Scoping Future Nuclear Proliferation Risks: Leveraging Emerging Trends in Socio-Cultural Modeling and Analysis

Jeannie L. Johnson
Utah State University

in cooperation with

The Center for the Advanced Study of Language
College Park, MD

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Introduction | Project Objectives

The key objective of this project has been to identify and then refine cutting-edge socio-cultural analytic models tailored to anticipate aspiring WMD actors and identify points of leverage within their national communities. In doing so, we hope to supply insights for strategic planners seeking to thwart, disrupt, or productively shift nuclear weapons activity. In order to achieve that end, our team:

- ✦ **(Section I) Combined key features of two socio-cultural models** successfully employed within the intelligence community into a framework designed to identify and capture critical components of WMD decisionmaking within a regime;
- ✦ **(Section II) Commissioned a set of papers** employing the Cultural Topography Analytic Framework (CTAF) in order to draw out key insights for the effective application of assurance, deterrence, dissuasion, and denial, with an eye toward an era in which the US may be engaging both an ally and an adversary at the same time. These papers delivered specific country insights in three key areas:
    - ✦ Key cultural components of the narratives driving WMD decisionmaking within the regime;
    - ✦ Decision vectors that may provide windows of opportunity for US policymakers;
    - ✦ Tailored policy recommendations for the way ahead in engaging this regime.
- ✦ (**Section III**) Drawing on our collective findings, this report offers **primary takeaways and promising avenues for the way ahead** in anticipating nuclear activity and forging tailored strategies in order to achieve US policy ends.

Section I | The Cultural Topography Analytic Framework (CTAF)

This project was designed to combine two cutting-edge models in sociocultural analysis: 1) the Cultural Topography Method (CTops), designed by Jeannie Johnson and Matthew Berrett to isolate and assess primary socio-cultural influences impacting the decisionmaking and behavior of a key actor on a selected policy issue, and 2) the Cultural Analytic Framework (CAF), developed for the National Counterproliferation Center by the Center for the Advanced Study of Language (CASL) at the University of Maryland (Joseph Danks, Marilyn Maines, John Walker, and Anne Wright), which integrated WMD expertise and focus with the cultural mapping approach.

When combined, the two methodologies present a potent analytical tool which combines best practices in the discipline for qualitative socio-cultural modeling focused on WMD issues. Applied by area experts to the difficult problem of anticipating nuclear and WMD aspirants and isolating both the operational narrative driving national decisionmaking and a selection of critical leverage points within the decisionmaking process, this project provided the opportunity for testing the utility of the models against real world targets as well as further refinement of the cultural analytic approach for use against WMD concerns and the larger scope of intelligence and policy problem sets.

MODEL 1: CULTURAL TOPOGRAPHY (CTOPS) OVERVIEW

Background and Assumptions. The field of strategic culture has done much to illuminate both the influence of national culture and the influence of the bureaucratic cultures within a nation's strategic community on its security policy decisionmaking. Possible deficiencies within this field of work are failures to account for shifts in national behavior over time or to anticipate which of the several layers of sometimes contradictory cultural narratives within a security community will influence actor decisionmaking on any particular issue.[1] Driven by these concerns, Jeannie Johnson worked with a senior manager within the intelligence community to form a framework which would help policy analysts isolate the relevant substate actors for any particular issue—in the case of this volume, the nuclear issue—and identify which of the multiple cultural influences they experience are likely to act as key reference points for their decisionmaking.

CTops Analytic Methodology. Called the Cultural Topography (CTops) framework, this model is designed to track the dynamic flex of multiple cultural narratives operating across an issue area like nuclear proliferation and to identify which of these has become the "operational cultural narrative" for the particular actor under study. Analysts proceed through a research process which helps them select an appropriate actor for study, identify available cultural narratives, and narrow their focus to the critical cultural factors in play on this issue at a particular moment in time. At the end of this process analysts map their findings against the cultural preferences of other groups surrounding the same security issue—nuclear abstinence, proliferation, or use—in order to identify which aspects of the key actor's cultural frame of reference, or "narrative," are likely to resonate with a wider array of relevant actors. Insight in this category provides policymakers with a "cultural topography" of sorts by identifying where strong cultural congruence exists between diverse critical actors and, conversely, where actors may diverge in significant ways in their concepts of appropriate action.

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[1] See Jeffrey Knopf's critique of the first generation of strategic culture scholarship, *Rationality, Culture and Deterrence*, PASCC Report Number 2013 009.

Exploring the Cultural Data from Four Perspectives. In order to supply structure to the cultural exploration described in the methodology, the following four categories were developed for assessing cultural data: Identity, Norms, Values, and Perceptual Lens. Each category inspires a distinct research track with its own set of questions (see Appendix A for a full accounting of the CTops research model and attendant research questions). The inevitable overlap in the cultural data accumulated across categories is employed as an indicator of robustness. For instance, those cultural factors which surface as an aspect of identity and have also been ritualized into norms (behavior) or are venerated as key values may be assessed as particularly robust and worthy of attention.
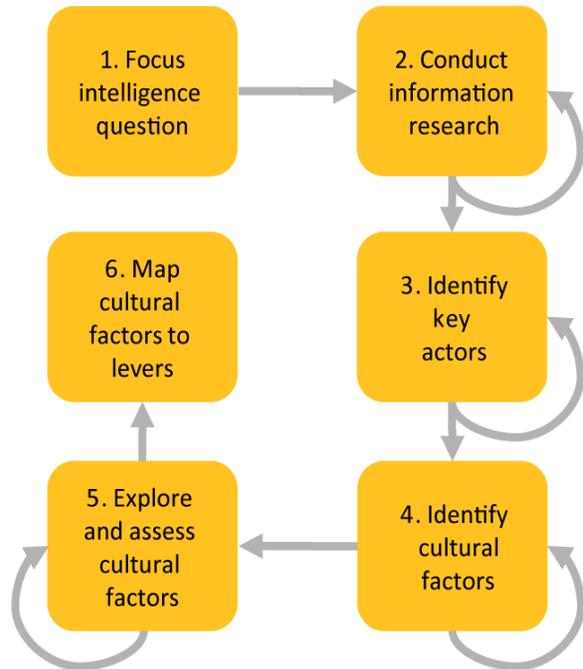

Figure 1. Steps of the Cultural Analytic Framework

✦ **Identity:** The character traits the group assigns to itself, the reputation it pursues, and individual roles and statuses it designates to members.
✦ **Norms:** Accepted and expected modes of behavior.
✦ **Values:** Material or ideational goods that are honored or that confer increased status to members of the group.
✦ **Perceptual Lens:** The filter through which this group determines "facts" about others.

MODEL 2: CULTURAL ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK (CAF) OVERVIEW

Background and Assumptions. University of Maryland's Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL), with funding from the National Counterproliferation Center (NCPC), developed an analytic methodology to address the impact of cultural factors on foreign decisionmaking in regard to nuclear weapons acquisition. The Cultural Analytic Framework (CAF) supplements and complements existing analytic methodologies that address standard political, military, economic, social, information, and infrastructure topics by providing analysts an easy-to-follow and repeatable method to recognize, organize, analyze, and assess cultural data as it applies to the nuclear decision process of over-the-horizon states that are considering or already proceeding down the path to nuclear development. The underlying assumption of the CAF is that "culture counts" and cultural factors can inform, impact, or impede both individual and group decisionmaking.

CAF Analytic Methodology. The CAF consists of six interconnected steps that take analysts through the analytic process of (1) focusing and clarifying the intelligence question; (2) conducting focused initial information research and using the "pearl growing" technique to expand original search terms to a larger set of data; (3) identifying key actors, both individuals and groups; (4) identifying and exploring cultural factors that impact those actors; and (5) evaluating and assessing the strength and impact of the identified cultural factors in relation to key actors to determine which factors are most critical. The final step of the CAF methodology (6), mapping critical factors for a given actor or group to a robust set of traditional and non-traditional foreign policy levers, supports "opportunity analysis" by enabling methodology users to develop unique levers selected and tailored to have maximum influence based on the cultural profile of the individual or organization.

Application. While each step provides input to and builds on the previous steps, the methodology itself is flexible and iterative. It allows analysts to enter into and out of the CAF as needed based on available information and also encourages them to loop forward or backward internally or between steps as new information is discovered or to select only those steps most useful for analysis of a particular country of concern. The CAF also provides examples and suggestions of where to find relevant cultural data, as well as examples of traditional and non-traditional foreign policy levers. While originally designed to examine intentions of over-the-horizon states, the cultural analytic approach can also be applied to nuclear capable states with the objective of freezing or rolling back existing nuclear programs or preventing further spread of nuclear technology to non-nuclear states.

THE COMBINED APPROACH: CULTURAL TOPOGRAPHY ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK (CTAF)

Using the Combined Cultural Analytic Approach (CTAF) to Provide New Insights to Policymakers. To maximize effectiveness in our application of the cultural analytic method, we combined CTops and CAF methodologies and refer to the resulting composite model as the Cultural Topography Analytic Framework (CTAF). Based upon discussion and feedback from the regional experts using this methodology to develop case studies, we were able to conclude that the Cultural Topography Analytic Framework is best able to provide new insights in regard to plans and intentions of over-the-horizon states in three key areas: (1) moving focus to the earliest stages of the WMD development process by analyzing the salience and robustness of national and subnational narratives on nuclear issues, (2) understanding roles and interactions of various types of actors in WMD decisionmaking in order to isolate key vector points, and (3) identifying a tailored set of policy levers to apply to the country of interest based upon the operational cultural narrative of the actors or organizations involved in the decision.

Moving to the Left. The combined methodology focuses on identifying and assessing relevant cultural factors as they pertain to foreign decisions on nuclear weapons development as early as possible on the weapons development timeline. The intent is to allow analysts to concentrate their efforts chronologically *earlier* ("move to the left") in the nuclear weapons development/acquisition cycle, potentially recognizing movement towards proliferation or other nuclear activity at the plans and intentions stage. The analytic goal is to thereby provide US policymakers with maximum time and flexibility to apply appropriate levers to deter or dissuade such activity. Cultural information on the identity (including role conception), values, norms, and perceptual lens of the country of concern may provide the key to select appropriate sets of levers to achieve desired deterrence.
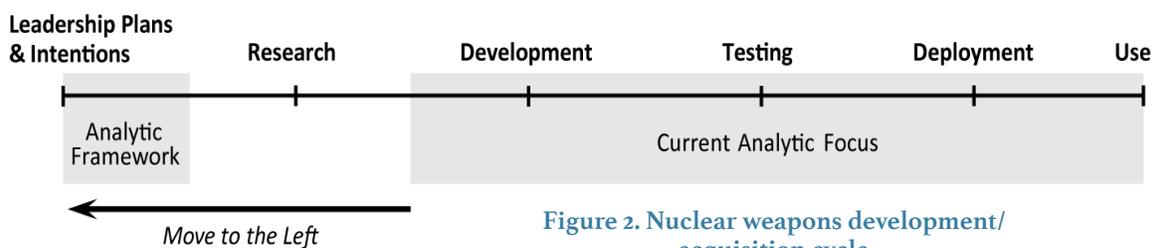

Figure 2. Nuclear weapons development/ acquisition cycle

Examining and Understanding Roles of Actors in WMD Decisionmaking. The CTAF approach breaks new ground in understanding the impact of cultural factors on plans and intentions of actors in regard to WMD decisionmaking by examining the complex roles of actors—defined as individuals, organizations, groups or other elements of a society that can make, enable or obstruct decisions in the WMD decisionmaking process.

✦ **Primary actors** are the key **decisionmakers** related to the initiation of a nuclear weapons development program, as well as their inner circle of trusted advisers, family members, key scientists, and critical military and political leaders. For most over-the-horizon countries, this is the level where most WMD-related decision are made.

✦ **Secondary Actors** are those supporting actors that impact the primary decisionmakers in either a positive or negative way. We can group these into **enablers** and **obstructers.**

    ✦ **Enablers** are those who support the intentions of the primary decisionmaker(s) and can impact choices made in regard to nuclear-related strategic requirements, policies, threat perceptions, goals and resource allocations. Enablers may also have control over some critical aspect of nuclear program support or logistics.

    ✦ **Obstructers** are those who might exert influence to prevent or delay decision or actions by the primary decisionmaker(s). These actors might include political or scientific opponents or rivals, individuals or groups that oppose nuclear weapons for ethical or religious reasons, or actors who were previously part of the inner circle and were later excluded.

In applying a culturally-based analytic model it is important for the analyst to examine the interaction among the various actors, sub-groups, and organizations within the country of interest and to develop insights into what cultural influences may be underlying or driving their actions. This applies both to countries just starting down the nuclear path and countries with threshold or established programs. The many competing currents operating at the sub-national level may have a significant impact on the direction and pace of a nuclear program, a nation's willingness to disband, freeze, or roll back a nuclear program or the willingness of weapons-capable states to assist over-the-horizon states in acquiring nuclear capabilities.

Identifying levers to impact proliferation decisions. The underlying objective of understanding the cultural influences that shape a country's behavior in regard to WMD decisionmaking is to be able to design a political approach that will deter the state from WMD aspirations, freeze the state at a particular level of progress, or roll back the program to an earlier or more limited level. There are three categories of traditional foreign policy levers—diplomatic, economic, and military—that offer a range of options to policymakers seeking to prevent or delay WMD development. Additionally, there are categories or approaches for nontraditional levers: (1) **messaging**, using multiple forms of communications media to convey messages that the US wants heard; (2) **identification**, applying social influence to cause states or actors to change behavior in response to external pressures or inducements without actually changing their preferences; and (3) **persuasion**, applying social influence so that states or actors change their behavior in response to an internal change in their preferences.[2] This last category is about "winning the hearts and minds" and is the most desired but also the most difficult to achieve.

All of the case studies done for this project include application of the "levers" component of the CTAF methodology, which serves to identify tailored traditional and nontraditional strategies for reaching desired policy outcomes on a case-by-case basis informed by cultural factors. Proper application of the CTAF methodology will lead to the identification of relevant cultural factors for each country under study, and then to the mapping of unique solutions and strategies for productively advancing nuclear deterrence in each case study.

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[2] See M.R. Rublee's *Nonproliferation Norms (*2009) for a more detailed discussion in terms of social psychology of the differences between "identification" and "persuasion" in regard to acceptance of nonproliferation norms. Maria Rost Rublee, *Nonproliferation Norms: Why States Choose Nuclear Restraint*, 2009, Athens and London: University of Georgia Press.

The current scholarly literature on nuclear proliferation and nuclear decisionmaking tends to focus on capability and extant security threats. This traditional dyad is insufficient in explaining why many nuclear capable countries—a position that has become increasingly attainable across the decades—instead choose to remain non-nuclear. As captured by Jacques Hymans, ours is a world largely characterized by "widespread capability with widespread restraint."[3] This phenomenon deserves serious attention, including an assessment of *what works* on many states in the deterrence, assurance, and dissuasion toolkit in addition to anticipating what does not. In large part this assessment is boiled down to one of motivations and intentions born out of national identity, values, security norms, and threats as perceived by the relevant actor. Cultural analysis provides a window into the critical variables which combine to form an actor's primary narrative—its operational code—regarding nuclear decisionmaking and clarifies areas where the US may exert policy leverage, or conversely, where US action may be counterproductive.

Our team drew insights from a number of participants within our project, both by way of workshop presentations and written research. The four most powerful case studies to emerge from this process are detailed within this section.

Our four cases studies highlight distinct and varied angles on current proliferation dilemmas: states seeking to achieve nuclear weaponization; state adherence to the specific terms of nuclear treaties and non-proliferation agreements; unilateral military action to protect regional nuclear monopolies; and potential use. J.E. Peterson examines the potential for nuclear acquisition by Saudi Arabia. Given that the most likely trigger for Saudi acquisition will be nuclear moves made by Iran, any action taken to assure Saudi Arabia will be complicated by an effort to apply—within the same time frame and regional space—forceful deterrence and denial strategies against Iran. With this in mind, Nima Gerami provides a deep look into the motivations and operational narrative of Iran's nuclear decisionmaking and illuminates how these constructs are likely to impact Iran's willingness to abide by the recently forged nuclear agreement with the US. Greg Giles assesses a third player in the region, providing an inside look at Israel's penchant for acting unilaterally in maintaining its regional nuclear monopoly—a norm which may not always align with US interests. Giles offers insight into leverage points the US may apply when aiming to constrain Israeli military action. Finally, Shane Smith offers a multi-scenario look at the culturally encoded perceptions of the North

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[3] Jacques E. C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Korean regime and how these may guide the shape, size, and character of its nuclear arsenal as well as scenarios for potential use.

Our project process encouraged insights from an extended circle of contributors. Among these were Dima Adamsky, providing his expertise on Russia; Can Kasapoglu on Turkey; Ekaterina Svyatets on Ukraine; and Rodney Jones on India. These cases showed impressive initial results and represent strong potential for follow-on research employing the Cultural Topography Analytic Framework (CTAF).

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SAUDI ARABIA

Identifying National Narratives Driving Nuclear Decisionmaking. An assessment of the security threats which may prompt a state toward nuclear action based on notions of a universally shared concept of rationality cannot adequately explain the actions of those who have sought nuclear arms as opposed to those who have not. Rather, strategic planners must be provided a view of security threats through the lens employed by the regime actors in question, as well as their perceptions of the role nuclear weapons would play in addressing them. It is these perceptions—often exaggerated, distorted, or hypersensitive—that inspire action on nuclear decisions, even if, as pointed out by Dima Adamsky in his assessment of Russian perceptions, these strike a Westerner as "counterintuitive conspiracy theory."

The internal narratives which inform nuclear decisionmaking for any key group emanate from perceived threats, but also from a distinctive sense of national identity and role, and key values which have been forged across the nuclear age. Thus, common themes which featured in national narratives regarding nuclear decisionmaking included: internally conceived perceptions of threat; perceptions of the US as a key player on the nuclear stage; identity narratives concerning national role in the region and role within non-proliferation regimes; and key values cultivated as actor-specific (national or subnational) norms in the nuclear era.

J. E. Peterson examines this combination of factors for Saudi Arabia and assesses a low probability that Saudi Arabia will act to acquire nuclear arms in the near term:

> Speculation regarding the acquisition of nuclear weapons by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has been percolating for at least several decades. To date, there is no reliable evidence that any attempt has been made to either purchase such weapons or to begin a process to produce them. In addition, most of the speculation has been

made by observers who either have little understanding of the KSA beyond the headlines or have an ideological ax to grind—or both.

His assessment is based on an operational cultural narrative that combines both push and pull factors and hinges in critical fashion on the Kingdom's relationship with the US. Peterson characterizes the Saudi security posture as "defense" and warns that "KSA leaders and elites [can] display an easily provoked prickliness about a wide range of issues." A key "push" factor toward nuclear acquisition is the sometimes high-risk behavior inspired by the Saudi conception of self. The Kingdom's superiority complex is grounded in history and its sense of religious singularity:

> [T]he KSA was never colonized and so retains a strong sense of unfettered independence. At the same time, its religious origins—in particular the puritanical Wahhabi or *salafi* interpretation of Islam—combine with its guardianship of Islam's Holy Places to provide the KSA—in self-perception—with an unchallengeable voice of legitimacy. This may lead to actions that on the surface may appear high-risk or even counter-productive. Examples include the secret purchase of Chinese missiles in the 1980s, economic threats to Britain whenever a dispute arises over treatment of British citizens in the KSA, or the KSA's lobbying for a seat on the UN Security Council and then abruptly rejecting it when offered.

The Kingdom's perceptions of threat provide another potential push factor. Peterson notes the "encirclement syndrome" that the Kingdom perceives due to its "panoply of external threats" including instability in Yemen, an increasingly rightist Israel, Da'ish (ISIL) in Syria and Iraq and its pull on Saudi youth, and most serious, Iran's revisionist ambitions in the region—including using the Shia population within the Kingdom as a potential fifth column to provoke insecurity and unrest. Detailing each of these, Peterson makes a critical point concerning the likelihood that these will trigger motivation to acquire nuclear arms:

> The [aforementioned] movements of course do not constitute a threat against which nuclear weapons capability would be of any use. But they do contribute to a broader and more diffuse uneasiness that more specific state-derived threats help to provoke. In this sense, Saudi perceptions of the general situation may parallel the Pakistani example: Islamabad's push to create nuclear weapon capability seemed to be prompted generally by its perceived location in an uncertain neighborhood and specifically by Indian proliferation.

Triggers within this security threat matrix that may flare Saudi motivation to acquire nuclear capability include concern over regional disintegration, Israeli provocation, continued Iranian belligerence and involvement in regional crises, deterioration of the JCPOA or evidence of direct Iranian provocation or interference in Gulf States' domestic affairs. Peterson argues, however, that the Saudi reaction will likely hinge on perceptions of the US as a reliable security partner and its valuing of this relationship. The current state is mixed.

Despite its longstanding commercial and security relationship with the US and a developing cultural affinity for American entertainment and products, a significant component of Saudi society and leadership believe that "the US acts as an imperialist power, imposing its will on others and carrying out policies that serve its interests while indiscriminately harming others." The legitimacy of US security assurances has been significantly damaged. The US is not regarded as a reliable partner. In specific terms, Saudis claim that "when the going gets tough, the US gets going" and reference the examples of American involvement in and then quick retreat from Lebanon, Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Perhaps more worrying, "[p]erceptions are widespread and growing that Americans are anti-Arab and anti-Muslim. These perceptions grow with the reaction of some Americans to every terrorist attack worldwide by expressing increased hostility toward Muslims in the US, which is widely reported in the US and the Middle East." The US is "not objective on Arab-Israeli matters," is perceived to have been indifferent to Saudi concerns while seeking nuclear agreement with Iran, and has a penchant for treating the Kingdom as a "junior partner."

Peterson's summary assessment, therefore, is that of all the potential triggers that may inspire Saudi nuclear ambitions, "it can be assumed that the status of the relationship between the KSA and the US would be a major driver: a deterioration in ties and confidence would undoubtedly spur greater Saudi resolve to pursue an independent security course."

The Saudi Kingdom places great value on its relationship with the US but little inherent value on the nuclear non-proliferation regime as an inviolable global norm. Peterson argues that this aspect of international law would lose in a clash of wills with Saudi self-conceptions of identity:

> [T]he KSA places great pride in never having been colonized and in its custodianship of the holiest symbols of Islam. The expansion and creation of the kingdom in the twentieth century was accompanied by a belief in a Saudi divine mission that was limited only on most frontiers by the presence of British-protected states. Gradually through the following decades, the KSA developed its self-image as not only the most important state in the Arabian Peninsula but as a major power in the Middle East and

Islamic world. Its ambitions and insistence on treatment as a world power have, if anything, accelerated to the present. It is not impossible to conceive that the KSA might in the near future, or already has, considered contingencies regarding nuclear weapons acquisition, particularly in consideration of an identity or national pride driver.

...The role of prestige may... play a significant role. Nuclear capability would enhance the KSA's leadership status among Arab and Islamic nations and raise its standing on the global stage. This would be particularly effective among elites and other educated sectors of the population (including within the royal family) who share a more globalized outlook, although the majority of citizens may also regard it as a patriotic plus. More to the point, a nuclear policy may be regarded as an assertion of the KSA's national right, and the kingdom has always been very assertive of its perceived rights. At the same time, both leadership and citizenry may express an inability to comprehend why the non-proliferation regime should apply to the KSA.

The US relationship is key, therefore, to the Saudi assessment that the potential advantages of a nuclear path do not yet outweigh the political costs of international and American opposition. With this in mind, Peterson offers policymakers insight into Saudi decisionmaking norms and potential points of leverage.

Isolating Vector Points in the Decisionmaking Process. Decisionmaking within the KSA, as Peterson points out, "is tightly controlled within a small central elite and public input is limited to diffused perception of public opinion, generally through traditional filtered means." Peterson tempers strict autocratic assumptions about the Kingdom by adding:

[C]learly the king is the actual decision-maker, including in the nuclear arena. He has the final say in establishing all policies and his decisions cannot be challenged by anyone. But it is a mistake to call him, as is often done in the West, an absolute monarch. The Saudi monarchy is built on its tribal ethos, which in its pure form demands access, consultation, and feedback. Even though the KSA has evolved into an authoritarian monarchy, these principles still play a significant role in the modern state. The long-term legitimacy of the regime depends heavily on building and maintaining consensus on major issues. Of course, the value of such consensus varies on the importance of the constituent group with whom the king and his advisers interact.

Consensus and respect for authority, therefore, form the foundation of the Saudi regime's legitimacy. Policies are enacted after what may be a lengthy consensus building process among

elites. The informal consultation process, known as *majlis*, allows the Saudi royals to gain a sense of popular sentiment—anyone may attend and offer opinions—and represents a potential opportunity and early intervention stage for expressing caution and perhaps stronger opinions regarding restraint on the nuclear question:

> While it is very unlikely that the question of whether the KSA should pursue nuclear weapons acquisition would be broached in a *majlis*, it is far more possible that discussion of Iran's nuclear program would be the subject of discussion. In this way, national leadership would have an opportunity to ascertain popular views pertaining to nuclear weapons, their utility, and desirability. While such views may have a political aspect, they are even more likely to display sentiments, whether culturally or religiously based, regarding the moral, as well as practical, implications of ownership and use of nuclear weapons. Either in or outside of a *majlis*, there may be some opportunity for educated Saudis and senior bureaucrats to articulate their positions on WMD as part of an informal consultation process, in supplement to their formal roles.

Intervention during the early stages of decisionmaking will prove key since once a decision becomes public, Peterson anticipates little negative reaction from a national population socialized to passively accept leadership decisionmaking on key security issues, including nuclear weapons; a passivity that stems both from deeply woven norms regarding respect for authority and also pervasive state control of the media.

Given the complexities of the current operational cultural narrative within Saudi Arabia regarding the acquisition of nuclear weapons, Peterson wisely points to a range of "wildcards" which could tip the balance one way or the other. He reminds us that in a realm where a core of key leadership figures hold nearly all the cards, "the personalities and conviction of those leaders are major determinants." A potential wildcard could be, therefore, "[t]he emergence of a new king with a significantly different mindset and personality":

> Much has been made of the inflated role of Muhammad b. Salman in KSA decisionmaking in light of the seeming non-involvement of his father, King Salman. Muhammad, about 30 and with little experience in government or military affairs, has been regarded as the architect of the KSA's campaign in Yemen to restore a weak president to his capital by aggressively attacking the opposition forces, alleged in Riyadh to be actively supported by Iran. The war has been a quagmire, millions of Yemeni civilians have been displaced and some 6000 have lost their lives. If it were the decision of Muhammad to make, would he be less aggressive when it came to nuclear aspirations.

Another potential wildcard would represent a bucking of traditional decisionmaking norms: a conservative backlash in public opinion against the possession or use of nuclear weapons. In order to carry weight, however, it would have to "be uniformly and strongly presented" in its opposition.

Policy Recommendations. Based on his assessment of the KSA's potential nuclear posture, Peterson downplays the likely efficacy of traditional approaches to coercive deterrence:

✦ The least threatening deterrent move may be presidential or (less provocatively) administration hints at US displeasure. But this tactic has featured in KSA-US relations for many years, dating back to the oil crisis of the 1970s and continuing with Arab-Israeli matters. Such action is unlikely to have positive effect and it is more likely to stiffen KSA resolve.

✦ Similarly, the US could take diplomatic action, such as not naming an ambassador to Riyadh. But this would probably result in a tit-for-tat, thus resulting in some damage to relations without achieving a positive result.

✦ The US could threaten to withdraw military support or announce its refusal to sell arms to the kingdom. In such a scenario, the KSA undoubtedly would turn to other suppliers: for example, France for reactors, Russia (and the European Union) for arms, and China for missiles. Riyadh has pursued a policy of diversification in economic and military goods and services for quite some time and this development would simply accelerate an existing trend. As a consequence, the US would run the risk of losing political and moral influence in Riyadh and thus its ability to monitor KSA activities would be degraded.

✦ The US could threaten to enact sanctions or take other similar action against the KSA. But such an attempt would likely be disregarded by other states while provoking KSA rhetoric and considerable impairment of direct relations. This would of course be even more true if the US actually attempted to apply sanctions. The question arises of what sanctions the US could organize that would have serious impact on the KSA. Would the US be able to pressure Europe to join a sanctions regime? The KSA's reaction might well be to provoke it to impose an oil boycott on the US. Even if the level of exports to the US did not constitute a serious liability, the reduction of KSA crude production (a major part of global production) would affect the world as a whole and the global economy would undoubtedly suffer as it did in the 1970s.

✦ The US could make either public or covert attempts to interdict KSA-bound nuclear fuel and equipment. This may have some short-term success in impairing KSA nuclear abilities but it would also likely cause friction with the KSA's suppliers.

Peterson's assessment of higher payoff policy options is based on an understanding of the Saudi valuing of US security assurances and of the norms inherent in the Kingdom's internal decisionmaking processes. From Peterson:

> *Assurance Policies.* Measures of assurance may well be more effective as long as US-KSA relations remain productive and friendly. The first cluster of options involves US official action vis-à-vis the KSA government. These may run from the provision of positive rhetoric supporting the security of the KSA to active support for and involvement in an effective nuclear-free zone in the Gulf. Another measure would be to rely on active assistance to the KSA in the acquisition of nuclear energy capability coupled with firm persuasion directed at the KSA government to abide by stringent international and American restrictions on nuclear activities. This might be accompanied by promises to provide more military support in both the short- and long-term. Independently or simultaneously, the validity of US assurance may well include an increase in the US military presence in the Gulf region. Stronger measures, applied as necessary, would involve a formal defense treaty or inclusion in a US-led alliance and, ultimately, basing nuclear weapons or fuel on KSA soil with limited KSA access but with a share in policy decisions, such as their storage or movement as well as protocols on use.

> *Interventions in the Saudi Decisionmaking Process.* [M]easures need not be restricted to the official bilateral arena. The US could appeal directly to Saudi opinion. On the one hand, this might mean reasoning with sympathetic members of the inner circle. This would include: royal family members who can influence consensus-building; the bureaucratic elite who can present rational policy alternatives; military leaders who would be responsive to advising caution; and other elites who can present their views informally to senior members of the royal family. Beyond that, appeals could be made to public opinion, either through a nuanced media campaign or by outreach to Saudi students in the US and after their return home. While the utility of enlisting military leaders, given their subservience to political authorities, may be limited, it is not inconsequential. Bonds and common outlooks between American military personnel and their Saudi counterparts, many of whom have been trained in the US and/or by Americans, are strong.

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IRAN

Identifying National Narratives Driving Nuclear Decisionmaking. Nima Gerami strikes a note of caution concerning the prospects for Iran's long term compliance with the recently forged

nuclear agreement between Iran and the P5+1—the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Iran sees itself as "a great civilization on par with global superpowers" with "a legitimate interest in scientific development;" two aspects of national narrative which "fuel its sense of entitlement to advanced nuclear fuel cycle technologies." Iran's substantial nuclear infrastructure means that post-JCPOA it will maintain status as a nuclear threshold state. In theory, as JCPOA restrictions begin to expire, Iran could "scale up its enrichment program to the point where it would have sufficient capacity to produce nuclear weapons in the span of a few weeks, should it choose to do so." Thus, "[d]espite robust monitoring and verification measures in place to detect such a breakout, the question of Iranian *nuclear intent* will become increasingly important in the course of the next decade" [emphasis added].

Gerami affirms the criticality of examining Iran's cultural construct in any assessment of intent: "In the long term, Iranian cultural factors are likely to trump most other considerations, both in terms of Iran's propensity to cheat on the JCPOA and its ability to overcome longstanding ideological hostilities with the West."

Discerning Iranian intent is difficult given the unresolved contradictions in Iran's own sense of self. Gerami defines Iran as a "revolutionary technocratic" type with a dualistic view of itself as both an Islamic country and a technocratic republic. Unsurprisingly, "[t]he inherent dichotomy between Iran's nationalist and Islamic identities has, at times, created tension within the political system." Iran has embraced the norm of *maslehat* (expediency) in order to navigate this tension. "According to this cultural norm, national security priorities may temporarily trump religious ideology, although the two are often mutually reinforcing." Iran has institutionalized this cultural tenet in the form of the Expediency Council (1988), tasked with discerning when national security interests trump religious ideology. Gerami makes clear the potential consequences for employment of *maslehat* in the nuclear realm:

> *[M]aslehat*...could be used to justify the acquisition or employment of WMD. Despite Khamenei's fatwa banning the development, stockpiling, and use of nuclear weapons, Iran could choose to ignore or overrule this religious decree if it deemed it was in its national security interests to do so.[4] When Khomenei drank from the "poisoned chalice" and agreed to the ceasefire that ended the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, he revealed in a letter released by former President Rafsanjani in September 2006 that Iran considered developing "a substantial number of laser and atomic weapons" as a practical necessity to win the war.[5] Similarly, despite frequent claims that the

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[4] See Michael Eisenstadt and Mehdi Khalaji, "Forget the Fatwa," *The National Interest*, March 14, 2013, http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/forget-the-fatwa-8220.
[5] After the letter appeared on Rafsanjani's website, the word "nuclear" was removed from the letter's text at the request of the Supreme National Security Council.

development or use of chemical weapons is *haram* (forbidden), Iranian officials apparently considered developing these weapons in response to Iraq's use of chemical warfare. In 1988, then as Majlis speaker and acting commander-in-chief of the armed forces, Rafsanjani stated in a speech to military officers, "chemical and biological weapons are poor man's atomic bombs and can easily be produced. We should at least consider them for our defense."[6] More recently, the IAEA's final assessment of the "possible military dimensions" to Iran's nuclear program suggests that Iran continued feasibility and scientific studies relevant to nuclear weapons after 2003, in spite of Khamenei's fatwa against nuclear weapons in October 2003.[7]

Principles of expediency are compounded by "Iran's adherence to the Islamic doctrine of *taqiyya*—a Shiite practice of deliberately dissembling or disguising one's religious or political beliefs in order to protect the Shia sect from mainstream Sunni Islam and perceived adversaries. *Taqiyya* permits Iranian leaders to lie when faced with existential threats, including potentially about the nuclear program." Given this particular combination of norms, Gerami warns that in the face of soft or hard power threats, "Iran will… have no qualms about using vague language, outright deception, or religious fatwas to hide its true nuclear intent."

Iranian intent is also derived, in part, by its sense of regional superiority. Iran perceives itself as the vanguard of Shiite and Sunni Islam and culturally superior to its Arab neighbors, resulting in "an intrinsic right to regional hegemony." This sense of destiny and superiority has led Iran to engage in revisionist policy. Indeed, it is part of its identity role conception that Iran "play a transformative role in regional and world affairs" and lead the "axis of resistance." Such an identity means that Iran will place limited stake in the status quo, likely including international norms on nuclear behavior, especially where those are seen as cementing unjust and unequal global relationships:

> Iran's history of invasion by great powers reinforces its belief in the need to restore equality between powerful and weak countries, obtain *edellaat* (justice) for the *mustazafun* (victims) of aggression, and defeat the *mustakbirun* (arrogant) foreign interventionist powers. Khomeini's embrace of *gharbzadegi* (Westoxification) in the early years of the revolution helped justify *velayet-e faqih* and was immediately felt in all aspects of governance, including the nuclear program which came to symbolize the embodiment of the Islamic Republic's anti-imperialist narrative.

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[6] Islamic Republic News Agency, October 19, 1988. More recently, Rafsanjani has condemned chemical weapons use by the Assad regime in Syria.

[7] "Final Assessment on Past and Present Outstanding Issues regarding Iran's Nuclear Programme," IAEA, December 2, 2015. https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov-2015-68.pdf

Iran's nuclear narrative remains a source of national pride. Gerami points out that President Rouhani is overt about the effort to tie nationalistic sentiment to the nuclear program. In Rouhani's words: "propaganda should be concentrated on creating national pride, not just in the ability to acquire nuclear technology, but also in the ability to protect it from enemy threats while protecting national security."[8]

Pride also rests, in part, on Iranian self-sufficiency. "Since the revolution, Iranian leaders have emphasized the need for the Islamic Republic to distance itself from great powers and to become self-reliant through scientific advancements."[9] Iranian officials are divided over the correct path to achieving national goals, including self-sufficiency. Debate tends to focus on two competing values: internal development or external expansion. "These divisions are manifested in Iranian arguments that an overt nuclear weapons program would endanger regime security and that the country has paid high costs even to build a civil nuclear power program." Gerami assesses that the recent nuclear deal "may indicate that Rouhani has persuaded the Supreme Leader to at least temporarily focus on improving Iran's deteriorating economy, while accepting some constraints on the nuclear program."

Although the current Iranian nuclear narrative may be tipped toward JCPOA adherence, it will be difficult to convince Iran's regional neighbors of cooperative intent. Iran's wider security narrative includes the deliberate cultivation of Iran's image as a "dangerous, radical state willing to absorb heavy costs in the name of martyrdom and revolutionary values." This sort of rhetoric coming from the decisionmaking echelons within Iran "increases the potential for miscalculation and inadvertent escalation of conflicts, particularly with Iran's Sunni Arab neighbors." Further, it complicates US deterrence efforts against Iran "since Israel and many Gulf Arab states perceive a nuclear-capable Iran as increasingly unpredictable and undeterrable."

Isolating Vector Points in the Decisionmaking Process. Decisionmaking norms within the Iranian policy are not consistent across issue areas. "As opposed to decisionmaking structures on domestic security, national security decisionmaking in Tehran traditionally reflects an interaction among multiple formal power structures and informal networks." Gerami details these, highlighting the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as "the single most and consistently influential group of individuals in national security matters" and "the chief custodian of sensitive weapon systems." Although the IRGC leaders tend to publicly support "an unbridled nuclear program," they are constrained in action by the Supreme Leader, among others, who must "rule by a fragile and shifting consensus." This mode of

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[8] Hassan Rouhani, *Amniyat-e Melli va Diplomasi-e Hasta'i* (Tehran, 2011), p. 341.
[9] Rouhani, *Andisheyeh Sisasyeh Islam: Sisasat-e Kharaji* (Tehran, 2009).

decisionmaking "allows Iranian leaders to share responsibility and risks associated with policy decisions." It also means, however, that the fate of JCPOA implementation remains unclear:

> Politicization of the nuclear issue in recent years has exacerbated internal political divisions, making it a lightning rod for a broader debate among Iran's elite about the core tenets of the Islamic Republic and its place in the world. Personal rivalries, bureaucratic infighting, and ambiguous guidance from the Supreme Leader on the nuclear issue further compound this problem, creating a political environment that could potentially make implementation of the JCPOA difficult to sustain.

Iran will not be in a hurry to resolve its internal ambiguities. "Iranian culture values strategic patience, or long-term gains, in its decisionmaking process and formulation of national security policies." American strategists may experience frustrated impatience in their quest to ferret out Iranian nuclear strategies and postures:

> Given Iranian views of time as non-linear and infinite, Iranian leaders probably prefer to play the long game when it comes to making important policy decisions that have a corresponding high amount of risk. Iran's penchant for ambiguity may also extend to its internal decisionmaking processes, with many Iranian officials themselves unsure of the ultimate objective for the nuclear program. If this is the case, it will be extremely difficult for the United States to gain any definitive insight into Iran's over-the-horizon nuclear plans and intentions.

The value of strategic patience dovetails with the Iranian worldview which "attributes great importance to future gain, even at great risk," a combination which paid off in the extended process of negotiations resulting in the JCPOA:

> Iran... demonstrated strategic patience on the nuclear issue, which was resolved only after nearly a decade of negotiations with the Europeans, P5+1, and the United States. Iranian officials have stated on numerous occasions that engagement with the P5+1 was intended to buy time to advance Iran's nuclear fuel cycle capabilities and to protect the program from military attack.[10]

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[10] For example, Basij commander Mohammad Reza Naqdi claimed that the purpose of negotiations with the West was "to buy time for Iran to build a nuclear bomb." "Moaza-ye Hasteh'i-ye Jomhori-ye Eslami az Zaban-e Namayandeh Vali Faqaiyeh dar Sepah" (The Islamic Republic's Nuclear Position in the Words of the Supreme Leader's Representative to the IRGC), Kayhan, September 11, 2013, http://washin.st/1iU2h8L. See also Hassan Rouhani, *Amniyat-e Melli va Diplomasi-e Hasta'i* (Tehran, 2011).pp. 335, 414; and "Chief Iranian Nuclear Affairs Negotiator Hosein Mousavian: The Negotiations with Europe Bought Us Time to Complete the Esfahan UCF Project and the Work on the Centrifuges in Natanz," MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 957, August 12, 2005.

Shaping deterrence policy to influence key decisionmaking vectors within the Iranian political construct will require, first, a clear conception of how deterrence is viewed by Iranian leadership figures. Gerami points out that Iranian notions of deterrence differ in some important ways from traditional Western conceptions:

> Although Iran lacks an official deterrence doctrine, Iran in the past few years has adopted the idea of *bazdarandegi*, which is the closest approximation to the Western concept of deterrence. *Bazdarandegi* is a vague term in Iranian discourse that is often used interchangeably with *defa* (defense) or *talafi* (retaliation or revenge).[11] This Islamist notion of deterrence, while influenced by the Cold War, focuses more on outlasting enemy attacks, inflicting high potential costs on adversaries, and maintaining the illusion of strength and power.[12] In this context, preserving Iran's reputation and *aberu* (saving face) is critical for its defense and deterrence postures. Iranian leaders may feel compelled to respond to threats—particularly if they are perceived as posturing—to avoid the reputational costs of failed deterrence. Building a strong deterrence against Iran therefore necessitates an understanding of Iran's strategic values and priorities, which might conflict with US cultural assumptions, in order to create a threat that Iranian leaders will perceive as credible and intolerable.

Iran's conception of deterrence has been operationalized in the form of *bazdarandegi fael* (active deterrence) which is based on the notion that "to attack is the best means of defense," a policy that has been put in play in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. It is also characterized by the use of ambiguity as a psychological deterrent, often in the form of obfuscating talk which invites multiple interpretations. Gerami warns that Tehran's cultivated nuclear ambiguity will complicate efforts to forge a region-wide security architecture to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions: "US allies in the Persian Gulf increasingly perceive that Washington has reconciled itself to Iran's eventual acquisition of nuclear weapons, thereby advancing Tehran's goal of being treated as a latent nuclear weapons state and increasing the risk of miscalculation and instability in the region."

Policy Recommendations. Gerami notes that US policy vis-à-vis Iran will be complicated both by the hurdles involved in correctly interpreting Iranian action and those inherent in effectively communicating US intent:

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[11] http://bit.ly/1PYqpJM; http://bit.ly/1OWdngR
[12] Yoel Guzansky and Avner Golov, "The Rational Limitations of a Nonconventional Deterrence Regime: The Iranian Case," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 2015, pp. 169-184.

Iranian leaders perceive threats, deterrence, and power through a different cultural lens than an American audience, which bears important implications for US policy toward Iran. Absent serious acknowledgment of cultural differences, Iranian leaders are likely to perceive threats where there are none, misinterpret US outreach efforts in the post-JCPOA environment, and miscalculate when it comes to US red lines. The risk of failed signaling between the US and Iran and ineffective deterrence is high, perhaps now more than ever as Iranian hardliners attempt to reassert Iran's unwavering opposition to the West following the nuclear deal.

Toward clarity in motives and efficacy in approach, Gerami makes the following recommendations:

- Iran does not respond well to "transactional" approaches to foreign policy. For example, Iran for many years refused to halt its nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief and only agreed to do so after the international community tacitly recognized Iran's right to uranium enrichment. After adopting the JCPOA, Iran also waited to take irreversible steps to alter its nuclear program—such as removing the calandria from the Arak heavy water research reactor—until the IAEA publicly closed Iran's PMD file at the UN Security Council. Despite the fact that closure of the PMD issue was not a necessary condition for Iran to reach Implementation Day and obtain sanctions relief, the Supreme Leader declared the IAEA must immediately close the file to demonstrate there were no lingering questions about the weapons-related aspects of Iran's nuclear program. These examples demonstrate Iran's concerns about respect, mutual trust, and international recognition of Iran's rightful place in the world.

- Iranian leaders value equality, or at least the appearance of equality, as a precondition to engagement with the West or participation in international initiatives. The emphasis on equality is rooted in the Islamic Republic's identity and overall worldview: the Shiite commitment to fighting "injustice," a determination to avoid a repetition of Iran's past national humiliations at the hands of great powers, and the rejection of perceived double standards (except when they benefit Iran).

- A key challenge for US policymakers going forward will be to redefine Iran's role in an international system that Iranian officials view as secular and inherently opposed to Iran's national interests. Tailoring US transparency measures to ensure they take into account Iranian norms and values—including by engaging Iran as an equal power broker, demonstrating heroic flexibility, and respecting Iran's national dignity—will be an important first step toward attaining this goal.

- In the soft power realm, appeals to Iran's sense of greatness and perception that it should play a larger role on the world stage are likely to resonate among keepers of its strategic culture. Regardless of their political affiliation, all Iranian officials believe that Iran can and should play an influential role on the world stage. The United States could publicly promote the important role that Iran can play in bringing peace and stability to the Middle East. US diplomats could also encourage allies, bilaterally and in international fora, to engage with Iran on important global issues such as counterterrorism, counternarcotics, humanitarian, and environmental issues.

- Direct bilateral engagement with Iran probably would have to occur privately through back channels, given the Supreme Leader's deep mistrust of US intentions and continued concerns about the reputational costs to Iran. Engagement would yield most productive results on discrete issues of mutual concern that are less politically sensitive, such as Afghanistan. While Syria, Iraq, and ISIL remain controversial—particularly given Iran's accusations about US support to ISIL—these are also areas where Iranian and US interests overlap. The United States should take incremental steps to show that it is serious in partnering on these issues, such as by providing Iran with credible information on ISIL and working with Russia to change Iran's stance on Assad in Syria. In the long term, engagement with Iran should not simply be for the sake of engagement itself, but rather aim to gradually influence Iran's behavior by appealing to its national interests and allaying fears that fuel the security dilemma in the region.

- Strategic messaging emphasizing Iran's need to focus on economic development would likely strengthen the technocratic strain in the country's political elite and result in increased discussion about the place of Islam and revolutionary values in a modern, industrialized Iran. In particular, the United States should explore the possibility that, in the aftermath of the nuclear deal, Iran could transform into a "half religious, half civil society" state that is more responsive to the overwhelmingly moderate proclivities of its populace.[13] While it is important to encourage the growth of civil society in Iran through greater press freedoms, reducing Internet controls, and promoting open political dialogue, Iranian leaders are likely to view any attempts at reform as part of a US "cultural invasion" aimed at regime subversion.[14]

The assurance and confidence-building strategies listed above should be backed by clear signals that the US will respond militarily to serious infractions. Gerami cites a number of examples in which credible military threats successfully reversed Iranian action:

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[13] See Zibakalam's analysis of turning points in Iran's political history, available at: http://www.zibakalam.com/news/2075

[14] http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2015/08/150826

- Iran tends to forsake values and ideological preferences, such as the Supreme Leader's red line on negotiations with the United States, when Iran perceives it is facing an immediate or credible threat. Iranian nuclear negotiator Abbas Araghchi in an off-the-record meeting with state radio and television officials following the JCPOA revealed that, since 2003, Iran had engaged in backchannel negotiations with the United States because of fears of an imminent military invasion.[15]

- Tehran backed away from its threats to close the Strait of Hormuz in response to new oil and gas sanctions in January 2012, after President Obama allegedly sent a secret message to Iran's Supreme Leader warning that closure of the strait would cross a "red line that would provoke an American [military] response."[16]

- Iran reversed a decision to send a convoy with military aid destined for Houthi rebels in Yemen, despite the Saudi naval blockade, after learning that a US carrier strike group was following the Iranian ships.[17]

Gerami stresses, however, that "[i]n order for deterrence to be effective, Tehran must *believe* that it risks a credible military response for defined acts of aggression" [emphasis added]. Toward that end he suggests that:

- Messages be passed covertly directly to the Office of the Supreme Leader, perhaps through the establishment of a "hotline" similar to the one the United States and Russia established during the Cold War. The direct line of communication between the US Secretary of State and Iranian Foreign Minister, for example, was reportedly critical for defusing tensions during the sailor incident in January and negotiating the release of American citizens held in Iran. These types of interactions should be institutionalized to ensure they outlast any one administration or set of topics.

- The United States should also rely on regional partners that are close to Iran, such as Oman and Iraq, to help signal US intentions and broker agreements on sensitive issues. Overt military threats are likely to backfire either because Iranian leaders do not believe they are credible or because they empower hardliners and bolster anti-American narratives. These threats must also be backed up with action, such as maneuvering of

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[15] Araghchi is known for being the closest person to Khamenei among the negotiators and was tasked with briefing the Supreme Leader on the details of the talks and passing his advice to his team, under both Saeed Jalili and Mohammad Javad Zarif. Less than twenty-four hours after the IRIB published details of Araghchi's meeting online, the website took down the post due to "technical errors."

[16] Elisabeth Bumiller, Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, "US Sends Top Iranian Leader a Warning on Strait Threat," *New York Times*, January 12, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/13/world/middleeast/us-warns-top-iran-leader-not-to-shut-strait-of-hormuz.html?_r=0.

[17] Kay Armin Serjoie, "Iran Challenges US and Saudi Arabia by Sending Aid Ship to Rebels in Yemen," *Time*, May 18, 2015, http://time.com/3882293/iran-saudi-aid-ship/.

ships near Iranian waters, insofar as Iranian leaders tend to view verbal threats more as insults than as security dilemmas.

In sum, Gerami advises vigilant attention to Iran's cautious but potentially duplicitous movement along the nuclear pathway:

> Iran's history of tactical flexibility and preference for indirect confrontation suggests it will avoid crossing nuclear red lines, particularly if there is a high degree of certainty that it will be caught cheating. However, Iran's views of itself as a great civilization on par with global superpowers and its legitimate interest in scientific development will fuel its sense of entitlement to advanced nuclear fuel cycle technologies. Despite Iran's accession to numerous nonproliferation treaties and agreements, it will likely seek ways to circumvent a rules-based order given Iranian leaders' deep mistrust of the post-Westphalian international system.

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ISRAEL

Identifying National Narratives Driving Nuclear Decisionmaking. Greg Giles offers a usefully unconventional take on the Israeli nuclear question by focusing on its commitment to protecting its regional nuclear monopoly, unilaterally and with military force if necessary, and US efforts to steer it. Giles succinctly captures the basic elements of Israel's operational cultural narrative as they relate to the Begin Doctrine—support within Israel for the use of military force to physically destroy enemy nuclear facilities:

> Israel's national security rests, in part, on the three pillars of its nuclear policy. Namely, the indelible legacy of the Holocaust dictates that the Jewish people living in their ancestral homeland must possess the ultimate guarantor of national survival—nuclear weapons—to ensure against conventional military defeat and international isolation. Second, Israel needs to balance the benefits of nuclear possession against the risk of sparking a nuclear arms race that would leave it worse off or running afoul of the nonproliferation policy of its main supporter, the United States. Israel achieves this balance through "nuclear opacity," neither confirming nor denying to friend and foe alike its possession of nuclear weapons. The success of this posture stems from the willingness of the Israeli populace to forego public discussion of nuclear matters, reinforced by strict censorship laws to further discourage it. Third, Israel's enemies are presumed to be irrational, that is, not bound by the logic of mutual assured

destruction, and therefore cannot be entrusted with nuclear weapons of their own. Therefore, the Jewish state must take active measures to preserve its presumed nuclear weapons monopoly.

Giles assesses "fit" with Israel's operational cultural narrative when comparing Israeli decision to use unilateral military force against Syrian and Iraqi nuclear facilities to the restraint employed vis-à-vis Iran. He explains:

From 2009 through 2013, Israel was seemingly gearing up to preemptively attack Iran's nuclear facilities, in part because covert and other means had failed to impede Tehran's nuclear progress. After prolonged and uncharacteristically public debate, Israel did not carry out a military strike against Iran. That outcome, like those of 1981 and 2007, was the result of the complex interaction of Israeli identity, norms, values, and perceptual lenses…the shared interpretation of what behavior is or is not acceptable at any given time in the name of national security.

Before being accused of overreliance on cultural factors in forecasting Israeli security behavior, Giles caveats his strategic culture ingredient list with an essential point:

Israeli values and norms are not fully deterministic; rather, they set a range of expected behaviors. They complement but can also compete with one another for prominence, particularly as they interact with other kinds of variables, such as individual ego and tangible military capacity.

Caveats in mind, Giles highlights a specific set of critical cultural factors which have consistently appeared within Israel's operational cultural narrative on nuclear issues. The critical identity feature for the Israeli state—the ability to protect its people from another Holocaust—cultivates an attendant bias for action: strong norms favoring military action over passivity. This norm is circumscribed within a companion norm which mandates that military acts fall within Israeli constitutional law. Within that body of the law, the Prime Minister must achieve the consent of the Ministerial Committee on Defense on any military action. Less formally, but equally important, any military action must satisfy a "no choice" threshold reflected in Judaic notions of Just War. It must be clear that Israel has been left with no other choice beyond military action. These norms serve the critical value of keeping nuclear weapons out of the hands of enemies; a value which must exist alongside a potentially competing value of maintaining good relations with Washington.

To demonstrate these crucial cultural points, Giles details the decisionmaking process behind the military strike on nuclear facilities in Syria and Iraq—showing that each of the critical criteria within Israel's operational cultural narrative for nuclear issues were met. In response to the potential tension between valuing decisive military action against enemy facilities and valuing good relations with Washington, Giles recounts: "One of Prime Minister Olmert's first steps was to take Israel's intelligence on the Syrian reactor to President Bush. He failed to get the Americans to destroy it but found that they would not interfere with Israeli efforts to do so."[18] Explaining the Israeli attack on the Syrian reactor after the US had declined to do it, Giles points out:

> When President Bush acted otherwise, Olmert was surprised and disappointed. To balance Israeli sovereignty with the reality of US influence, Olmert carefully avoided asking for US "permission" to take out the reactor himself. While he did not seek, nor apparently receive, a "green light" from President Bush, neither did Olmert receive a "red light" when he told Bush that because the United States would not destroy the reactor, Israel would.[19] This implicit understanding enabled the Israeli strike to proceed without fear of US repercussions for the Jewish State. Notably, IDF planning for a unilateral military strike appears not to have begun until it became clear that the United States would not do the job itself.

Giles draws a sharp line of contrast with Netanyahu's proposed military action—debated across the 2009-2013 timeframe—against Iran. Netanyahu worked "relentlessly" for a similar green light from the US and failed. "In the case of Iran, where the stakes for the United States were much higher, President Obama was decidedly opposed to Israeli preemption. Instead, the President worked to reassure Netanyahu that America would invoke its own military option if that became necessary to keep Iran from the bomb." The US pursued a package of assurance aimed at Israel "including the dispatch of several high-ranking civilian, intelligence, and military officials to Israel, particularly in 2012; presenting Netanyahu with US contingency plans for an Iran strike to show that President Obama was serious; [20] and, reportedly, joint efforts to sabotage Iran's nuclear program,"[21] with clear refusal to bless unilateral military action.

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[18] After the destruction of the reactor, President Bush directed that the US Government also maintain absolute silence in support of the Israeli gambit. Elliott Abrams, "Bombing the Syrian Reactor: The Untold Story," *Commentary*, February 1, 2013, https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/bombing-the-syrian-reactor-the-untold-story/

[19] Abrams, *op cit.*

[20] Barak Ravid, "US Presented Netanyahu with Contingency Plan for Iran Strike," *Haaretz,* July 29, 2012, http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/u-s-presented-netanyahu-with-contingency-plan-for-iran-strike-1.454235

[21] David Sanger, "Obama Ordered Sped Up Wave of Cyberattacks Against Iran," *New York Times,* June 1, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/01/world/middleeast/obama-ordered-wave-of-cyberattacks-against-iran.html

While on the surface Israeli military action to destroy Iran's functioning nuclear facilities would seem to have fallen clearly within the Begin Doctrine, the potential compromise of a key value within the Israeli narrative—their standing with Washington—produced political fracturing within the constitutional decisionmaking bodies of Israel and meant that "key cultural thresholds or conditions... were not, or could not be, met. In the end, these cultural inhibitions, combined with other practical considerations, proved insurmountable and made a preemptive strike unacceptable by Israeli standards." Giles provides an intimate account of Israeli decisionmaking in the 2009-2013 era and identifies six key areas in which Israel's own operational cultural narrative could not justify a preemptive strike:

✦ *The last resort/no choice threshold was not satisfied.* The Israeli security establishment and key figures in the political echelon did not believe that all other options to avert an Iranian nuclear threat had been exhausted and that the use of force was now justified under Jewish tradition and state practice. Said Mossad chief Dagan in 2011, "An attack on Iran now before exploring all other approaches is not the right way how to do it."[22]

✦ *The existential threat condition was not satisfied.* Many in the Israeli security establishment believed that in the event Iran managed to acquire nuclear weapons it could be deterred from using them against Israel. This perspective, held by such figures as former Mossad chiefs Dagan and Pardo,[23] and former President Shimon Peres,[24] provided an important counterweight to Netanyahu's messianic diatribes.

✦ *The Constitutional norms were not satisfied (2010-2011).* As Dagan made clear, Netanyahu's 2010 directive to put the IDF on a "P-Plus" footing was not lawful. In 2011, he did not muster a majority of his Inner Cabinet to support a strike, and so the motion never made it to a forum with the Constitutional authority to order an attack.

✦ *Israel's special relationship with the United States could not be preserved.* An Israeli preemptive attack against Iranian nuclear sites would not only defy the United States, it would cost US lives in the ensuing Iranian retaliation. No amount of badgering or unprecedented interference in US domestic politics by Netanyahu could change that outcome. Indeed, Dagan noted the severe damage Netanyahu's handling of the Iran issue had done to US-Israeli relations.[25]

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[22] Ethan Bronner, "A Former Spy Chief Questions the Judgment of Israeli Leaders," *New York Times,* June 3, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/04/world/middleeast/04mossad.html?_r=0
[23] Barak Ravid, "Mossad Chief: Nuclear Iran Not Necessarily Existential Threat to Israel," *Haaretz,* December 29, 2011, http://www.haaretz.com/mossad-chief-nuclear-iran-not-necessarily-existential-threat-to-israel-1.404227
[24] "Israel's Peres Sees Containment for a Nuclear Iran," *Reuters,* April 29, 2009, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-iran-nuclear-idUSTRE53S78020090429
[25] "Nahum Barnea and Shimon Schiffer, "There is a Speech. There is No Responsibility," *Yedi'ot Aharanot*, February 27, 2015. Interview with Meir Dagan, translated from Hebrew by the Open Source Center.

✦ ***The Iranian nuclear problem could not be solved militarily.*** Even with a perceptual lens and institutional bias favoring military solutions, Israel simply lacked sufficient military capacity to conduct a successful strike with high confidence. Iran had learned the lesson of Iraq in 1981 and Syria in 2007; it had dispersed its nuclear facilities and buried them; in the case of Fordow, deep beneath a mountain. Tasked to come up with a plan, the IDF tried its best, but the distances involved and the operational challenges were enough to make two Iran hawks in the Cabinet, including a former-IDF Chief of Staff, "melt." Even if an attack had been launched, Iran would have soon recovered and then would have all the justification it needed to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and build the bomb, thus ending Israel's presumed nuclear monopoly and key pillar of national security.

✦ ***The risk to the Israeli home front was unacceptable.*** The notion of preventing another Holocaust by preempting Iran's nuclear program collided with the realization that Iranian retaliation against the Israeli populace would have been overwhelming. Unlike Olmert in the Syria case, Netanyahu had been so public about attacking Iran that there could be no hiding it afterwards, and to deter him Tehran had been just as outspoken in warning that it would retaliate massively, including against the United States. In preparation, Iran had supplied Hamas to Israel's south and Hezbollah to the north with some 40,000 rockets. In addition, Iran's long-range mobile missiles would present Israel with a three-front war targeting Israeli civilians. A business research company in Israel estimated in 2012 that the financial cost alone of such retaliation to the Jewish State would be over $41 billion.[26]

Giles argues that the three key questions posed by Defense Minister Ehud Barak as a litmus test for Israeli military action are reflective of the above six cultural criteria:[27]

1. Does Israel have the ability to cause severe damage to Iran's nuclear sites and bring about a major delay in the Iranian nuclear project? And can the military and the Israeli people withstand the inevitable counterattack?

2. Does Israel have overt or tacit support, particularly from America, for carrying out an attack?

3. Have all other possibilities for the containment of Iran's nuclear threat been exhausted, bringing Israel to the point of last resort? If so, is this the last opportunity for an attack?

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[26] Rishon Lezion, "Cost of Israeli Iran Attack: $41.4 Billion," *United Press International,* August 21, 2012, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2012/08/21/Cost-of-Israeli-Iran-attack-414-billion/58171345556685/
[27] Ronen Bergman, "Will Israel Attack Iran?" *New York Times Magazine,* January 25, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/29/magazine/will-israel-attack-iran.html?_r=0

Given that the answer to all three questions was a demonstrable "no," Giles makes a case for the robustness of Israel's operational cultural narrative.

Isolating Vector Points in the Decisionmaking Process. Israel's decisionmaking process on nuclear action provides more leverage points for US policymakers given the prominent role of the US-Israel alliance within its strategic culture. As is demonstrated in the case study offered by Giles, the strident Israeli commitment to protect its citizens and its concomitant bias for action is woven together with an assumption that the US and Israel will act together on this front:

> The state imperative to protect its citizenry is by no means unique to Israel, but the defining historical experience of the Nazi Holocaust accentuates it and instills in Israeli leaders a strong preference for action over passivity. But the notion that the Israeli state is sovereign in matters of national security is complicated by the nature of relations with Washington. The United States is seen by Israeli leaders as a critical, perhaps indispensable, ally of the Jewish State. Indeed, as exemplified by Prime Minister Olmert in the al-Kibar affair, the United States is expected not only to share Israel's security concerns but to agree on and carry out Israel's preferred solution, preemptive military attack.

The Israeli valuing of its US relationship does not make discerning Israeli intent simple, however. Especially when US interests and projected security behavior may not cleanly line up with Israel's preferred mode of action, cracking the code of the Israeli decisionmaking process may prove difficult. Israeli decisionmaking norms on issues of critical security interest keep the circle of advisors and decisionmakers quite small. The somewhat public debate over a strike on Iran was therefore unusual. One potential window into decisionmaking of this sort is the proclivity in Israeli politics to leak sensitive information for political advantage; however, this consistent practice has encouraged a counter-norm: "For these particular reasons, as well as the importance attached to freedom of maneuver more broadly, Israel's Prime Ministers play their cards very close to the vest, taking very few, if any, into confidence."[28]

That said, the US still maintains far more leverage with Israel than with many other actors across the nuclear spectrum due to the way in which the US-Israel relationship features within Israeli strategic culture. Giles notes:

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[28] Charles D. Freilich, "National Security Decision-Making in Israel: Processes, Pathologies, and Strengths," 652, *Middle East Journal,* vol. 60, no. 4, Autumn, 2006, http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/freilich_mej_autumn_2006.pdf

As former Israeli Deputy National Security Advisor Chuck Freilich has observed, "'What the Americans think' is the single most important consideration in virtually all [Israeli] policy deliberations, exposing the [Israeli decisionmaking] system to additional approaches and options and setting limits regarding what should and should not be done."[29]

Former Prime Minister Olmert was even more explicit: "What's all this talk, that we will decide alone on our fate and that we won't take anybody else into consideration? Can someone please explain to me with which airplanes we will attack if we decide to attack alone, against the opinion of others—airplanes that we built here in Israel? With which bombs will we bomb, bombs that we made by ourselves? With which special technologies will we do it, those that we made by ourselves or those that we received from other sources?"[30]

Maintaining open communication and the good health of the Israeli-US relationship will remain key to exercising US influence over Israeli nuclear decisionmaking. Giles quotes Emily Landau, an Iran expert at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University, in summing up the decisionmaking of 2009-2013: "Netanyahu backed away because he was getting the message that he was going too far and this could do damage [to the special relationship with the United States], this was not helpful either to Israel or to stopping Iran... Relations with the United States is a much more substantial, real issue, but it's more difficult to give that as your explanation [for not engaging with Iran]."[31] In the end, claims Giles, the United States exercised *decisive* influence over Israeli decisionmaking.

Policy Recommendations. Giles offers a number of key takeaways for US policymakers facing future scenarios in which Israel will have strong incentives to act in protecting its regional nuclear monopoly. According to Giles, "Netanyahu has been unrepentant in his attitude toward the Iran nuclear deal even upon its implementation," and insists that Iran is still bent on nuclear acquisition.[32] It is conceivable that a series of events including Iranian cheating and divergent US-Israeli ideas on what do to about it could revive the impasse experienced in 2009-2013. Iranian deviation from agreed-to terms may elicit a strong Israeli reaction:

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[29] *Ibid.*, 662.
[30] Jodi Rudoren, "Remarks by Former Official Fuel Israeli Discord on Iran," *New York Times,* April 28, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/29/world/middleeast/yuval-diskin-criticizes-israel-government-on-iran-nuclear-threat.html
[31] *Ibid.*
[32] "World's Response to Implementation of Iran Historic Nuclear Deal," *Press TV,* January 17, 2016, http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2016/01/17/446068/world-response-jcpoa-implementation-/

> [I]n the event of an Iranian "smoking gun," e.g., clear evidence that it was in the process of building nuclear weapons, strategic culture tells us Israel's inclination to launch a strike could be quite high. Such brash cheating would underscore to Israeli audiences that diplomacy had patently failed and that there was "no choice" but to use force urgently to prevent Iran from completing the bomb. In such a heightened sense of crisis, the Israeli debate on whether a nuclear-armed Iran posed an existential threat to the Jewish State would be revived and perhaps distorted by the heightened sense of urgency.

In this case, the polity of Israel "pointedly reserves the right to continue covert action against Iran's nuclear program."[33]

> Covert action is more likely to pass muster with Israeli values and norms in that it dampens Iranian pressures for massive retaliation, a key constraint for overt military strikes. Israeli covert action would pose an interesting dilemma for the United States, however, as Washington seeks to balance its obligations to the Jewish State with its commitments under the JCPOA.

In anticipation of such a scenario, Giles recommends a number of possible actions. Paraphrased, these include:

✦ Maintaining continued coordination with Israel regarding suspicions of Iranian cheating on the JCPOA nuclear deal.

✦ Casting anticipated action against a strategic culture "checklist" in order to determine whether key *Israeli* criteria for an attack have been satisfied.

✦ Intimating the prospect of reduced intelligence sharing, curtailed access to strategic weaponry, and political isolation from the United States if unsanctioned action is taken.

✦ Becoming familiar with the Jewish State's own strategic culture, with its emphasis on ethical and democratic conduct, and preparing to use it against itself if appropriate.

Giles ends with a cautionary note concerning overreliance on the eminent value of the US relationship with Israel. "Much will depend on the decisiveness of Israel's leadership at the time. The IDF has made clear that, notwithstanding the "P-Plus" controversy in 2010, it will faithfully execute a lawful order [should it come] to strike Iran's nuclear program irrespective

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[33] Adam Entous, "Spy vs. Spy: Inside the Fraying US-Israeli Ties, *Wall Street Journal,* October 22, 2015, http://www.wsj.com/articles/spy-vs-spy-inside-the-fraying-u-s-israel-ties-1445562074

of the risks."[34] For his part, Netanyahu has conceded nothing with regard to the need for a "green light" from the Americans. Defeated in his ambitions to act in 2012, he remarked:

> "If what I just heard is that on this matter which threatens our very existence, we should just say, we should just hand the keys over to the Americans and tell them, 'You decide whether or not to destroy this project, which threatens our very existence,' well, that's one possible approach, but it's not my approach... My approach is that if we can have others take care of it, or if we can get to a point where no one has to, that's fine; but if we have no choice and we find ourselves with our backs against the wall, then we will do what we have to do in order to defend ourselves."[35]

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NORTH KOREA

Identifying National Narratives Driving Nuclear Decisionmaking. Shane Smith, tasked with addressing one of the most opaque and inaccessible regimes on the planet, acknowledges that North Korea now possesses enough fissile material to build "anywhere from six to about thirty weapons" and that its leader, Kim Jung Un, has declared his intention to "ceaselessly develop nuclear weapons technology to actively develop more powerful and advanced nuclear weapons." Over the horizon projections indicate that "sooner or later it will be able to target South Korea, Japan and the United States" with the US as its "primary nuclear target." The question of acquisition has already been answered. The critical decisions ahead for North Korea are "the shape, size, and character of its arsenal" and scenarios for nuclear use.

Nuclear weapons have come to play an indispensable role in Pyongyang's identity narrative which casts North Korea as "the decisive element in the world system, if not the center of the universe." North Korea's extreme form of exceptionalism is a combination of "national solipsism" alongside "militarism and ethnocentrism that borders on xenophobia." North Korea's Taedong river basin is boasted as "the cradle of mankind" based on archeological evidence dating back one million years. *Tan'gun*, the original progenitor of the North Korean race 5,000 years ago, founded his state near Pyonyang—a legacy that has been neatly intertwined with the Kim dynasty as evidence of their destined rule. This extraordinary perceptual lens, founded largely on state-born constructions, cannot be dismissed for its delusionary qualities. The belief in the singularity and ancientness of the North Korean people is inextricably linked with the way the state perceives its right to nuclear weapons and

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[34] "Israeli Decisionmaking in Turbulent Times," US National Defense University Symposium, September 30, 2015, conducted under Chatham House rules.
[35] Rudoren, *op cit.*

its relationship to their use. Nuclear weapons hold special acclaim in the national narratives of the Kim regime. Referred to as the "nation's life" and a "national treasure," there is little doubt that these are inexorably intertwined with North Korean sense of self:

> Nuclear weapons have become central to [the identity] narrative in a number of ways. They are seen to offer the prestige that is befitting a historically great, if not the most important, country. For instance, following North Korea's launch of a Taepo-dong-1 in 1998, state media declared it "a great pride of the *Tan'gun* nation." [36] Nuclear weapons also are often characterized in sweeping historical terms, helping North Korea claim its central place in the world and securing its destiny for all time.

The perceptual lens which informs North Korea's nuclear narrative is hypersensitive to security threats and perceives itself as "under constant siege." The "military first" policy introduced by Kim Jong Il prioritizes military interests above all else. "Having suffered hundreds of incursions from more powerful neighbors over the millennia, Korean identity has been shaped by a historic vulnerability to outside predators." Key among its contemporary predators is the United States. Since the Korean War, North Korea's internal narrative has held that "the imperialist Americans are bent on destroying North Korea and the distinct Korean identity." Only the threat of North Korea's military defenses keeps them at bay. Nuclear weapons are the crown jewel of that defense system and a fulfillment of both *Juche*—North Korea's political ideology—and *Songun*—Kim Jong Il's military first policies. With pride, North Korea openly celebrates its status as a "nuclear state." Smith's assessment of the North Korean identity and security narratives and their congruence with the possession of nuclear weapons leads to a strong note of caution regarding any hope of rolling the program back:

> So embedded are nuclear weapons with all that makes North Korea North Korea, that one longtime student of the country suggests that "the nation itself and nuclear weapons have been combined in a condensed symbol of intention."[37] For this reason, it is increasingly difficult to imagine that North Korea will ever give up its nuclear ambitions. To the contrary, it is likely to continue to do just as it says: build bigger, better, and more nuclear weapons as a manifestation of national purpose.

One implication of the strong tie between nuclear capacity and national identity is that the centrality of nuclear success to the North Korean narrative is likely to lead the regime to "exaggerate nuclear accomplishments and capabilities." This may not be confined to

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[36] Michael J. Seth, *A History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present,* New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011, p. 444.
[37] Peter Hayes, "The DPRK's Nuclear Constitution", NAPSNet Policy Forum, June 13, 2012, http://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/the-dprks-nuclear-constitution/#axzz2jhUXzEj8.

overstatement and braggadocio for foreign consumption, but may be a form of exaggeration that creates internal delusion about actual capabilities. Smith cites the case of Iraq in assessing the potential for an ill-informed perceptual lens resulting from the communication norms potentially at work in North Korea, noting that the regime's "brand of personal despotism likely exceeds that of Stalin's Soviet Union and any other country in modern times" resulting in "no dissent, no loyal opposition, and no 'conversation' with the Supreme Leader in North Korea." The outcome is that nuclear narratives, even those held by the regime's foremost decisionmaker, may be divorced in significant and important ways from reality.

Isolating Vector Points in the Decisionmaking Process. North Korea was born in the hands of the Kim family. During founder Kim Il Sung's forty-six year reign, "his power was near limitless" and was exercised to protect what would become dynastic family rule. Not surprisingly, therefore, Kim Il Sung's influence permeates "nearly every facet of modern North Korea," including its identity, norms, values, and perceptual lenses. "So engrained is the Kim family in the national identity of the North… that it is nearly impossible to imagine that North Korea, as we know it today, could survive with an alternative leader outside of the Kim family."

Kim Il Sung's stamp is perhaps most pronounced in North Korea's *Suryong* (leader-dominant) system of governance and decisionmaking. Within this system, the Supreme Leader has ultimate authority and all power and legitimacy of the state flows from the reigning Kim. He is "portrayed as godlike—omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent—and the sole source of national self-actualization." Kim Jung Un's formal powers, therefore, are unconstrained, but some doubt whether he has yet amassed the "unquestioned, absolute, and enduring loyalty of the elite and mass population that his father and grandfather enjoyed." Despite his complete control over the positions and mortality of individuals within the political and military elite, he cannot:

> effectively govern by fiat and make policy on a whim despite the prerogatives his officially bestowed as the Supreme Leader. Even in North Korea, governance requires adhering to the protocols and boundaries of what is viewed as appropriate by a wider cross-section of those who would safeguard and carryout state policy. Doing so likely means hewing to widely shared notions of national identity and the norms, values, and perceptual lenses that have long guided North Korean decisionmaking.

With this limited caveat in mind, there is no doubt that Kim Jung Un retains sole authority to launch nuclear weapons. "Putting these weapons in the custody of another military commander or political leader with pre-delegated launch authority could serve to identify, at least symbolically, a suitable successor to the Supreme Leader," a notion the young Jung Un

has no interest in encouraging. Although the US has no control over the comport of this decisionmaking structure and limited influence within it, it can anticipate potential ramifications of such tight-fisted control by one individual on command and control structures and nuclear doctrine:

> Reluctance to relinquish control over its nuclear weapons could constrain North Korea from adopting operationally complex command and control systems involving forward employed weapons and issuing launch-on warning type of authority. Such constraints would likely impact its doctrinal options. For instance, nuclear doctrine that is aimed at deterring low-level conflicts as well as doctrine intended to deter disarming or decapitating first-strikes is thought to be more credible if the state is able to rapidly disperse and use nuclear weapons without centralized authority. Without that ability, North Korean doctrine might be limited to strategic retaliation that is primarily aimed at deterring high-end attacks that would threaten its leadership and strategic assets.

Should North Korea choose to exercise use, Smith admonishes that US policymakers consider seriously Pyongyang's repeated threats to turn Seoul into a "sea of fire." Smith references distinctions between North and South bound into North Korea's identity narrative. Although all Koreans are considered to be superior and exceptional in nature, the South's tolerance of multiracial and multinational marriages is perceived as "treasonous" by the North and has compromised their claim to Korean purity—leaving the North the only source of pure, undiluted Korean-ness, the "vessel of the 'true Korea.'" The South's laxness in protecting its heritage is one among several potential indicators that it has been "led astray if not enslaved by US imperialists." The South is accused of colluding with the US to invade the North in 1950 and has succumbed to being a "puppet" ever since. The result of Pyongyang's diminished regard for the South, Smith points out, may be a lack of nuclear restraint even for fellow Koreans should the North feel threatened. "The world," Pyongyang radio declared in 2003, "without North Korea is meaningless, and it should be destroyed."

Exploring potential scenarios for use, Smith focuses on the key value of the North Korean state: "the survival and veneration of the Kim family." North Korea's "declaratory policy" indicates an "ambiguous and potentially low threshold for nuclear use." This in mind, the following scenarios fall out as worth considering:

> [O]n the one hand… nuclear weapons might be used only when the regime believes that is has no other option. That is to say, it would use the threat of nuclear weapons only as a final bid to save the Kim family in the last throes of conflict. To do otherwise carries the risk of actually hastening the destruction of the regime. On the other hand,

a sense of fatalism among North Koreas' leadership could be triggered without a decisive military defeat or with US and South Korea forces approaching the gates of Pyongyang. Some observers believe that the regime is brittle—outwardly rigid and hard but if struck in the right spot, like a partial but humiliating military defeat, it could shatter or unravel. Early but limited use of nuclear weapons might be seen by North Korea's leaders as the best way to stave off that fate.

North Korea's veneration of guerrilla tactics, harking back to the heroics of its partisan guerrilla struggle for independence against the Japanese, may inform both its threshold for and means of use in a nuclear conflict. Consequently, North Korea values "the creative use of unconventional tactics, brinkmanship, and unpredictability to prevail against superior forces."

In line with the guerrilla tradition, North Korea might think about using nuclear weapons in limited way to surprise, shock and/or degrade enemy forces. For instance, it might use nuclear weapons for psychological effects during a conflict by firing a demonstration shot; for area denial effects by targeting access points to North Korea or military ports in the South, such as the Port of Busan, where the US might otherwise disembark forces; or for operational effects by targeting military bases away from civilian population centers, such as air bases at Kusan and Osan, to reduce US air sorties.[38] The guerrilla tradition in North Korea might also impact how North Korea thinks about different delivery methods, including the use of highly trained special operations forces to penetrate lines of defense. In fact, North Korea showed off what it claims to be an atomic backpack unit in a 2013 military parade. Limited use doctrine and operational system involving individually portable weapons would have both command and control as well as technical hurdles that North Korea may be unable to surmount. But, given the influence of guerrilla warfare on shaping North Korean values, it would not be unreasonable to assume that it is exploring such options.

Draconian threats issued from Pyongyang of "genocidal blows," or initiation of a "merciless sacred war," or use of nuclear weapons "at any time" against the United States have become routine. "The problem today is that North Korea can actually make good on these threats as its nuclear capabilities grow. It is reasonable to expect that as its threats become more credible, Pyongyang will continue if not increase its use of nuclear brinkmanship to challenge what it contends to be objectionable political and territorial arrangements."

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[38] Shane Smith, "Implications for U.S. Extended Deterrence and Assurance in East Asia", US-Korea Institute at SAIS, November 2015, http://38north.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/NKNF-Smith-Extended-Deterrence-Assurance.pdf

While it is easy to dismiss North Korea's nuclear bluster as bluff, and many analysts do, Smith cautions that "it is impossible to know with certainty what is behind North Korean nuclear threats." North Korean norms that may point to serious intent include a history of "willingness to impose extreme deprivation on its people and to call on them to make great sacrifices," as well as infrastructural preparations for the North Korean leadership to survive a nuclear exchange, reemerge, and then fight and prevail. The mindset within North Korea is consistently prepped to expect "a final war against imperialism" and has been imbued with the notion that "their military is more courageous, spirited, and resilient than that of their opponents and that using nuclear weapons is the surest way to defeat its enemies." Smith warns that consistent exposure to this narrative may mean that North Koreans actually come to believe it, and "become emotionally committed to an irrational optimism about the prospects of waging and prevailing in a nuclear conflict."[39]

North Korea "is declining precipitously in relevancy compared with its modern and economically superior neighbors, save for its nuclear weapons." This position means that "[i]t has few vested interests in a stable regional status quo that unevenly benefits others." Such an optic may inspire bold revisionist action in order to shape future political outcomes. Smith notes that while Pyongyang may refrain from use, the Kim regime believes it can exploit its nuclear arsenal to "dictate" international trends and regional relations.[40]

Policy Recommendations. Shane Smith aptly provides specific policy prescriptions tailored as a response to the operational cultural narrative surrounding nuclear weapons in North Korea. His comments are provided in full below:

Any hope to slow, halt, or reverse its nuclear program will require five elements.
- ✦ *Political and economic pressure:* The US must redouble efforts to build broad multilateral coordination to oppose North Korea's nuclear ambitions. It must demonstrate to leaders in Pyongyang that nuclear developments will result in increasing international isolation and tightening economic sanctions that targets businesses and banks that continue to cooperate with North Korea. To date, international sanctions have been watered down or poorly implemented by countries, such as China, which either seek to maintain a strategic relationship with North Korea or fear that sanctions could lead to its instability. But, that is precisely the point. Sanctions should signal that nuclear weapons could be

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[39] Geoffry Blainey argues that optimism about victory in war is often the product of "moods which cannot be grounded in fact" and which "permeate what appear to be rational assessments of the relative military strength of two contending powers." It is the "process by which nations evade reality." Geoffry Blainey, *The Causes of War,* New York: Free Press, 1973, p. 54.

[40] Alexandre Mansourov, "Kim Jong Un's Nuclear Doctrine and Strategy: What Everyone Needs to Know," *Nautilus Peace and Security Network*, December 16, 2014, http://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/kim-jong-uns-nuclear-doctrine-and-strategy-what-everyone-needs-to-know/

the regime's undoing and not the ultimate guarantor of "the eternal future of the nation."

✦ *A path to prosperity:* Combined with the promise of additional sanctions and isolation against further nuclear developments, there must be a clear and viable alternative route for the Kim regime that includes both diplomatic and economic incentives. Without a detailed path for peaceful coexistence and opportunity for the regime to benefit –in terms of building an economically "strong and prosperous" nation—from halting its nuclear program or denuclearizing, there is little incentive for it to do so. This could include some type of normalization of relations, although it is unclear that the North Korean regime is looking for better international relations, which would run counter to its anti-imperial partisan identity.

✦ *Information campaign:* The US should ramp up information operations to undermine the international and domestic legitimacy for a Kim regime that is bent on developing nuclear weapons. For instance, the United States could use radio broadcasts, leaflets, telecommunications, etc., to spread information about the estimated costs of North Korea's nuclear program in contrast to the condition of ordinary North Koreans, including its human rights failings, combined with the estimated benefits from a "path to prosperity." Appealing to its historical identity and dignity of the ancient Korean nation, information operations could highlight the perverse priorities of the regime. After every nuclear test, missile launch, or other provocation, the US and its allies should emphasize the narrative that such actions are a sign of weakness not strength of an increasingly desperate regime with no record of progress or success outside of crude nuclear capabilities.

✦ *Measured responses to provocations:* Crises and tensions serve to strengthen the North Korean internal narrative of being under attack by outsiders and the "sole defender" against US imperialism. Hyping the threat from North Korea each time it conducts a nuclear or missile test can heighten the symbolic value of its nuclear program for domestic audiences. The United States should respond in a measured but concrete manner.

✦ *Military denial:* The United States should articulate details on how its regional military posture will respond to each nuclear step that North Korea takes in order to convey that continued nuclear developments will not buy Pyongyang strategic advantage.

North Korea appears bent on developing and deploying an operational nuclear weapons capability. The actions above may slow but will not likely halt those ambitions. Presumably, US interests would be better served by some North Korean decisions regarding doctrine and operations over others. US policies should include:

- *Military assurances:* The US military posture should convey that it is defensive nature. It is unclear whether North Korea would ever trust that US intentions are purely defensive but anything that exacerbates North Korean concerns that the US is preparing a decapitation or disarming first strike will incentivize Pyongyang to disperse its weapons and pre-delegate launch authority.

- *Balancing resolve and restraint:* Policies and plans must balance the need to communicate to North Korea that it cannot escalate its way out of conflict with the need to include "off ramps" and targeting packages that signal restraint and options for Kim Jong Un other than nuclear escalation should conflict erupt.

- *Information campaign:* The US should begin conducting an information campaign aimed at communicating to military commanders and political leaders that, should conflict come, any and all individuals responsible for carrying out any part of a nuclear-use order will be held personally accountable. But, those who do not carry out those orders would receive amnesty and an opportunity to pursue a normal life in post-war Korea. An information campaign should also be used to raise questions about the surety, security and authority over North Korea's weapons to exploit an divisions in civilian-military relations that could complicate command and control related decisions.

SECTION III | PRIMARY TAKEAWAYS AND THE WAY AHEAD

Drawing on the collective lessons learned during the course of the project, several broad policy takeaways may offer more general policy guidance further to the country-specific policy recommendations provided above for consideration in shaping wider government policy.

RECOMMENDATION #1

Enhance the development of cultural expertise and the application of socio-cultural knowledge and critical methodologies throughout the government policymaking community, and not just within the intelligence community, where it has already been widely adapted. This could be accomplished by encouraging, sponsoring, and rewarding scholarship on socio-cultural analysis and its relevance to specific policy initiatives or programs. Ways of institutionalizing socio-cultural criteria for policy evaluation should also be considered in support of this goal.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Devote greater attention to assessing plans and intentions, moving to the left on the WMD acquisition timeline. Intentions matter, and are directly shaped by cultural factors. Any given country's aspirations to WMD acquisition are manifested in both steps toward obtaining

WMD capabilities (overtly or covertly), and in declarations of a country's intentions, as reflected in its sense of identity, values, norms, and threat perceptions. In order to more effectively thwart, disrupt, or productively shift the policies of states with latent or emerging nuclear acquisition aspirations, and in view of the impending ubiquity of inherently dual-capable civil nuclear power, it will become increasingly necessary to ascertain intentions. This will help determine whether a particular case requires more of an "assurance" approach (with friends and allies) versus more of a "deterrence" approach (with prospective adversaries).

RECOMMENDATION #3

Adopt and refine socio-cultural analytical models. For example, points of leverage within the policymaking elites of potential nuclear aspirants can effectively be ascertained through socio-cultural mapping. This analytical approach is being developed and refined within the intelligence community for threat assessment purposes, but also needs to be incorporated into the policy-making process, to help determine which policy options may be effective, and which might actually be counterproductive. The "opportunity analysis" component of the cultural analysis models lies in the identification of the cultural factors most likely to impact WMD intentions of key actors/groups and then creatively mapping of the critical cultural factors to those tailored policy levers most likely to promote the desired proliferation behavior.

RECOMMENDATION #4

Improve tailored deterrence strategies by incorporating socio-cultural analysis into both operational planning and declaratory policy. Socio-cultural mapping and comparative analysis across a diverse set of case studies demonstrates the complexity of simultaneously applying deterrence strategies against significantly different actors. While the need for "tailoring" deterrence is well known, the analytical toolbox for operationalizing this remains under-developed.

RECOMMENDATION #5

Incentives and inducements, or threats and attempts at deterrence, are likely to be more effective when they resonate with a country's identity, values, norms, and perceptions. Use socio-cultural modeling and analysis to identify decision vectors within individual polities, and then to assess which sets of actors may be most open to influence by the United States, directly or indirectly, to determine the appropriate mix of policy levers (political, military, diplomatic, and economic), pressures and incentives to be applied.