

The Making of US and Israeli Policy toward Iran's Nuclear Program

written by Dr. Raphael BenLevi | 01.01.2024

We are pleased to announce the publication of our research fellow, Dr. Raphael BenLevi's new book: *Cultures of Counterproliferation: The Making of US and Israeli Policy on Iran's Nuclear Program* with academic press, Routledge.

About the book:

The United States and Israel have been the two states most active in opposing Iran's nuclear ambitions; however, the respective strategies of each of these states have changed repeatedly. This book explores how competing cultural schools of thought on grand strategy within each state inform and shape the key policy decisions in their attempts to prevent a nuclear Iran. Drawing on numerous interviews conducted with former high-level officials in each country as well as published memoirs, this book first describes in detail the belief systems of the competing schools and then analyses the internal debates and key decisions on policy toward the Iranian Nuclear Program, while critically assessing the extent to which these beliefs influenced policy in the face of material-structural pressures. This in-depth analysis of the internal debates and dilemmas within the national leadership of the two states most prominent in the effort to prevent a nuclear Iran constitutes an indispensable guide for scholars and policymakers who will inevitably face similar dilemmas in dealing with this ongoing challenge and additional cases of nuclear proliferation around the world.

Endorsements:

Head of the Misgav Institute, Meir Ben-Shabbat: "Dr. BenLevi has provided a well-researched and in-depth analysis of the interests and considerations that informed the key debates within Israel and the United States regarding one of their greatest mutual national security threats. A must-read for policymakers and scholars alike!"

Prof. Emeritus at Georgetown University, Robert J. Lieber: "BenLevi's book

provides a valuable addition to the literature on decision-making, strategic culture, the impact of ideas on foreign policy, and to our understanding of divergent responses to the Iranian nuclear program. It is an important and original work, especially in explaining policy choices made by U.S. and Israeli leaders.”

Excerpt from final chapter:

“Current circumstances raise the question of whether a state that is determined to attain nuclear weapons can ever be stopped. Indeed, the case of North Korea is an example of a failure to prevent such an outcome. On the other hand, the case of Iraq, Syria and Libya provide examples of successful counterproliferation, by military strikes in the first two, and by the implicit threat of military intervention in the third. This suggests that the only policy that can prevent a determined proliferator from going nuclear is a willingness to use force. However, a coercive sanctions regime, coupled with a credible threat of force and a clear red line can have the effect of weakening a proliferator’s determination and willingness to attempt to cross the threshold. This is in fact the difference between North Korea and Iran. For North Korea, for the reasons outlined above, neither the United States nor South Korea was willing to issue a credible threat of a counterproliferation strike and North Korea understood this. For Iran, on the other hand, it faced such a threat first in the 2000s from the United States, after the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and in the 2010s from Israel. I would argue that the reason Iran has not yet crossed the threshold despite decades of developing its enrichment capabilities is because of Israel’s covert delay actions, the unprecedented macro-economic sanctions regime its, most importantly, its continued credible threat of military action.”

[Link to book page at Routledge website.](#)