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Iranians and the Bomb: Elite Cues and Support and Opposition to the Development of Nuclear Weapons

C. Christine Fair*
Karl Kaltenthaler*
William J. Miller*

Introduction

Iran's nuclear ambitions vex the international community, bringing the Islamic Republic into ever-sharpening conflict with the United States and its key European allies.[1] The United States, working with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the EU-3 (France, Germany, and the United Kingdom), and the European Commission, among others, has sought to increase the pressure on Iran in a variety of ways, including increased bilateral sanctions and through UNSC Chapter VII resolutions. While calls for military action were most prevalent during President Bush's tenure, President Barack Obama's initial approach of engaging the regime through diplomacy has failed to fructify, and his administration has

*C. Christine Fair is Assistant Professor at the Center for Peace and Security Studies in the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service.

*Karl Kaltenthaler is Professor of Political Science at The University of Akron and Case Western Reserve University.

*William J. Miller is Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness and instructor of political science at Flagler College.

[1] Matthew Kroenig, "Time to Attack Iran," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no.1 (2012): 76-86; Colin Kahl, "Not Time to Attack Iran," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 2 (2012): 166-173; Colin Dueck and Ray Takeyh, "Iran's Nuclear Challenge," *Political Science Quarterly* 122, no. 2 (2007): 109-110; James Lindsay and Roy Takeyh, "After Iran Gets the Bomb," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 2 (2010): 33-49.

publicly discussed punitive options.[2] Israel, an important American ally, is weighing military action in an attempt to retard Iran's nuclear program.[3] Muslims around the world, already deeply worried by the enduring Palestinian-Israeli conflict, unwavering U.S. support for Israel, and the U.S. invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, are widely suspicious of American intentions.[4] An Israeli or American attack on Iran would thus be deeply inflammatory, despite the fact that some Arab leaders bear a strong antipathy towards Iran and even support military action to prevent the Iranian regime from acquiring nuclear weapons.[5]

Given the high stakes of Iran's nuclear program, a number of organizations have undertaken polling of the Iranian public in order to assess the degree to which Iran's citizenry supports the development of nuclear weapons.[6] All of these polling efforts present only tabulations are geared to producing media headlines. They offer few if any explanatory insights about why Iranians support the development of nuclear weapons.[7] Furthermore, with one exception, noted below, the firms that do such polling work in Iran do not make respondent-level data available freely to the public and thus scholars have no recourse but to rely on their unsatisfactory analyses.

This essay hopes to advance scholarly understanding of Iranian popular support for Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons.[8] To do so, we use respondent-level data made available to our team by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA). This study uses that organization's most recent data, derived from a national survey of 710 Iranians in 2008. It aims to shed greater light on whether Iranians support developing nuclear weapons and, equally important, why they do or do not. This effort will enable analysts to discern with greater clarity the distance that exists between the regime's position on key policy questions and the views of the diverse public over which it rules.

Our analysis finds that a majority of Iranians support Iran's right to develop a full civil nuclear power cycle. There is, however, a significant minority that prefers that Iran develop a weapons capability. Curiously, when other factors are controlled, fear of the United States does not explain public support for weaponization.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, we address an important prerequisite to this query: whether or not public opinion matters in authoritarian states like Iran. We argue that it does. Next, we review the available literature on dominant elite discourse, which helps in some measure to explain why some Iranians may want their country to acquire a weapons capability. We draw several hypotheses from this literature,

[2]Helene Cooper and Mark Landler, "U.S. Eyes New Sanctions Over Iran Nuclear Program," *New York Times*, February 8, 2010; Mohamed El Baradei, *The Age of Deception: Nuclear Diplomacy in Treacherous Times* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2011); Matthew Kroenig, "Time to Attack Iran," *Foreign Affairs 91, no.1* (2012): 76-86; Colin Kahl, "Not Time to Attack Iran," *Foreign Affairs 91, no. 2* (2012): 166-173.

[3]Charles Levinson, "Israelis Debate Striking Iran Without U.S. Consent," *Wall Street Journal*, April 21, 2010; Jacques Hymans, "Botching the Bomb," *Foreign Affairs 91, no.3* (2012): 44-53.

[4]"Public Opinion in the Islamic World on Terrorism, Al Qaeda, and US Policies," *World Public Opinion*, February 25, 2009.

[5]Ian Black and Simon Tisdall, "Saudi Arabia Urges US Attack on Iran to Stop Nuclear Programme," *The Guardian*, November 28, 2010.

[6]"Global Opinion Trends 2002-2007: A Rising Tide Lifts Mood in the Developing World–Sharp Decline in Support for Suicide Bombing in Muslim Countries," *Pew Global Attitudes Project*, July 24, 2007; Dalia Mogahed, "The Battle for the Hearts and Minds: Moderate v. Extremist Views in the Muslim World," *Gallup World Poll Special Report*, 2006; "Public Opinion in Iran and America on Key International Issues," *World Public Opinion*, January 24, 2007. "Poll of Iranians and Americans," *World Public Opinion*, April 7, 2008; "Results of a New Nationwide Public Opinion Survey of Iran Before the June 12, 2009 Presidential Elections," *Terror Free Tomorrow*, June 2009.

[7]One exception is C. Christine Fair and Steven M. Shellman, "Determinants of Popular Support for Iran's Nuclear Program: Insights from a Nationally Representative Survey," *Contemporary Security Policy* 29, no. 3 (December 2008): 538-558. As the authors of that paper note, they confronted a serious technical issue, as the data they used, from the 2006 survey of Iranians conducted by the United States Institute of Peace and the Program on International Policy Attitudes, split the sample on key questions pertaining to support for the program. Fair and Shellman tested the hypothesis that those with "realist" views on foreign policy would be more supportive of developing nuclear weapons. This paper differs from the previous one in that it uses an improved sample and offers a new argument about the role of religion in shaping attitudes toward nuclear weapons.

[8]It should be stated at the outset that there is considerable debate about whether the Iranian government actually intends to acquire weapons. Iran claims that it is developing peaceful (e.g. civilian) nuclear capabilities, consistent with the rights and privileges conferred on signatories of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). Iran is a signatory of the NPT as a non-nuclear weapons state.

which we will test using our survey data. Third, we describe the data and methods employed in this survey. The penultimate section of this paper details the analytical results. Finally, we conclude by discussing several implications of our analysis.

Does Popular Opinion Matter in Authoritarian States?

An important, if ultimately unanswerable, question is whether or not Iranian public opinion matters in influencing the decisions of the authoritarian regime.[9] There are compelling reasons to believe it does. Iran's regime has invested considerable resources in securing and sustaining popular support to maintain regime legitimacy. Iran regularly conducts elections at federal and sub-national levels (although the candidates must be approved by the regime's Council of Guardians), reflecting the importance of popular attitudes on domestic and foreign policy issues. Elections at the sub-national level are less closely controlled, and thus Iranians tend to view these elections as more genuinely reflecting the public's preference.[10] The importance of the Iranian street was made evident in 2009, when widespread protests broke out following President Ahmadinejad's victory in a flawed election. While the mass gatherings initially were confined to expressing support for his reformist challenger, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, they soon transformed into the "Green Revolution," which challenged the regime's very legitimacy. In a further embarrassment to the regime, Hassan Khomeini, the grandson of Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, supports the Green Movement, as do almost all of Khomeini descendants.[11] This mobilization, which episodically resurfaces, has unsettled the government and spurred it to use ever-more coercive means of repression.[12]

As further evidence of the importance of public opinion, the regime has energetically cultivated popular support for its controversial nuclear aspirations, variously defined but usually described as developing a "full nuclear fuel cycle" rather than a nuclear weapons capability. This has been most evident during the tenure of President Ahmadinejad. He has successfully pulled the debate about Iran's nuclear policy out of the discrete purview of policy elites and into the public domain. In doing so, he has framed the nuclear issue as one of "national independence that would stymie foreign powers seeking to deprive Iran of its rightful place—as a major international and technological power."[13] By most accounts, he has been successful. Numerous polls of Iranians find that, among Iran's political elite and general public alike, there is a near unanimous belief that Iran should have a "full nuclear fuel cycle."[14] Iran's path to weaponization might resemble that of India, which maintained that it was only developing a civilian capacity up to the day in 1998 that it actually tested a weapon.[15]

U.S. policy also assumes that Iranian public opinion matters. The Bush administration explicitly sought to reach out to the Iranian public, which it believed to be amenable to regime change. In 2005, the U.S. Congress passed the Iran Freedom and Support Act of 2005, which appropriated $10 million to fund groups opposed to the Iranian government. President Bush praised the allocation of these so-called 'regime change funds' as the first step in promoting popular efforts to overthrow Iran's theocratic government and to forge a liberal democracy in its place.

More recently, Twitter (a social network that allows users to quickly pass small messages to large groups) emerged as a key tool in organizing the Green Movement demonstrations. Coincidentally, Twitter had previously scheduled a major update, which would have taken the service off-line, for a date shortly after the protests began. The U.S. State Department, in a radical departure from its usual practice, asked Twitter to delay the upgrade to facilitate further popular mobilization.[16] Regime efforts to shut down the social networking tool failed. This underscores the value of public opinion both to the regime and to outside forces seeking to mobilize the public in order to create political upheaval.

While polls of the Iranian public proliferate, there is no theoretical literature that explores how relevant public opinion is to the policy choices of an authoritarian regime. While several studies have explored the regime's likely course of action with respect to developing a nuclear

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[9]Karim Sadjadpour, "How Relevant is the Iranian Street?," *The Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2007): 151-162.

[10]"Public Opinion in Iran and America on Key International Issues," *World Public Opinion*, January 24, 2007.

[11]Babak Dehghanpisheh, "Iran's Hushed Up Civil War," *Newsweek*, June 8, 2010.

[12]Christiane Amanpour, "Iranian Protestors Defy Policy," *ABC News*, February 14, 2011.

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[13]Kayhan Barzegar, "The Paradox of Iran's Nuclear Consensus," *World Policy Journal* 26, no.3 (2009): 21-30.

[14]*Ibid*, pg 26.

[15]India first tested in 1974, but while the 1974 test gave India a "proof of concept" status and thus an existential deterrent, the results were inadequate for weaponization. Ashley J. Tellis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture: Between Recessed Deterrent and Ready Arsenal* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001); C. Christine Fair, "Learning to Think the Unthinkable: Lessons from India's Nuclear Test," *India Review* 4, no. 1 (January 2005): pp. 23-58.

[16]Lev Grossman, "Iran Protests: Twitter, the Medium of the Movement," *Time*, June 2009.

weapons capability and what factors might shape its decisions, this body of literature on state motives cannot easily be applied to the question of publics approve of or reject a policy. Moreover, there is little theoretical guidance on which polling techniques are more suitable for gauging public attitudes within highly constrained authoritarian regimes, where respondents may fear that participating in a survey or answering particular questions in specific ways will attract unwanted attention. Consequently, some firms field their surveys using phone-interviews from call-centers within or outside Iran, while others use face-to-face techniques. As discussed below, while proponents of each method tend to argue for the superiority of their approach, both have strengths and weaknesses.

Explaining Iranian Opinion on Developing Nuclear Weapons: The Importance of the Dominant Elite Discourse

As the Iranian regime contemplates the scope and goals of its nuclear program, there is every reason to believe that the policy-makers involved have weighed the pros and cons of developing nuclear weapons, taking into account all pertinent information, much of it not available to Iran's public. It is equally reasonable to assume that the Iranian public does not deliberate in the same way, if for no other reason than this information asymmetry.[17]

Myriad analyses of foreign policy attitudes have found that the public, in every country under study, is not well informed about foreign policy issues. Early studies of public attitudes about foreign policy issues argued that these mass attitudes lacked consistency and coherence.[18] Subsequent studies found that foreign policy attitudes are more structured than originally assumed, but that those attitudes are not based on highly developed models that tie complex aspects of foreign and security policy issues together.[19] These more recent studies have found that the average person is a "cognitive miser" when it comes to processing information about security policy, taking cognitive short-cuts to understanding complex issues.[20]

If the typical citizen of any country does not know much about security policy issues, how does it form its views? Public opinion researchers have argued that societal and political elites play a very large role in shaping what the public thinks about policy issues, particularly policy issues they do not understand very well. Zaller, in a seminal book on the origins of public attitudes, argues that elites play a large role in framing issues and shaping their presentation in the mass media and public discourse.[21] While this is true in a democracy, their role would be even more important in an authoritarian system, where the governing elite would have near or complete control over the media. The mass public most often assumes that the elites have better information on issues than they themselves do, and take their cues on complex issues from those whom they consider knowledgeable.[22] As Lupia argues, the more expert an elite is assumed to be on an issue, the more likely it is that citizens will follow its cues on issues that are deemed to be in the elite's realm of expertise.

Elites may use any number of arguments to garner public support for the elites' positions regarding nuclear weapons. These arguments may be based on security considerations, secular ethics, or appeals to national

[17]Shahram Chubin and Robert Litwak, "Debating Iran's Nuclear Aspirations," *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no.4 (2003): 99-114.

[18]Gabriel Almond, *The American people and foreign policy* (New York: Harcourt, 1950); P. E. Converse, *The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics*, in D.E. Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: Free Press, 1964).

[19]John H. Aldrich, Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver, Jason Reifler, and Kristin Thompson Sharp, "Foreign Policy and the Electoral Connection," *Annual Review of Political Science* 9(2006): 477-502; Peter D. Feaver and Christopher Gelpi, *Choosing Your Battles: American Civil-Military Relations and the Use of Force* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver, and Jason Reifler, "Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq," *International Security 30, no. 3* (2005/2006): 7-46; Jon Hurwitz and Mark Peffley, "How are Foreign Policy Attitudes Structured? A Hierarchical Model," *American Political Science Review 81, no. 4* (1987): 1099-1120; Michael Maggiotto and Eugene R. Wittkopf, "American Public Attitudes Toward Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (1981): 601-631.

[20]Jon Hurwitz and Mark Peffley, "How are Foreign Policy Attitudes Structured? A Hierarchical Model," *American Political Science Review 81, no. 4* (1987): 1099-1120.

[21]John Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[22]Arthur Lupia, *The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need to Know?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

pride, religion, or other values.[23] Strategically, one would expect elites to use public appeals that they think will engender public support for the elite's position on nuclear weapons, no matter the real reason the elites want to develop such weapons. It is possible that, at times, those appeals to public support are sincere, while at other times they are meant as smoke-screens for the elites' real intentions.

Since the overthrow of the Shah in 1979, the Shia clerical establishment in Iran, dominated by the Supreme Leader, has shaped the public discourse on nuclear weapons, with Islam the foundation for its stance on the development and use of nuclear weapons.[24] Is Islam inherently opposed to the development of nuclear weapons? Of course there is no mention of the nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction in the Koran or the *hadiths*. But while there is no consensus within the *ulema* (the community of clerics) on the permissibility of the development and use of nuclear weapons within Islam, a few Islamic scholars have debated the question.

Hashmi identifies three different types of Islamic views on the permissibility of developing and using nuclear weapons.[25] The most common is what he calls the "WMD jihadist" argument. Adherents of this view believe that it is permissible to develop and use nuclear weapons to defend Muslims in a defensive jihad. Nuclear weapons and other forms of WMD can be used as weapons of last resort to ensure the survival of Muslims. Another approach to nuclear weapons is what Hashmi calls the "WMD terrorist" argument. This position states that it is morally and pragmatically necessary for Muslims to acquire nuclear weapons, which can be used as weapons of first resort. They see nuclear weapons as a legitimate weapon of warfare when they are used on behalf of Islam by Muslims.

The third category of argument is what Hashmi calls the "WMD pacifists." This group argues that the development and use of nuclear weapons is forbidden by Islamic law and ethics. There are no circumstances under which the acquisition or use of nuclear weapons would be permissible. According to Hashmi, the "WMD terrorist" and "WMD pacifist" arguments are on the fringe of the debate among Islamic scholars on the issue.[26]

The governments of various Muslim-dominant countries have taken different positions on the development and use of nuclear weapons. The Pakistani government, which developed a nuclear weapons program, tested a nuclear weapon in 1998, and now has several dozen nuclear weapons, adopted the "nuclear jihadism" approach to convince its public of the legitimacy of its actions.[27] Nizamani observes that the Pakistani government has long presented itself as facing an existential threat from India.[28] In fact, in 1965, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto argued: "Pakistan is a small country facing a great monster…[who is] determined to annihilate Pakistan."[29] In 1979, Bhutto painted Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear weapons in religious and even civilizational terms:

> The Christian, Jewish, Hindu civilizations have nuclear capability along with communist powers. Only the Islamic civilization was without it, but the situation was about to change. What difference does my life make now that I can imagine eighty million of my countrymen standing under the nuclear cloud of a defenseless sky?[30]

It was Bhutto who, in the 1970s, introduced the notion of the nuclear deterrent into the Pakistani national discourse. The nuclear deterrent was described as necessary to protect Islam from Hindu India, which, successive civilian and Pakistani elites averred, wanted to destroy its neighbor. This line of argument has been deployed ever since to justify Pakistan's "Islamic bomb."[31] Thus, the Pakistani security and political elite have developed, to use Hashmi's terminology, a "WMD jihadist" argument to garner Pakistani public support for nuclear weapons as well as gain material support and legitimacy from other Muslims states. This elite

[23]Sohail Hashmi and Steven Lee (eds.), *Ethics and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Religious and Secular Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Haider Nizamani, *The Roots of Rhetoric: Politics of Nuclear Weapons in India and Pakistan* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2000); David S. Meyer, "Framing National Security: Elite Public Discourse on Nuclear Weapons During the Cold War," *Political Communication* 12, no. 2 (1995): 173-192; Nina Tannenwald, "The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-use," *International Organization* 53, no. 3 (1999): 433-468.

[24]Shahram Chubin, *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006).

[25]Sohail H. Hashmi, "Islamic Ethics and Weapons of Mass Destruction: An Argument for Nonproliferation," In Sohail Hashmi and Steven P. Lee (eds.), *Ethics and weapons of mass destruction: Religious and secular perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[26]Sohail Hashmi, "9/11 and the Jihad Tradition," In Daniel J. Sherman and Terry Nardin (eds.), *Terror, Culture, Politics: Rethinking 9/11* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

[27]Samina Ahmed, "Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons Program: Turning Point and Nuclear Choices," *International Security* 23, no. 4 (1999): 178-204; Onkar Marwah, "India and Pakistan: Nuclear Rivals in South Asia," *International Organization* 35, no. 1 (1981): 165-179.

[28]Haider Nizamani, *The Roots of Rhetoric: Politics of Nuclear Weapons in India and Pakistan* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2000).

[29]*Ibid*, pg 71.

[30]*Ibid*, pg 95.

[31]Rasul Rais, "Pakistan's Nuclear Program: Prospects for Proliferation," *Asian Survey* 25, no. 4 (1985): 458-472; of Politics, Economics, and Culture 16, no. 3-4 (2010): 77-81.

discourse seemed to find a receptive audience in much of the Pakistani public, as there has been widespread public support for the Pakistani nuclear program.[32]

Iran's ruling political elite's public stance on the development of nuclear weapons has differed significantly from that of Pakistani political elites. While the Shah had been seeking to build nuclear weapons before the Islamic Revolution removed him from power, the new leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, declared that nuclear weapons were forbidden under Islam and halted the program.[33] He repeated this position on several occasions, and it was the official Iranian government line until his death.

Khomenei's successor as Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, has made the same argument about the illegitimacy of nuclear weapons within Islamic teaching. In fact, he has even gone further, issuing a fatwa forbidding their use. IRNA, the semi-official news agency of the Iranian regime, issued the following statement in 2005: "The Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has issued the fatwa that the production, stockpiling, and use of nuclear weapons are forbidden under Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran shall never acquire such weapons."[34] Khamenei has frequently stated this position in public fora in Iran. In May 2012 he told an Iranian audience:

> From an ideological and juridical perspective, we consider developing nuclear weapons unlawful. We consider using such weapons a big sin. We also believe that keeping such weapons is futile and dangerous and we will never go after them.[35]

What is the importance of the fact that Khomenei and Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leaders and its most important voices on religion, have publicly stated that Islam forbids the development of nuclear weapons? Having the most influential cleric in the country pronounce the development of

nuclear weapons "haram," or forbidden in Islam, would likely play a large role on shaping public attitudes among a people that takes its religious identity quite seriously.[36] The more authoritative the religious figure making the pronouncement on a foreign policy issue, the more likely that his view will be adopted by many within the public, particularly if the public is prone to be receptive to religious arguments.

Increasingly, research has shown that religious arguments about security policy and other political issues do resonate in societies with significant numbers of religious citizens.[37] This is particularly true in Islamic societies where Islam has deep roots and where much of society takes its religion very seriously; and it is certainly true in Iran.

Since Ayatollah Khamenei is the supreme religious leader in Iran, he would be particularly well-positioned to be seen as a legitimate source of opinion on the matter of nuclear weapons. Even if not all Iranians like the clerical regime or cherish the thought of Khamenei as their leader, his word on matters of Islam would carry substantial weight, particularly since he follows the same line as the late Ayatollah Khomenei. Thus, we contend, those Iranians who believe that Islam forbids the development of nuclear weapons will not support Iran's development of such weapons.

Some Iranians may disagree with the Grand Ayatollah on the issue of what Islam says about nuclear weapons. They may think that Islam does, in fact allow for the development of nuclear weapons. The example of Pakistan developing its "Islamic bomb," for instance, may persuade some that Islam does sanction the development of nuclear weapons. It stands to reason that those Iranians who do not believe that Islam forbids nuclear weapons would be more willing to support their development.

But this is not the only possible explanatory model of Iranian support for or opposition to the development of nuclear weapons. It could be argued that the national discourse on Islam and nuclear weapons may not be the primary driver of Iranian views on the development of nuclear weapons. Some Iranians may focus solely on the perceived threats that Iran faces from other countries. Iranians who view the world as being an inherently

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[32]Samina Ahmed, David Corthright, and Amitabh Mattoo, "Public Opinion and Nuclear Options for South Asia," *Asian Survey* 38, no. 8 (1998): 727-744; Haider Nizamani, *The Roots of Rhetoric: Politics of Nuclear Weapons in India and Pakistan* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2000).

[33]Gawdat Bahgat, "Nuclear proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran," *Iranian Studies* 39, no.3 (2006): 307-327; Gregory Giles, "The Islamic Republic of Iran and Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons," In Peter Lavoy, Scott Sagan, and James J. Wirtz (eds.), *Planning the Unthinkable: How New Powers will Use Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

[34]Juan Cole, "Yes, MEMRI, There is a Fatwa from Khamenei Forbidding Nukes," *Informed Consent* 22 (2012); Edward Yeranian, "Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei says Islam Opposes Nuclear Weapons," *Voice of America*, February 19, 2010.

[35]"Iran's Nuclear Theology: Bomb and Truth," *The Economist*, May 19, 2012.

[36]"Khamenei: Nuclear Bombs Illegal and Haram," *Islam Times*, February 20, 2010.

[37]Jonathan Fox, "Religion as an Overlooked Element of International Relations" *International Studies Review* 3, no. 3(2001): 53-73; Shibley Telhami, "Arab Public Opinion and the Gulf War," *Political Science Quarterly* 108, no. 3 (1993): 437-452; Mark Tessler and Jodi Nachtwey, "Islam and Attitudes Toward International Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42, no. 5 (1998): 619-636; Monica Duffy Toft, "Getting Religion? The Puzzling Case of Islam and Civil War," *International Security* 31, no. 4 (2007): 97-131.

hostile place may be more likely to think that their country must develop a strong deterrent capability in the form of nuclear weapons.[38]

A related idea is that those Iranians who support the use of force to further Iran's national interests, at home or abroad, will be more supportive of the idea of developing Iranian nuclear weapons. Wittkopf[39] has argued that those who believe that use of force abroad is ethical are more supportive of the use of nuclear weapons. Iranians who have such a view of the broad legitimacy of the use of force could believe that all means of maximizing that force, including nuclear weapons, are to be developed to help Iran achieve its interests.

The following sections of this paper are devoted to exploring these ideas through empirical analysis.

Data and Methods

The data used to test the aforementioned set of hypotheses comes from a 2008 PIPA survey. PIPA fielded its survey, along with Search for Common Ground (SCG), in Iran using face-to-face surveys of 710 respondents between January 13 and February 9, 2008. Overall, the survey's margin of error is +/- 3.8%. PIPA used a multistage stratified, province-based sample. This poll builds upon a previous survey fielded by PIPA, SCG and the United States Institute of Peace. The 2008 PIPA/SCG is the best available data on Iranian public opinion on the nuclear issue. While there have been more recent surveys carried out in Iran on political issues, none of the more recent surveys available for scholarly analysis have questions relevant to nuclear issues.[40] Thus, the 2008 PIPA/SCG data is the most recent, most comprehensive, and (due to the means of collection) most reliable data set available for analysis of the determinants of Iranian attitudes toward nuclear weapons development.

While the data, collected in 2008, may seem dated, the basic issues have not changed since that time. Iran still faces the same international issues it faced in 2008 (albeit some of them with more urgency). But the Iranian government has not changed its public stance on nuclear weapons nor, from our perspective, has it changed its position that the development of nuclear weapons is forbidden by Islam. Thus, since the context of the nuclear weapons issue has not changed that much, we believe this data still gives us valid and important insights into the Iranian public's thinking on nuclear weapons. It is also highly unlikely that there will be any more public-opinion polling, with publicly available data, carried out in Iran in the near future due to the regime's sensitivity about foreigners asking such questions in a highly charged political environment.[41]

In order to test the hypotheses developed in this study and alternative potential explanations, we perform a logistic regression using data from the 2008 PIPA Iran Survey. Using Gary King's Clarify program for Monte Carlo simulations, we additionally examine first differences to determine the relative magnitude of the significant independent variables in explaining the variance in our dependent variables. This statistic lets us directly compare which of the significant independent variables has the strongest influence on the dependent variable. The number of respondents in the original sample was 710. We use a sub-sample of that, which has removed the *don't know/no response* (DK/NR) responses from the original sample. This leaves with a sample of 328 respondents for the analysis. Given the potential trepidations faced by respondents when deciding whether to answer some of the questions related to U.S.-Iranian relations and nuclear weapons, we opted to not utilize any data imputation methods. Without being able to ascertain whether respondents were genuinely acknowledging a lack of opinion or choosing to not express an opinion they hold, we believe any imputation method would potentially misrepresent the responses and cloud our analysis and findings. An analysis of missing cases can be viewed in Appendix 1.

The Dependent Variable

In order to assess Iranian attitudes towards nuclear weapons and policy, we ran a model with a dependent variable based on a question that examines Iranian attitudes toward national nuclear policy. It asks respondents: *Iran's position is that it should have a full fuel cycle nuclear energy*

[38]Paul Brewer, Kim Gross, Sean Aday, and Lars Willnat, "International Trust and Public Opinion About World Affairs," *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no.1 (2004): 93-109; C. Christine Fair and Stephen M. Shellman, "Determinants of Popular Support for Iran's Nuclear Program: Insights from a Nationally Representative Survey," *Contemporary Security Policy* 29, no. 3 (2008): 538-558.

[39]Eugene R. Wittkopf, *Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

[40]Terror Free Tomorrow conducted a poll in Iran in 2009 that asked a pair of questions about support for nuclear weapons development, but that data is proprietary and not available for analysis.

[41]Even survey groups that try to call into Iran from the outside or make calls within Iran are finding it nearly impossible to do so because of the intense scrutiny from the regime and Iranians' fear of answering sensitive questions in an environment of coercion.

program, but shouldn't develop nuclear weapons.[42] *Do you: (a) think Iran shouldn't pursue a full fuel cycle nuclear energy program, (b) approve of this program, or (c) think Iran should develop nuclear weapons.* Figure 1 shows the breakdown of responses for the dependent variable.

Figure 1: Iranian Nuclear Policy Preferences

	Iran shouldn't have full fuel cycle nuclear energy program	Approve of current policy	Think Iran should develop nuclear weapons
■ Series1	5.7	72	22.3
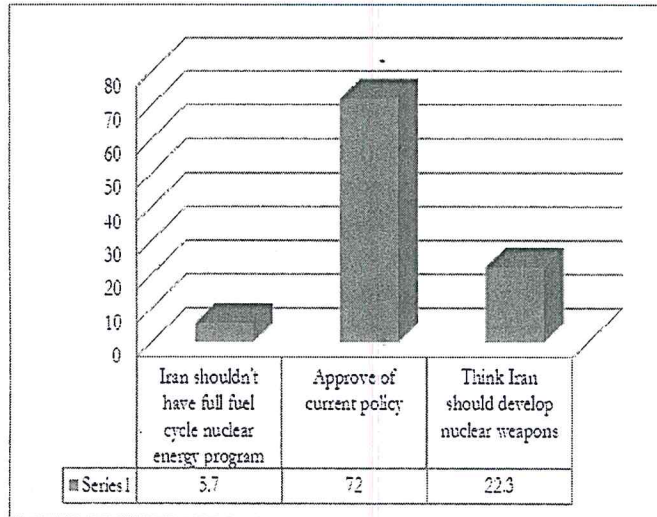
What we can gather from these results is that a majority of respondents are satisfied with the status quo. Over 70% of respondents approve of the current Iranian nuclear policy. We do see, however, that just under a quarter of respondents would like to see Iran expand its nuclear program to include weapons.

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[42]This question is problematic because the respondents are first primed with a statement about Iran's official position (e.g. developing a full nuclear fuel cycle) and then asked whether they agree with this program or support weaponization. The structure of the question may influence what respondents believe about the country's actual policy and/or bias them towards supporting the status quo position. Ideally, we would have preferred a question that simply asked respondents if they believe Iran should develop nuclear weapons, pursue a non-weaponized full fuel cycle, among other options. While we cannot ascertain the degree to which respondents' answers were affected by the question design, we are aware that the question is problematic. However, it is the only question that allows us to operationalize our dependent variable.

The Independent Variables

In light of the previous work on the Iranian public's attitudes towards nuclear policy and foreign policy in general, we examine several rival explanations within our model.

The first category of explanation focuses on an individual's sense of threat from other countries. We hypothesize that Iranians who view other countries as threats will be more likely to support the development of nuclear weapons. We also use measures that relate to physical threats to Iran. Those who believe the U.S. will attack are expected to be more likely to want nuclear weapons. Given that potential nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states are defecting from the NPT, the assumption is that individuals who convinced of the existence of many secret nuclear regimes in the world would want Iran to also have nuclear weapons. The third measure examines the perceived threat posed to Iran by the U.S. having military bases in the Middle East. Those that see U.S. military bases as a major threat are expected to want Iran to possess nuclear weapons.

The second explanatory category focuses on citizens' attitudes regarding the use of violence to further the national interest. To instrument potential attitudes on the use of violence, we employ four questions from the 2008 PIPA survey. The first variable examines the perceived benefit to Iran of providing weapons to Iraqis to use against American forces. Those that believe it is a good idea are predicted to want Iran to possess nuclear weapons, as they demonstrate that they believe the use of force is moral. The second and third variables focus on attacking American civilians either in Muslim countries or in the United States. Since we believe that views on the morality of violence will condition positions on nuclear weapons, we would assume that those who approve of attacks on American civilians in Islamic countries or in the United States are more likely to approve of the development of nuclear weapons.

We also include a variable that measures Iranian views on what the principles of Iranian foreign policy should be. Based on the logic of the use of force explanation, those individuals who want to expand Iran's influence and power will be more likely to approve of developing nuclear weapons. Those who believe that Islam either requires the development of nuclear weapons or does not prohibit such development are more likely to support a weaponization program.

In addition to the independent variables suggested by our three categories, we include controls for four variables as part of our models: education, age, gender, location of residence. Appendix 1 describes the full

operationalization of the independent variables along with providing a correlation matrix and variance inflation scores.

Results of the Analysis

The logistic regression analyses results for our model are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Logistic Regression Results

Independent Variables	Model One			Model Two		
	Coef.	S.E.	First Diff.	Coef.	S.E.	First Diff.
Provide Weapons to Iraq	.357	.290		.045	.340	
Attack U.S. Employees	.154	.191		.235	.135	
Attack U.S. Citizens	-.126	.156		-.244	.180	
Nuclear Weapons Against Religion	-.857***	.147	.299	-.968***	.171	.298
U.S. Humiliates Islam	-.149	.241		-.063	.268	
U.S. Attack Nuclear Facilities	.094	.141		.016	.165	
Secret Nuclear Programs	.399*	.172	.130	.545**	.201	.164
U.S. Base Threat	-.020	.137		.077	.156	
Iran Focus	.231	.283		.177	.317	
Education				-.396**	.150	
Income				-.367	.190	
Tehran Resident				.790*	.376	
Age				-.454**	.179	
Gender				-1.321***	.324	
Pseudo R2	.124			.229		
Log Likelihood	-167.09			-138.33		
Log Likelihood 2	47.50			82.28		
N	357			357		

Dependent Variable-Iranian Nuclear Weapons Preference

Note: Figures are unstandardized coefficients shown alongside standard errors.
*p<1   **p<.05   ***p<.01.

Model one examines just our explanatory variables while model two looks at the explanatory variables along with the controls. Both models have similar results as regards our explanatory predictors. We find support for two of three categories of explanation: threats from other countries and religious considerations. The threats from other countries category produced one significant variable (out of four). At the .05 level of significance, we find that Iranians who believe there are a large number of secret nuclear programs in the world are more likely to want their nation to also adopt nuclear weapons. Our results indicate that fears of U.S. bases in the Middle East, fears of a U.S. attack on nuclear sites in Iran, and the U.S. seeking to humiliate Islam are not significant predictors.

The morality of the use of force explanation, which included four variables in our analysis, did not prove to be a useful means of predicting support for the development of nuclear weapons in Iran. The variables that focus on providing weapons to Iraqis fighting Americans, attacking U.S. civilians working in Muslim countries, attacking U.S. civilians in the United States, and whether Iran should expand its power and influence did not yield statistically significant results.

The third category of explanation, the role of religion in shaping Iranian views on nuclear weapons development, was a powerful predictor of support for developing nuclear weapons. The question dealing with the compatibility of the development of nuclear weapons with Islam yielded a highly significant coefficient. As predicted, those Iranians who believe that Islam permits the development of nuclear weapons were more likely to support the Iranian government developing such weapons.

Four of our control variables emerged as significant predictors, which explains the difference in robustness between models one and two. We find that women, younger Iranians, Tehran residents, and less educated individuals are more likely to want Iran to move toward developing nuclear weapons. Income did not prove to be a significant predictor.

Given that we use logit, the coefficients reported in Table 1 do not represent the marginal effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables. As a result, we report the first differences of our significant independent variables in Table 1 as well. The first difference reported measures the probability of the dependent variable, signifying a desire to see Iran move toward developing nuclear weapons, as the independent variable of interest moves from its minimum to its maximum value, with all remaining independent variables held at their means. This allows us to consider the substantive significance of each independent

variable to explaining variation in the dependent variable. When looking at the model, we see that the perceived compatibility of the development of nuclear weapons with Islam proved to have the largest first difference: .299. That means that increasing the value of this variable from its minimum to maximum while holding all other variables constant creates a 29.9% increase in the probability·that the respondent would want Iran to develop nuclear weapons. The variable that measured an Iranian's views on the likelihood of other countries developing secret nuclear programs produced a first difference of .130.

Conclusions

This essay analyzed what the Iranian mass public believes about Iran potentially developing nuclear weapons. Moreover, in some measure, it explained how and why Iranians differ on these matters. We argued that the elite narrative about nuclear weapons would likely play the most important role in shaping Iranian opinions on weaponization. This narrative is a largely religious one, and it has resonated with a significant portion of the population, especially since the Ayatollahs Khomeini and Khamenei both declared nuclear weapons to be forbidden by Islam. We tested this religious-based hypothesis against a set of other hypotheses drawn from the literature about which values might shape demand for nuclear weapons.

The results of our analysis proved very instructive. A significant minority of Iranians are willing to state that they would like their country to develop nuclear weapons, but most Iranians express opposition to nuclear weapons. This set of findings, which corresponds well with previous opinion research on Iran, shows that there is a fairly strong basis of support for the Iranian government's asserted position on the nuclear energy issue.

This is important for understanding Iranian foreign policy, at least in the near term. It means that there is little downside for the Iranian government in taking an assertive stance on nuclear energy, at least as far as domestic politics are concerned. In fact, this posture may be a significant means of bolstering support for the regime. If the public is enthusiastic about the idea of Iran energetically pursuing its right to a civilian nuclear program, the Iranian government has a strong incentive to do so. This is particularly true if the international community cannot impose sanctions that tip the cost-benefit calculus in the opposite direction for the Iranian government (although this may be changing). As we know, governments will often use foreign policy issues that they know will generate support from their populace to distract that populace from domestic problems or weaknesses in the government. While public opinion is likely not driving the Iranian government on the issue of its nuclear policy, it is likely bolstering the intransigence of the Iranian government in continuing to pursue its nuclear program.

The results of our analysis of the factors that drive some Iranians to support the idea of Iran developing nuclear weapons indicate that the national elite discourse explanation proved most predictive of Iranian views on developing nuclear weapons. Specifically, the perception of the Islamic legitimacy of developing nuclear weapons in Islam is the most important factor shaping support for this policy option.

This finding has significance for our understanding of the factors that influence foreign policy opinions held by the public. In religious societies, the opinions and edicts of religious authorities can have a large impact on the positions that segments of the public take on foreign policy issues. While this may not be true in all societies, especially largely secular societies, it is potentially quite important in societies with religious publics.

While this research was able to give us important insights into how Iranians think about the development of nuclear weapons and why they hold those opinions, there is much more to be learned about the relationship between Iranian religious views and opinions on security issues. There has been a spate of recent research that has explored how particular religious views affect how individuals think about security affairs and conflict. Unfortunately the available data did not allow this study to go much beyond the specific question of the legitimacy of nuclear weapons in Islam. Scholars have explored many questions at the nexus of religion and security, such as how religious views affect perspectives on international

politics, the use of violence to protect the religion or to help others, and the legitimacy of weapons of mass destruction (beyond the Iranian context).[43]

One of the most important findings of this body of research is that the more authoritative the religious figure who takes a stance on a particular foreign policy issue, the more likely that stance is to be adopted by the religious faithful. This is clearly the case in Iran, where the chief clerics in the country came out against nuclear weapons development and most of the public seems to adhere to this view. This research seems to be one more piece of evidence that religion should be considered an important variable in many worldviews.[44]

The perception of other nations as threats proved to be the second most important explanation of the distribution of views on developing nuclear weapons in Iran; specifically, those who believe that there are countries with secret nuclear programs are more likely to support Iran's development of nuclear weapons. Still, in the Iranian case, a sense of threat was trumped as a predictor of views on weaponization by views on the religious legitimacy of nuclear weapons.

Perhaps just as important as determining what drives the demand for nuclear weapons is determining what does not condition that demand. The results of this study give no support for the hypothesis that the perceived morality of the use of violence to further the national interest conditions attitudes toward nuclear weapons.

What implications do these findings have for the policies of countries trying to halt Iran's suspected nuclear weapons program? The findings of this study seem to offer cause for some pessimism *and* optimism about Iran's nuclear program. A reason for pessimism is that it appears that, since

Iranians, in large numbers, support the government's stance on developing nuclear energy (in the face of sanctions and the threat of an Israeli strike), Iranian public opinion cannot be used to shift the Iranian government from its present intransigence regarding its nuclear weapons program. That said, a majority of Iranians do not want their government to develop nuclear weapons and believe that to do so would be to violate the precepts of Islam. As long as the top clerics in Iran stand by the position that nuclear weapons are forbidden by Islam, the majority of the mass public in Iran should continue to oppose the development of such weapons.

Appendices
Independent Variable Correlation with Don't Know/No Response Respondents

Provide Weapons to Iraq	.049
Attack U.S. Employees	.024
Attack U.S. Civilians	.057
Nuclear Weapons Against Islam	-.014
U.S. Humiliate Islam	-.011
U.S. Attack Nuclear Facilities	.016
Secret Nuclear Programs	-.039
U.S. Base Threat	-.046
Iran Focus	.032
Education	-.078
Income	-.076
Tehran Resident	-.115
Age	.072
Gender	-.292

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[43]Jody C. Baumgartner, Peter L. Francia, and Jonathan Morris, "A Clash of Civilizations? The Influence of Religion on Public Opinion of U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East," *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no.2 (2008): 171-179; Paul Froese and F. Carson Mencken, "A U.S. Holy War? The Effects of Religion on Iraq War Policy Attitudes," *Social Science Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (2009): 103-116; James Guth, "Religion and American Public Opinion: Foreign Policy Issues," In Corwin E. Schmidt, Lyman A. Kellstedt, James Guth (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); James Guth, "Economic Globalization: The View from the Pews," *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 8, no. 4 (2010): 43-48; T. G. Jelen, "Religion and Foreign Policy Attitudes: Exploring the Effects of Denomination and Doctrine," *American Politics Research* 22, no. 3 (1994): 382-410; Shibley Telhami, "Arab Public Opinion and the Gulf War," *Political Science Quarterly* 108, no. 3 (1993): 437-452; Mark Tessler and Jodi Nachtwey, "Islam and Attitudes Toward International Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42, no. 5 (1998): 619-636.

[44]Jonathan Fox, "Religion as an Overlooked Element of International Relations" *International Studies Review* 3, no. 3 (2001): 53-73.

Hypothesis Table

Hypotheses	Independent Variables
H(1): Those Iranians who view other countries as threats will be more likely to support developing nuclear weapons.	1) Which point of view is closer to yours? The U.S. mostly shows respect to the Islamic world (0), The U.S. is mostly disrespectful to the Islamic world, but out of ignorance and insensitivity (1), or The U.S. purposely tries to humiliate the Islamic world (2)? 2) How likely do you think it is that the United States will take military action against Iran's nuclear facilities in the next year or two? not at all (0), not very (1), somewhat (2), or very (3). 3) How many countries do you think have secret programs for developing capacity to produce nuclear weapons? none (0), a few (1), some (2), and many (3). 4) How much, if at all, do you think U.S. bases in the Middle East are a threat to Iran? not at all a threat (0), a minor threat (1), some threat (2), and a major threat (3).
H(2): Iranians who support the use of force to further Iranian national interests will be more likely to support developing nuclear weapons.	1) Do you think it would be a good idea or bad idea for Iran's neighbors to provide weapons to Iraqis fighting U.S. forces in Iraq? good idea (1) or bad idea (0). 2-3) Thinking about the following kinds of attacks on Americans, please tell me if you approve of them, disapprove of them, or have mixed feelings about them? Attacks on U.S. civilians working for U.S. companies in Islamic countries and Attacks on civilians in the United States. strongly disapprove (0), somewhat disapprove (1), mixed feelings (2), somewhat approve (3), strongly approve (4). 4) Which is the more important principle for Iranian foreign policy? Iran should use its power and influence in the way that best serves Iran's interests and values (1) or Iran should coordinate its power and influence together with other countries according to shared ideas of what is best for the world as a whole (0).
H(3): Iranians who are convinced that Islam permits the creation of nuclear weapons will be more likely to support developing nuclear weapons.	Is it your opinion that producing nuclear weapons is or is not against the principles of Islam? is not (0), Islam has no position on WMDs (1), is (2).

Correlations between Variables

	Provide Weapons to Iraq	Attack U.S. Employees	Attack U.S. Civilians	Nuclear Weapons Against Islam	U.S. Humiliate Islam	U.S. Attack Nuclear Facilities	Secret Nuclear Programs	U.S. Base Threat	Iran Focus	Education	Income	Tehran Resident	Age	Gender
Provide Weapons to Iraq	1													
Attack U.S. Employees	.2016	1												
Attack U.S. Civilians	.2113	.6284	1											
Nuclear Weapons Against Islam	-.0893	-.1547	-.1918	1										
U.S. Humiliate Islam	.0495	.0700	.0458	-.0157	1									
U.S. Attack Nuclear Facilities	.0730	.0790	.1540	.0436	-.0615	1								
Secret Nuclear Programs	.0730	-.0309	-.0289	-.0478	.0009	.1278	1							
U.S. Base Threat	-.0053	-.0044	-.0184	-.0329	.1077	.2685	.2084	1						
Iran Focus	-.1835	-.1063	-.0606	.0335	.0900	-.0895	.0688	.0383	1					
Education	-.2040	-.0599	-.1612	-.0035	-.0723	.1402	.0050	-.0523	-.0049	1				
Income	-.2320	-.0705	-.1411	.0146	.0027	.0066	.0360	-.0956	.0416	.2942	1			
Tehran Resident	-.1092	-.1924	-.1507	-.0074	.0469	-.1107	-.0941	-.1352	.0844	.1643	.4367	1		
Age	.0892	-.0400	.0013	.0619	.1430	-.1597	.0461	-.0268	.0289	-.0814	-.0136	-.1063	1	
Gender	-.0935	.1246	.1562	-.0822	.0835	-.0919	.0100	.0571	.0723	-.0814	.1135	.0033	.0616	1

Variance Inflation Factor Values

Variable	VIF
Attack U.S. Civilians	1.80
Attack U.S. Employees	1.75
Income	1.43
Education	1.40
Tehran Resident	1.38
Age	1.28
U.S. Attack Nuclear Facilities	1.21
Provide Weapons to Iraq	1.20
U.S. Base Threat	1.18
Secret Nuclear Programs	1.09
Iran Focus	1.07
U.S. Humiliate Islam	1.07
Nuclear Weapons Against Islam	1.05
Gender	1.05
Mean VIF	**1.28**

The Impact of the Arab Uprisings on the Gulf Cooperation Council States: The Politics of Resilience and Adaptation

Abdullah Al-Shayji*

(I)

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War over two decades ago, the world has witnessed fundamental transformation at many levels in the international system. These changes were revolutionary. "One could argue that six revolutions are dominating in what could be called the long twenty-first century. Starting in 1989, the revolution in international affairs, the revolution in economic affairs, the revolution in technological affairs, the revolution in societal affairs, the regulation revolution and finally the revolution in military affairs."[1] Henry Clement and Robert Springborg detailed the impact of these revolutions in their work on the Middle East.[2]

But none of the Arab or Western scholars and analysts anticipated the magnitude of the sweeping changes which swept many Arab republics and monarchies in 2011-13 and the power of these monumental and tectonic

*Abdullah Al-Shayji holds Ph.D. degree from the University of Texas at Austin, US. He is the chairman of the Political Science Department at Kuwait University- Kuwait. He is Associate professor of International Relations and Comparative Politics. He is specialized in the Gulf and US politics. He served as Special Political Advisor to the Speaker of the Kuwaiti Parliament and its Foreign Relations Committee from 1992-1996.

[1]Heurlin Bertel, "*The Middle East and the Six Global Revolutions*" Paper delivered at the second LAF-RSSC Second Regional Conference on the "Middle East Beyond 2012.

[2]Clement Henry, and Springborg Robert, "*Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East,*" Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition, 2010.