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PLANNING FOR UNITED STATES MILITARY
RESPONSES TO A NUCLEAR-ARMED ISLAMIST STATE
OR NON-STATE ACTOR

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF OPERATIONAL STUDIES

AUTHOR: MAJOR RAYMOND L. ADAMS, USMCR

AY 2011-12

Mentor: Dr. Wray R. Johnson
Approved: [Signature]
Date: 24 Feb 2012
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THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS SCHOOL OF ADVANCED WARFIGHTING OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ten states have developed nuclear weapons; the total global nuclear weapons inventory is approximately 20,500 warheads. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan has a robust nuclear weapons capability, and maintains close relationships with a rogue’s gallery of transnational Islamist terrorist organizations. The Islamic Republic of Iran is actively seeking a nuclear weapon. Al Qaeda has sought nuclear weapons for nearly two decades. North Caucasus-based Islamist terrorist organizations struggling against Russian suzerainty seek to commit nuclear terrorism. Radical Islamists routinely call for the destruction of the United States and would likely not hesitate to attack the homeland with a nuclear weapon. The global black market is rife with the technical skills and hardware required to develop a nuclear weapon, giving state and non-state actors seeking the bomb advantages not possible even a decade ago. Clearly the nuclear genie is out of the bottle and the question is not if, but when, an Islamist state or Islamist terrorist organization obtains a nuclear weapon. Four general scenarios are possible in which an Islamist bomb becomes a reality. The most likely scenario consists of an Islamist regime developing a weapon. The most likely American military response to an Islamist bomb will be special operations, cyber, and conventional precision weapons attacks against the nuclear weapons themselves (if intelligence can locate them) and their production facilities. Understanding the threat and preparing military options for this eventuality now will mitigate the possible consequences of an Islamist bomb.
If the United States and other governments keep doing what they are doing today, a nuclear attack on American soil is more likely than not in the next decade.

Graham Allison, Harvard University, 2004

More than thirty states have sought nuclear weapons; ten have succeeded. One state, the Republic of South Africa, unilaterally disarmed its nuclear arsenal. The total global nuclear weapons inventory is approximately 20,500 warheads. One nuclear-armed state, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, has a complicated relationship with a bevy of powerful domestic and transnational radical Islamist terrorist organizations. Time will tell if the Pakistani state can remain a democracy or if it will become the first nuclear-armed failed state. The only member in the sixty-seven year history of the United Nations (UN) to call openly for the destruction of another member state – the Islamic Republic of Iran – is actively pursuing nuclear weapons. A recently released report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on the Iranian nuclear weapons program expressed growing concern “about the possible existence in Iran of undisclosed nuclear related activities involving military related organizations, including activities related to the development of a nuclear payload for a missile, about which the Agency has regularly received new information.” Al Qaeda has sought nuclear weapons for nearly two decades. North Caucasus-based Islamist terrorist organizations struggling against Russian suzerainty seek to commit nuclear terrorism. Clearly the nuclear genie is out of the bottle and the question is not if, but when, an Islamist state or Islamist terrorist organization obtains a nuclear weapon. The United States military must prepare now to respond to the inevitability of an Islamist bomb.

An Islamist bomb is among the most troubling politico-military challenges facing the United States in the twenty-first century. At a nuclear summit meeting in Washington, D.C. in April 2010, President Obama framed the problem:
The single biggest threat to US security, short-term, medium-term and long-term, would be the possibility of a terrorist organization obtaining a nuclear weapon. This is something that could change the security landscape of this country and around the world for years to come....And we know that organizations like al Qaeda are in the process of trying to secure a nuclear weapon – a weapon of mass destruction that they have no compunction at using.7

The late al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden repeatedly issued fatwas, beginning in 1998, justifying the use of weapons of mass destruction to kill millions of Americans even though bin Laden was not an Islamic religious authority and therefore had dubious credibility to issue binding fatwas.8 However, the appeal of bin Laden and the al Qaeda brand to radical Muslims worldwide provides powerful justification for the use of an Islamist bomb. In 2003, radical Saudi cleric Nasir bin al-Fahd issued a twenty-five page fatwa, “A Treatise on the Legal Status of Using Weapons of Mass Destruction Against Infidels,” in which he justified the use of nuclear weapons:

[T]he matter of striking [America] with these weapons is permissible....If a bomb that killed ten million of them and burned as much of their land as they have burned Muslims’ land were dropped on them, it would be permissible, with no need to mention any other argument. We might need other arguments if we wanted to annihilate more than this number of them!....There are [Quranic] texts that indicate the permissibility of using such weapons if those engaged in jihad decide that there is benefit in using them. The arguments for this are many.5

In 2008, then-deputy al Qaeda leader Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri penned “A Treatise on the Exoneration of the Nation of the Pen and Sword of the Denigrating Charge of Being Irresolute and Weak,”10 in which he strengthened and expanded al-Fahd’s fatwa, using Quranic themes to justify an attack with weapons of mass destruction.11 Former al Qaeda number three Mustafa abu al-Yazid stated in 2009 that al Qaeda would use Pakistan’s nuclear weapons if it could gain access to them: “By God’s will, the Americans will not seize the Muslims’ nuclear weapons and we pray that the Muslims will have these weapons and they will be used against the Americans.”12 The recent incident involving the US RQ-170 Sentinel drone captured by Iran
sheds some light on the Obama Administration’s covert efforts to probe the depths of the Iranian nuclear weapons program. Iran is a global state sponsor of terrorism and little doubt exists that the Iranians would share nuclear technology with radical Islamic terrorist organizations. Likely targets of an Islamist bomb would be American, European, or Israeli population centers, politically or militarily significant sites (the Pentagon, the White House, UN headquarters, North Atlantic Treaty Organization headquarters, the Israeli Dimona nuclear facility), and global financial centers. No shortage of desire or religious justification exists for an Islamist organization to employ a nuclear weapon against the United States.

Various international organizations and treaties exist to address the problems of proliferation but these institutions are ill suited to stem the nuclear tide with regard to terrorist organizations and Islamist states. Such organizations and agreements include the UN, the IAEA, the Conference on Disarmament, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material. The main problem with these institutions is their assumption that states and organizations will play by established rules. The most obvious shortfall is that the states and organizations most likely to proliferate – North Korea, Iran, and terrorist organizations (if they develop nuclear weapons) – are non-signatories to relevant agreements, are not members of the nonproliferation organizations, nor would they pay attention to any restriction regarding proliferation. The lone scientist or network willing to sell expertise to the seekers of a nuclear weapon embodies a second vulnerability: the “A.Q. Kahn problem.” Kahn was a “middleman: a broker for businesses willing to supply and for states wanting to buy, he fused the commercial greed of the former with the strategic interests of the latter.”13 The network centering on Kahn allegedly worked with a rogue’s gallery of states seeking nuclear weapons: North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and Libya. Kahn’s activities “provide a
unique window into a shadowy world in which a small group of nations worked collaboratively
to develop advanced missile and nuclear technology out of sight of the rest of the world,
technology that then became the foundation for a global trade that will far outlast its most
famous contributor.\textsuperscript{14} The A.Q. Kahn problem will only grow in the future as more states
develop nuclear technology. Increasing globalization and the vulnerabilities posed by the threat
of cyber-espionage make it more likely that future states and terrorist organizations will be able
to circumvent established nonproliferation regimes and treaties in the quest to obtain nuclear
weapons. The existing architecture to protect against nuclear proliferation is therefore
inadequate and will eventually fail. An Islamist bomb is not a question of if, but when.

A central question for future military planners is therefore whether traditional deterrence
will work against an Islamist state or terrorist organization committed to acquiring nuclear
weapons. "Classical" deterrence is "a dynamic process that relies not necessarily on the
rationality of national leaders but on emotion and fear"\textsuperscript{15}; it is "a strategy of issuing threats to
cause another to decide against unwanted behavior."\textsuperscript{16} A prescient document published in 1995
by United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) anticipated some of the problems
addressed in this paper and further refines the concept of deterrence in the post-Cold War era:

\ldots a form of bargaining which exploits a capability for inflicting damage at such a level as
to truly cause hurt far greater than military defeat. Although we want any rational
calculations about future state [sic] to caution against action, to be most effective,
deterrence must create fear in the mind of the adversary--fear that he will not achieve his
objectives, fear that his losses and pain will far outweigh any potential gains, fear that he
will be punished. It should ultimately create the fear of extinction--extinction of either
the adversary's leaders themselves or their national independence, or both.\textsuperscript{17}

But what if our future nuclear-armed adversaries are not only "irrational," but rely on
emotional traditions and concepts of fear foreign to the Western mind? Al Qaeda, radical
Deobandi groups, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and other radical Muslims actively seek martyrdom at the
hands of the United States. What if a charismatic leader convinces an entire state that national suicide will gain his people accelerated entry into paradise? Deterrence will likely fail against such an enemy. Furthermore, such states and organizations would welcome an American strike, whether or not in response to a first strike, as useful propaganda.

The shortcomings of classical deterrence are also readily apparent when dealing with a non-state actor the United States cannot easily target militarily, who will not take responsibility for a nuclear attack, or who seeks to provoke a nuclear response. The USSTRATCOM document noted earlier addresses the link between culture and deterrence: "Insightful tailoring of what is valued within a culture, and its weaving into a deterrence message, along with a projection of the capability that can be mustered, is the type of creative thinking that must go into deciding what to hold at risk in framing deterrent targeting for multilateral situations in the future." One potential way to prepare for the future threat is to grow a cadre of military officers whose sole responsibility is to focus on the specific regions and cultures from which our future Islamist nuclear-armed enemies will emerge. These planners must understand that traditional concepts of deterrence may not work in the future.

Four general scenarios are possible in which an Islamist bomb becomes a reality. The first is state failure of an existing nuclear-armed state in which nuclear warheads fall into the hands of an Islamist terrorist organization. The most obvious potential example is Pakistan. The Pakistani regime is politically unstable. Pakistan is home to some of the world’s most violent Islamist terrorist organizations, including Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, al Qaeda, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and the Haqqani network. The presence of radical elements at the lower and middle levels of the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) and the military is established. A jihadist revolution or coup in Pakistan is not out of the
question. 20 Indeed, some observers detect a growing Islamization of Pakistan's military. 21 Thus far, however, the ISI and the military have “ensured that their institutions do not get infected with radical ideas at the senior level.” 22 This may be the case today but tomorrow’s military and intelligence leaders will emerge from today’s lower- and mid-level officers. These and other factors fuel growing concern about the security of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal.

Current estimates indicate that Pakistan has an inventory of between 60 and 100 nuclear warheads. 23 Pakistan has a range of potential delivery platforms, including F-16s, Mirage 5s, and A-5 Fantan jets, ballistic and cruise missiles, and short-range delivery systems. 24 In testimony to Congress in 2009, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, confirmed that Pakistan continues to invest in its nuclear program, upgrading and adding to weapons systems and warheads. 25 Expansion of the nuclear arsenal and the development of smaller weapons come with a concomitant requirement to safeguard more material. In 2000, Pakistan instituted a nuclear command and control architecture centered on the national command authority. 26 The government upgraded the command and control system following the attacks of September 2001. Pakistan further protects its nuclear stockpile by storing “its warheads unassembled with fissile core separated from non-nuclear explosives [and their] delivery vehicles.” 27 To reduce further the possibility of compromise, the weapons are likely stored at military facilities spread throughout the southern portion of the country.

Despite these safeguards, audacious attacks against Pakistani military headquarters in 2009, the Mehran Naval Air Base in Karachi in May 2011, similar attacks against other government and intelligence facilities, and political assassinations call into question Pakistan’s ability to protect its nuclear inventory. Moreover, Pakistan has actively supported – as a matter of state policy – jihadists in Afghanistan and India, nurtures homegrown terrorist organizations,
and struggles against a stagnant economy. Finally, Pakistan has a history of political instability and is the only nuclear power in which the military controls the "nuclear button." The question as to whether the military will cede control to civilian leaders in a crisis is unanswered. A future radicalized Pakistani military may not hesitate to offer a terrorist organization access to nuclear weapons. These factors portend serious challenges for the future.

A second scenario involves an existing Islamist regime developing or obtaining nuclear weapons. Iran is the most likely Islamist state to develop a nuclear warhead. In 2008, an internal IAEA document revealed, "Iran has sufficient information to be able to design and produce a workable implosion nuclear device." In 2009, the US Director of National Intelligence (DNI) estimated that "Iran probably would be technically capable of producing enough highly enriched uranium for a weapon sometime during the 2010-2015 time frame." In Congressional testimony in 2011, the DNI was more vague: "[O]ur judgment [is] that Iran is technically capable of producing enough highly enriched uranium for a weapon in the next few years, if it chooses to do so." The IAEA report of 18 November 2011 referred to above and recent statements by the US Defense Secretary and the Israeli Defense Minister indicate that Iran could acquire the bomb as early as the summer of 2012. Added to that, Iran already holds the largest inventory of ballistic missiles in the Middle East and "continues to expand the scale, reach and sophistication of its ballistic missile forces, many of which are inherently capable of carrying a nuclear payload."

Another possible pathway to an Islamist bomb is for an Islamist group to obtain a functional weapon, or the technology to make a weapon, from an existing nuclear-armed state. The state most likely to provide for this is North Korea, which detonated its first device in 2006 and has a history of exporting sensitive nuclear technology. International sanctions are effective
in slowing the pursuit of nuclear weapons, but are no guarantee. A more complicated conundrum is stopping the exportation of nuclear competence – the A.Q. Khan problem. The A.Q. Khan network is responsible for “much of the equipment and knowledge for developing nuclear technology [that] is no longer controlled by states—it is in the marketplace.”33 An individual like A.Q. Khan can make the difference for a state or organization that has access to the technology but lacks the technical knowhow to develop a nuclear weapon.

If Iran develops a nuclear weapon, Saudi Arabia (another country with a significant Islamist population) and other oil-rich Gulf Arab states may follow suit. Former Saudi intelligence chief Prince Turki bin Faisal Al-Saud recently stated, “If our efforts, and the efforts of the world community, fail to convince Israel to shed its weapons of mass destruction and to prevent Iran from obtaining similar weapons, we must, as a duty to our country and our people, look into all options we are given, including obtaining these weapons ourselves.”34 Although Prince Turki no longer holds office in Saudi Arabia, he is an influential member of the royal family and his words likely reflect the sentiment of important members of the Saudi government. An Iranian bomb will therefore open a nuclear Pandora’s Box in the greater Middle East. More nuclear-armed states in the volatile Middle East will likely increase the possibility of an Islamist terrorist organization gaining access to a nuclear weapon.

A third possible future scenario is an Arab Spring-like revolution bringing Islamists to power in a future nuclear-armed state. In December 2010, Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself afire in protest of his mistreatment by a municipal official. This single act ignited a social movement that engulfed the Arab world in 2011, sweeping the autocratic leaders of Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya out of power after decades of rule. Islamist political parties in Tunisia and Egypt won majorities of the vote; Islamists in Libya are jostling for power. At this
writing, protesters seek to remove President Bashar al-Assad of Syria from office. In 2007, Israeli airstrikes destroyed what was believed to be a Syrian nuclear reactor built with major assistance from North Korea.

The newly empowered people of the Arab world are standing up to governments in ways that seemed impossible barely one year ago. Thus, a related possible future is “electoral Islamism” in a future nuclear-armed state, in which an Islamist group manages “to impose a theocracy via the electoral process.” Electoral Islamism would likely occur in stages, with Islamists asserting control over various institutions, including the media, educational systems, and professional associations, before taking full power. Various electoral pathways for Islamists to take power in future states are easily foreseeable and a possible revolution bringing Islamists to power in a nuclear-armed state is probable, a scenario for which the United States must prepare.

The fourth possible scenario is for an Islamist non-state actor to steal, purchase, or on its own develop a nuclear weapon. Stealing or purchasing a nuclear weapon is a feasible outcome under the failed state scenario addressed earlier. The development of a nuclear weapon by an Islamist organization presents significant but not impossible technical problems. Figure one below describes the tasks required to construct a nuclear device, presupposing possession of the requisite fissile materials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Develop bomb design and drawings of necessary components and assembly instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Perform chemical testing of nuclear material</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each of the steps requires a high degree of technical expertise, but even without access to a nuclear expert, sensitive nuclear weapons-related information is openly available on the internet.\(^3\) On the other hand, transporting a nuclear device from the production facility to a target still presents difficult logistical and security challenges for a terrorist organization. That said, smuggling individual warheads into the country is likely the only way a terrorist organization would be able to attack the United States with a nuclear weapon.\(^4\) Even so, uncovering a terrorist organization's plans to develop a nuclear weapon presents the intelligence community with significant problems. In that regard, the Department of Energy's intelligence chief stated in Congressional testimony in April 2008 that:

The task for the intelligence community is not easy. We must find something that is tactical in size but strategic in impact. We must stop something from happening that we have never seen happen before….We do not know what a terrorist nuclear plot might look like.\(^4\)
Future ideologically motivated A.Q. Khans will also be difficult for US intelligence agencies to uncover and interdict. The A.Q. Khan problem foreshadows the future likelihood of a transnational nuclear proliferation network from which a terrorist organization could assemble the required expertise and technology for a nuclear weapon.\textsuperscript{42}

Undoubtedly, the US military has a detailed continuum of plans to deal with a future Islamist bomb. It is beyond the scope of this unclassified paper to discuss specifics of any such efforts and the author did not access any planning documents in his research. That said, Joint Publication 3-0, \textit{Joint Operations}, describes the range of military operations available to the joint warfighter (Figure 2).\textsuperscript{43}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{range_of_military_operations.png}
\caption{Range of Military Operations}
\end{figure}

Six possible US military options within the range of military operations are available to respond to a future Islamist bomb. Figure three below is a graphical depiction of each of the scenarios and the potential US military response. The problem of locating the weapons is a major intelligence hurdle that is beyond the scope of this paper but warrants further investigation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Potential US military response</th>
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<tr>
<td>Failure of existing nuclear armed state</td>
<td>Conventional attack</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Special operations mission</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conventional precision strike on nuclear weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cyber attack on regime C2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coercion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing Islamist regime develops nuclear weapons</td>
<td>Conventional attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special operations mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conventional precision strike on nuclear weapons</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cyber attack on regime C2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coercion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Spring or electoral Islamism</td>
<td>Special Operations mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conventional precision strike on nuclear weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cyber attack on regime C2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Coercion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nuclear-armed non-state actor</td>
<td>Special Operations mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conventional precision strike on nuclear weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cyber attack on organization's C2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coercion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3

The first option is a massive conventional military response, either unilaterally or in conjunction with international partners. This contingency is suited for scenario one (an existing nuclear-armed state fails rendering its warheads vulnerable) and scenario two (existing Islamist regime develops or obtains nuclear weapons). Depending on the geography of the failed state, amphibious, airborne, land, and air, or a combination of these four operations, might be appropriate. Given the current political climate, the military goals would need to be limited to neutralizing, seizing, or destroying the loose nuclear weapons.

The second possible military response is special operations. This contingency response is suitable for all four scenarios. The special operations mission would be to locate and destroy or secure the nuclear weapons of a failed state, an existing Islamist regime’s nuclear arsenal, or a nuclear-armed Islamist non-state actor. Select members of the interagency with critical skills, such as Federal Bureau of Investigation forensics and explosives experts or a Department of Energy Nuclear Emergency Support Team, could be included in the mission.
A third possible scenario is a nuclear strike on the nuclear weapons sites. The American arsenal purportedly contains the B61-11 nuclear weapon, a tactical device capable of destroying underground targets. Testing on the B61-11, however, indicated significant limitations in its earth-penetrating capability. Furthermore, a strike with the B61-11 would likely result in major nuclear contamination in the detonation area. Another problem with this scenario is the likely massive collateral human and environmental damage. The questionable legality of first use of nuclear weapons and the attendant political risks involved for a US President make this scenario unlikely. For the same reasons, a US first-strike nuclear attack on an above ground target is unlikely. The reaction of the so-called “Muslim street” to a nuclear strike on a Muslim state also seriously militates against this scenario.

A related, fourth scenario is to launch a conventional precision strike against above ground or buried targets. Conventional weapons suffer the same penetration problems as their nuclear cousins. However, for targets in populated areas, or to avoid the radiological and political fallout inherent in a nuclear strike, conventional precision munitions are ideal. Collateral damage is more controllable and predictable with conventional munitions and obviates the adversary propaganda value of a nuclear strike.

A fifth option is cyberwarfare. A cyber attack against an existing regime’s command and control systems could significantly impede the state’s ability to launch a nuclear attack. Command and control difficulties could buy the US time to tighten sanctions, assemble a coalition, or seek options short of war to defuse a nuclear crisis. The debilitating effects of the Stuxnet computer virus that attacked Iran’s nuclear program in 2010 offer hope to future military planners seeking a viable, deniable, non-kinetic alternative. Cyber attacks are feasible alone or in conjunction with traditional military operations, special operations, or nuclear operations. A
cyberwarfare component to any of the previously mentioned scenarios would likely enhance the
effectiveness of the military operation.

Coercion comprises the sixth military option. Threatening a nuclear-armed Islamist state
or non-state actor with nuclear retaliation, regime change, and/or destruction of the state’s
military forces is a coercive measure short of war. Taking these measures might convince the
possessors of nuclear weapons of the futility of a first-strike option. Executive Order 12333
prohibits assassination; however, the President may choose to rescind the order in an in extremis
situation such as the threatened use of a nuclear weapon by an Islamist state. Finally, investing
in enhanced land, sea, and space-based ballistic missile defense systems is a passive defense
measure that may mitigate the likelihood of a successful nuclear ballistic missile attack.

The US has a wide range of potential active and passive military options with which to
counter an Islamist bomb. Some of the options are politically feasible and likely to occur if the
Islamist bomb becomes a reality. An American nuclear response, however, is not likely due to
the certainty of radiological fallout and the political ramifications of such an attack. The United
States may choose to execute a hybrid from the available range of military options, or may
decide to act in concert with partner states. Special operations forces will undoubtedly play a
key role in any scenario. Options to counter the Islamist bomb will no doubt be part of US
strategic planning efforts.

Radical Islamists routinely call for the destruction of the United States. The global black
market is rife with the technical skills and hardware required to develop a nuclear weapon,
giving state and non-state actors seeking the bomb advantages not possible even a decade ago.
The Islamic Republic of Iran, a state sponsor of terrorism and adversary of the US, is actively
seeking a nuclear weapon. On New Year’s Day 2012, Iran announced the successful test of a
long-range surface-to-surface cruise missile and the production of a nuclear fuel rod. The latter innovation is a technological feat the US doubted Tehran could achieve alone. Although not directly related to the development of a nuclear weapon, the production of a nuclear fuel rod betrays a sophisticated level of nuclear technical expertise. As recently as late 2011, some intelligence estimates indicated Iran was years away from developing a nuclear weapon. In January 2012, the DNI echoed similar Senate testimony from 2010 and 2011 when he expressed uncertainty about whether Iran would eventually decide to build nuclear weapons. These intelligence estimates appear to contradict the reality in Iran. Short of a military strike against the nascent nuclear program, an Iranian nuclear weapon appears to be a foregone conclusion, perhaps as early as the summer of 2012. The most likely of the scenarios presented in this paper consists of an Islamist regime developing a weapon. The most likely American military response to the Islamist bomb will be special operations, cyber, and conventional precision weapons attacks against the nuclear weapons themselves (if intelligence can locate them) and their production facilities. It seems certain that, in the near future, an Islamist state or Islamist terrorist organization will obtain a nuclear weapon. Understanding the threat and preparing military options for this eventuality now will mitigate the possible consequences of the Islamist bomb.

2 http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/nuclearweapons/nukestatus/html. The nine current nuclear-armed states are Russia, the United States, France, China, the United Kingdom, Israel, Pakistan, India, and North Korea, accessed 5 Dec 11.
3 Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian President, frequently makes public calls for Israel’s destruction.
6 Islamists oppose secular government and democracy, and advocate the establishment of a global sharia-based society. Islamists use the Koran and the Sunnah to justify the use of violence to spread their ideology. This definition is extracted from www.islaminwatch.org/islamist, accessed 15 Feb 12.
Bin Laden also made statements expressing his desire for nuclear weapons including, "It would be a sin for Muslims not to try to possess the weapons [chemical and nuclear] that would prevent the infidels from inflicting harm on Muslims," accessed 27 Dec 11.


18. Ibid., 4.


20. The jihadist revolution, electoral Islamism, and a Jihadist-military coup scenarios are all developed in Julian Schofield and Michael Zelukin, "Appraising the Threat of Islamist Take-Over in Pakistan" (Montreal: Université du Québec à Montréal), 2007.


27. Kerr and Niktin, 2.


29. As quoted in Albright, 204.

30. Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, (Senate hearing), US Senate, 111th Cong. (2009).


32. Ibid.

33. Corera, xiv.


35. Schofield and Zelukin, 12.


37. Masse, 7.
38 Figure one is from the text on page 22 of Brunn and Ryan, *The US-Russia Joint Threat Assessment on Nuclear Terrorism*.
39 Ibid., 41.
40 Schmidt, 219.
41 Statement of Rolf Mowatt-Larsen, Director of the Office of Intelligence and Counterintelligence, United States Department of Energy, Before the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee (Senate Hearing), US Senate, 111th Cong. (2008).
43 Figure two is copied from Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 11 Aug 11), I-5.
45 Executive Order No. 12333, 1981.
46 Unclassified Statement for the Record on the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, (Senate hearing), US Senate, 111th Cong. (2012), accessed 15 Feb 12.
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