

Fuhrmann and Sechser on a Nuclear Iran

The Skeptics

Justin Logan | January 13, 2011

Matthew Fuhrmann of the Council on Foreign Relations and Todd Sechser of UVA have a good piece in the *Christian Science Monitor* about the prospect of a nuclear Iran. While, as Paul Pillar has observed, the timeline for worrying about the prospect likely has been extended, Fuhrmann and Sechser poke holes in two of the arguments that have been used to fan the flames of fear about the looming Iranian menace to superlative heights: that Iran would be more likely to blackmail its neighbors, and that it would be more likely to succeed in blackmailing its neighbors. Fuhrmann and Sechser argue that

[i]f history is any guide, the acquisition of nuclear weapons will not embolden Iran to blackmail its neighbors. This does not mean that Iran will refrain from threatening its neighbors if it builds the bomb. Tehran has threatened other states in the Middle East in the past and it will probably do so again in the future. Building nuclear weapons, however, is not likely to accelerate the rate at which Iran makes coercive threats.

Would a nuclear-armed Iran have more success blackmailing its neighbors? The historical record suggests not. For example, during the 20th century, Britain made successful threats against Germany, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Turkey, and others before acquiring nuclear weapons in 1952. Since acquiring the bomb, however, it has made only one successful threat, as part of a NATO coalition against the Bosnian Serbs in 1994...

The whole piece is worth a read. I wrote a paper on dealing with a nuclear Iran in 2007, which can be found [here](#). Those with concerns about a “nuclear domino effect” in the Middle East would be well-served to examine the work of Philip Bleek, Frank Gavin, and John Mueller (chapter 7), among others.