A State's Choice: Nuclear Policy in a Changing World

Libya, North Korea and Iran

Tiran Rothman

The Tel Aviv Workshop for Science, Technology and Security

The Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy

TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

Why have states facing similar threats chosen to cope with them so differently? What is the role of perception in determine their defense policy? Can we learn some lessons from the choices have been taken by Libya, North Korea and Iran? The present study analyzes the complex dilemma attending a state's choice of nuclear policy as a reflection of its "security dilemma". Going nuclear is not such the common choice it is often believed to be, mainly in recent years. In fact, only few countries proceeded with nuclear development, while dozens of others chose a different path. In this study, we attempt to understand why countries with similar "opening positions" and similar constraints chose different ways of coping with their dilemmas. The study tries to emphasis that a state's choice affected by a combination of factors, most of them concerning the perception of the state and its subjective environment, as will be analyze by exploring three models of nuclear choices at the contemporary international system: Libya, North Korea and Iran, each of which has chosen a different path on the long way (and back?) towards the bomb.

Tiran Rothman has served for the past last years as intelligence and analyzes officer. He has a bachelor degree in Middle Eastern studies and in International Relations and has graduated Cum Laude his M.A in Security studies at Tel-Aviv University. Tiran dealt with the Iranian issue and with research of nuclear policy in the last years. He taught in Tel-Aviv University the Faculty of Political Science, as an assistant lecturer and he is nowadays a fellow at the Hartog school of Government & Policy at Tel-Aviv University.

The Harold Hartog
School of
Government and Policy

TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

The Tel Aviv Workshop for
Science, Technology and
Security

A State's Choice: Nuclear Policy in a Changing World

Libya, North Korea and Iran

Tiran Rothman

Edited by Marsha Weinstein

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank the Hartog School of Government and Policy, particularly Professor Yossi Shain and Dr. Gary Sussman, for giving me the opportunity and support necessary to publish this article. I also wish to thank my colleagues at the School, who encouraged my efforts and helped me bring them to fruition. Professor Aharon Kleiman, who supervised the thesis on which this article is based, offered insightful and illuminating comments, which were essential to helping me formulate my ideas. I am also grateful to Professor Yitzhak Ben-Israel, head of the Security Studies Program, who took an active interest in my research. My thanks to Dr. Emily Landau of the Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies, Professor Ezer Gat, Dr. Ariel (Eli) Levite, and the many others who contributed to my research, whom space precludes me from citing by name. Despite their generous input, any errors herein are my responsibility alone.
Tiran Rothman

A Note from the Head of the Hartog School of Government and Policy and the Head of the Security Studies Program

The State of Israel now faces one of the most difficult and complex periods in its history. The potential nuclear armament of nations in the Middle East – chief among them Iran – and the threat of terrorism necessitate employing different coping strategies than those used until recently. No longer can the tank, the fighter jet, and other classic armaments provide a solution to these problems. Rather, a more dynamic and nuanced response is needed.

An understanding of the "big picture" depends definitively on an analysis of the international system, and particularly of those nations that have chosen the nuclear path. As this article illustrates, each nation faces a different subjective security reality, assessed in terms of cost and benefit. If we can understand all of the multiple elements underlying a nation's strategic choices – and not only its security considerations – then we may be able to understand how best to influence that nation.

The principal contributions of the theoretical segment of this article are its analysis of the nuances of a nation's subjective perception and their effect on that nation's choosing to develop nuclear power, and its positing a strong correlation between the two. In its practical application of this theory, the article reveals that it was the gradual, complex change in the perception of threat of the nations under study (North Korea, Libya, and Iran) that ultimately led them to choose their respective security strategies.

According to Albert Einstein, "the solution lies at the heart of the problem". This article, which is based on Tiran Rothman's master's degree thesis, analyzes the heart of the problem behind the strategic choice to develop nuclear weapons, and in it seeks the "solution": those (few) possibilities that decision-makers may use to influence a nation's choices.

Professor Yossi Shain
Head of the Harold Hartog
School of Government and Policy

General (Res.) Professor Yitzhak Ben-Israel
Head of the Security Studies Program
Head of the Tel Aviv Science,
Technology and Security Workshop

Abstract

The present study analyzes the complex dilemma accompanying a state's choice of nuclear policy as a reflection of its "security dilemma". "Going nuclear", particularly in recent years, is not as common a choice as it is often believed to be. In fact, only a few countries have proceeded with nuclear development, while dozens of others have chosen a different path. This study attempts to understand why countries with similar starting positions and constraints have chosen different ways of coping with their dilemmas. It emphasizes that a state's choice is affected by a combination of factors, most of which concern the state's own perceptions and its subjective environment. To clarify this, the study analyzes the choices of three nations – Libya, North Korea, and Iran – each of which has chosen a different path on the long way (and back?) to the bomb.

Introduction

The proliferation of nuclear weapons has transformed the national security policies of most countries in recent decades. The technological revolution has also revolutionized international relations, changing the nature and scale of security threats in the latter half of the 20th century.

This change has heightened the security threat faced by most countries in the world. Some of them have remained completely unable to meet the new challenge, and have been forced to make difficult choices to deal with this threat. These states face a crucial dilemma, which has serious implications for their survival in the future and the security of their citizens in the present: How to cope with the security threat? Should they "go the hard way", increasing their conventional power while bolstering their security with political agreements and coalitions? Or should they opt to take a "security leap", attempting to obtain nuclear weapons that would act as a deterrent, constituting a sort of "insurance policy"?

Their dilemma does not end here, however. The latter of these two routes has a major drawback: By joining the nuclear arms race in an age when nuclear proliferation is not the international norm, these nations risk being excluded from the "family of nations", becoming pariahs or so-called "rogue nations", with all that this implies.

Although dozens of countries initially chose to "go nuclear" in recent decades, few of them have persisted in this aim; many of them have either suspended nuclear development or even "rolled back" their nuclear programs completely.

Libya, North Korea and Iran are three nations that face this type of security dilemma. Libya, which opted for nuclear deterrence some three decades ago, has recently declared its intention to disarm itself. Various Western assessments, and pronouncements by its own representatives, suggest that North Korea already possesses nuclear capability. However, under the strain of consequent international pressure, this nation has become one of the most economically and politically isolated states in the world. Iran, on the other hand, is still in the crucible of its security dilemma; its choice of a nuclear policy for military purposes remains ambiguous. On one hand, the project may provide the key to its future survival, constituting a first-rate deterrent in an era of increasing external threats – not least of which are reflected in recent, clear statements by Washington about the need to topple its Islamic regime, or at least to neutralize its unconventional capabilities and support of terrorism. On the other hand, Iran's nuclear project has generated much pressure and many threats; it may, in and of itself, lead to that country's international isolation and political exclusion.

Why have states facing similar threats chosen to cope with them differently? What is the role of perception in determining a country's defense policy? What role do the external and internal security environment play in the choices made by a state? What

lessons can be learned from the "practical" choices recently made by Libya and North Korea? What happened in 2003 that led to a major change in the three cases analyzed here?

These questions have yet to be adequately discussed by specialists in international relations and nuclear policy. Basing itself on the international literature concerning nuclear policy and the perceptions of states and their influence on international relations, this study analyzes the environment as perceived by these three states. In this, it attempts to reveal their subjective perspective, rather than the international perspective often used in the literature to analyze states' nuclear policy. It then analyzes the role of perception in a nation's security-bound choice of a nuclear path, and reveals the close connection between nuclear policy and perception. Through these case studies, this paper attempts to determine what elements lead a given state to choose a particular path.

The first section of the study presents background on the framework of analysis chosen, and on the complex situation accompanying a given state's choice of nuclear policy as a reflection of its "security dilemma". This is followed by a review of the literature on the three states' motives for nuclear armament or disarmament. A thorough analysis of the aspects of each country's policy will be used to shed light on the reasons for their differing choices, and on the essence of the dilemma. A comparative analysis of the choices of two of these countries, and how these are changing, brings the study to its conclusion.

Background

States, Bureaucracy, and Individual-level Analysis

To argue that the international environment determines a state's behavior is to assert that all states react similarly to the same objective external situation. Changes in a state's domestic regime, its bureaucratic structure, and the personalities and opinions of its leaders mostly do not lead to changes in its polices. Changes in the external situation, however, do alter behavior, even when other variables remain constant.[1] To test these claims, we need good measures of all variables, especially the nature of the objective situation and a state's policies. Even if we had many indicators, we would have to cope with the paucity of the most desirable types of comparison.

This can easily be understood by glancing at a similar issue in the study of individual behavior in determining an individual's behavior, in which the relative importance of situation and role, as opposed to idiosyncratic variables, is hotly debated.[2] People from widely differing backgrounds, and with different personalities and opinions, may fill the same role, and each person fills many different roles. Consequently, we can try to determine the relative impact of situational and idiosyncratic variables by examining how a person's behavior varies as his role changes, and how people of widely differing characteristics perform in similar situations.

It is much harder to make analogous comparisons in international relations. In only a few regional systems do we find cases in which states play multiple roles, either simultaneously or consecutively, and in which each role is filled by states that are otherwise quite different. Even if all states do not behave similarly in similar situations, the details of decision-making and image may not be significant. Instead, the state may be the appropriate level of analysis: Variations in decision-makers' policies may be accounted for by variations in the social and economic structure and domestic politics of the states they are serving. Wilsonian and Marxist theories are examples of this position. Other theories at this level of analysis argue for the importance of a state's geographic position, traditions, and national style, or for the often unintended consequences of domestic conflicts.

---

[1] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. New York: Princeton University Press, 1976, p 18.

[2] Ibid.

This study, however, does not analyze the influence of individuals within, or the internal bureaucracy of, each country. It does assess the perceptions and interests of groups within the bureaucracy. However, causal relationships are often hard to establish. Although different groups do potentially influence policy, their influence remains within a "black box".[3] Even if bureaucrats' policy preferences were linked to their positions within the government, this link would be relatively unimportant, unless their preferences explained policy outcomes. However, we should note at the outset that even if this were true, we would have to explore the sources of power of parts of the bureaucracy. If we were to find, for example, that the military often prevails when conflict arises with the organization in charge of arms control, we might find that this was because the state's leaders had supported the former more than the latter over time.

The case studies presented herein focus on non-democratic states. This affords us a proper indication of what is going on inside the "black box" in each case, as the leadership and bureaucracy in these countries are relatively similar, given the absence of internal opposition. This in turn affords us an opportunity to specify what has affected each state's choice. However, it should e borne in mind that some would call such non-democratic states "irrational" states. By rational I mean ways of interpreting evidence that conform to generally accepted rules of drawing inferences; conversely, by irrational, I mean the use of methods and influences that violate the rules of "scientific method", methods and influences that might be rejected by a person who was aware he was employing them.[4] We assume that policy is set through a rational, orderly decision-making process, and not offhandedly.

My choice of nuclear policy as a reflection of a state's security policy is far from accidental. Nuclear capability is "the captain's weapon". Importantly, the same cannot be said for other unconventional weapons, such as chemical or biological weapons, which are not political "power multipliers". Therefore, a state's attempt to secure military nuclear capability is akin to its attempt to deal with its security dilemma. Consequently, analyzing its nuclear policy, together with other important spheres of its security policy, may shed light on how it addresses its security dilemma in the contemporary international system.

---

[3] Scholars have tried to open the "black box". Scott Sagan focused on the effect of bureaucracy on policy; see Scott Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search for the Bomb", *International Security*, Vol 21, No. 3 (Winter 96/97). See also Donald Mackenzie, *Inventing Accuracy: A Historical Sociology of Nuclear Missile Guidance.* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990; and Steven Flank, "Exploding the Black Box: The Historical Sociology of Nuclear Proliferation", *Security Studies*," Vol. 3, No. 2 (Winter 93/94), pp 259-294.

[4] Jervis, p 118.

Theoretical Infrastructure: Perception and Nuclear Policy

What is the role of perception in a state's choice of a certain security path? Is nuclear policy determined by an objective overview or, as the great German philosopher Nietzsche once wrote regarding the absence of "objective truth",[5] by a subjective overview?

Robert Jervis (1976), in his pioneering work on states' perceptions, claimed that even when we know what a state's interests are, we do not necessarily know how it perceives its environment or selects the best route to its goals.[6] T.V. Paul (2000), who focused on the security choices made by states in deciding whether or not to pursue a nuclear path, assumed that a state would make such a decision based on its perception of the environment and the regional balance of power. He believed that states occupying the same regional system were likely to act similarly toward the same regional threats.[7]

States that wished in the past, for various reasons, to maximize their security by obtaining the ultimate weapon, have chosen to interrupt and even abandon nuclear development. However, other, smaller states – true "exceptions" – have chosen to proceed with nuclear arms development. In other words, the realistic approach to constant security maximization finds nuclear rollback preferable to nuclear development, and may even see the latter as undermining a country's security. Indeed, it may be claimed that, to a certain extent, such countries have relinquished ultimate security in favor of relying on the international system.

It is my understanding, however, that members of the international community cope with the dilemma of security dynamically. In other words, any choice by any state, strategic though it may be, is changeable and subject to that state's external and internal constraints, which may at any time force it to change paths.

A state that is experiencing a security dilemma may view its regional and international environment first and foremost through the prism of defense interests, even though it may not constantly strive for maximum security. The objective of maximum security, tempered by the need to minimize both political and economic costs, may be termed "soft" realism.

---

[5] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 493. The inherent problem that might occur here is about the author perception. Is it objective? Nietzsche's solution was "for the purpose of preserving beings such as ourselves, such judgments (synthetic a priori judgments) must be believed to be true; although they might of course still be false judgments! Therefore, we humans need to act as if we are certain of what we are doing even though we cannot be certain.

[6] Jervis, p 18.

[7] T.V. Paul, *Power Versus Prudence: Why Nations Forgo Nuclear Weapons*. Montreal: McGill- Queen's University Press, 2000, p 22.

This type of realism assumes that while a state may wish to maximize its security, it will also wish to do so at the least cost to itself socio-economically and politically. Therefore, it will constantly (subjectively) assess its environment through a prism that includes not only defense, but also internal economic, political, bureaucratic, and social considerations, as well as normative international considerations.

Nuclear Policy and the International System

The starting point of classic realism is that members of the international community inhabit an essentially anarchic system, wherein each state strives for maximum security. The race for security is the cause of the security dilemma, in which all states are involved in a zero-sum security game: That is, one country's security is another's insecurity. This impels each state to balance its security vis-à-vis that of the others in the system, by constantly pursuing military capabilities.[8]

When states seek to increase their ability to defend themselves, they get both too much and too little: Other states, feeling menaced, may increase their own arms, thereby reducing the first state's security. Unless the requirements for offense and defense differ in kind or amount, a power status quo will assume a military posture, which resembles that of an aggressor. This makes it nearly impossible for other states to infer from the first state's military force or preparations whether it is indeed aggressive. States therefore tend to assume the worst, and to assume that another state's intentions are co-extensive with its capabilities. In other words, they assume that a powerful state will do what it can do to harm them (or will if it gets the chance). Therefore, to be safe, a state should arm itself with as many weapons as it can afford.

However, since both sides obey the same imperative, attempts to increase one's security by standing firm and accumulating more arms is ultimately self-defeating. With hindsight, decision-makers may recognize the undesired and undesirable effects of their actions. Lord Grey, the British Foreign Secretary before World War I, realized this as he looked back over the diplomacy of his period:

"The increase of armaments, that is intended in each nation to produce consciousness of strength, and a sense of security, does not produce these effects. On the contrary, it produces a consciousness of the strength of other nations and a sense of fear.

---

[8] A.F.K Organski, *World Politics.* NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Second Edition 1968, pp 313-335.

Fear begets suspicion and distrust and evil imaginings of all sorts, till each Government feels it would be criminal and betrayal of its own country not to take every precaution, while every Government regards every precaution of every other Government as evidence of hostile intent".[9]

This has important implications for the way states approach nuclear capabilities. The analytical and political approach that was common during the postwar years, as the American-Soviet nuclear arms race was gaining momentum, was that many states would seek to join the nuclear arms race in order to ensure their security. President John F. Kennedy even predicted, somewhat apocalyptically, that within the next 25 years, dozens of nations would possess nuclear capability.[10] Reality proves, however, that most members of the international system have made a profoundly different choice (see Table 1).

Table 1: The Nuclear Status of Members of the International System[11]

Never Attempted	Possessing	Still Attempting	Attained but Abandoned	Attempted but Rolled Back
(?)	China, France, Russia, US, Britain India, Pakistan, **North Korea,** Israel (?)	**Iran**, Algeria Iraq (up to 2003)	Belarus, Kazakhstan, South Africa, Ukraine	Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Japan, Norway, Yugoslavia, **Libya**, Switzerland, Italy, Australia, Indonesia, Germany, Holland, Romania, Taiwan, South Korea, Sweden, Egypt (?)

[9] Edward Grey, *Twenty-five Years*, Vol. 1. London: Hodder and Staughton, 1925,p. 92. Quoted in Jervis, p 65.

[10] Quoted in Albert Carnesale, Paul Doty, Stanley Hoffmann, Samuel P. Huntington, Joseph S. Nye, Jr. and Scott Sagan, *Living with Nuclear Weapons*. Cambridge. Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983. p 215.

[11] Based on Ariel E. Levite, "Never Say Never Again", *International Security*, Vol 27, No 3 (Winter 2002/03), p 60.

What Motivates Nuclear Rollback?

The study of nuclear rollback has largely identified similar motives for a state's decision to arm itself or to abandon its military nuclear project. Various studies have analyzed a range of factors affecting nuclear rollback in the international system; all of them suggest a "devaluation" of all or some of the following relevant factors:[12]

1. The external defense environment has changed in favor of the state in question, or other security alternatives have emerged (peace agreements, alliances, etc.).

2. Changes have occurred in internal security and/or in economic policy (moving from a centralist to a market economy).

3. Changes have occurred in normative defense policy, including changes in access to nuclear weapons, and/or changes in international weapons control norms.

Despite the literature in this area, however, scholars disagree on the relative weight of each of these factors in a state's decision to rollback its nuclear program. Their disagreement revolves not only around the extent of any given factor's influence on nuclear policy, but also around the nature of any given factor in the country under study, which of course differs in each case. For example, it is difficult to establish which of the following is more influential in a state's decision to attain nuclear capability: the scientific community, the military-industrial complex, or the political system.

This difficulty is compounded by the impact of regime type, economic policy, geo-strategic location, international norms, or any other factor influential in a state's decision to embark on a nuclear program in the first place. Many analysts therefore assume that nuclear policy is never motivated by any one single consideration, but rather by several factors. Consequently, the relative weight of a state's decision to start or abandon a nuclear program depends on the peculiarities of each case.

Nevertheless, it is commonly agreed that the defense motive plays a relatively dominant role. This motive, or consideration, may be broken into sub-elements, such as the nature, scope and frequency of security threats. In fact, the CIA has recently assessed that it is "political motives, more than economic and/or technological motives, which prevent most countries capable of developing nuclear weapons from doing so"; this indeed seems true.[13] According to this approach, the latter motives have no significant influence on the rate of development, management, or effectiveness of a national nuclear project.

---

[12] See also Mitchell Reiss, *Bridled Ambitions: Why States Constrain Their Nuclear Capability*. Washington, D.C: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995; Mitchell Reiss, *Without the Bomb: The Politics of Nuclear Nonproliferation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988; and Barry R. Schneider and William L. Dowdy (eds.), *Pulling Back from the Nuclear Brink: Reducing and Countering Nuclear Threats*. London: Frank Cass, 1988.

[13] Quoted in Levite, p 74.

Conversely, both among researchers of nuclear rollback and among those analyzing states' initial motives for starting a nuclear program, there are some who believe that economic, internal security, internal politics and prestige factors affect the decision in question no less than does any actual or perceived external threat. Some scholars emphasize the importance of economic factors, and view them as a significant restraining force, alongside the influence of the defense environment. Others stress internal political considerations. They believe that three types of player are active in a state: the nuclear energy establishment; the military establishment; and the politicians who support the possession of nuclear weapons. A coalition of these players is believed to lead a state's nuclear policy, regardless of its perceived security needs. Scott Sagan has even claimed it possible that these players make cynical use of security threats in order to affect a state's nuclear policy.[14]

Beyond the empirical difficulty of describing decision-making processes, especially on such a sensitive issue, positing internal politics as the major force affecting a state's nuclear policy is not without its problems.[15] Clearly, both totalitarian and democratic countries have attempted to develop nuclear weapons. It is nevertheless possible for a regime change to lead to a change in national security elements and nuclear policy. Primarily, regime change can change how a state perceives threats against it, and this in turn can lead to a change in its nuclear policy. This is illustrated by the case of South Africa.[16]

Prestige has also featured in attempts to shed light on states' motives for initiating nuclear programs. Sagan called prestige "nuclear symbolism", and suggested that possessing nuclear weapons might play a (perceived) symbolic role in shaping a state's self-image and international image. According to this approach, a state's decisions are not dictated by broad and complex considerations, but rather by the consideration of image alone.

---

[14] Scott Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of the Bomb", *International Security*, Vol 21, No 3 (Winter 96/97), pp 54-86.

[15] See also Donald Mackenzie, *Inventing Accuracy: A Historical Sociology of Nuclear Missile Guidance*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990; and Steven Flank, "Exploding the Black Box: The Historical Sociology of Nuclear Proliferation", *Security Studies*, Vol 3, No 2 (Winter 93/94), pp 259-294.

[16] See also Peter Liberman, "The Rise and fall of the South African Bomb", *International Security*, Vol 26, No 2, (Fall 2001), pp 45-86.

For example, following World War II, France did not face any conceivable threat and was protected, albeit unwillingly, by NATO's nuclear umbrella. However, President de Gaulle thought that French nuclear capability should be taken for granted, in view of its self-image as an international superpower.[17]

What has affected the choices made by Libya, North Korea and Iran regarding the above? What is the role of perception in their choices? The next section focuses on the external factors affecting these nations' nuclear policy, in an attempt to understand their concept of national security and hence to explain what happened in 2003, which was a year of change.

Nuclear Rollback: The Libyan Case

Perceived Threat: Primary Considerations

Libya's conception of threat originates first and foremost in its objective situation. Libya's huge territory constitutes a major part of the Maghreb region, most of which is desert and does not allow extensive settlement.[18] This is a key factor in understanding Libya's subjective perception of threat. The tribal state with its different elements is an essential part of Libya's perceived threat, as it tries to monitor any external influence on its stability and tribal groupings. It is the combination of this factor with that of Libya's self-image of its regional and international status which underpins its perceived threat.

Libya's perceived threats are not many. Recently, the main threat has come from the east: Israel, its main and "traditional" opponent. The Libyan response to the Israeli threat, perceived until a few years ago to be a potential existential threat, included the buildup of asymmetric capabilities, such as unconventional weapons and logistic and economic support for Palestinian terrorism. Until recently, Libya's consistent position regarding Israel's right to exist had been unwaveringly negative.

---

[17] In a letter to President Eisenhower in 1959, de Gaulle wrote: "A France without world responsibility would be unworthy of herself, especially in the eyes of Frenchmen…It is for that reason that she intends to provide herself with an atomic armament. Only in this way can our defense and foreign policy be independent, which we prize above everything else" (Sagan, pp 79).

[18] Dirk Vandewalle, *Libya since Independence: Oil and State-building*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998, p 122.

It had also stressed, on numerous occasions, the need for Israeli Jews to return to their countries of origin, expressing profound hostility toward Zionism and the State of Israel.[19] The perceived threat from the United States, which has clear military superiority over Libya, increased with time, becoming an existential threat to the survival of its regime. The threat from the US was present as early as 1973, when Washington imposed a variety of economic sanctions against Libya, including banning military and oil trade with it. Although these sanctions were moderated from time to time, most of them remained in force. In 1986, Libya's fear materialized when the US bombed several military bases in Libya, as well as the residence of its leader, Mu'amar Qaddafi, using some one hundred aircraft. Several dozens were killed in the bombing, including Qaddafi's daughter.[20]

Libya regards most of its neighbors in the region as satellite countries, subject to its political authority. Libya's perceived threat from within the region focused on Egypt, which it saw as a "traditional" opponent, due mainly to a struggle for regional hegemony and leadership of the Arab world. However, this rivalry never affected the "special" tie between the two countries, which was based on the personal relationship between Qaddafi and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak – a combination of mutual suspicion and respect.

Winds of Change: Libya and Africa

> "Libya is right in turning its face towards Africa. Nobody can gainsay that or argue about it, since it is a truth compelling itself on us all. You are part and parcel of Africa, your destiny and Africa's are one. At the same time, you are part of the Mediterranean, your destiny and the Mediterranean's are one."
> Mu'amar Qaddafi, March 2000

The late 1990s saw the beginning of a strategic change in Libya. Libya had been perceived by the West as a country that supported terrorism since the 1970s, and has since been defined by the US as being part of the "axis of evil".

The suspension of UN sanctions in 1999 and the removal of the many financial limitations that had crippled the Libyan economy led to the easing of political limitations, which had also burdened the country for many years. Their removal may be attributed to the very recent transformation in Libya's defense policy.

---

[19] Tim Niblock. *"Pariah States" and Sanctions in the Middle East: Iraq, Libya, Sudan*. Boulder Co.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001. p 25.

[20] Libya was still included (as of 1979) on the American list of countries that support terrorism.

In recent years, the focus of Qaddafi's regional policy began to shift to the African continent, although Libya nevertheless continued to play an active role in the Arab world, maintaining and promoting its ties with most Arab countries. This new trend of increased emphasis on Africa was part of Tripoli's far-reaching pretense of leading the continent, as reflected in statements by its political leadership. The reason for this shift seems to be Libya's realization that the Arab world is not conducive to fulfilling Qaddafi's ideological yearning to create a new world order. It was therefore only by buttressing his position as the African continent's leader that Qaddafi could promote his objectives vis-à-vis the West.

Qaddafi's dream of uniting the African continent, and his new emphasis on directing his gaze southward, were part of a general turn-of-the-century trend in Libya, which was probably motivated by Qaddafi's ambition to lead a consolidated electoral and economic force capable of confronting the consolidated forces of Europe and North America, and to be on a par with an international body such as the UN. It seemed that Qaddafi sought to change the African continent's status from that of the so-called Third World to one of being a worthy opponent of the developed nations. Qaddafi also wished to relieve Africa of its dependence on the West.

National Security Policy

> "Why does Qaddafi throw down his rifle?! How can a fighting soldier throw his weapon down?! Because Qaddafi will seem as a foolish terrorist if, after his enemy has been beaten, he continues to fight. We have won, and therefore we call for peace, negotiations and cooperation, reparations, and working for the common good out of mutual respect."
> Mu'amar Qaddafi, September 2000

Why has Libya abandoned its nuclear program? Various studies have attempted to address the motives for Qaddafi's dramatic announcement of December 2003, that Libya would abandon its nuclear and long-range missile programs. The following have been suggested:[21]

1. The collapse of the Soviet bloc left the US as the sole superpower in the international system, forcing Libya to adapt and adjust itself to the latter's wishes.

---

[21] Comprehensive research on this issue was conducted by Bahgat Gawdat, "Oil, Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Libyan Diplomatic Coup", *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, winter 2004, pp 373-394.

2. Libya's new emphasis on the African continent came at the expense of the Arab world and the Israeli-Arab conflict, and meant a suspension of support for Palestinian terrorism.

3. Qaddafi's abandonment of the nuclear project was a direct consequence of the American invasion of Iraq, and grew out of his fear that Libya would become the next target.

4. The need to maintain internal security and deal with the regime's own Islamic opposition, as well as the acute need for economic reform, dictated a change in Libya's national priorities and led to increased emphasis on socio-economic development.

5. Libya's economy, which is almost entirely dependent on oil income, was deteriorating.

As this list shows, Libya's motives for abandoning its nuclear program are more complex than meets the eye; each factor must have played some role in prompting Libya's rollback of its nuclear program. Technologically, it seems that Libya found it difficult to complete its programs and achieve independent, unconventional capabilities. It is therefore possible that Libya reasoned that it would be unable (even with external help) to complete its programs within the time frame necessary to provide it with an insurance policy against an actual American strike.

What changed in Libya's defense policy in the late 1990s, and why? The strategic political move made by Libya as it turned its back on the Middle East and its face towards Africa set many processes in motion. Libya's defense policy become tailored to the new political reality it created – a reality in which the more distant perceived threats seemed smaller, with a concomitant increase in emphasis on internal and more proximal threats.

Above all, the change was reflected in Libya's suspension of its military nuclear program, initially planned against those distal threats, now seen as anachronistic. In fact, the talks it initiated in the context of that critical move, and its new openness to the West, meant a complete turn-around in its defense policy. Several of its major threats were immediately removed – mainly, that posed by the United States.

When Tripoli reassessed the new threat map after its nuclear disarmament, and to a great extent even beforehand, it no longer perceived Israel as its secondary existential threat. Accordingly, Qaddafi's son, Seif El-Islam, stated in 2004 that Israel no longer constituted a threat to Libya.[22]

---

[22] Seif El-Islam claimed that, until recently, Israel was indeed a threat, but that "things have changed" – the Palestinians no longer want military aid, but rather prefer political aid, such that "the Arab-Israeli conflict is no longer Libya's concern after the Arabs have chosen peace". He nevertheless stressed that "Libya will not recognize or negotiate with Israel", and called upon Israeli Jews of Libyan descent to return to Libya and "give up the lands taken from the Palestinians".(*El-Zaman*, March 23, 2004).

Although Tripoli has yet to recognize Israel, its statements and the adjustment of its defense policy to proximal threats (Islamic opposition and terrorism) reflect a radically new threat perception, in which Israel plays an increasingly minor role.The reduced Israeli threat is probably part of Qaddafi's general view of the Middle East, and especially of the Arab regimes' attitude toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the years. He continues to distance himself from the Middle East and even acts as a "rogue" leader, antagonizing other countries in the region. He frequently disparages other Arab regimes, stating that they are stagnant due to their exclusive concern with private interests, rather than with those of the "Arab nation".[23] Libya's new defense policy introduced a series of changes in priorities.[24] In recent years, it seems the Libyan regime has focused increasingly on internal affairs as an integral part of its new defense concept. This is reflected by Libya's struggle with internal threats – including Islamic opposition and terrorism, illegal immigration into Libya and from Libya to Europe, and increasing public disapproval of the economic situation.

Thus, the forces of change have gained in strength in Libya. These are led by Seif El-Islam, one of the main promoters of the new disarmament dialogue with Britain and the US, and Prime Minister Shukri Ghanem. It also seems that there is considerable support for further reform. At the same time, Qaddafi has been careful to limit and adjust reform to suit his own needs; he continues to bolster his centralist-totalitarian regime, preventing any true political reform and keeping a close watch on the media, while presenting his regime as the epitome of "popular democracy". Today, the Libyan regime continues to cope mainly with challenges to its internal stability, although these are not really perceived as existential threats; in fact, no truly organized political opposition can now seriously threaten it. These challenges include Islamic militancy, crime and illegal immigration, and the largely paradoxical fear of Western cultural influence. They also include pockets of resistance to Qaddafi's new pro-Western policy from within traditionally supportive forces, such as the "old guard".[25]

---

[23] Seif El-Islam stated that Libya is destined to distance itself even more from "the so-called Middle East", having decided to promote a comprehensive policy of reform instead of the "no longer necessary" continued investment in the military sector (*Libyan News Agency*, October 13, 2004).

[24] This was well illustrated in the area of military procurement. After announcing that it would abandon its nuclear program, Libya also announced that it would discontinue any military or economic cooperation with countries identified with the proliferation of unconventional weapons, and that it would no longer trade in missile technologies with countries that hadn't signed international anti-proliferation treaties – namely Iran, North Korea and Syria (*Libyan News Agency*, May 13, 2004). On the other hand, it expressed its wish to procure from the United States 22 aircraft for civilian purposes (*Reuters*, June 17, 2004).

[25] The regime has largely been successful in its struggle against terrorism, relying on its traditional foundations (the loyalty and effectiveness of security organizations; forcefulness against those identified as opposed to the regime; a delicate balance of power in top political ranks; and effective information campaigns) to prevent any threat to its centralist nature.

Nuclear Deterrence: North Korea

The American Threat

> "{North Korea} will build up its nuclear weapons arsenal in order to protect the ideas, the system, the freedom and the democracy chosen by its citizens…"
> North Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs, February 2005[26]

Why did North Korea initiate its nuclear project? Scholars attempting to analyze its motives have suggested the following:[27]

1. Deterrence against the United States. North Korea began seeking nuclear capability in the 1950s to meet its goal of developing appropriate responses to American military capabilities, which were positioned at Pyongyang's doorstep. America's recent occupation of Iraq, and North Korea's inclusion by the US in what President Bush deemed "the axis of evil", reinforced Pyongyang's motivation to deter Washington from acting against it.[28]

2. Maintaining a balance vis-à-vis South Korea's conventional power.

3. Self-reliance. As part of North Korea's autarchic defense policy, and particularly in view of the political developments in China and the (former) Soviet Union, which were its allies, North Korea's leaders have sought independent defense capabilities.

4. Global prestige. According to this perspective, Pyongyang also initiated a nuclear program to increase its prestige internationally, and to focus world attention on it and its interests.

5. Advancing technology and science. Finally, some believe that one of North Korea's motivations in developing nuclear capability was that such a project, which would be based on the country's own technological and scientific abilities, infrastructure and resources, would ensure international recognition of these abilities.

As noted, the first motive for North Korea's nuclear program was a perceived immediate nuclear threat from the US. During and after the Korean War (which lasted from 1950 to 1953), the US threatened to use its nuclear weapons to deter both Chinese and North Korean aggression. This American frame of mind was conceived by former President

---

[26] North Korean News Agency: www.kcna.co.jp.

[27] See a detailed analysis by Michael J. Mazarr, *North Korea and the Bomb: A Case Study in Nonproliferation*. New York : St. Martin's Press, 1995, pp 25-28.

[28] Roger Dingman, "Atomic Diplomacy during the Korean War," *International Security*, Vol 13, No 3, (Winter 1988-1989), pp 60-86.

Dwight D. Eisenhower as the New Look: American nuclear deterrence against both the Soviet Union and China would substitute for conventional power. Later, Eisenhower formulated the Massive Retaliation Doctrine, according to which any Soviet military move would be countered by maximal nuclear response, even in the context of regional conflict (such as that in Korea).

After the Korean War, the US continued to pose a clear and immediate threat to North Korea, particularly following the introduction of tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea, in what the Americans saw as a response to increasing violation of armistice agreements by Soviet expeditionary forces stationed in North Korea.[29]

In subsequent years, the US deployed additional nuclear weapons systems to South Korea, including nuclear cruise missiles with a range of up to 1,100 kilometers in 1959, and cruise missiles with a range of up to 1,800 kilometers in 1961. Nuclear mines were later deployed, as well.

Like leaders of other countries in the region that had no nuclear response to the American threat, North Korea's Kim Il Sung made a determined effort to achieve nuclear capability. In 1963 he stated, "we must strengthen our country…in order to defeat those who have the atomic bomb, although we do not".

At the same time, tensions were mounting in the region between China and the Soviet Union, partly due to ideological rivalry. North Korea, torn between the two and reliant on both, saw the crisis evolving between these two giants as a threat to its vital interests and a testimony to its weakness and vulnerability, should it continue to rely on them. The acute need for strategic deterrence capability – not only to protect its interests but also to reduce its dependence on its allies – thus became a political, as well as a military, necessity. As North Korea continued to receive Soviet military aid following the evacuation of Chinese troops in 1958, Pyongyang sought to remain neutral during the Sino-Soviet conflict; in the early 1960s, Kim Il Sung even signed separate, mutual defense treaties with both China and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, in 1962, he decided to emphasize North Korea's alliance with China, following what he perceived to be the Soviet Union's weakness in managing crises in Taiwan and, particularly, Cuba. That same year, Kim Il Sung even publicly supported China in its war against India.

This dovetailed with growing recognition of the necessity of self-reliance, which was formally deemed the essence of North Korean defense policy.

---

[29] The United States positioned 280mm nuclear artillery shells and short-range nuclear missiles in South Korea. See www.nti.org for information on US-North Korean relations during and after the Korean War (1950-1953).

Kim Il Sung's biographer, Suh Dae Sook, stated that Juche, or North Korean political self-reliance, represented the leader's attempt to "form a North Korean identity as a counterbalance to Soviet influence". Juche also has a military element: Jawi, or military self-reliance. According to Suh, this means that "each country must create its own military force, without relying on others".[30]

The South Korean Threat

After the war and the reconstruction of South Korea, the US started building up the South's military forces, so that by the early 1970s, these were clearly superior to those of the North.[31] In response, in December 1962 North Korea announced an "equilibrium" policy vis-à-vis the South, and began spending about one-third of its budget on military buildup, and particularly on the creation of an independent arms industry.[32]

The North Korean regime imagined that, along with conventional military buildup, its southern neighbor was also developing a nuclear program. Why was this the case? According to some scholars, Seoul itself faced a security dilemma: a threat to its vital defense interests, engendered in part by the US's intention of evacuating its expeditionary force from South Korea. This threat first became apparent with the American withdrawal from Vietnam in the early 1970s, which the South Koreans viewed as overall US disengagement from Southeast Asia. Fear of the threat gained momentum when then-President Richard Nixon began negotiating for partial American withdrawal from South Korea.[33]

South Korea not only had the motive to initiate a military nuclear program, but also the ability to do so, as it already possessed an impressive nuclear infrastructure for civilian purposes. Much like its northern neighbor, Seoul took several steps in the direction of developing a nuclear arsenal. The US probably learned about its ally's plans only a short time after the Indian nuclear experiment of 1974. Later that same year, the Washington Post quoted South Korea's president as stating that Seoul was indeed capable of "developing nuclear weapons, but would refrain from doing so as long as the American military presence continues".[34]

---

[30] Suh Dae Sook, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, p 143.

[31] Ibid, p 127.

[32] Ralph N. Clough, *Embattled Korea: The Rivalry for International Support*. Booulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987, pp 48-49.

[33] Mazarr, pp 25-28.

[34] Robert llette, "US Squelched Apparent S. Korea A-Bomb Drive," *Los Angeles Times*, .04.11.78, quoted in Mazarr, p 27.

In response, the US threatened to suspend economic aid and even insisted that Seoul sign an additional agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to ensure that its nuclear plants be used for peaceful purposes alone. South Korea eventually did abandon its nuclear program, but only after ensuring its original objective: continued American military presence.[35]

The 1980s saw no improvement in North Korea's geo-strategic situation, as it felt isolated in its regional environment: trapped in the conflict between China and the Soviet Union, isolated by the improved relationship between China and the US, and within proximity of a major American satellite to the east, Japan. Neither was the presence of some half a million American soldiers along its southern border conducive to its sense of security. This was attested to by what a representative of the North Korean regime had told an Italian delegation that visited the country a decade earlier: "If we make a wrong move, we face destruction or sellout".[36]

At the Crossroads: Iran and the Bomb

National Security Conception: The Systemic Level[37]

From Genghis Khan's occupation of Persia in the 13th century to the Allies' occupation of modern Iran during the World War II, Iran's concept of national security was dictated by fear for its very existence. This is also true in the post-Khomeini era.

Prior to the Islamic Revolution, the citizens of modern Iran knew ups and downs in their personal security. Persia's history and violent regional environment led modern-day Iran to devise a complex defense policy, which was rooted in its history and designed to serve its main objectives: protecting its territorial integrity, and ensuring the regime's survival.[38]

---

[35] Perhaps this should serve as a lesson to North Korea in its talks with the US. For more on the South Korean case, see Taewoo Kim, "South Korea's Nuclear Dilemmas," *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol 16, No 2 (Summer 1992), pp 258-259, and Joseph Yager (ed.), *Nonproliferation and US Foreign Policy*. Washington, D.C: The Brookings Institution, 1980.

[36] Mazarr, p. 51.

[37] Based on the author's article, "Iranian Nuclear Policy: Rationale, Objectives and Modus Operandi", *Ma'arachot 399*, (February 2005), pp 36-40 (published in Hebrew).

[38] The Iranian Revolution saw the worldwide dissemination of Shi'ite values ("exporting the revolution") as a primary objective, with the intention of eventually forming a super-national theocratic regime.

The ousting of the Shah in 1979 changed Iran's priorities, at least for the subsequent first ten years: It made the survival of the new Islamist regime and the promotion of Islamic revolutionary values Iran's top priorities, to the relative exclusion of its interests as a nation-state. This actually weakened Iran's national security, as the mobilization of the new revolutionary state's resources to advance ideological objectives, such as "exporting the revolution" and extreme hostility to Israel, sometimes contradicted or were even detrimental to national ones.[39]

At the end of the new regime's first decade in power, however, growing nationalistic sentiment slowly overshadowed revolutionary ideology; this was similar to the trajectory of other radical revolutions in the post-colonial world. As a consequence, Iran returned to the assumptions that had traditionally informed its defense policy.

At the root of the constant dialogue between ideological interests, which were dogmatic in their approach to defense issues, and more pragmatic national interests, we find an internal conflict in Iranian policy, which predated the revolution. These were Iran's ambition to be the "Asian giant", with regional hegemony over its traditional rivals (Iraq and Israel), on one hand, and the harsh reality of Shi'ite Iran's "encirclement" by massive numbers of Sunni Muslim Arabs and history of countless defeats by more powerful enemies, on the other.[40] How could Iran's defense policy resolve these two contradictory yet inseparable elements?

The need to bridge the gap between its goals and reality, between the need for survival and the Iranian national imperative to be viewed (at least in its own eyes) as a regional superpower, impelled Iran's decision-makers to make deterrence a foundation of its defense policy. This, it was felt, would make up for its conventional military inferiority, on one hand, and project a powerful image internationally, on the other.

Khomeini's rise to power did not change the way Iranian decision-makers thought about their country's defense needs. Iran's defense requirements were further clarified by Iraq's use of unconventional weapons in the Eight-Year War (1980-1988). That war, more than anything, finally convinced Iran that conventional deterrence was not enough to prevent Iraq, or any other power, from threatening its national interests.

Thus, Teheran realized that it had to diversify its deterrence and improve its security. This it chose to do by creating an additional, unconventional dimension of deterrence, which would enable it to confront asymmetric forces from without.

---

[39] Iran's inferior army suffered a major crisis following the regime change and the long war with Iraq. It is also incapable of defending a front of some 5,000 km.

[40] Shahram Chubin, Daniel Byman, and Jerrold Green. *Iranŝ Security Policy*. CA: Rand, 2001, pp 52-58.

At first, this meant relatively limited usage of chemical weapons, which were employed toward the end of the war with Iraq. Today, Iran is trying to create a nuclear alternative as a means of strategic deterrence.

In order to understand the basis of Iran's striving for military nuclear capability, the following is an attempt to analyze its motivations and existent capabilities, by investigating the mainsprings of its concept of national security since Khomeini's rise to power.

Perceived Threats: Fundamental Considerations

Iran is a country of many contradictions, compared to its Middle Eastern neighbors. Its uniqueness is all too readily apparent: It is a Shi'ite nation isolated in a proverbial sea of Sunni Arabs; its regime is theocratic, not monarchic or socialist; it has a relatively high standard of living; it is a vibrant and democratically-oriented society surrounded by repressive regimes; it is an ancient and proud national entity; and, finally, it is an authentic nation-state among a multitude of new and sometimes artificial post-colonial entities.

Iran's national security conception is based on its geopolitics, history, population and economy. Geographically, Iran is a mountainous country; its topography has allowed it to maintain independence and develop a sovereign political system. Nevertheless, the fear of invasion and encirclement is deeply entrenched in the Iranian psyche, due to the Russian and British invasions of Iran in 1921 and 1941, respectively.

From a political-defense perspective, Iran faces three types of perceived threat: a potentially existential threat, currently posed by the US and posed in the past by Britain and the Soviet Union; a national threat to its territorial integrity, posed by Iraq;[41] and a challenge to its regional hegemony, posed by Israel, Turkey, Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Regional Threats

Throughout its history, Iran has faced multiple and diverse threats. At present, however, Iranian leaders looking at the "threat map" in Asia would not discern any true existential threat to the survival of their regime or to the country's territorial integrity.

---

[41] This perceived threat also exists today, albeit to a lesser extent.

Nevertheless, along its northern borders with the Caucasus and Central Asia, Iran is subtly competing for influence with Turkey and Russia. Apart from their cultural-religious differences, these countries are in a constant state of tension in what Iran perceives as its "backyard".

At least since the 1980s and the rise of Wahabbism (Sunni fundamentalism) in Saudi Arabia, tension has been being fueled by drug trafficking to Iran from the east. In addition, Iran has had a long history of ethnic animosity with Pakistan, in part due to that country's persecution of its Shi'ites. Moreover, Pakistan's military conflict with India, overshadowed by both countries' nuclear capabilities, has spread the fear of nuclear conflict over the entire subcontinent. Iran fears not only that any escalation in that unconventional military theater might spill over to it, but also that Pakistan still constitutes a conventional threat.

To the south, Iran has yet to resolve its conflict with the United Arab Emirates over three islands it occupies in the Persian Gulf. Concurrently, tension continues with other Gulf neighbors, particularly Saudi Arabia, over (economic) influence and control of the Gulf region.

At least until 2003, Iraq was Iran's "traditional" religious-ethnic rival. This rivalry reached a climax in the Eight-Year War, which was a constitutive event, from Iran's point of view. Following its failure to defeat Iraq, Iran has been determined to rebuild its conventional forces so as to reach a strategic equilibrium vis-à-vis Iraq.

The lessons of that war, especially Iraq's significant advantage in long-range ground-to-ground missiles and chemical weapons (used intensively in 1984 against both troops and civilians in Iran), surprised Iran, which was caught unprepared. Its anxiety became even keener when Iraq's advanced nuclear program was exposed in the aftermath of the Gulf War. This "bleeding" reality and geopolitical situation made it clear to the Islamist regime in Iran that it would have to develop an appropriate response to the Iraqi threat, in the form of both missiles and strategic weapons.[42]

The Israeli Ideological-National Threat

The Israeli threat as currently perceived by Teheran is a clear product of the Islamic Revolution. Prior to 1979, the Israeli-Iranian alliance was based on a commonality of interest vis-à-vis the Sunni-Arab majority in the region and a shared pro-Western attitude.

---

[42] This was reflected in a statement by former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani, in an interview to *IRNA* (the state news agency), in October 1988. In it, he stated that the decisive role played by unconventional weapons in the Eight-Year War had become apparent, and that consequently Iran must "arm itself, completely, with chemical, biological and radiological offensive and defensive weapons".

Following the Islamic Revolution, however, Israel – or the "Zionist Entity", as it is dubbed in Teheran – has been seen as the regime's mortal enemy, a "cancer" in the heart of the Islamic nation, a "little Satan". This purely ideological animosity is free of any history of conflict or territorial disagreement.

Iran's conflict with Israel represents a combination of its ideological and national interests: deterrence of Israel and the ability to respond to an Israeli attack, and the wish to be seen as a regional superpower. Although ideology is fundamental to Iran's perception of Israel as a threat, since Iran assumes itself to be inferior to Israel in conventional military terms, it feels obligated to develop a strategic response to this immanent threat. This preserves a dynamic and ongoing tension between the two states.

A "State of Siege": The American Threat

In the aftermath of America's war with Iraq, Iran – a proud member of President Bush's "axis of evil" – began to fear the American threat, which has loomed ever larger in Teheran since September 11th, and because it assumes itself to be militarily inferior to Israel (America's ally). This fear is grounded in the dramatic change in the geo-strategic and geopolitical reality in the region, which Iran feels is working against it. Furthermore, the American threat has became even more acute since the increased deployment of American troops in Asia and Washington's demonstrating that it is not afraid of attacking so-called rogue states in the region.

The American threat is real: Iran is geo-strategically encircled. To the north, Russia has agreed to the deployment of American (peacekeeping) troops in many countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia. This has included defense agreements that allow American troops to engage in anti-terrorism activity in the region. To the east, American troops remain active in Afghanistan, whose regime is clearly pro-American, and in Pakistan, which is also leaning increasingly toward the West. To the south, the American Fifth Fleet still patrols the Persian Gulf. Moreover, since before its second invasion of Iraq, the American Central Command, or CentCom, has been moved to Qatar. Finally and most crucially, American forces still maintain an impressive presence in occupied Iraq, to the west.

From the Iranian point of view, this threat is composed of several objectives diligently sought by Washington, including limiting Teheran's regional influence, changing its habitual (or "problematic") courses of action – mainly nuclear development and support of terrorism –

and, in the longer run, undermining the current regime's stability so as to fundamentally change Iranian society.

In fact, for more than a generation since the revolution, the American threat has

been one of the most important challenges the Islamic regime has had to face. Iran's strategic predicament, moreover, is not only a result of the American siege, but is also an outgrowth of additional interfaces that affect its defense policy, namely its involvement in the emerging regime in Iraq and its support of anti-Israeli terrorism.

Iran's Nuclear Policy: Rationale, Objectives and Courses of Action

As noted, since the revolution, Iran's concept of defense has changed dramatically. Teheran's objectives, courses of action and international image have changed from being those of a pro-Western nation to being those of a "rogue" nation. Its allies have changed, and enemies have become friends. However, its own national interests have remained paramount, even to the detriment of some ideological-religious objectives, such as the violent tendency to "export the revolution" so characteristic of the regime's first decade.

In this context, beyond the objective of ensuring its own survival, Iran's development of nuclear capability is its ticket to the regional nuclear club, whose (rather unofficial) members are the Soviet Union, Israel, India, Pakistan and Iraq. Also, as noted, nuclear capability is a symbol of political prestige, which any country would be happy to flaunt.

Beginning with the revolution and gathering pace in recent years, the Iranian race for the bomb has been part and parcel of Teheran's national security conception. Beyond its combined ideological and national rationales, it stems from a consensual defensive-deterrent conception, which has deep routes in Iranian history. Accordingly, the Islamic regime's defense policy is similar, in practice, to that of the Shah. The defensive doctrine of seeking to deter its enemies not only serves the revolution's primary objective – the Islamist regime's survival – but also ensures the survival of the country itself.

Since it has been derived from the conception of threat of all of Iran's decision-makers in recent decades, Iran's nuclear policy has been shaped by the broad range of real and imagined threats facing it. However, Iran has run into severe political difficulties, which have made the very attempt to solve its security dilemma a double-edged sword. On one hand, Iran's nuclear project may be essential to ensuring its survival, serving as a primary deterrent in an age of increasing external threat and little-concealed American ambition to topple its Islamic regime, or at least to neutralize that regime's unconventional capabilities and support of terrorism. On the other hand, Iran's nuclear project has become a major source of international pressure and threat, as well as a probable cause of any foreseeable forceful action in the future, or of international isolation, at the least.

Today, Iran is trying to maneuver among these constraints using its traditional "middle ground" policy for dealing with regional and international predicaments. It is trying to neutralize potential threats to it and win on all fronts by advancing its nuclear program

while avoiding international pariah status, like that accorded North Korea. However, the current nuclear crisis threatens to force Iran to choose between its ability to maneuver among the constraints and threats it faces, in its assessment, and American insistence on this issue.

While Iran is at the crux of its security dilemma, the choices made by North Korea and Libya are clear. Having analyzed the external influences on these states' choices, we now turn to an analysis of the economic, technological and internal security aspects of the choices made by North Korea and Libya.

Pyongyang and Tripoli: An Internal Comparative Analysis

Economic Aspects

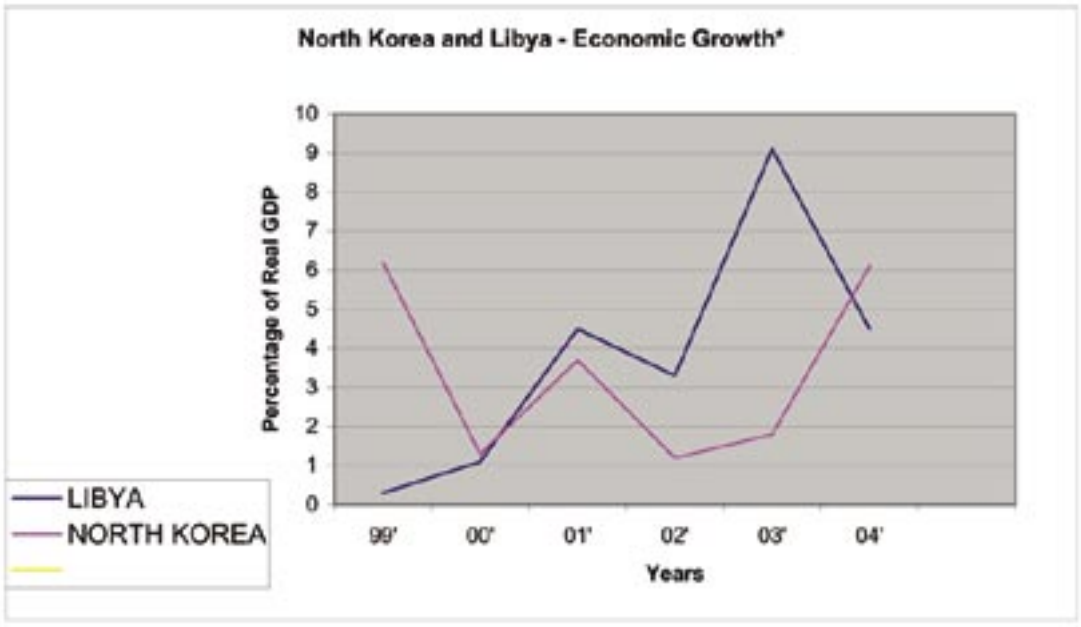
Information about North Korea's economic condition is lacking both in quantity and in quality, and relies mainly on assessments by the Bank of Korea (BOK). According to BOK figures, North Korea's gross domestic product (GDP) fell by 25% between 1990 and 2002 – an average annual drop of 2%. This was mainly true between 1990 and 1998, before the economy stabilized thanks to international aid, mainly in durable goods. Nevertheless, the economic state of North Korea is not unique. Marcus Noland (2004) studied North Korea's economy, and also compared the economic performance of a large number of countries on five continents during the 1990s. Using World Bank data, he discovered that apart from North Korea, 42 additional countries lost one-quarter or more of their annual income between 1990 and 2002.[43] These findings show that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the consequent suspension of its generous aid to North Korea triggered a significant economic slowdown during the 1990s. This was not unlike slowdowns experienced by many other states, however.

Libya also suffered economically during the late 1980s and early 1990s, especially in the oil sector, due to the continued stagnation in oil income and the sanctions imposed by the UN. Today, its economy is still almost exclusively dependent on the oil sector. In 2003-2004, Libya's economy grew gradually, reflecting recent increases in oil prices.

In fact, since the removal of UN sanctions in 1999 and the initiation of economic reforms the following year, Libyans have enjoyed a marked improvement in their standard of living.

---

[43] Marcus Noland, *Korea after Kim Jong-Il*. Washington, DC.: Institute for International Economics, 2004.



*Based on World Bank and International Monetary Fund data for 2005: www.imf.org; and Bank of Korea data for 2005: www.bok.or.kr

The diagram shows that, notwithstanding North Korea's relatively improved economic situation, thanks mainly to international aid provided in 1998, it has apparently not rethought its nuclear policy. Following the removal of sanctions against Libya in 1999, we see a clear growth trend, which continued following a rise in oil prices and internal economic reform. Ironically, we see slower growth the year that Libya abandoned its nuclear program, probably due to debt repayment and investment in long-term infrastructure, which were part of that economic reform.

Thus, these economic data make it difficult to determine whether economic considerations decided the fate of Libya's and North Korea's respective nuclear programs. Is there a link between North Korea's unrelenting nuclear policy, of whose objectives and economic effects its regime is keenly aware, and the moderate improvement in the country's economy? Conversely, can Libya's economic growth – which began a few years before its decision to abandon its nuclear program and to start negotiating with Britain and the US, and a few years after the removal of UN sanctions – be considered one of the factors that led to its crucial decision?

Advancing Technological Infrastructure

North Korea began developing its technological infrastructure, primarily in the form of heavy industry, in its earliest days. With heavy Chinese and Soviet aid, it began

developing the technological-scientific infrastructure required for a nuclear program more than 50 years ago. This aid not only supported the buildup of North Korean nuclear capability, it also included the scientific training in the Soviet Union and, later, the extensive scientific development in North Korea itself that constituted the technological basis of Pyongyang's nuclear program.[44]

Libya, on the other hand, did not develop heavy industry. However, until the 1980s, it was assisted by several European nations, which saw the economic potential of such development and hoped to ultimately reap its profits. However, most of Mu'amar Qaddafi's technological aid came from China and Pakistan.

Information that came to light after the suspension of Libya's nuclear program reveals that it spanned at least ten different sites, where American and British experts found complete centrifuges and thousands of centrifuge parts, attesting to the level of nuclear development and to Libya's reliance on black market sources to close technological gaps. Had Libya chosen to proceed with its program, these sources could have helped it reach actual military nuclear capability.

Internal Security and Regime Stability

This paper does not attempt to assess the stability of the regimes in either North Korea or Libya. However, it indicates that internal security and regime survival did underlie their respective nuclear programs. Was internal security a motive for Pyongyang's and Tripoli's nuclear policies? Although both Libya and North Korea are relatively isolated and subject to totalitarian regimes (despite Qaddafi's attempts at pseudo-democracy or North Korea's pretences as a so-called Democratic Republic), it is nevertheless possible to examine the influence of regime stability on their nuclear policies.

In North Korea, the current ruling elite has been in power since the establishment of the regime by Kim Il Sung. According to several scholars, it seems that his heir, Kim Jung Il, is in no danger of losing power. As in all postwar communist states, the source of power is the party – in this case, the Korean Workers' Party, which was founded in August 1946. Although internal rivalry characterized its early years, by the end of the 1950s, Kim Il Sung had managed to have his supporters nominated for all important party positions. In Libya, opposition to Mu'amar Qaddafi began gaining momentum in the 1980s. Primarily, this was opposition to the manifestations of Qaddafi's "revolutionary" ideology:

---

[44] Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen, "North Korea's Nuclear Program, 2005", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* Vol 61, No 3 (May/Jun 2005), pp 64-67.

totalitarianism; complete exclusion of any opposition; economic and political persecution of dissidents; and total disregard for civil rights. Cruel methods of suppression, including assassination of so-called enemies of the revolution, exacerbated relations between the opposition and Qaddafi's regime. The threat of radical Islam became more serious in the 1990s; Islamists have even accused Qaddafi of heresy. Today, Libya's regime continues to focus on challenges to its internal stability, although these are not yet perceived as authentic threats. In fact, at present, no organized political opposition challenges Qaddafi's central rule. Existing challenges include Islamic militancy, crime, illegal immigration, and the largely paradoxical fear of Western cultural influence. They also include pockets of resistance to Qaddafi's new pro-Western policy in sectors traditionally supportive of the regime, such as the "old guard". Qaddafi has been careful to limit and adjust reform to suit his needs. He continues to bolster his centralist-totalitarian regime, preventing any true political reform and keeping a close watch on the media, while presenting his regime as the epitome of "popular democracy". The Libyan case, in fact, reflects the influence of the new nuclear policy on the country's internal security, rather than the other way around. With the economic burden of its nuclear program and principal external threats removed, Tripoli has begun to direct its resources internally, to socio-economic reform and the continued survival of the regime.

Table 2: Relative Nuclear Policy Change Factors, 1991-2003

Change Factors	Libya	North Korea	Iran
Internal security	No change	No change	No change
Major changes in economic situation[45]	No change	No change	No change
Technological ability to proceed with a nuclear program	No change	No change	No change
Policy vis-à-vis international norms	Change	Change	No change
Continued international pressure[46]	No change	No change	No change
National security concept	**Change**	**No change**	No change
The quest for prestige	No change	No change	No change
Type of regime	No change	No change	No change

[45] No major deference (less then 5%) indicated between the economic statuses of the states before the "year of change" (2003).

[46] The three states have faced massive international pressure during 1991-2003.

2003: A Year of Change

Why was 2003 a year of change? Why did Libya take a different route in 2003? The North Korean case shows that the motives for nuclear policy can change over time. Having begun, most probably, as a "straightforward" response to the American threat, the North Korean nuclear program acquired additional motives later on. In time, Pyongyang realized that a well-developed nuclear program could draw world attention to its interests and, primarily, help it receive economic aid and even improve its diplomatic ties. In fact, this indeed occurred, at least for a while, with the signing of the Framework Agreement with the US.

However, North Korea's nuclear "whip" is a consequence of the perception of a true existential threat, and couldn't have come into being without it. Pyongyang's conception of threat has been with it ever since the creation of North Korea; it has merely become more complex, due to what the regime perceives as hostile intentions to topple it, perhaps as happened in Iraq. The socio-economic component of the country's motive for nuclear armament, although relevant to understanding Pyongyang's nuclear policy during the past decade, was actually an addition to the essence of that policy, which was and is, as noted, a perceived existential threat.

The strategic political move made by Libya as it turned its back on the Middle East and its face towards Africa, as it ceased supporting terrorism, and as international economic sanctions were removed, set many security processes in motion. Most of the changes that occurred, occurred because of the reality that Libya itself promoted. Nevertheless, the "direction" this reality took came from US policy and actions toward Libya.

Libya's defense policy has been adapted to this new reality, in which distal perceived threats seem ever smaller and focus is increasingly placed on internal and proximal ones. The Libyan case outlined here suggests far greater complexity than do current discussions in the literature. The removal of existential threats, as perceived by Qaddafi's regime, has led to a change in Libya's threat conception, which is no longer existential: Libya's potential adversaries still have capabilities, but they do not have any intent to cause harm.

As the subjective perception of Libya vis-à-vis external threats diminished, Qaddafi began a cost-benefit analysis of his country's nuclear policy, in view of its national interests as a whole. I define this as "soft" realism. Libya's announcement of its intention to abandon its nuclear program in December 2003 shows that the regime realized that the costs involved in proceeding with the policy outweighed the benefits of continuing the nuclear program. Since no enemy wished to harm Libya, continuing with its nuclear program would have been more harmful than stopping it.

Conclusion

New regional powers began to appear in the post-Cold War world, affecting both the general atmosphere internationally and US foreign policy. The erstwhile balance of power was replaced by regional systems.[47]

In the international system of the 1990s, new regional powers appeared, which had both the will and the power to affect their spheres of activity, and which were more or less able to ignore the preferences of the American hegemony or of international bodies such as the UN. The "re-nationalization" of political strategies became rife, after having been neglected during the Cold War due to the dominant considerations of the twin superpowers. The new regional powers thus enjoyed unprecedented opportunities to promote their international influence.

Today, both military and political power are decentralized, as a result of a more complex system revolving around regional-internal conflicts. Although these have been simmering since before the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of its defense shield have made them more prominent. Each regional system is characterized by the multiple, diverse constraints and threats that constitute each state's security environment. A similar security environment may be perceived differently by two different states, which will respond to these threats (perceived or real) as they see fit. This study shows that how each state deals with its security dilemma, and the nuclear path it charts, is dictated above all by how it perceives its external and internal system's threats.

Policy is stable, because perceptions are slow to change. Of course, a state's policies can change even though its image of other states has not. However, a major change in perception almost always brings with it a change in policy. Consequently, national interests, motives and choices can be reassessed and changed in view of shifting external threats that affect national constraints. In other words, if we can understand a state's perception over time – not just its security perception, but the whole "picture" of external and internal threats – we may be able to see most of the subjective external environment perceived by that state, and hence to understand the choices it has made. This might give us the tools to "read" the complex dilemma of each state in a given region, and then help us find the right tools to "shape" the security choice made by each state.

In conclusion, it seems that the attempt to analyze a country's defense policy and understand the motives for its national choices is not unlike the attempt to analyze any other human behavior. Research does not offer the tools to predict future behavior, nor does it pretend to be able to do so.

---

[47] Graham E. Fuller, "The Intractable Problem of Regional Powers", *Orbis* Vol 40 (Fall 1996), pp 609-622.

However, retrospective knowledge can be applied to the study of the defense policies of countries like Libya and North Korea, which have already made their choices.

Today's Iran may be likened to a person at a crossroads, who must decide which way to turn – a decision that will affect his destiny. The Iranian dilemma may be reflected in the following aphorism of Zoroaster, which describes "traditional" Iranian indecisiveness:

Neither our thoughts nor our doctrines nor our minds' forces,
Neither our choices nor our words nor our deeds,
Neither our consciences nor our souls agree.