arab states by Iran would be much harder to implement<sup>43</sup> than a non-nuclear coercion which today exists between Iran and GCC states. Regional balance would not only demand Saudi proliferation, but may also include second order effects, which might include Turkey, UAE and Egypt, who have motives – and one may argue, opportunity as well – to pursue nuclear capability<sup>44</sup>.

#### Stability – Instability Paradox

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<sup>43</sup> Shashank Joshi, *The Permanent Crisis* (Whithall Paper 79, Routledge Journals, UK, 2012), 95.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*,104.

Even if KSA later acquires nuclear capability, the stability-instability paradox will come into play. The paradox describes that while two nuclear rivals remain stable at nuclear threshold, they become unstable at conventional and proxy conflicts, due to low opportunity cost. While the world has not seen any nuclear state being pushed to a limit where its vital national interests are destroyed, there is no guarantee that comparatively ‘softer’ approaches would not be employed, from across the whole spectrum of conflict. It would therefore be a far cry to expect peaceful Gulf with nuclear Iran than a non-nuclear Iran.

### **Strategic Options for GCC States and their Implications**

#### **Proliferation**

A logical GCC response against nuclear Iran would be GCC efforts to acquire nuclear capability of their own – most likely by KSA<sup>45</sup> followed by perhaps UAE – to establish decisive regional balance<sup>46</sup>. Prince Turki, former Saudi Intelligence Chief said that any Iranian misadventure to acquire nuclear technology would lead to untold consequences<sup>47</sup>. Saudis have simple stance – they would not live in a world where Iran possesses nuclear weapon and they don’t<sup>48</sup> – best described as:

*“In the event of a successful Iranian nuclear test, Riyadh would immediately launch a twin-track nuclear weapons programme, The Times has learnt. Warheads would be purchased off the shelf from abroad, with work on a new ballistic missile platform getting under way to build an immediate deterrent, according to Saudi sources. At the same time, the kingdom would*

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<sup>45</sup> Amos Yadlin, Avner Golov, *A Nuclear Iran: The Spur to a Regional Arms Race?* (Institute of National Strategic Studies, Strategic Assessment | Volume 15 | No. 3 | October 2012), 12.

<sup>46</sup> Kenneth Pollack. *Unthinkable : Iran, the bomb, and American Strategy* (Simon & Schuster, 2013),342.

<sup>47</sup> Jay Solomon, *Saudi Suggests ‘Squeezing’ Iran over Nuclear Ambitions* (Wall Street Journal, June 22, 2011)

<sup>48</sup> New York Times, *Prince hints Saudi Arabia May Join Nuclear Arms Race*, Dec 6, 2011.

*upgrade its planned civil nuclear programme to include a military dimension, beginning uranium enrichment to develop weapons grade material in the long run*<sup>49</sup>”

The Emiratis, wary of Tehran’s seizure of three strategically sited islands amidst Hormuz channel, announced in 2008 that they are developing their own nuclear industry for civilian purposes<sup>50</sup>. Though, UAE selected a line in accordance with NPT guidelines<sup>51</sup>, the program may also serve another foundation, if Iran goes nuclear. The counterargument for UAE proliferation interestingly develops on inner front. Riyadh’s viewpoint may logically be that if any GCC state has to counterbalance Iran by possessing nuclear capability, it should be KSA itself and not its “little brothers<sup>52</sup>”. It might be the biggest restraint on UAE, who would be willing to face international pressure or sanctions, but may not be willing to act in defiance to KSA.

#### Extended Deterrence

One possible solution is extended US deterrence for Gulf States, for which an effort was made in 2007<sup>53</sup>. It might also help American efforts to counter Saudi proliferation to some extent, but has three issues. First, defence pact for a kingdom whose human rights record is not clean is hard to sell domestically and would draw huge political controversy<sup>54</sup>. Secondly, USA would have to deter a potential aggressor state (Iran) that cost of her misadventure against Arab world would invite American response that outweighs her potential gains, whereas Iranians yet are known to be undeterred. Third and most difficult, USA would have to convince Arab world that they can rely on USA and don’t have to fear Iran, but again, it is equally difficult to reassure

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<sup>49</sup> Hugh Tomlinson, *Saudi Arabia threatens to go nuclear ‘within weeks’ if Iran gets the bomb*, The Times 10 Feb 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Christopher M. Blanchard, Paul K. Kerr, *The United Arab Emirates Nuclear Program and Proposed U.S. Nuclear Cooperation* (Congressional Research Service Report, 20 Dec 2010)

<sup>51</sup> Kenneth Pollack. *Unthinkable : Iran, the bomb, and American Strategy* (Simon & Schuster, 2013),88.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*,89.

<sup>53</sup> Jacquelyn K. Davis and Robert L.Pfaltzgraff Jr. *Anticipating a nuclear Iran : Challenges for US Security* (Columbia University Press, New York. 2013),131.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

one's ally, if not easier, than to deter his opponent<sup>55</sup>. In addition GCC might ask US to increase conventional forces in the region<sup>56</sup>, pre-deploy tactical nuclear weapons and seek further technological buildup of their forces.

#### Economic Leverage – Use of Arab Oil Card

As of 2013, approximately 20% of the whole world's oil daily passes through Hormuz channel. Oil is highly responsive to world's geopolitical problems and fears of risks of its disruption – either in supply or production<sup>57</sup>. GCC states would leverage their financial pivot, to ensure their security<sup>58</sup> against threat of nuclear Iran. More importantly, the ongoing conflict against Houthis Shias in Yemen, led by Sunni-Arab coalition under KSA<sup>59</sup>, might also contribute to oil card. If Yemen conflict reinforces Saudi perception that KSA has to take care of its own security, in absence of USA due to her strategic shift, Arab oil would no longer be traded for USDs, but for any currency or barter acceptable to them<sup>60</sup>.

#### Sunni Muslim Card

KSA also has to diversify its regional alliances, which might include non-Gulf states, e.g. Morocco, Jordan and Egypt<sup>61</sup>. In addition there are unconfirmed reports of nuclear agreement

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<sup>55</sup> Dennis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London : Michael Joseph, 1989),243

<sup>56</sup> USA already has major military bases in Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar and access to military facilities in KSA and Oman. Kenneth Pollack, *Unthinkable : Iran, the bomb, and American Strategy* (Simon & Schuster, 2013),348.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* ,361

<sup>58</sup> How much would that be effective in presence of Iranian oil (if the sanctions on Iran are lifted after nuclear deal) in international market would be another debate, outside the purview of this paper

<sup>59</sup> BBC News, *Saudi Arabia launches air strikes in Yemen*, 26 Mar 2015. Available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-32061632>

<sup>60</sup> Traditionally since Nixon government, Arab oil has been traded only for USDs, which is a major cause of stability in USD, as it creates huge artificial demand for USDs in the whole world. In return, Saudis get a security guarantee from USA. The model is generally known as “Petro-Dollars”.

<sup>61</sup> Formal invitations to join GCC has been sent to Morocco and Jordan, while an invitation to Egypt is likely. Curtis Ryan, *Jordan, Morocco and an Expanded GCC* (Middle East Research and Information Project, April 15, 2014)

between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, particularly from 2003<sup>62</sup>. Saudis might be able to take delivery of a weapon or buy one, in hour of need<sup>63</sup>, or even be able to get (and publicly declare) extended deterrence guarantee from Pakistan<sup>64</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Iran is a traditional Arab rival in Middle East and both sides are involved in numerous proxy conflicts since long owing to their historical, ethnic, sectarian and cultural differences. Fearful of nuclear aspirations of an isolated state, international community has been together in compelling Iran to forego its nuclear program in better interest of peace, but in vain. USA has been tradition Arab ally for decades, but since 9/11 there has been a marked shift in US regional interests. The strategic tilt towards Iranian interests, evident on Middle Eastern chessboard, is troublesome to the GCC states. To top it all, world six powers and Iran are on their way to conclude a nuclear deal, which may be a forerunner to an economically more viable nuclear Iran, exerting much greater influence in the region in the coming years. Arab hegemony is seriously being questioned, and there is increasing likelihood that a nuclear Iran would negatively affect the security of GCC states. Despite the theory that nuclear capability brings stability or it reduces the odds of war, Iranian would still pose a dangerous threat to GCC, who would look for more allies, options for extended deterrence or proliferation – a hazard for regional stability.

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<sup>62</sup> Arnaud de Borchgrave, *Pakistan, Saudi Arabia in Secret Nuke Pact*, Washington Times, October 22, 2003. As quoted in Kenneth M. Pollack. *Unthinkable : Iran, the bomb, and American Strategy* (Simon & Schuster, 2013),85.

<sup>63</sup> Bruce Riedel, *Saudi Arabia: Nervously Watching Pakistan* (Brookings Research) <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2008/01/28-saudi-arabia-riedel>

<sup>64</sup> Jacquelyn K. Davis and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr. *Anticipating a nuclear Iran : Challenges for US Security* (Columbia University Press, New York. 2013),132.



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