Country-specific Studies (1)

STUDIES on IRAN

Responses, Articles

Foreign Policy Research Centre
NEW DELHI (India)
In the month of April 2013, Foreign Policy Research Centre (FPRC) launched a country-specific studies project. These countries hold an importance place for India. Each study seeks to highlight India’s relationship in bilateral and international perspective. The initiative begins with Iran and is to be followed by similar studies on other countries - Pakistan, Afghanistan.

The Iran project is a timely initiative and in our venture, we have the support of national and international scholars who have agreed to come under the umbrella of FPRC to disseminate knowledge on Iran. We express our sincere gratitude to them for their cooperation in bringing this project to a successful culmination. They have always been a source of strength to us.

Dr. Mahendra Gaur
Director

Dr. Indira Gaur
Mg. Director

Foreign Policy Research Centre

New Delhi
From the Editor’s Desk

Sylvia Mishra is currently Research Associate at ICRIER-Wadhwani Chair in India-US Policy Studies. Prior to her working at ICRIER, she has worked at several New Delhi and London based think tanks. Her research interests include Middle Eastern politics and Geostrategy, International Security and Foreign Policy Analysis. She holds a Masters degree in International Relations from London School of Economics.

Perhaps no other country has piqued the extent of interest, speculation and concern that Iran has generated in the last couple of years. This has re-calibrated tremendous curiosity in Iran, positioning it as a focal point in the present international politics. Rich in cultural heritage and richer by the vagaries of political transitions, the greatness of the Iranian past forms a part of the country’s national conscience and its historical influences bear strong semblance on the current political discourse. As the Arab spring continues to unfold and its changing impact being experienced at local, regional and international politics, it hinges on the geopolitical realities of Iran. Iran’s geo-strategic position in the heartland of the Greater Middle East and its location cradled in between the Caucasus and the Indian Sea makes it an important regional actor. With energy becoming a salient concern and Iran being home to the world’s third largest oil reserves, political developments have catapulted Iran to prominence as not only a powerful country in its immediate neighbourhood but also in the world. However, defying global powers and the spirit and letter of international law, the country has plunged into a long standing isolation in the international community. In spite of the spate of recent economic difficulties at home, the Iranian people have once again displayed the elixir of life and hope in democratically electing moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani as the
President of Iran. The world now looks to the Iranian leaders to lead Iran into a path of integration with the world economy. Iran’s integration with the world community would also entail precluding fulfilment of Iran’s obligations as a responsible power.

FPRC embarked on a path to demystify Iran, one of the world’s most interesting and significant political actors. The country’s defiance and resilience has raised critical questions on issues with far-reaching implications directly affecting the complexion of world politics. To capture this significance of Iran within its region and beyond, FPRC has attempted to furbish a volume of dedicated research work which has engendered rich debate on Iran. To assist this quest of FPRC, veteran diplomats, renowned authors, scholars, columnists and pundits of Iran’s foreign policy have come under FPRC’s canopy to present a contextual analysis of the Iranian-state, society, foreign policy and diplomacy. This volume explores and reflects on the comparative causes and the drivers of insecurity, challenges and prospects of politics in Iran and its implications on international policy.

The completion of this volume is made possible by the valuable contribution of all our contributors and their commitment to the cause of research on topical issues concerning Iran. This volume is incomplete without the mention of my inspiration, Dr. Mahendra Gaur. Prof. Gaur is the energy behind this volume and he has worked both zealously and tirelessly to bring this volume to fruition. I want to convey heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Gaur. This book project most importantly was borne out of love, friendship, admiration and respect for Iran, its people and culture. With the help of this volume I want to reach out to our readers with the message of friendship, mutual respect and tolerance which we harbour in our hearts and display in our bilateral relations with Iran. The completion of this project also comes at a critical juncture in Iranian politics when Iranian people and leaders face new opportunities and challenges and a vision of “Change; Government of Prudence and Hope.”

In the hope for a better world promoted by peace, friendship, social justice and dialogue between nations, I wish all our readers happy and conscious reading.

Sincerely,

**Sylvia Mishra**
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IRAN - In search of a balance
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Country-specific Studies (1)

STUDIES on IRAN

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  ![Pawel Rabiej](image)

**Iran’s Nuclear Program**

- **Dr. Richard Rousseau**
  Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the American University of Ras Al Khaimah, United Arab Emirates

  ![Dr. Richard Rousseau](image)

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  ![Dr. Venkat Lokanathan](image)
1. **Amb. Akbar Mirza Khaleeli**

*Former Indian Ambassador to Iran*

*He joined the Indian Foreign Service in May 1959 and has served as Ambassador to Iran and Italy. He was High Commissioner to Australia from 1991 to 94. He has also served in Indian Missions at Baghdad, Colombo and Amman. Can speak Persian, Urdu, French and Arabic. He is a student of comparative theology and cultures. Interested in Persian poetry, vocal music and painting. Resides at Bangalore.*

It was Pandit Nehru's view that through the last three thousand years or more of India's history, Iran exercised the maximum influence over India. I assume he meant both post-Islamic and especially pre-Islamic periods. Most of his successors have had little feel for history; mythology and politics are more interesting and urgent.

With the creation of Pakistan, we moved out of our natural historical environment. So long as Pakistan sees itself as an anti-Hindu/ anti-India entity and its so-called elites since the 1980s, mainly Sunni/Punjabi/ h-Army types, seek to be closer to the Arabs and the Pathans and deliberately deny its basic character as an odd product of Indo-Iranian inter-action (Khuda Hafiz instead of the current Allah Hafiz), it repudiates its own real ethos, and its role as a bridge between Iranian and Indian culture and with it, a greater role in Central Asia rather than the mirage of defence-in-depth by manipulating Pakhtuns as lever or pawn of an uncontrollable Afghanistan. As a barrier, it has done much political damage. In historical terms it has to become a bridge or be washed away. Imagine trying to to be a bridge for China to the Persian Gulf and being a barrier between its genetic cultural forbears !!

The point I am making, is that we have fallen into the same trap. When I had the honour of being selected as Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran just after the revolution,( I may not have made it had the Shah been there), I was approved first by Morarji and Vajpayee, then by Charan Singh and after he fell, by Mrs: Indira Gandhi. Many postings of others were changed in those six to eight months. Mine was not for some reasons which I will not divulge; nor need I divulge much of what
was discussed with that great lady, who like her father had a built-in understanding of Iran and the Persians. All I need to state is that she felt that we could never afford to have a hostile Iran. While trying to re-build trusting relations I should ensure that hostility is banished especially, as almost all countries had become hostile to Iran.

Iranians may not be an easy people to deal with, but surely we have much in common. However, if policy is built on running after the Americans and adjusting to the Chinese, with little time for those that were friends and close, then relations with patient Iran will be a casualty. If our people are waiting to re-discover Iran's importance along with say Russia, after the Yanks leave Afghanistan or the scenario in that tragic and brutalised country threatens others it could be rather late. Since I am not in the loop of things today, I will not say more on the nuclear issue or the pipe-line or other issues where I feel India has not been in the right. I will only state that the manner in which many ordinary Iranians are being treated including those who have spent decades if not generations in India, does not befit our culture though like Pakistan we too may attribute this to politics.

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2. Dr. Dov Zakheim

Dov S. Zakheim is Senior Advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and Senior Fellow at the CNA Corporation, a US federally funded think tank. Previously he was Senior Vice President of Booz Allen Hamilton where he led the Firm’s support of U.S. Combatant Commanders worldwide.

Zakheim served as the under secretary of defense (comptroller) and chief financial officer for the Department of Defense (DOD) from 2001-2004. As comptroller, he was the secretary of defense’s principal advisor on financial and budgetary matters. From 2002-2004, Zakheim was DOD’s coordinator of civilian programs in Afghanistan.

During the 2000 presidential campaign, he served as a senior foreign-policy advisor to then-Gov. George W. Bush. Zakheim held several other DOD posts from 1981-1985. And from 1985-1987, he was deputy under secretary of defense for planning and resources in the office of the under secretary of defense (Policy). Prior to that, he was a principal analyst in the national security and international affairs division of the Congressional Budget Office.

In addition to teaching as an adjunct professor at the National War College, Yeshiva University, Columbia University, Georgetown University and Trinity College in Hartford, Ct., Zakheim has served on a number of government, corporate, non-profit, and charitable boards and authored numbers books and articles. He is a Fellow of the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences. A 1970 graduate of Columbia University with a B.A., summa cum laude, Zakheim also studied at the London School of Economics. He holds a doctorate in economics and politics at St. Antony’s College, University of Oxford, where he held three fellowships. He is the three-time recipient of the Defense Department’s highest civilian award.

QUESTIONNAIRE-IRAN

1. What does Hasan Rohawni’s becoming the President of Iran means to the West? Hasan Rowhani has described his elections as the “opening of a new era that would follow the path of moderation and justice and not extremism.”

Rowhani is no reformer, at least with respect to the regime’s fundamental concerns. He was intimately involved in Iran’s secret nuclear weapons program. If he were a real reformer, Khamenei would never have allowed him to be on the ballot.

2. Western diplomats attribute the Iranians’ greater openness to the effects of EU-led sanctions, domestic political considerations and regional geopolitics. On the other hand, Hassan Rouhani has already said that he would not be halting Iran’s uranium enrichment programme. Your comments.

Western diplomats are always hunting for good news, even if there is none.

3. What could be the impacts of Nuclear Iran in the Region?

An arm race would start in the region or it would be helpful to maintain deterrence in the region.
No question but that Turkey and/or Saudi Arabia and/or Egypt and/or the UAE would go nuclear.

4. What are the prospects for U.S.-Iran Relations on the Nuclear Issue?

Poor.

There are three scenarios: diplomacy, containment, and military action. Which one has a better chance?

There is room for even tighter sanctions, even by the US alone, e.g. Granting no exemptions to India, China etc. Call it sanction-based diplomacy.

5. What really drives American foreign policy toward Iran? Is it a post-Cold War determination on the part of the United States to dominate the Middle East?

The US is backing away from the Middle East, at least for the time being. Whatever the US ultimately does with respect to the Syrian civil war will not fundamentally alter this trend, at least until there is a new president in the White House. In any event, the United State has reached out to Iran several times, to no avail. For nearly four decades, the regime has needed the US as an enemy, and did not really want better relations. It is not at all clear, therefore, whether the current Iranian smile offensive is no more than that, or whether it truly reflects a strategic shift on the part of the Supreme Leader and his closest associates.

6. Some Iranian experts are of the view that India was much inclined towards the U.S. and should reconsider striking a balance in its foreign policy; India was not being pragmatic but opportunistic. Do you agree with the view that India has not been hesitant to play the Iran card to draw concessions from US on matters of bilateral concern?

India has not played an Iran card all that much. And if it did it would not get very far, again because it is unclear whether the Iranian leadership really is prepared to change its stance vis a vis the US.

7. Do you agree with the statement that US policy towards Iran is giving India a diplomatic headache? Should not US show better understanding of India's stakes in Iran?

No. India's policy towards Iran gives the US a headache too. This is not at all the case in most other respects, however, where American and Indian interests share much in common, though they do not entirely overlap.

8. How far do you agree with the statement that India stands at the forefront of countries that appear to be in a position to give Iran the kind of support that would be needed in the "very very critical and crucial discussions and dialogue that Iran needs to do."
As noted above, Iran is not really interested in better relations with the US. Both Clinton and Obama reached out to Iran and got nowhere. If India were truly able to help end the impasse between Iran and the West, that would be an excellent development, but it is not likely to happen.

9. It’s suggested that the EU needs a new approach to Iran because its interests in Iran go way beyond the nuclear dossier. Iran is the EU's geographic neighbour. Individual EU member states have much closer economic, cultural and people-to-people links with Iran than the US does. How far is this argument valid?

A nuclear Iran can threaten Europe. Should Europe take that risk?

10. How strong are the economic ties between Iran and China and what is their impact on China’s position regarding Iran’s nuclear program?

China depends on Iran for petroleum and petroleum products. Of course that has affected the Chinese position.

11. What are Arab Perspectives on Iran’s Role in a Changing Middle East after the Arab uprisings? How Iranian threat is perceived in the Arab States? Is Iran’s Syria policy hurting its regional popularity?

The Arabs have long resented Iranian pretensions to leadership of the Middle East. There is an ethnic rivalry but also, especially with respect to the southern Gulf Sunni Arabs, a religious rivalry that is centuries old.

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3. Amb. Touqir Hussain

Touqir Hussain is a Senior Visiting Fellow at SAIS Johns Hopkins University and Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University and the Syracuse University (Washington DC campus). Earlier he had taught at the University of Virginia Charlottesville also. He was a Senior Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace (2004-2005) and Research Fellow at the Center for the Study of Globalization George Washington University (2006-2010). Mr Hussain is a former diplomat from Pakistan. He served as Ambassador to Brazil (1990-1993), Spain (1993-1995), and Japan (1998-2003). He also held senior positions in the Pakistani Foreign Office, and served as the Diplomatic Adviser to the Pakistani Prime Minister from 1996 to 1998.

1. What does Hasan Rowhani’s becoming the President of Iran mean to the West? Hasan Rowhani has described his elections as the “opening of a new era that would follow the path of moderation and justice and not extremism.”

It is too early to tell. For now what he is saying is on one hand his personal views and on the other what basically amounts to a statement of intent reflecting the sentiments of the electorate specially those who voted for him. The message is as much for them as for the West. It is not really a declaration of policy. But it does presage a certain reformist inclination in the tradition of Khatami. The real test will come in the governance. That will show where he intends to go and how far he can proceed given the complexity and plurality of power centers in the Iranian system, with one center of power being more equal than others i.e the Supreme Leader. The bottom line is how much freedom of scope he enjoys to change relations with the West specially the US and carry out reforms at home would depend on the system whose pivot may be the Supreme Leader but the supporting structure of the system also matters. Ultimately we are talking here not of personalities or ideologies but the dynamics of a political system.

2. Western diplomats attribute the Iranians’ greater openness to the effects of EU-led sanctions, domestic political considerations and regional geopolitics. On the other hand, Hassan Rouhani has already said that he would not be halting Iran’s uraniam enrichment programme. Your comments.

In the West we exaggerate the role of sanctions. Of course they are important but are not the game changer. They do not fundamentally change the priorities of the Revolution and the basis on which it wants a relationship with the West. Iran can live with the sanctions, that is not the defining issue in its relations with the West. It has a secondary place. The Iranian revolution has successfully gone through far more serious challenges of survival than the sanctions.

Rowhani’s statements at this stage are essentially rhetoric. If he really wants a change of policy rhetoric is of course important as an opening gambit. It indicates flexibility without breaking a new ground in the negotiations which of course if it comes will come later. To a
degree his statements have thus served the intended purpose—to improve the atmospherics and change the conversation. But at this stage it will be premature to read a policy change in them.

3. What could be the impacts of Nuclear Iran in the Region? An arm race would start in the region or it would be helpful to maintain deterrence in the region.

The fear of an arms race is overblown. Given the stringent nuclear export regimes which are by and large being adhered to by all industrialized countries, the intelligence operations that have all but eliminated the chance of anymore A Q Khans, and the threat of sanctions, not to mention the cost, time and effort involved to set up the requisite industrial infrastructure for a nuclear program it is not easy to go nuclear. Iran has been at it for two decades and is still not there.

This talk of an arms race is essentially a scare tactic being promoted by the US, and Israel and other regional powers opposed to Iran’s nuclear program, basically to mobilize international coalition against Iran’s program. The idea is to paint the repercussions of Iran going nuclear to be as momentous as possible not just in terms of regional security but also in global security and nuclear proliferation. But the real reasons for opposition to the program are more limited.

4. What are the prospects for U.S.-Iran Relations on the Nuclear Issue? There are three scenarios: diplomacy, containment, and military action. Which one has a better chance?

I rule out military action, not only by the US but by Israel also. It has to be diplomacy with a whole range of options—engagement, containment, contentment and what have you. And that is what it is going to be. The initiative has already been wrested by Iran. How it uses it—to complete the program or to seek normalization with the US and at what cost, it is up to Iran. It is a dilemma. And the irony is the US too has its dilemmas. It is not a straight forward issue for either side. Of course normalization of relations will be good but if that does not happen there are some payoffs for both sides. Ultimately the normalization can take place in a new framework of Iran’s and America’s policies in the Middle East and possibly a new internal dynamics within Iran. None of three conditions are on the horizon.

5. What really drives American foreign policy toward Iran? Is it a post-Cold War determination on the part of the United States to dominate the Middle East?

It is not so much to dominate the Middle East but the fear of losing that domination. Israel has its own fears—not so much the fear to its security but the fear of losing the strategic superiority in the Middle East.

As for what else really drives the US policy towards Iran, it is the pressure or influence of the following on Washington:

Israel
Saudi Arabia
6. Do you subscribe to the view that Obama’s Iran policy is, in some ways, worse than Bush’s?

Both have followed the same policy—and for the same reasons except that Bush failed whereas Obama is trying to make the best of a bad bargain. It is not just in Iraq and Afghanistan that he was dealt a bad hand by Bush. It was in Iran also.

First mistake that Bush made was to try to achieve regime change and stop Iran’s nuclear program simultaneously. Each objective made the attainment of the other more difficult. Opposition to the regime made the regime cling to the nuclear program, on which the Iranian nation was united, like a life jacket. That gave strength to the program as it made it difficult for the regime to give any concessions on the program. And America’s simultaneous efforts to oppose the nuclear program made it difficult to change the regime as it became defender and guardian of a popular program. So the survival of the regime and survival of the nuclear program got reciprocally linked.

Apart from the above mistake another reprieve Iran got was out of the Iraq war. Bush’s hands were tied to go after Iran militarily in the wake of two faltering wars. So the military option was ruled out. The Iranians thus freely and aggressively interfered in Iraq to make things difficult for the US to succeed there thus gaining another card in the negotiations with the US. The US was in a quandary—to ask for concessions on the nuclear program or Iraq. In the event it got neither. The US had was too weak. Above all one must give credit to Iran’s negotiating strategy based on a stop and go policy and dividing the big powers and taking full advantage of the complexities of the American political which often rigidifies America’s diplomacy and delays resolution of politically sensitive issues. Net result—Iran got a lot of time to advance its program both under Bush and Obama.

Obama’s policy is more careful. He also has more cards to play and he is not going after the regime but focusing only on the nuclear program. But despite the fact that his hand is a little stronger the broad context of issues and constraints in which the two countries have been operating has not changed much. Will it see some change under Rouhani remains to be seen.

7. Some Iranian experts are of the view that India was much inclined towards the U.S. and should reconsider striking a balance in its foreign policy; India was not being pragmatic but opportunistic. Do you agree with the view that India has not been hesitant to play the Iran card to draw concessions from US on matters of bilateral concern?
Certain degree of opportunism is always part of pragmatism and a certain part of pragmatism is always part of any foreign policy. I think India is handling relations with the US and Iran very cleverly and successfully.

8. How far do you agree with the statement that India stands at the forefront of countries that appear to be in a position to give Iran the kind of support that would be needed in the "very very critical and crucial discussions and dialogue that Iran needs to do."

Problems between the US and Iran are very specific to the two countries. They know how to handle them but neither side is prepared to pay the price for normalization as it is being trumped by other interests and constraints.

9. It's suggested that the EU needs a new approach to Iran because its interests in Iran go way beyond the nuclear dossier. Iran is the EU's geographic neighbour. Individual EU member states have much closer economic, cultural and people-to-people links with Iran than the US does. How far is this argument valid?

I agree.

10. How strong are the economic ties between Iran and China and what is their impact on China’s position regarding Iran’s nuclear program?

At issue are not only China’s economic but strategic interests as well. And they both impact on China’s position on the nuclear issue. But keep in mind this position is circumscribed by China's relations with the US as well as other Gulf countries.

11. What are Arab Perspectives on Iran’s Role in a Changing Middle East after the Arab uprisings? How Iranian threat is perceived in the Arab States? Is IranSyria policy hurting its regional popularity?

Iran has not been very relevant in the changes the Arab world is undergoing. In the distant past Khomeini’s tirades against the corrupt rulers of the Islamic world specially those allied to the West did have resonance and may have played part in inciting the build up of domestic resistance against these regimes. And in recent years Ahmedinejad’s nationalistic, Islamic and anti West rhetoric may have also fortified these feelings in the Arab world specially in the Arab street. But the way this so called Arab Spring is unfolding it has its own dynamics and value system which does not make it indebted to Iran or allied to it. Indeed much of the Arab spring is fired more by democratic aspirations and people's demand for empowerment. So if anything it has more affinity with the now dormant Green Movement in Iran than the policies, rhetoric of the Iranian regime which did play some part in arousing the Arab street against its rulers but has gone beyond that. It is following a different trajectory now.

Iran's Syria policy is of no direct linkage with Arab uprisings which have a dynamics of their own. Syria is of concern mainly to countries which are not engulfed in the uprisings like Saudi Arabia and it Gulf allies. Not to mention the other major players concerned about Iran's Syria policy as US and Israel.

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4. Dr. Trita Parsi

On Rouhani taking over

(Trita Parsi is the 2010 recipient of the Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order.)

He is the founder and president of the National Iranian American Council and an expert on US-Iranian relations, Iranian foreign politics, and the geopolitics of the Middle East. He is the author of Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Iran, Israel and the United States (Yale University Press 2007), for which he conducted more than 130 interviews with senior Israeli, Iranian and American decision-makers. Treacherous Alliance is the silver medal winner of the 2008 Arthur Ross Book Award from the Council on Foreign Relations.

Parsi’s new book A Single Roll of the Dice - Obama’s Diplomacy with Iran (Yale University Press) was released early 2012. He interviewed 70 high-ranking officials from the U.S., Iran, Europe, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Brazil—including the top American and Iranian negotiators—for this book. Parsi uncovers the previously unknown story of American and Iranian negotiations during Obama’s early years as president, the calculations behind the two nations’ dealings, and the real reasons for their current stalemate.

Parsi was born in Iran but moved with his family at the age of four to Sweden in order to escape political repression in Iran. His father was an outspoken academic and non-Muslim who was jailed by the Shah and then by the Ayatollah. He moved to the United States as an adult and studied foreign policy at Johns Hopkins’ School for Advanced International Studies where he received his Ph.D. He founded NIAC to provide a non-partisan, non-profit organization through which Iranian-Americans could participate in American civic life. NIAC is a vocal proponent of dialogue and engagement between the US and Iran, which Parsi consistently has argued would enhance our national security by helping to stabilize the Middle East and bolster the moderates in Iran.

Parsi has followed Middle East politics through work in the field and extensive experience on Capitol Hill and at the United Nations. He is frequently consulted by Western and Asian governments on foreign policy matters. Parsi has worked for the Swedish Permanent Mission to the UN, where he served in the Security Council, handling the affairs of Afghanistan, Iraq, Tajikistan and Western Sahara, and in the General Assembly’s Third Committee, addressing human rights in Iran, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Iraq.

Parsi studied for his Doctoral thesis on Israeli-Iranian relations under Professor Francis Fukuyama at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. In addition to his PhD, he holds a Master’s Degree in International Relations from Uppsala University and a Master’s Degree in Economics from the Stockholm School of Economics. He has served as an adjunct professor of International Relations at Johns Hopkins University SAIS, an adjunct scholar at the Middle East Institute and as a Policy Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington DC.

He is fluent in Persian/Farsi, English, and Swedish. Parsi’s articles on Middle East affairs have been published in the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Financial Times, Jane's Intelligence Review, the Nation, The American Conservative, the Jerusalem
As the Ahmadinejad era is officially over now with Hassan Rouhani taking over as the new President in Iran, I wanted to share a few points and observations. Thank you.

Can Rouhani deliver?

Rouhani is not the sole decision-makers in Iran, so the question of whether he can deliver or not is warranted. But in many aspects, his ability to challenge the status quo in Iran may be greater of that of president Khatami precisely because he isn’t a reformist but a centrist. His political center of gravity is at the center. He enjoys good relations with most elements within the Iranian power structure, from the IRGC, to the clergy to the various political factions.

Perhaps most importantly, he appears to have a mutual agreement with Khamenei. As I wrote for Reuters last month, while "Rouhani used the rhetoric of the reformists in the election campaign, he was very careful to avoid one of their memes: Unlike leaders of the Green Movement in 2009, Rouhani repeatedly declared his loyalty to Khamenei and credit the supreme leader for all of his own successes. By this, Rouhani signaled that he would not violate Khamenei’s most critical red line: Khamenei will yield Rouhani the ability to create or change policy in most areas — as long as the president does not challenge the institution of the supreme leader (Velayat-e faqih)."

Does he believe Obama can deliver?

The less frequently asked question, but equally important one, is whether Rouhani believes President Obama can deliver. The views in Tehran tend to vary from seeing Obama as well intended but completely outflanked by Congress to a disingenuous politician who has made the confrontational policy of the Bush administration more effective by adding a pretense of diplomacy.

Rouhani likely falls in the former category. Obama is seen as well intended but weak, either incapable or unable to take on Congress and the domestic political forces favoring Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s line on Iran. The latest vote for sanctions in the House of Representatives is a case in point. The vote took place only three days before Rouhani’s inauguration and the bill did not include critical presidential waivers. While the White House did not favor the passage of the bill at that time, it did not spend any political capital to stop, delay or amend the bill.

The time has long passed for the dynamic between Congress and Obama to be seen as a good cop - bad cop tactic. For that to work, the good cop (Obama) must convincingly convey his ability to control the bad cop (Congress). But Obama is not perceived as being
able to control Congress. Instead of a good cop - bad cop tactic, the Iranians only see an American strategy in disarray, with the hardliners running amok.

That doesn't help Obama get a deal because the Iranians are left unconvinced that he can deliver on his end of the bargain.

**A sheep, a wolf or a dealmaker?**

Rouhani is neither a sheep nor a wolf. He is a pragmatist within the Iranian political context who favors diplomacy and coming to terms with the West on the nuclear issue.

In fact, his past experience where Iranian outreach fell on deaf ears in Washington will likely temper his interest in diplomacy. Rouhani believes he was badly burnt by the failure of the Bush administration to reciprocate Iranian measures and later he was accused of having been too soft in the nuclear negotiations. Though he always rejected that accusation, he will be cautious not to conduct future nuclear talks in a manner that would give an air of vindication to those accusations.

If Rouhani decides to move in a positive direction, the reaction of the West will be critical to determine how far that change can go. The Iranians missed a major opportunity in 2009 when they assumed that President Obama would be no different from previous US leaders - and then acted according to that assumption. Tehran's non-responsiveness rendered Obama's job to change the relationship more difficult. Washington should be careful not to commit that mistake.

Just as the extent of Obama's outreach to Iran depended on Tehran's willingness to reciprocate, any effort by Rouhani to change the relationship with Washington will depend on America's willingness to tango along. Rouhani is neither a wolf nor a sheep, but whether he is a dealmaker depends partly on the actions of President Obama and the U.S. Congress.
5. Dr. Marvin G. Weinbaum

Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; currently, Director of the Pakistan Studies Center at the Middle East Institute in Washington DC.

Marvin G. Weinbaum is professor emeritus of political science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and served as analyst for Pakistan and Afghanistan in the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research from 1999 to 2003. He is currently a scholar-in-residence and Director of the Pakistan Studies Center at the Middle East Institute in Washington DC.

Professor Weinbaum has his doctorate from Columbia University in 1965, and he joined the Illinois faculty in the same year. At Illinois, he served for fifteen years as the director of the Program in South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. Dr. Weinbaum was awarded Fulbright Research Fellowships for Egypt in 1981–82 and Afghanistan in 1989–90, and was a senior fellow at the United States Institute of Peace in 1996–97. Additionally, Dr. Weinbaum has been the recipient of research awards from the Social Science Research Council, the Ford Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, IREX, the American Political Science Association, and other granting agencies.

After retiring at Illinois, Professor Weinbaum has held adjunct professorships at Georgetown and George Washington universities, and lectures regularly at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute. At the State Department he was a recipient of its Superior Honors Award. Since leaving the Department, he has assumed numerous consultancies, both with government agencies and the private sector.

Dr. Weinbaum's research, teaching, and consultancies have focused on the issues of national security, state building, democratization, and political economy. He is the author or editor of six books, including South Asia Approaches the Millennium: Reexamining National Security, co-edited with Chetan Kumar in 1995, and Afghanistan and Pakistan: Resistance and Reconstruction in 1994. Dr. Weinbaum has also written more than 100 book chapters and professional journal articles, mostly about Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran, but also on Turkey and Egypt. He is also author of numerous opinion pieces in leading American newspapers, magazines, and think-tank reports. Among his recent publications are book chapters in edited volumes dealing with the U.S.-Pakistan partnership in counterterrorism, Pakistan’s political culture, and state building and the security challenges in Afghanistan.

Response to Questionnaire

1. What does Hasan Rowhani’s becoming the President of Iran mean to the West? Hasan Rowhani has described his elections as the “opening of a new era that would follow the path of moderation and justice and not extremism”

The West has been very enthusiastic in the aftermath of Rowhani's election. But it is
doubtful that major changes will result from this election. Rowhani might have been a moderate among the candidates, a centrist in the Iranian political spectrum, but it is important to remember that he was supported by the regime (otherwise he would not have been cleared to run for the elections). Thus we might see a new tone in renewed nuclear negotiations; but the much wanted/needed change of direction of Iran is unlikely to occur.

2. Western diplomats attribute the Iranians’ greater openness to the effects of EU-led sanctions, domestic political considerations and regional geopolitics. On the other hand, Hassan Rowhani has already said that he would not be halting Iran’s uranium enrichment program. Your comments.

Iran has been playing a game with its enrichment program, alternatively showing readiness to negotiate, then ignoring Western concerns and requests. If regional politics and domestic considerations did have an effect on the Iranians’ greater openness, it also had an effect on the continuation of the nuclear program. Uranium enrichment is important for Iran’s pursuit of regional power that is, above all, intended to challenge Saudi Arabia’s influence. Moreover, the regime is using the nuclear program as a way to strengthen its domestic grip on power by rallying the population around a popular cause—that Iran has every right to nuclear power.

3. What could be the impacts of Nuclear Iran in the Region?

An arm race would start in the region or it would be helpful to maintain deterrence in the region.

A nuclear Iran could indeed spur an arm race and increase tensions within the region. Countries throughout the region, but especially those in the Gulf, would have to reassess their strategic security calculations. While some countries would seek ways to build their defenses, others might choose greater accommodation with Iran. Saudi Arabia and Egypt are the best candidates for trying to embark on their own nuclear weapons programs. However, at best these would be only long-term answers to their security needs. Several Arab countries could seek to strengthen their partnerships with the United States. Pakistan, with its large nuclear arsenal, may be sought after to provide a Sunni counterweight to Shiite Iran. The Saudis could conceivably ask Pakistan for a nuclear umbrella. But the most obvious impact of a nuclear-armed Iran is to provoke the Israelis. Seeing a nuclear Iran as an existential threat, Israel may very well decide on military action. The consequences of an attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities, with the almost certain deaths of hundreds of civilians, can be expected to create a political firestorm throughout the Muslim world.

4. What are the prospects for U.S.-Iran Relations on the Nuclear Issue?

There are three scenarios: diplomacy, containment, and military action. Which one has a better chance?

The Obama administration has to date had very little success with diplomacy. It may be open, however, to exploring diplomacy depending on what new initiatives come from a
Rowhani government. Sanctions have always been seen as the means to get Iran to negotiate an agreement that leaves it short (how short is an issue in itself) of actual weapons nuclearization. Although Washington insists that containment is not an option it will entertain, if in the end the United States refrains from taking military action and Israel is persuaded not to strike, then containment may be the only course left. Military action by the U.S. cannot be ruled out, especially if Israel is determined to go ahead. (Only an American strike can put the Iranian program out of business for an extended time.) But the potential geopolitical consequences for American foreign policy in the region weigh heavily on American decision-makers and the US will act only with great reluctance.

5. **What really drives American foreign policy toward Iran? Is it a post-Cold War determination on the part of the United States to dominate the Middle East?**

American foreign policy towards Iran is not driven by a determination to dominate the Middle East, although it is anxious not to lose what influence it has in the region. Given American domestic opinion and the “light handed” approach of the Obama administration, if anything, the U.S. wants to disengage from the region as much as possible without losing out strategically. It is particularly anxious not to allow countries like Iran with its Islamic agenda and its regionally expansionist policies to prevail. The U.S. is notably concerned that the flow of oil in the Persian Gulf is not impeded and that Iran not be in a position to dictate oil prices. The spread of Al Qaeda and like organizations in the region—groups with global terrorist aims—will also ensure a continuing U.S. presence in the region. It is the defense of Israel, however, that guaranties American involvement will not disappear. To a far lesser extent, the desire to promote democracy remains a goal, but only when it does not run counter to American strategic interests. None of this amounts to domination by the U.S., which is, in any case, unachievable.

6. **Do you subscribe to the view that Obama’s Iran policy is, in some ways, worse than Bush’s?**

Contrary to what has been said a number of times during his first term in office, Obama’s policy offers much continuity from Bush’s. He has, however, also shown a greater willingness to negotiate and, as a result, Iran has bought time to pursue and accelerate its nuclear development. I don’t believe that Obama’s policy can be characterized as worse; Bush’s often-strident rhetoric poisoned the atmosphere. Obama still has a better chance at reaching out to the general population and the regime’s opposition.

7. **Some Iranian experts are of the view that India was much inclined towards the U.S. and should reconsider striking a balance in its foreign policy; India was not being pragmatic but opportunistic. Do you agree with the view that India has not been hesitant to play the Iran card to draw concessions from US on matters of bilateral concern?**

The importance of Indian-U.S. trade relations and the shared security interests (notably in Afghanistan) are major elements to take into consideration when thinking about the way
India has played its Iran card. India has always had a high degree of independence in its foreign policy. The importance of Iran’s energy resources cannot be discounted and Iran’s Char Bahar port offers access to Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan. In all likelihood India is likely to accede to some American pressures regarding Iran and reject others.

8. How far do you agree with the statement that India stands at the forefront of countries that appear to be in a position to give Iran the kind of support that would be needed in the "very very critical and crucial discussions and dialogue that Iran needs to do."

It is hard to see what kind of support India would give. At most, some have suggested that India could assume the role of intermediary with the U.S. in negotiating contentious issues. There seems to be little prospect of that any time soon. While India and Iran have some overlapping interests, most of them economic, the Iran-India relationship is also conditioned by Iran-Pakistan relations.

9. It’s suggested that the EU needs a new approach to Iran because its interests in Iran go way beyond the nuclear dossier. Iran is the EU’s geographic neighbour. Individual EU member states have much closer economic, cultural and people-to-people links with Iran than the US does. How far is this argument valid?

The importance of Iran for the EU and the European foreign policy (if we can talk of a European foreign policy at all) relies in great part in the ambition of the European Union to position itself as a great power in global affairs. The nuclear issue should have provided the EU with an opportunity to stand as one bloc and show cohesion and uniformity. Iran may also be inclined to form bilateral relations in order to lower the weight of European sanctions as a whole. If such strategy were to be attempted, the EU’s unity would be tested. Whatever the links of Iran as a result of geographic proximity, much of the diaspora community in Europe is anti-Iranian regime. As a whole, the EU perceives Iran as a radical Islamic state, and few governments or their publics feel particularly close to the Islamic Republic.

10. What are Arab Perspectives on Iran’s Role in a changing Middle East after the Arab uprisings? How is the Iranian threat perceived in the Arab States? Is Iran’s Syria policy hurting its regional popularity?

Iran has established a foreign policy based on a fragile equilibrium in the Middle East, being the leading Shia country but using a pan-Islamic discourse to increase its power. But instead, the Arab uprisings, and particularly the ongoing war in Syria, have revealed a deepened gap between Sunni and Shia countries and peoples in the region. Most notably, the support that the Islamic Republic has given to the Assad’s regime has adversely affected its popularity among most Arab populations. Iran’s ability to project power beyond its borders through groups like Hezbollah has caused a great deal of apprehension in many Arab capitals.
6. Dr. Pierre Goldschmidt

Non-resident Senior Associate, Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment

Goldschmidt was the deputy director general and head of the Department of Safeguards at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) from May 1999 to June 2005. The Department of Safeguards is responsible for verifying that nuclear material placed under safeguards is not diverted to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices and that there is no undeclared nuclear material or activities in non-nuclear-weapon states party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Before the IAEA, Goldschmidt was director general of SYNATOM, the company responsible for the fuel supply and spent-fuel management of seven Belgian nuclear plants, for twelve years. He was a member of the Directoire of EURODIF, the large French uranium-enrichment company, for six years.

Goldschmidt is a member of the European Nuclear Society’s High Scientific Council and has headed numerous European and international committees, acting as chairman of the Uranium Institute in London (now the World Nuclear Association), the Organisation des Producteurs d’Energie Nucléaire in Paris, and the Advisory Committee of the EURATOM Supply Agency.

In November 2005, he became doctor honoris causa of the University of Brussels. He was nominated Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur (France) in 2009 and knighted by the king of Belgium in 2012.

Among a number of cultural and scientific awards, he received the 2008 Joseph A. Burton Forum Award of the American Physical Society.

Goldschmidt is the author of more than 100 publications.

QUESTIONNAIRE-IRAN

1. What does Hasan Rohawni’s becoming the President of Iran means to the West? Hasan Rowhani has described his elections as the “opening of a new era that would follow the path of moderation and justice and not extremism.”

Hassan Rohani’s election makes it possible for Iran to adopt a more constructive approach in negotiating the nuclear issue without losing face. One can hope that he can also improve respect for human rights, including freedom of opinion and the condition of Iranian women.

2. Western diplomats attribute the Iranians’ greater openness to the effects of EU-led sanctions, domestic political considerations and regional geopolitics. On the other hand, Hassan Rouhani has already said that he would not be halting Iran’s uranium enrichment programme. Your comments.

It is likely that in order to have the UN, the US and the EU lifting present sanctions Iran will adopt a more flexible approach to resolve the nuclear issue. It is doubtful however that Iran will be ready to suspend all its enrichment activities but under certain conditions it should be possible to find a reasonable compromise acceptable to all parties.

3. What could be the impacts of Nuclear Iran in the Region?
An arm race would start in the region or it would be helpful to maintain deterrence in the region.

If by a "Nuclear Iran" you mean Iran starting the production of nuclear weapons, the consequences could be dramatic. First because it would increase significantly the probability that Israel would take preemptive steps which in turn could trigger war in the region with dramatic consequences for everyone. Assuming that Israel doesn't take such a step, the possession by Iran of a nuclear arsenal could lead Iran's leadership to feel invulnerable to foreign threats and therefore to get further involved in other states domestic affairs either directly or by proxy. That too would increase the risk of an arms race and war in the region.

If, as North Korea did, Iran were to withdraw from the NPT it would undermine the credibility of the whole non-proliferation regime and the possibility of further nuclear proliferation in the region couldn't be ruled out.

I strongly reject the idea that Iran's possession of a nuclear arsenal would increase the stability in the region. Don't forget that contrary to the situation prevailing between the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War or between India and Pakistan today, there are no diplomatic contacts between Iran and Israel and that Iran doesn't even recognize the existence of Israel. Therefore the risk of a nuclear conflict - voluntary or by mistake or misperception- would increase significantly.

4. What are the prospects for U.S.-Iran Relations on the Nuclear Issue? There are three scenarios: diplomacy, containment, and military action. Which one has a better chance?

First diplomacy, then containment and last military action.

5. What really drives American foreign policy toward Iran? Is it a post-Cold War determination on the part of the United States to dominate the Middle East?

I don't think the US wants to dominate the Middle East! Certainly not Obama. They want peace and stability in the region. China has the same interest because conflicts in the region mean higher oil prices. Russia wants to play a role in the region and, in case of tension, would benefit from higher oil prices.

6. Do you subscribe to the view that Obama's Iran policy is, in some ways, worse than Bush's?

Absolutely not. Bush invaded Iraq on a false pretext. His wars in Iraq and Afghanistan made Iran much stronger than it was when Iran's undeclared nuclear
activities were reported to the world in 2002. At that time a lasting compromise might have been possible when the barrel of oil was below 30 USD, and Iran's conversion plant in Esfahan and enrichment facility in Natanz were not yet in operation. Iran's position was much stronger in 2009 when Obama was elected. Bush envisaged a military attack on Iran. Obama favors a negotiated solution coupled with diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions.

7. Some Iranian experts are of the view that India was much inclined towards the U.S. and should reconsider striking a balance in its foreign policy; India was not being pragmatic but opportunistic. Do you agree with the view that India has not been hesitant to play the Iran card to draw concessions from US on matters of bilateral concern?

I assume your question refers to the US agreement to make an "Indian exception" for not applying to India the nuclear export criteria of the NSG. This was a clear success for India's diplomacy. It was a huge mistake of the Bush Administration because by concluding such an agreement - without requiring that India fulfills certain conditions - the US undermined the credibility of the NSG and the global non-proliferation regime in exchange for short term if not illusory political and economic advantages.

8. How far do you agree with the statement that India stands at the forefront of countries that appear to be in a position to give Iran the kind of support that would be needed in the "very very critical and crucial discussions and dialogue that Iran needs to do."

I don't think India should get involved in the negotiation of the P5+1 with Iran, but should implement fully UN Security Council resolutions on Iran and support the US and EU sanctions as long as Iran defies these legally binding resolutions and does not fully cooperate with the IAEA. Once the nuclear stalemate with Iran has been resolved it is clear that India would be in a very good position to establish major trade and commercial relations with Iran to the benefit of both countries.

9. It's suggested that the EU needs a new approach to Iran because its interests in Iran go way beyond the nuclear dossier. Iran is the EU's geographic neighbour. Individual EU member states have much closer economic, cultural and people-to-people links with Iran than the US does. How far is this argument valid?

It is true that the EU has close economic, cultural and people-to-people links with Iran and this is why the EU has a clear interest and wish to resolve peacefully the nuclear crisis with Iran. But the EU considers Iran's unwillingness to resolve the
nuclear issue in a way that would reassure the world that its nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes as justifying progressively increasing economic sanctions even if it is at a cost to EU member states.

10. How strong are the economic ties between Iran and China and what is their impact on China's position regarding Iran's nuclear program?

Economic ties between Iran and China have increased dramatically over the last ten years. China is importing oil from Iran and wants to avoid another conflict in the region that could push the barrel of oil to price levels unseen so far. China has therefore used its position as a veto wielding member of the UN Security Council to water down and delay Security Council sanctions on Iran. Russia has done the same but for different reasons as indicated above.

11. What are Arab Perspectives on Iran's Role in a Changing Middle East after the Arab uprisings? How Iranian threat is perceived in the Arab States? Is Iran's Syria policy hurting its regional popularity?

Beyond some apparent opening earlier this year of Egypt’s President Morsi towards Iran, I don’t think that the "Arab uprisings" have changed the deep animosity of Arab Sunnis towards Iranian Shiites. Iran’s public support for President Bachar al-Assad in Syria is further hurting Iran’s popularity in the Arab world and makes it even more obvious that Iran is interfering in other nations domestic affairs something Iran blames the United States for doing.
7. Alex Vatanka

Adjunct Scholar at the Middle East Institute
Washington D.C.
Alex Vatanka is an adjunct scholar at the Middle East Institute in Washington D.C. He joined MEI in 2007.

He specializes in Middle Eastern affairs with a particular focus on Iran. From 2006 to 2010, he was the Managing Editor of Jane’s Islamic Affairs Analyst (jiaa.janes.com). From 2001 to 2006, he was a senior political analyst at Jane’s in London where he mainly covered the Middle East. Alex is also a Senior Fellow in Middle East Studies at the US Air Force Special Operations School (USAFSOS) at Hurlburt Field and teaches also at DISAM at Wright-Patterson AFB.

He has lectured widely for both governmental and commercial audiences, including the US Department State, various US military branches, US Congressional staff, and Middle Eastern energy firms.

Beyond Jane’s and the Middle East Institute, he has written for such outlets as Christian Science Monitor, Foreign Affairs.com, Americas Quarterly, the Journal of International Security Affairs, BBC Persian Online, Jamestown Foundation, The World Today, PBS, Daily Beast, the Jerusalem Post and the Council of Foreign Relations.

Some of his most recent publications have included “Tangle in the Caucasus: Iran and Israel fight for influence in Azerbaijan”; “The Guardian of Pakistan’s Shia”; “The Artesh: Iran's marginalized regular military;” and “The odd couple: Iran and Qatar and Arab Revolutions.”

Born in Tehran, Iran, he holds a BA in Political Science (Sheffield University, UK), and an MA in International Relations (Essex University, UK), and is fluent in Farsi and Danish. He is currently working on a book on Iranian-Pakistani relations and its impact on US national security.

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QUESTIONNAIRE-IRAN

1. What does Hasan Rohawni’s becoming the President of Iran means to the West? Hasan Rowhani has described his elections as the “opening of a new era that would follow the path of moderation and justice and not extremism.”

There is of course a lot of sloganeering going on at all times. And this includes Mr. Rouhani, who as a foot soldier of the Islamic Republic for the last 34 years can not claim to be an "original reformer."

But the fact is Rouhani’s election will in the short term provide a nice pretext for both Tehran and Washington to lessen the rhetoric and give diplomacy a serious try.
At the very least, Rouhani is not saddled with the hugely negative image that Ahmadinejad created for himself in the United States.

Ahmadinejad - despite the fact that his role in the nuclear saga was limited - had nonetheless become part of the problem.

Rouhani can turn his rhetoric into part of a diplomatic solution.

2. Western diplomats attribute the Iranians' greater openness to the effects of EU-led sanctions, domestic political considerations and regional geopolitics. On the other hand, Hassan Rouhani has already said that he would not be halting Iran’s uraniam enrichment programme. Your comments.

He plays in a tough political environment at home and the Iranian regime likes to create and ride on a nationalist wave around the nuclear program.

But the fact that he was allowed to run in the first place by the regime (in the elections) means he has the backing from the top to provide concessions to the West if the West is willing to reciprocate.

I don't think the political atmosphere in Tehran will allow Rouhani to halt enrichment in Iran but with the right kind of negotiations a suspension - as in 2003-05 - is a serious possibility.

3. What could be the impacts of Nuclear Iran in the Region?

An arm race would start in the region or it would be helpful to maintain deterrence in the region.

This is difficult to predict but I do not see a mass race toward the bomb by Iran's neighbors.

Countries like Saudi Arabia and UAE might want to opt for a bomb if Iran gets one, but the United States will strongly oppose this development.

One of the pillars of US policy in the Middle East is "anti-proliferation." Just because Iran gets it, does not mean the US will let other follow.

This, however, would require a US policy of extending a nuclear umbrella to provide security guarantees to allied states in the Persian Gulf region in particular.

4. What are the prospects for U.S.-Iran Relations on the Nuclear Issue?

There are three scenarios: diplomacy, containment, and military action. Which one has a better chance?
At this stage the hope is that diplomacy still has the potential to work. This I think will be tried for at least another year.

Failing that, we are probably looking at containment even though the US says that is not an option.

I cannot see any serious and lasting military intervention in Iran under the Obama administration.

5. What really drives American foreign policy toward Iran? Is it a post-Cold War determination on the part of the United States to dominate the Middle East?

It is a combination of factors but Iran's anti-American, anti-Israel and often anti-Arab (certainly anti GCC) has created a very formidable opposition to it in Washington.

6. Do you subscribe to the view that Obama’s Iran policy is, in some ways, worse than Bush’s?

No, Obama merely inherited a file that had been going on since 2002 and was moving ahead because Iran's nuclear program was moving ahead.

One can make the argument that Obama escalated the sanctions in Iran as a way of appeasing the anti-Iran voices in Washington. In other words, with tougher sanctions the Obama team sought to prevent the need for war which it opposes.

7. Some Iranian experts are of the view that India was much inclined towards the U.S. and should reconsider striking a balance in its foreign policy; India was not being pragmatic but opportunistic. Do you agree with the view that India has not been hesitant to play the Iran card to draw concessions from US on matters of bilateral concern?

It is not about opportunism. It is about protecting one's national interests. In 2005, India received a very good deal from Washington and that set the stage for India's policy toward Tehran in the Iran-US fight.

India will not choose Iran over the US. This says more about Iranian foreign policy failures than it speaks of Indian opportunism.

8. How far do you agree with the statement that India stands at the forefront of countries that appear to be in a position to give Iran the kind of support that would be needed in the "very very critical and crucial discussions and dialogue that Iran needs to do."

I think due its size and trade relations with Iran, India can be an important player in convincing Iran. I would not say India is in the forefront but among the key international players that can act as a mediator.
9. It’s suggested that the EU needs a new approach to Iran because its interests in Iran go way beyond the nuclear dossier. Iran is the EU's geographic neighbour. Individual EU member states have much closer economic, cultural and people-to-people links with Iran than the US does. How far is this argument valid?

EU has for a number of years, after Ahmadinejad came to power, taken a back seat and has let the US decide the course of action against Tehran. That will, I think, continue to be the case unless the Europeans suddenly find themselves in disagreement with Washington which there is no sign off at the moment.

10. How strong are the economic ties between Iran and China and what is their impact on China’s position regarding Iran’s nuclear program?

China is key to Iranian trade. It has replaced Germany as Iran's biggest trading partner at some $30 billion per year. The Asian oil importers of China, Japan, India and South Korea are in many ways the lifeline of the Iranian economy.

11. What are Arab Perspectives on Iran’s Role in a Changing Middle East after the Arab uprisings? How Iranian threat is perceived in the Arab States? Is Iran’s Syria policy hurting its regional popularity?

The key impact of the Arab Spring is that it has heightened the Iranian sense of isolation. And to break from this isolation Iran needs to break itself from the shackles of the nuclear saga and overhaul its foreign policy across the board, in the region and on the international stage. Iran cannot become another North Korea and they know it in Tehran and nor do they want that sort of status. That's why Rouhani was allowed to run and won, to bring Iran back.

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8. Prof. Ali M Ansari

BA (Lon) PhD (Lon)
Professor of Iranian History & Director of the Institute for Iranian Studies at the University of St Andrews; Senior Associate Fellow, Royal United Services Institute; Vice President of the British Institute for Persian Studies


He is also Editor of the Cambridge History of Iran Vol 8 (The Islamic Republic).

Response to QUESTIONNAIRE on IRAN

1. What does Hasan Rohawni’s becoming the President of Iran means to the West? Hasan Rowhani has described his elections as the “opening of a new era that would follow the path of moderation and justice and not extremism.” At best Rowhani’s election will offer the possibility of a new beginning with the West.

There will be much less of the reckless rhetoric that characterised Ahmadinejad’s administration but much will depend on what is done rather than what is said (more internally than externally) and also the people who shape Rowhani’s administration. What we do know that is Rowhani is saying all the right things, we also know that a modus vivendi has been established between Khamenei and Rafsanjani (and to some extent Khatami). What we don't know is that with the absence of Ahmadinejad how long this political alliance will last. In other words has there been a genuine change in political outlook or are we witnessing an expedient political alliance to get rid of Ahmadinejad.

2. Western diplomats attribute the Iranians’ greater openness to the effects of EU-led sanctions, domestic political considerations and regional geopolitics. On the other hand, Hassan Rouhani has already said that he would not be halting Iran’s uranium enrichment programme. Your comments.

Sanctions have clearly had a role but they are not the whole story. Economic and political mismanagement has been at the centre of the public frustration but sanctions are part of that narrative as Rowhani and his supporters themselves say. The idea that sanctions played no role whatsoever is not supported by the evidence.

3. What could be the impacts of Nuclear Iran in the Region?
An arm race would start in the region or it would be helpful to maintain deterrence in the region.

I am not convinced it would create an arms race but I don’t think it will be stabilising either.

4. What are the prospects for U.S.-Iran Relations on the Nuclear Issue?

There are three scenarios: diplomacy, containment, and military action. Which one has a better chance?

I think diplomacy now has a much better chance as long as both sides are open to serious negotiation and compromise. Military action is now much less likely, I never thought it was a realistic possibility but now less so. Containment is however the default position.

5. What really drives American foreign policy toward Iran? Is it a post-Cold War determination on the part of the United States to dominate the Middle East?

You cannot understand American policy towards Iran outside the hostage crisis and the Iran-contra scandal. Both these have helped shape American attitudes and made public opinion more amenable and receptive to anti-Iranian propaganda. At the same time, Iran under Ahmadinejad made matters much much worse by playing up to the stereotype. At the heart of the Iran-US tragedy is the view from each side that the other betrayed them. You cannot understand the emotions that underpin the antagonism outside the real friendship that used to exist.

6. Do you subscribe to the view that Obama’s Iran policy is, in some ways, worse than Bush’s?

No. Obama has in effect inherited the frame of reference established by Bush. Its not worse but Obama could do better!

7. Some Iranian experts are of the view that India was much inclined towards the U.S. and should reconsider striking a balance in its foreign policy; India was not being pragmatic but opportunistic. Do you agree with the view that India has not been hesitant to play the Iran card to draw concessions from US on matters of bilateral concern?

I am not expert enough in this, but my sense is that India has like many other countries, played the Iran card to its advantage.

8. How far do you agree with the statement that India stands at the forefront of countries that appear to be in a position to give Iran the kind of support that would be needed in the “very very critical and crucial discussions and dialogue that Iran needs to do.”

I think India is in a strong position to play a pivotal role.
9. It’s suggested that the EU needs a new approach to Iran because its interests in Iran go way beyond the nuclear dossier. Iran is the EU’s geographic neighbour. Individual EU member states have much closer economic, cultural and people-to-people links with Iran than the US does. How far is this argument valid?

In my view it was Ahmadinejad that lost Europe, not the other way round. Up until 2005, Iranian administrations’ always cultivated Europe as a counterweight to America.

10. How strong are the economic ties between Iran and China and what is their impact on China’s position regarding Iran’s nuclear program?

Strong but vastly imbalanced. China pays Iran for its oil in kind, mainly agricultural produce which has devastated Iran’s agricultural sector.

11. What are Arab Perspectives on Iran’s Role in a Changing Middle East after the Arab uprisings? How Iranian threat is perceived in the Arab States? Is Iran’s Syria policy hurting its regional popularity?

The main conflict is between Saudi Arabia and Iran for influence and as currently characterised, Iran is definitely losing ground in the Arab world because it is regarded principally as a Persian rather than a Shia power.
9. Dr. Daniel Pipes

President of the Middle East Forum

Daniel Pipes is president of the Middle East Forum. His bi-weekly column appears regularly in the National Review and in newspapers around the globe, including the Jerusalem Post (Israel), La Razón (Spain), Liberal (Italy), National Post (Canada), and the Australian.

His website, DanielPipes.org, offers an archive of his work and an opportunity to sign up to receive e-mails of his current writings. With 64 million page visits, it is of the Internet's most accessed sources of specialized information on the Middle East and Muslim history.

CBS Sunday Morning says Daniel Pipes was "years ahead of the curve in identifying the threat of radical Islam." "Unnoticed by most Westerners," he wrote, for example, in 1995, "war has been unilaterally declared on Europe and the United States." The Boston Globe states that "If Pipes's admonitions had been heeded, there might never have been a 9/11." The Wall Street Journal calls Mr. Pipes "an authoritative commentator on the Middle East" and the Washington Post deems him both "a prominent conservative intellectual" and "perhaps the most prominent U.S. scholar on radical Islam." The Huffington Post recognizes him as "a renowned scholar on matters of extremist Islam."

He received his A.B. (1971) and Ph.D. (1978) from Harvard University, both in history, and spent six years studying abroad, including three years in Egypt. Mr. Pipes speaks French, and reads Arabic and German. He has taught at Harvard, Pepperdine, the U.S. Naval War College, and the University of Chicago. He has been affiliated with Princeton and Stanford universities. He served in various capacities in the U.S. government, including two presidency-appointed positions, vice chairman of the Fulbright Board of Foreign Scholarships and board member of the U.S. Institute of Peace. He was director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute in 1986-93.

Mr. Pipes discusses current issues on television on such U.S. programs as ABC World News, Crossfire, Good Morning America, News-Hour with Jim Lehrer, Nightline, O'Reilly Factor, and The Today Show. He has appeared on leading television networks around the globe, including the BBC and Al-Jazeera, and has lectured in twenty-five countries. He has publicly debated leading figures, including Noam Chomsky and Ken Livingstone.

Mr. Pipes has published in such magazines as the Atlantic Monthly, Commentary, Foreign Affairs, Harper's, National Review, New Republic, Time, and The Weekly Standard. More than a hundred American newspapers have carried his articles, including the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Washington Post. His writings have been translated into 37 languages and have appeared in such newspapers as ABC, Corriere della Sera, The Daily Telegraph, Le Figaro, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, and The Sydney Morning Herald.


Mr. Pipes edited two collections of essays, Sandstorm (UPA, 1993) and Friendly Tyrants (St. Martin's, 1991). He has edited two journals, Orbis (1986-90) and the Middle East Quarterly (1994-2001). Mr. Pipes sits on five editorial boards, has testified before many congressional committees, and worked on five presidential campaigns. Universities in the United States and Switzerland have conferred honorary degrees on him. Mr. Pipes takes pride in having been Borked by Edward Kennedy, called an "Orientalist" by Edward Said, deemed the neo-conservative movement's "leading thinker" by Egypt's Al-Ahram newspaper, and publicly invited to convert by a leading Al-Qaeda figure. He has also been recognized as one of Harvard University's 100 most influential living graduates and is listed in Marquis Who's Who in the World.

Mr. Pipes founded the Middle East Forum (MEForum.org), an independent 501(c)3 organization, in 1994. The Forum has a nearly US$4 million budget. Its mission is "promoting American interests" through publications, research, media outreach, and public education. It publishes the Middle East Quarterly and sponsors Campus Watch, Islamist Watch, the Legal Project, and the Washington Project.
RESPONSE to Questionnaire

1. Rouhani’s election means the West will be fooled.
2. Openness is all very fine but has nothing to do with centrifuges whirling away.
3. A nuclear Iran will have very negative and potentially catastrophic consequences for the region. The mullahs might well deploy the bomb.
4. Containment seems most likely but one never knows. My article from 3 1/2 years ago might be newly relevant again: http://www.danielpipes.org/7921/bomb-iran-save-obama-presidency
5. Neither: see #3.
6. They are both sadly weak.
7. I do.
8. Trade and moral support from India are very important in Tehran's ruling circles.
9. Not at all valid. Europeans need to worry about #3.
10. [I don't follow this]
11. Shi’ites generally support Iran and Sunnis generally oppose it. Yes, the Syria involvement has made the mullahs deeply unpopular.

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1. IRAN and US

Will the West Ever Give Iran a Fair Deal?

- **Ambassador Karamatullah K. Ghori**  
A former Pakistani career diplomat

*America, Iran, and the International Relations of the Iranian Nuclear Issue*

- **Dr. Mark N. Katz**  
Professor of Government and Politics at George Mason University (Fairfax, Virginia, USA)

*Can Rouhani and Obama Make Peace?  
Identifying the systemic factors that constrain US-Iran communication*

Prof. Hooshang Amirahmadi

Former director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Rutgers University  
&  
Kayvon Afshari  
Political scientist and CBS News journalist

The U.S. – Iranian Nexus: Where does the relationship go from here?

- **Gustavo Mendiolaza**  
Research analyst, Indian Ocean Research Programme, Future Directions International, Perth, Australia

*Impact of Rouhani’s Election Win on Iran-US Relations*

- **Hossein Asgarian**  
Expert with Tehran International Studies & Research Institute (TISRI)  
Director of TISRI’s “Book of Asia” and “Book of CIS” departments

2. IRAN and RUSSIA

Russia and Iran

- **Dr. Richard Weitz**
Senior Fellow and Director, Center for Political-Military Analysis, Hudson Institute, Washington, DC &

- **Dr. Victor Mizin**
  currently the Deputy Director of the Institute for International Studies, and Professor of the Moscow State Institute of International Affairs (University) (MGIMO), as well as the Senior Research Fellow with the Center of International Security at the Russian Academy of Sciences’ Institute of World Economy and International Relations.

&

- **Ms. Natalia Sharova**
  An international-security analyst. She has recently interned with the Carnegie Moscow center.

### 3. IRAN and CHINA

**The Myth and Imponderabilia of Sino-Iran Interaction**

- **Zhou Lei**
  Dr. in Anthropology
  Founder of Oriental Danology Institute and BRICS FUTURES Consultancy

**Iran in the PRC politics**

- **Konstantin Syroezhkin**
  Chief Researcher of Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies, under President of Republic of Kazakhstan

&

- **Prof. Malik Augan**
  Al-Farabi Kazakh National University

### 4. IRAN and European Union

**Iran and EU’s Chilled Relations: Would the Roles and Bonhomie Revive?**

- **Dr. Muhammad Aslam Khan Niazi**
  Retired Brig. from Pakistan Army

### 5. IRAN and ARAB WORLD

**IRAN AND THE ARABS**

- **Dr. HALEH ESFANDIARI**
  Director, Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C.

**A STRATEGY TESTED: IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND THE ARAB AWAKENING**

- **Flynt Leverett**
  Professor of international affairs and law at Pennsylvania State University and a visiting scholar at Peking University’s School of International Studies
Country –specific Studies (1)

STUDIES on IRAN

&

- **Hillary Mann Leverett**
  Senior professorial lecturer at American University’s School of International Service and also a visiting scholar at Peking University’s School of International Studies

*Iran and the Arab World: Iran, Syria and the Arab Spring*

- **Dr. Jubin M. Goodarzi**
  Assistant Professor and Researcher, International Relations Department, Webster University Geneva, Switzerland

**Iran-Egypt Relations: Testing Times in an Era of Turbulence and Transition**

- **Col. Rajeev Agarwal**
  Research Fellow at IDSA, New Delhi

*Iran-Kuwait Foreign Relations: Pre and Post Gulf war*

- **ATIK UR RAHMAN**
  Research Scholar, Dept. of West Asian Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India

6. **IRAN and PAKISTAN**

**External factors in Iran-Pakistan Relations: An Assessment**

- **Nihar Ranjan Das**
  Research Fellow at the Eurasian Foundation, New Delhi

**Complaisant Pakistanis, Condescending Persians: Orientalist Observations on Irano-Pakistan Relations**

- **Burzine K. WAGHMAR**
  School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (Great Britain)

**Iran and Balochistan: Human Rights and International Implications**

- **Dr. Richard L. Benkin**
  American human rights activist and journalist

7. **IRAN and AFGHANISTAN**

**Iran’s Policy in Afghanistan Amidst Turbulence and Transition**

- **Anwesha Ghosh**
  Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Willy Brandt School of Public Policy, University of Erfurt, Germany

**Iran-Afghanistan Relations Post-2014**

- **Monish Gulati**
  an independent analyst based in New Delhi

**Afghan-Iran Socio-Economic and Political Relations: Prospects and Challenges**

- **Prof. MA. Abdul Malek Halimi**
Faculty of Economics, Kabul University, Kabul, Afghanistan

**Iran’s Foreign Policy For Afghanistan**

- **John K. Wood**  
  Associate Professor, Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, Washington, D.C

**Iran-Afghanistan Relations: New President, Old Politics?**

- **Dr. Siegfried O. Wolf**  
  Director of Research at SADF, Lecturer in International Relations and Comparative Politics, SAI, Heidelberg University, Germany

8. **IRAN and ISRAEL**

*My enemy’s enemy is my friend – Israel and Arabs against Iran?*

- **Dr. Ehud Eilam**  
  Representative of Israel Defense magazine in the USA.  
  Lecturer and researcher of Israel’s national security and military doctrine

9. **IRAN and INDIA**

*Indo-Iranian relations in the 21st century*

- **Balaji Chandramohan**  
  Visiting Fellow with Future Directions International, a policy think tank based in Perth, Australia

**Indo-Iran Strategic Partnership: Opportunities and Challenges in the 21st Century**

- **Dr. Mohammad Samir Hussain**  
  Research Associate, Yashwantrao Chavan National Centre of International Security and Defence Analysis, University of Pune,

&

- **Dr. Shahriar Abbasabadi**, Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, University of Pune,

**India and Iran – narrowing the separation?**

- **Dr. Uddipan Mukherjee**  
  an IOFS officer under the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB), Ministry of Defence, Government of India

**Iran’s New President and an Opportunity to Improve Bilateral Relations with India**

- **Dr. Mahmoud Reza Golshanpazhouh**  
  Editor in Chief of Iran Review Website

**INDO – IRAN RELATIONSHIP- A SURVEY**

- **Dr. Manas Chakrabarty**  
  Professor of Political Science, University of North Bengal
India-Iran Relationship: Future Prospects and Challenges
- Masood Ur Rehman Khattak
  Lecturer of International Relations, Department of Politics and I.R., International Islamic University, Islamabad.

A Review of Indo-Iran Relations based on Constructivist Approach
- Dr. Mandana Tishehyar
  Assistant Professor, Faculty of World Studies, University of Tehran, Iran

Dilemmas and Convergences in Indo-Iran Relationship: A Tight Rope Walk
- Ranjita Chakraborty
  Asst. Professor in Political Science, University of North Bengal

India and Iran Relations: The Need for Constructive Re-engagement
- Mukhtar Ahmad Bhat
  Research Scholar, Dept. of West Asian Studies, A.M.U. Aligarh, India

Iran’s Domestic and Foreign Policies

Iran's Newly Elected President and His First Term's Significant Domestic and Foreign Policies
- Dr. Majid Rafizadeh
  President International American Council on the Middle East
  and a senior fellow at Nonviolence International

IRAN - In search of a balance

IRAN - modernisation by evolution
- Dr. Małgorzata Bonikowska
  Political scientist, co-founder and partner of THINKTANK analytical centre, Warsaw, Poland
  and President of Centre for International Relations and of India EU Council
  &
- Pawel Rabiej
  Co-founder and partner of THINKTANK analytical centre, Warsaw, Poland.

Iran’s Nuclear Program

The Rationality of Iran’s Position on Its Nuclear Program
- Dr. Richard Rousseau
  Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
  at the American University of Ras Al Khaimah, United Arab Emirates

US-Iran Nuclear Confrontation: Belligerence rather than Diplomacy
- Dr. Venkat Lokanathan
  Assistant Professor and Coordinator, Master’s Program, Department of Political Science,
  St. Joseph’s (Autonomous) College, Bangalore
**ARTICLES :**

(1) **IRAN and US**

### Will the West Ever Give Iran a Fair Deal?

**Amb. Karamatullah K. Ghori**

(Ambassador Karamatullah K. Ghori is a former Pakistani career diplomat and ambassador. He served his country’s Foreign Service with distinction in various parts of the world—and in a variety of diplomatic assignments—in a career spanning 36 years. Before taking up the diplomatic career, Ambassador Ghori had lectured at Karachi University and worked as a researcher at Pakistan’s premier ‘think tank’, the Pakistan Institute of International Affairs (PIIA).

Since his retirement from service, in early 2002, he has been a free lance columnist, commentator and speaker on politics and international affairs. He is a regular contributor to Pakistan’s DAWN newspaper, and to the New Indian Express, and the Milli Gazette of India. His research papers have also been appearing regularly in FPRC Journal, Delhi, and PIIA’s Journal, Pakistan Horizon.

Ambassador Ghori is also a poet and writer of renown in his native Urdu language. His latest book—pen profiles of Pakistan’s prime leaders and national luminaries—is due to come off the press, in India, later this year.)

Hasan Rouhani’s election as Iran’s new President, on June 14, 2013, marked a long-awaited watershed event on Iran’s current political landscape.

Given the fact that clergy-dominated and tightly controlled Iranian electoral system is not a western stereotype, Rouhani’s triumph at the polls was truly astounding. The clergy had sifted all and every presidential hopeful minutely, so much so that only eight candidates were found suitable to run for the office out of a staggering 12,000 or so hopefuls in the field, initially.

In this highly selective and tightly regulated milieu, Rouhani’s election in the first round of balloting was all the more impressive. With the label of a so-called liberal or moderate on him, it was widely believed, in the West, more than anywhere else, that he would not be looked down with favour by a conservative clergy, headed by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran’s supreme leader (Rehbar) whose powers are immense and whose voice is decisive in all substantive measures in the Iranian system of governance.
Except for Rouhani, the field of candidates vying for the highest elected office of Iran was packed with the right-wing, or right-leaning, conservative candidates. He was the only one who could fit the description of a progressive, with an agenda uncommon from the rest of the pack. This factor, alone, was enough to trigger an almost consensual belief and speculation in the West that the orthodox clergy will not allow Rohani to succeed. To buttress their argument they cited, ad nauseam, the example of Hussain Mousavi, at the 2009 polls. Mousavi, in the eyes of the West had won the election against Mehmood Ahmadinejad but was denied the fruit of his victory because of his liberal views.

These naysayers and Cassandras were left askance by Hasan Rouhani’s categorical and convincing victory. The fact that the much-decried Iranian clergy didn’t move a finger to subvert the people’s verdict in favour of Rohani literally came down upon these Iranian detractors like a ton of bricks. They scrambled for cover to hide their embarrassment.

However, even a transparent and visibly fair verdict of the Iranian people—spoken in favour of a reform-minded and progressive Rouhani—was deemed insufficient by Iran’s purblind detractors and critics. They deliberately overlooked the massive, 80 percent-plus turnout at the polls. Which pales into insignificance the usual 40 to 45 % turnout at the polls in western countries, where even this—a minority turnout of registered voters—is considered ‘positive. Likewise ignored was Rouhani’s winning margin of 51 % of the votes cast, thus obviating the need for a second round of polling.

The Canadian government, for instance, seemed to be leading the charge on behalf of the Western Jeremias left wallowing in their congenital hatred of the Iranians. In his comments on the outcome of the Iranian presidential election, Canadian Foreign Minister John Baird—who flaunts himself as an unremitting Israeli crony and partisan and was the architect of the decision, last year, to close down the Iranian Embassy in Ottawa and cut off diplomatic ties with Iran on the spurious charge of it being ‘an exporter of international terrorism—casually dismissed it as ‘effectively meaningless.” (1) He had the gall to denigrate and pour scorn on the Iranian President-elect, calling him “One of Ayatollah Khamenei’s puppets.”(2)

Which prompted one of Canada’s veteran journalists and media commentators, Tony Burman—who had previously headed Canada’s official radio network, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and lately also Al Jazeera international—to decry Baird’s terse comment as “cynical and extreme.” (3)

Burman had the savvy to hone in on the real reason behind Baird’s terse dismissal of the Iranian assertion of democracy. Commenting on Baird’s bull-in-a-china-shop reflexes, Burman said: “Should it surprise us that Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird was in Jerusalem shortly after he made that statement, listening to his comrade-in-arm, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying essentially the same thing? In today’s polarized Middle east, there must be something promising if both the current Israeli and Canadian governments oppose it.” (4)
Burman had, more or less, put his finger on the nub of what may be regarded as a mental fixation of not only the Canadian government of the day but also many of the western governments, if not all of them: they have pawned their decision making on all things Iranian—as well as all things Arab and Muslim—to Israel and its hawkish leadership with its pronounced proclivity to muscle its way through every problem and shoot from the hip.

The Canadian government of the day, led by a deeply conservative and retrogressive agenda, subscribe to an inane philosophy that Israel can do no wrong and must always be copied in whatever response it may have to a situation involving the Iranians or the Arabs. This mental fixation finds regular expression in both words and actions. It spoke loudly for itself when the Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, gave a blank cheque of approval to Israel’s barbaric invasion of South Lebanon in 2007. In Harper’s skewed comments on the situation, Israel’s brutal military assault was ‘a measured response’ to what he blatantly described as ‘provocation’ from Hezbollah of Lebanon. Likewise, Canada bullied Mahmood Abbas, the Palestinian leader, with threats of cutting off all economic and humanitarian assistance—which is not much, to begin with, a few million dollars a year, at best—to the Palestinian Authority (PA) if it went to the UN General Assembly for a change in its status. And when Abbas didn’t flinch under blatant arm-twisting, the Canadian government did, in fact, put all its aid to PA on hold.

Not to be outdone by a ruling establishment that does not lay store by moral probity or intellectual honesty, their conservative votaries in the media and intelligentsia have also waxed eloquent in denouncing the Iranian election as a useless exercise. Referring to the eight candidates who were, finally, cleared by Iran’s Guardian Council to run for the office of the president, this is what Houshang Hasan Yari, a fellow at the Queen’s University’s Centre for International and Defence Policy of Canada had to say: “The eight who qualified are toothless. Iranians say they have no bones in their bodies.”

Such half-baked intellect is not only evidence of a palpable lack of enquiry to seek the truth and sift chaff from the grain but is also symptomatic of a typical mind-set that believes in the veracity of only that which meets the standards of choice and democracy approved in the west. Anything different—real or perceived—is unacceptable and must be denounced and castigated as sub-standard. Of course, this is not the first time that a free and independent choice of the Arabs or the Iranians has been provocatively rejected by western governments and intelligentsia. Hamas was instantly rejected by Israel and its western votaries the moment the Palestinian people cast their vote, at the 2006 election, in its favour in what was by all standards and measurements a free and fair election, overseen by western monitors. The Palestinians were pooh-poohed for making the ‘wrong choice.’ They are still being punished, especially in Gaza, for giving their mandate to a party not on the ‘kosher’ list of Israel and its western mentors.

In this perspective, it was nothing less than a very welcome thing to read the New York Times’ editorial of June 23, welcoming the election of Rouhani as “a promising moment in Iran.” The editorial greeted the Iranian people’s free choice as “an opportunity to move forward on a
negotiated agreement to stop Iran’s nuclear weapons program and to begin to repair three decades of hostility with the United States. The question is whether Mr. Rowhani and President Obama have the political skill and courage to make it happen."

The New York Times has the reputation of being a mouth-piece of the American establishment, and its comments carry the weight of what is known in American power parlance as ‘the Washington Beltway insiders.’ So the editorial on Rouhani’s election deserved to be taken seriously and poured upon.

On the face of it, it is a balance of US hopes and expectations of Iran under a new president. But parsing its nuances it becomes clear that the American establishment is placing the entire burden of repairing the torn fences between the two countries entirely on the shoulders of Iran, and absolving itself of any major responsibility to mend a battered relationship.

Whatever mending is to be done is, unfairly, expected of Iran. The Western world has assumed a convoluted, twisted and weird, mind-set in relation to Iran. While it has arrogated to itself the role of judge, jury and hangman—all rolled into one—as far as Iran-in-the-dock is concerned it expects Iran to come up with evidence that it is not the guilty party.

This is, in a nut-shell, a product of frontier justice: Iran is guilty until proven innocent. And the onus of proving itself non-guilty is also on Iran. Therein lies the crux of the problem; a problem entirely pegged on the West’s perception of Iran.

And what is the Western perception of Iran? It is one heavily smeared with a thick overlay of suspicion of Iran, its intentions and policies. It is not prepared to concede that much as Iran may be perceived as a theocracy run by bearded Mullahs who are deemed to be non-democratic and autocratic, it is still a functioning democracy which has regularly held presidential and parliamentary elections, on schedule. Iran is so punctilious about its electoral undertakings that elections were still held, on time, even while the country was engaged in a debilitating, 8-year-long, war with Iraq.

This highly prejudiced view of Iran also assumes that the system just would not allow the Iranian people to make a free choice, with no interference from the orthodox clergy. The 2009 presidential election has been cited, ad nauseam, to buttress this argument, when Mahmood Ahmadinejad won the contest while in Western minds the actual winner was Hussein Mousavi. Ahmadinejad and the overseeing clergy were blamed for having stolen the election from the people of Iran.

They were expecting a rehash of the 2009 scenario in 2013, too. However, as noted by Willaim O. Beeman, Chair of Anthropology at the University of Minnesota, in his blog of 16 June, 2013, “the Iranian presidential election did not turn out as expected—happily for many Iranians, and not so happily for Western critics of Iranian society.” (7)
Beeman had also no doubt that the enthusiasm displayed by the Iranian people at the presidential election of June 14 was just astounding for the Western naysayers and detractors. With their mature and disciplined turnout at the polls the Iranian people “gave the lie to this superficial Western view”(8) that the Iranians have little or no democratic instincts.

Interestingly, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia—the wealthiest of the Arabs and a known rival of Iran in their quest for regional domination—was quick to congratulate Rouhani on his election triumph. “We are glad to congratulate you in the name of the people and government of Saudi Arabia...”(9) said the official announcement from Riyadh. This is the same King Abdullah—who is also the holder of the exalted title of Keeper of the Two Holiest Shrines of Islam, in Mecca and Medina—who had been famously revealed in last year’s Wiki League disclosures of top secret American archives, advising George W. Bush to ‘cut off the head of the serpent’ in reference to Iran.

One may be inclined to be charitable to the Saudi monarch and reckon that he may have deemed it wise to seek good relations with a fellow Gulf-denizen which has matching resources and ambition to dominate the region. However, a more balanced opinion, given the ground realities induced by two and a half years of the Arab Spring, would be to conclude that the Saudi leader would prefer to avoid fighting on two fronts. The Saudi opposition to Arab Spring is no secret, and there is hardly an imponderable about it.

The Saudis simply loathe the rolling wave of the people’s movements from the likes of Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, reaching their shores. They have painstakingly engineered an outcome—delicate and fragile, at best, though it may be—of the Yemeni people’s uprising against their long-entrenched dictator, Ali Abdullah Saleh, that seems to be have deflected any spin off of the Yemeni tumult on their soil. Even more relevant to the Saudi exercise in erecting barricades against an Arab Spring fallout on their soil was the alacrity with which they rose to the rescue of the Bahraini authoritarian regime against its majority Shiite citizens’ vociferous demand for a more open and democratic society.

More to the point was the unguarded haste and jubilation that propelled King Abdullah to felicitate the power-addicted Egyptian military for its nakedly undemocratic overthrow of President Morsi’s year-old presidency in Egypt. Morsi, just like Rouhani in Iran, had been elected in a transparent and fair election overseen by Western monitors and observers, by a majority of Egyptians. However, the Saudis’ congenital fixation against the Muslim Brotherhood, which Morsi represented, never quite approved of the Egyptian people’s choice.

But notwithstanding King Abdullah’s suave diplomatic initiative, vis-à-vis the new Iranian President, some Western intellectual gurus known to be beneficiaries of Saudi munificence had unkind words to describe Rouhani’s election. One such free lance ‘consultant’ on Middle Eastern politics working out of London—and pandering to the wealthy Arab potentates’ known patronage of western commentators as the font of all intellect—had the following to say about Rouhani’s election: “For the Gulf’s Arab states, Rouhani may be more of the same.”(10) Not
shying away from wielding his pen like a scalpel, he went on to scorn the elected Iranian leader in these words: “Rouhani is a new broom, or merely (as Ahmadinejad styled himself) the loyal sweeper of the Rahbar.”(11).

This terse dismissal of Rouhani by hired pens from the West is typical of the double-standard that has so consistently marked the Western attitude in relation to democracy in the non-western world, especially in regard to the Arab countries, or Iran for that matter.

Hostility, often disguised but occasionally undisguised and unvarnished, informs the western policies when it is perceived that the people concerned, in a quarry state, have made a wrong choice that does not meet the requirements of the West. This has been epitomized in the brutal punishment of the Palestinians of Gaza for their daring to elect Hamas in a free and open contest. It does not move many souls in the western democracies that Gaza has been the world’s largest open-air prison since 2006 under Israel’s punishing blockade of that territory. What one hears, or sees, at best, are muffled voices of concern, not of protest, raised in some western capitals, from time to time, and nothing more than that to stop Israel’s savage assault against the Palestinians in Gaza.

The latest—and nauseatingly callous—manifestation of the Western double-standard can be seen in how the Egyptian army has been given a free pass on its thuggish assault on the Egyptian people’s democratic choice of a leader. As of the writing of these lines, there is no word, yet, from the military clique—and the puppet civilian leaders installed in seats of power—about the whereabouts of President Morsi. The world has not heard from him since July 3, the day of the military coup against him. But one has not heard any western demand on the client regime that has replaced him, to tell where Morsi is.

So the lofty principle of democracy by a people’s free choice must always be taken, in Western perception, with some qualifications and reservations, when it relates to a country on the list of enemy or suspicious states in their lexicon. Egypt, under Morsi, was a suspect democracy, and therefore Morsi’s premature demise is not to be mourned, in fact hailed. Iran, on the other hand, is an enemy state. As such, the free expression of its people for Rouhani as their leader and head-of-state, deserves to be questioned, if not ridiculed, whether it marks “a new direction or a more palatable expression of the same mentality.”(12).

The Nuclear Issue:

But nothing so informs the western mentality—of taking everything in the context of Iran with a grain of suspicion—as does the litany of demands on Iran on the nuclear issue, which has been made into a veritable crusade against Iran.

But shorn of all sophistry, the entire history of western grievances against Iran’s alleged nuclear file stands on mere conjecture, a lingering suspicion that Iran is on the road to making a nuclear bomb. To date, there is no concrete evidence from any quarter, that Iran is actually embarked on the journey to make a bomb. But that is immaterial, as far as western policies and open
hostility to Iran is concerned. All that suffices to the West is that it is convinced that Iran has ambition to become a nuclear power. So, it can be deduced from this perception, that Iran must be engaged in making the bomb. The West need not come up with evidence because it is always right. But Iran, because it is always in the wrong, must satisfy the West to the contrary. In short, it is guilty of a crime it has not committed.

So devoid of principle is the western hostility against Iran that one may be forgiven for suggesting that the West would have invented some thing else, some other excuse, to keep Iran perennially in the dock, even if there was no nuclear issue.

But, as professor Beeman so aptly observes: “From the myopic perspective of Washington, London and other Western capitals, however, the only issue worth talking about was Iran’s nuclear program.”(13)

Iran’s nuclear programme was launched in early 1970s under US patronage and assistance. That was the era of the Shah in Iran, and he was deemed as Washington’s trusted policeman in the Gulf and the region around it. So, in the spirit of FDR’s famous dictum that it was o.k. for one to be an S.O.B. if one were ‘our S.O.B.’ the Shah’s Iran was kosher with nuclear programme. US were all primed to give Iran two 1000 megawatts research reactors for its Busheh Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP). Iran signed, on May 15, 1974, Safeguards Agreement with IAEA, in Vienna, under NPT, thus becoming a member of the global community adhering to the framework for nuclear activities under IAEA’s watch.

The Shah’s toppling from power as a result of the Islamic revolution of Iran, in 1979, changed the American calculus to a degree where Iran, the erstwhile policeman of American interests, became a hostile, enemy, power. Iran did not resume its nuclear programme, geared to peaceful purposes, until 1992, when the Russians were given the contract to complete the installation of one of the two plants left in a limbo by the Americans.

However, the haunting of Iran on suspicion that it was getting into strides to becoming a nuclear power began on the heels of the cataclysm of 9/11 when a bruised and emotionally ‒ charged US, on a revenge mode, unleashed its open-ended war on terror. It was prefaced with George W. Bush, who saw himself as a moral crusader against all evil, lumped Iran, Iraq and North Korea into his ‘Axis of evil.’ Iran became an instant pariah in the eyes of a crusading US out to protect the world against evil. A campaign to brand Iran as a serious threat to international peace was kicked off as an adjunct to the ‘war on terror.’ UN was roped in to provide evidence that Iran was into a nuclear weapons programme.

To date—between now and 2006—UN Security Council, at US behest, has adopted five different resolutions on Iran’s alleged nuclear ambition to make a bomb: Resolutions 1696 (2006); 1737 (2006); 1747 (2007); 1803 (2008); and 1929 (2010). Each of these resolutions has, progressively, aimed at tightening the stranglehold against Iran on mere suspicion, and hearsay, that it was on a search to become a nuclear power. The latest resolution, 1929, has authorized binding
sanctions that is aimed at squeezing economic life out of Iran and forbidding it from selling its oil in the international market.

The sanctions imposed by the US government and Congress are in addition to the UN sanctions and are even more biting. The latest in the series is the clamp against the Central bank of Iran which can no longer enter into banking transactions with the outside world.

The impact of these biting sanctions is translating itself in the suffering of common Iranians. The Iranian currency is under terrible stress and losing its par value, vis-à-vis hard currencies. Imports are becoming increasingly dearer, the cost of living is rising, life-saving drugs and medicines are in short supply et al.

But this, of course, does not bother the conscience of US and its western allies, just as the horrific suffering of the Iraqis did not bother them when Iraq was kept under what President Clinton’s national Security Adviser, Sandy Berger, boasted, unashamedly, as history’s most biting and stringent sanctions, for 12 long years, until the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. That 1.5 million Iraqis—half a million of them children—perished because of those inhumane sanctions did not stir any nerves in the west. When asked if those sanctions were worth the price they were exacting from the Iraqis, the then Secretary of State, Medlin Albright, said blithely, without losing a heart-beat, that it was worth it.

The IAEA, on its part, has kept Iran’s nuclear research plants under microscopic scrutiny. In the past several years, since US started breathing down its neck to come up with a report which could bolster Washington’s assumption that Iran was engaged in making ‘the bomb’ IAEA’s Board of Governors has adopted as many as 12 resolutions, periodically, in connection with implementation of safeguards in Iran (14).

The latest in this series of resolutions was adopted last May 15—and derestricted on June 5—according to which “the Agency (IAEA) has not been able to begin substantive work with Iran on resolving the outstanding issues, including those related to possible military dimensions to Iran’s nuclear programme.” (15) This is about the closest IAEA’s Board of Governors has come in obliging a hectoring US to put its cachet of concurrence that Iran is on the road to making a bomb.

So intense and microscopic is IAEA’s surveillance of the Iranian nuclear plants that, according to Herman Nackaerts, IAEA’s Deputy Director-General in charge of safeguards regime, “two to six IAEA inspectors are on the ground, in Iran, everyday, covering 16 Iranian facilities.” (16).The sharpest focus is on the two plants—Natanz and Fordow where uranium is being enriched.

And yet, despite all these intrusive searches that virtually amount to going through Iran’s programme with a high-powered search light, neither the Americans nor IAEA have been able to come up with any concrete evidence that Iran is doing what they suspect it of doing.
Thomas R. Pickering was once American Ambassador to UN and is not a novice to the issue of Iran or its nuclear programme. He had written an op-ed, in association with two other American experts, Willaim Luers and Jim Walsh, in the New York Book Review sometime ago. That paper has been re-carried, on July 22, on the popular, non-establishment website of PSA (Partnership for A Secure America) under the title, For A New Approach to Iran, in which Ambassador Pickering—who is also on the PSA’s Advisory Board—has cogently argued: “Iran did have elements of a nuclear weapons program in the 1990s, but the Supreme Leader (Ali Khamenei) shut those down in 2003. Since then, the Islamic Republic has continued to increase its capability for enrichment but has not—as far as we know—restarted a weapons program. As the Director for National Intelligence, James Clapper, has twice testified (before Congress):

*We assess Iran is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons...should it choose to do so. We do not know, however, if Iran will eventually decide to build nuclear weapons.”* (17)

Clapper, according to Pickering, has also testified that Iran “could not direct safeguarded material and produce a weapons-worth of WGU (weapons-grade uranium) before this activity is discovered.” (18).

It is ironic that while US has been tightening the noose against Iran on mere suspicion and ignoring the fact that as a signatory to NPT, Iran is within its legal rights to develop its nuclear programme for peaceful purposes—and also enrich uranium for medical isotopes—it has been turning a blind eye to more than one country not signatory to NPT but engaged in nuclear weapons programme. In the years since Iran got on to the American radar, India and Pakistan, both, have joined the Nuclear Club and produced nuclear weapons. Both have steadfastly refused to become signatory to NPT. Ditto for Israel, which has been helped by western powers in becoming a nuclear power and stockpile a huge arsenal of nuclear weapons, with US turning a blind eye to such brazen activity, and giving Israel a blank cheque for the purpose.

It is the same Israel that has built up a huge cache of nuclear arms, on the lam, with the not-too-disguised material support of its western allies and mentors. It is also in arrear of brazenly flouting dozens of UN resolutions on its Occupied Palestinian Territory and its in humane treatment of its Palestinian quarries.

But Israel is the one making the most noise over Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons programme. Israel’s hawkish Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu has been leading the western-sponsored diplomatic offensive against Iran—on spurious grounds—while also threatening to use military force—with or without the aid of its western allies—to take out Iran’s ‘bomb-making sites’ in pre-emptive raids. The macabre theatrical performance of Netanyahu at the UN general Assembly, in September of 2012—when he drew a redline on Iran’s alleged uranium enrichment on a cardboard display—was as absurd, risible and provocative as was the suave and urbane Colin Powell’s—then George W. Bush’s Secretary of State—bemoaning in the UN Security Council, just weeks before US invaded Iraq, in March 2003, that Saddam Hussein had weapons
of mass destruction (WMDs) capable and primed to hit western capitals at an hour’s notice. Out of office, subsequently, Powell bemoaned his theatrical performance as the most embarrassing episode of his otherwise distinguished career in public service.

That Israel, the world’s most notorious violator of all laws and regulations, conventions and treaties signed in the past decades, should be threatening Iran with Doomsday punishment and drawing ‘red lines’ in the sand is at the nub of the web of politics that has informed the international controversy around Iran’s nuclear programme.

Ambassador Pickering refers to 2003 when Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, the Rahbar, decreed that Iran will not be going the route of nuclear weapons. That was the period when Rouhani was Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator (2003-2005) under a very moderate and conciliatory President Mohammad Khatami. “In 2004, on his (Rouhani’s) watch, Iran voluntarily suspended uranium enrichment as a confidence building measure in hoped-for negotiations with the West. The US and other Western powers pointedly ignored this gesture, and imposed further sanctions.” (19).

That early and brusque dismissal of Iran’s voluntary desire to turn a new leaf in its estranged relations with the West gave out the hidden western agenda, vis-à-vis Iran. It has, consistently, been one of seeking constant confrontation with Iran and, thus, give itself a readily accessible alibi to keep Iran in the dock of western condemnation.

The nuclear issue—and all the web of technical details and nit-picking entailed with it—is merely a ruse, a side-show at best to keep Iran under an international focus. It is like throwing a condemned man into a cell and then keep the spot light on in the cell, all the time, to deprive the man of any sleep. The real focus in the Iranian context is political; has been so for a very long time.

There is a whole history of Western intrigues and conspiracies going back to the early years after WWII aimed at destabilizing Iran and keeping it in ferment. It is not only the well-known, and grisly episode of 1953 when a people’s Prime Minister like Dr. Mohammaed Mossadeq, was overthrown to pave the way for the return to the throne of the despised Shah, who could never outlive his title of being the most loyal puppet of Western interests in Iran and the Gulf.

However, the Iranians seemed prepared to put that sordid history of western subversion of their rights and freedoms when President Khatami—an epitome of conciliation and peaceful co-existence—magnanimously offered to the West to hold ‘a dialogue among civilizations.’ Khatami was not grand-standing or playing to the gallery when he floated that noble idea in an interview, on January 7, of 1998—within months of coming to office—in an interview with CNN’s ace reporter, Christiane Amanpour, who was herself of Iranian origin. Khatami’s Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharrazi, expanded the basis of that potentially-game-changing idea, by informing the news media, “We are ready to work with all nations, provided they are ready to establish their relations with us based on mutual respect.” (emphasis added) (20).
Interestingly, Rouhani, too, soon after his thumping victory, spoke in Khatami’s conciliatory tone, vis-à-vis, US in an interview with the London-based Asharq Al-Awsat. Dilating on the tangled relations with Washington, Rouhani lamented that “It is an old wound that needs to be healed.” But then he set the tone for the terms on which Iran would be ready to enter a new phase of relations with US. He said: “We are not looking for increasing the tension. The two countries must think about (the) future and based on mutual trust America must abide by the Algiers Accords and recognize Iran’s nuclear rights.” (21)

The Algiers Accord Rouhani was referring to was the agreement between the two countries, signed in the Algerian capital, under Algerian peace-making, in 1981, which led to the release of the American Embassy personnel in Tehran. Under the agreement, US pledged not to interfere in the internal affairs of Iran.

However, the Algiers Accord has been honoured by US more in its constant violation than anything else. Interfering in the affairs of any state—more so of a state deemed as an enemy—is considered a matter of ‘right’ by US on the basis of its global reach and interests. US, of its own arrogance, are a neighbour to every country in the world because it has the power and reach to act globally.

And ‘mutual respect’ that Khatami regarded as the corner stone of bilateral relations—and which is essential to any abiding relationship in the eyes of Rouhani—has no sanctity in Washington’s global agenda, in which Iran is, at best, an irritant that must be taken out.

So, Khatami was frustrated and rebuffed, after some initial gestures of accommodation under Bill Clinton. But after Clinton, Bush ascended to power with a vengeful agenda, drafted for him by his neo con henchmen, and his many friends in the hawkish clique in Israel. Bush’s arrogant answer to Khatami’s dialogue of the civilized was something that palpably reeked of the jungle law. He branded Iran as one of the Axis of Evil concocted by him. The law of the jungle had no room in it for mutual respect because primacy in it belonged only to the powerful.

Frustrated Iranians—a proud people with a continuous civilization dating back to five millennium—also turned inward by electing a hawkish president Ahmadinejad. His often unguarded rhetoric played right into the hands of the Bush neo cons and the Israeli hawks, and provided grist for their propaganda mills against Iran.

It was not merely coincidental that the spate of US’ unilateral sanctions against Iran began soon after the induction of Ahmadinejad in Iran. The UN was also roped into the act despite the fact that it had been contemptuously brushed aside by Bush when he decided to invade Iraq, on his own, without bothering to seek a carte blanche from the world body.

The advice to Bush by his imperialist neo con minions, and his Israeli cohorts, was to move on to Iran after Iraq. The then Israeli PM, Ariel Sharon, a veritable ultra-hawk, had no compunction in advising his friend, Bush, to turn his tanks in the direction of Tehran, right after finishing off Iraq.
But Bush’s Iraqi adventure hugely backfired. He was bogged down in the Iraqi quagmire and couldn’t muster enough support to take on Iran.

But there was recompense for Bush’s imperialist agenda in the energizing of the nuclear issue against Iran, which was pounced upon with an aggression never before seen. What the American guns and aircraft could not do against Iran, a yet-unending chain of sanctions has done, admirably for the agenda of Bush and his successor, vis-à-vis Iran. Iran may still be defiant, in its policy, to US diklat but its economy is in a shambles because of the enervating sanctions; they are sapping the joy of life from the Iranian people, just as they had done to the Iraqis under Saddam Hussein.

**Conclusion:**

So the whole spectrum of Iran’s relations with the West, in particular with US which has been leading the western world’s charge against Iran with unrelenting exuberance, if not vengeance, boils down to this one immutable element: Iran will not buckle down to intimidation or pressure of any kind and surrender itself to dictates of this or that power. Iran would be ready to meet the west, or whoever may represent that bloc, only on terms of equality and mutual respect.

However, what US seem unprepared, viscerally, for is to recognize the thrust of history. Iran, like China or India, is an ancient civilization, going back to five thousand years. It has a proud history and a flourishing culture that had deep roots. Iran has kept to its roots, embedded in antiquity, with a pride that only belongs to ancient nations. For instance, the festival of Nourouz, dating back to millennia, is still the most important event on its calendar, notwithstanding the fact that Iran may have embraced the Shiite sect of Islam with a commitment that puts its apart from many a Muslim society.

US, in contrast, is an upstart nation which has gone berserk as a global power. In its arrogance of power, it is now turning inward upon itself, in what could only be attributed to an Orwellian denouement. Security—or whatever goes in the name of it—has been trumping civil liberties and rights of the American people across the board. Whistle-blower Edward Snowden, has unveiled to the world the rampant incursion of a ruling elite, inebriated from extreme hubris, into the domain of people’s privacy. However, the US House of Representatives, in a landmark decision, voted down a move to stop intelligence surveillance of people’s phones and e-mails, on July 24.

On the external front, US would give whatever meaning is associated with the word ‘respect’ only to those states prepared to kowtow to its agenda and sign on the dotted lines.

A case in point is the recent coup d’etat by Egypt’s power-hungry and besotted generals against a popularly-elected President Mohammad Morsi. The world may call it as such—a military takeover, or coup d’etat—but not US. To Washington it is anything but a military coup. And why is it so? The answer is simple: the Egyptian army is ready to do the US biddings to the hilt; the generals would jump as high as commanded to from Washington. So the 1.3 billion dollars that
are thrown into the coffers of the Egyptian army, each year, from Washington—without going through the channel of the Egyptian government—will continue to flow to the army. The brutal massacre of the protesting Morsi followers on the streets of Cairo or Alexandria, or any other city, makes no dent into Washington’s iron-clad patronage of an anti-democratic cabal.

With such palpable double-standards—on democracy, human rights et al—ruling the roost in American foreign policy in regard to the outside world—and in particular in reference to the Arab and Islamic worlds—it is unthinkable that US would be ready to accord Iran the mutual respect it’s leaders insist upon as a sine qua non for a dialogue or process of conciliation.

Recent history of US-Iran relations has ample evidence in support of this argument.

President Khatami’s initiative of ‘a dialogue among civilizations’ came crashing down because US was not prepared to grant it the respect it deserved. Khatami wanted US to lift its arbitrary sanctions against Iran and unfreeze all the Iranian assets sequestered in US (believed to run into tens of billions of dollars). However, that legitimate request was deemed “entirely contrary to U.S. policy and U.S. interests.”(22)

In what was seen in Iran as an insult upon injury, Iran was told that it “would get the sanctions completely lifted only when it had demonstrated changed behavior on the issues that mattered to the United States (emphasis added)—terrorism, nuclear weapons, and opposition to the peace process.” (23)

That was the position of US 15 years ago. However, any student of US-Iran relations would have no hesitation to concede that in the years since, the US arrogance—insisting on the primacy of its interests and objectives alone—has acquired mass exponentially, and with it demands on Iran have expanded, too. Added to it is the additional factor of Israel, which has been flexing its muscles, drawing red lines on its own, and threatening to take pre-emptive action against Iran’s impugned nuclear ambitions, with or without Washington's support. Israel is a bosom ally of US and no American president would dare oppose it at the risk of cutting his own political career short.

So the only change in the calculus of power is that it has got worse, as far as interests of Iran are concerned, or concern for the people of Iran being subjected to the type of biting sanctions that sapped life out of the Iraqis, not too long ago.

US are not looking for a negotiated settlement that may lead to a peaceful outcome. Such an outcome demands, per se, that there be a dialogue on the fundamental basis of equality and mutual respect. That is a non-starter as far as Washington is concerned. On the contrary, it what it is seeking is some kind of collective action to bend Iran to its will. Sanctions are a tool of collective punishment and US has full backing and support of its European allies in meting out that collective punishment to the Iranians. The West’s reckless drift on an collision course with Iran forced Ambassador Pickering and his colleagues to conclude, with remorse: “We are convinced that the current trajectory presents higher risks and possibly catastrophic costs.” (24)
So, it does not matter, in the end, what Rouhani may have to offer Iran’s adversaries. He may feel comfortable in telling the world that Iran is seeking a “dialogue and interaction with others from an equal position, based on mutual respect and interests.” (25). But the cold reality of the times leaves precious little room for optimism.

US may be consumed by an overdose of power politics that relies increasingly more on the use of force instead of relying on diplomatic give-and-take that demands patience and perseverance. Iran, on the other hand, has seen little or no reward at all for its voluntary concessions—such as the suspension of uranium enrichment between 2003 and 2005. Rouhani has already ruled out “any return to voluntary suspension…as a confidence building measure.” (26) So, in the end, it is back to square one of what many a western intellectuals see as the Persian Puzzle.

Footnotes:
2. Ibid
3. Tony Burman, theToronto Star, June 22, 2013.
12. Ibid.
14. IAEA’s official Website.
15. IAEA, op cit.
16. As quoted by Barbara Salvin, a Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council, writing for Al Monitor, an On-line Watchdog on ME, July 22, 2013.
18. PSA, op cit.
20. Kenneth M. Pollack, the Persian Puzzle—the Conflict between Iran and America, page 316.
23. Ibid.
24. PSA, op cit.
America, Iran, and the International Relations
of the Iranian Nuclear Issue

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Ever since the Islamic Republic of Iran came into being in 1979, there has been much that Tehran and Washington have disagreed on. Arguably the most important—and the most intense—disagreement between them has been with regard to the Iranian nuclear program. Tehran insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only, and that it has no intention of acquiring nuclear weapons. Washington fears that Iran is seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, and points to Tehran’s lack of cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency inspection program—as well as the “international community” more broadly—as justification for its concerns. The U.S.—especially under the Obama Administration—has sought to increase economic sanctions against Iran not just to induce Tehran to verifiably reassure the international community that it will not acquire nuclear weapons, but also to raise the costs of Iran’s not doing so to the point that Tehran is eventually forced to capitulate on the nuclear issue. Tehran has responded sometimes through openly defying American pressure and sometimes through indicating a willingness to cooperate with the international community on this issue but then not doing so. Both responses only fuel American concerns, and so the cycle continues.

The Iranian-American disagreement over the Iranian nuclear issue, of course, is not simply a bilateral issue between Washington and Tehran. Many other governments are also affected by and concerned about the Iranian nuclear issue, the American-led sanctions campaign against Iran, and their own relations with Iran more generally. As a result, the international relations of the Iranian nuclear issue are complicated.

With the possible exceptions of Syria and North Korea, there are no other governments that want Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. But while some of them state this strongly (such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, France, and the UK), others do so more quietly (Russia and China), while others still do not say much of anything even though they would very much prefer Iran not to acquire nuclear weapons (Pakistan in particular
comes to mind). Still, on the question of whether Iran should or should not acquire nuclear weapons, the overwhelming majority of governments agree (publicly or privately) with the U.S. that it should not.

As noted earlier, the Obama Administration in particular has sought to intensify international economic sanctions on Iran in order to force it to submit to international supervision over its nuclear activity. Yet while most other governments do not want Iran to acquire nuclear weapons, not all of them are as enthusiastic about this approach as Washington is. The U.S. began imposing economic sanctions in 1979 and has been steadily tightening them ever since. For the U.S. to impose additional economic sanctions on Iran, then, has little or no negative impact on the American economy since Iranian-American economic ties are already extremely limited.

Many other countries, though, have substantial trade ties with Iran. Some governments—such as the U.K., France, and Germany—have been or may be willing to sacrifice them in the attempt to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. But while many other governments do not want Iran to obtain them either, they are not so happy about being asked to sacrifice their own trade interests for this cause. Some have gone along with the increased sanctions that the U.S. and some European governments have called for more because they do not want their relations with the West to suffer—especially when the U.S. and EU threaten to impose penalties on those who do not comply with the sanctions regime. By contrast, some of Iran’s neighbors—most notably the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Authority, and Turkey—have sought to profit from serving as conduits for Iranian trade even while claiming to adhere to the sanctions regime against it. Others still—especially China and Russia—support some increased UN Security Council sanctions against Tehran as a means of currying favor with America and the West on the one hand, while on the other increasing their trade with Iran (a strategy which China has been far more successful at than Russia).

For many governments, the problem with complying with the increased sanctions against Iran that Washington in particular calls for is that doing so involves real economic sacrifices for their countries but will not necessarily succeed in preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. For those governments most concerned about the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran, their anticipation that even a severe economic sanctions regime against Iran will not prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons has led them to contemplate the use of military means. Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel in particular sees the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran as so threatening as to require the use of force to prevent it. Various Saudi officials have indicated that they would not oppose—indeed, would actually facilitate—the use of force to halt the Iranian nuclear program. President Obama has indicated that he has not ruled out anything (i.e., military means) to achieve this aim.
It is doubtful, though, that there are any other governments that would support the use of force to halt the Iranian nuclear program. Their opposition, though, is likely to be highly differentiated. Some oppose the use of force in general. Others oppose its use without authorization from the UN Security Council (which would definitely not be forthcoming in this case). Others—such as Russia—oppose any American or Western use of force which they see as aimed at expanding the Western sphere of influence at Moscow’s expense. Still others fear being negatively affected by any ensuing Iranian-American conflict that might result. There are some, though, that might publicly condemn the use of force against Iran while privately welcoming it—either because it damages the Iranian nuclear program, provides them with a pretext for ending their cooperation with the American-sponsored economic sanctions regime, or both. There are even some (possibly China and Pakistan) which might welcome the prospect of a prolonged Iranian-American conflict as an opportunity for them to pursue aggressive aims of their own with less fear of being opposed by the U.S.

In their face-off over the Iranian nuclear issue, an important problem that both Washington and Tehran face is that each tends to overestimate the isolation of the other from the rest of the international community. Washington should not mistake most governments’ opposition to Iran acquiring nuclear weapons as implying that they would support (even privately) military action to prevent this or will agree to indefinitely ratchet up sanctions at America’s behest which increasingly harm their own economic interests. Similarly, Tehran should not mistake much of the world’s opposition to American military action that is not authorized by the UN Security Council as implying a willingness to do anything meaningful to defend Iran should it be attacked by the U.S. and/or Israel. Tehran should also keep in mind that if it does actually acquire nuclear weapons, it is not just the U.S. and Israel that will react negatively. Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons is likely to be followed quickly by Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt seeking to do so, and by these countries and several others turning more toward the U.S. to deter and contain Iran—even as many of them continue to actively trade with it.

The acquisition of nuclear weapons, then, will not necessarily increase Iranian security as Tehran might hope and expect. On the other hand, American policy toward the Iranian nuclear issue is more likely to receive broader support if Washington aligns itself with the interests and concerns of others instead of attempting to force them into supporting a policy formulated by the U.S. and a just a few of its close allies that is insensitive to their interests.
Can Rouhani and Obama Make Peace?  
*Identifying the systemic factors that constrain US-Iran communication*

**Hooshang Amirahmadi and Kayvon Afshari**

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**Abstract**

The recent election of moderate Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has led many observers to speculate that direct talks between Iran and the United States may take place in the next four years. This prediction is based on the belief that elected officials can play a decisive role in shaping foreign policy and international relations. While we remain cautiously optimistic that this is the case, there are many systemic factors that challenge the ability of leaders to pursue dialogue.

In this paper, we identify the first three sequential steps for communication: 1.) engaging, 2.) sustaining talks, and 3.) reducing tension. Next, we outline the unique challenges that leaders face at each of these steps, constraining them from advancing. In particular, we highlight the role of mistrust and fear, Iranian pride, previous negotiating failures, lack of honesty and diplomacy, misinformation, reciprocity, and the Islamic Revolution as the main challenges. Then, we discuss the role of third parties including Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Great Britain in constraining US-Iran dialogue. Finally, we outline our recommendations for future constructive diplomacy between the two governments.

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**Introduction**

The relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America remains an anomaly in international relations. The two sides have not had diplomatic relations for over thirty years, a longer period than the diplomatic cutoff after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the communist takeover in China in 1949. Throughout the Cold War, the US and USSR maintained open channels of communication precisely because they were enemies who wished
to avoid a spiraling conflict. In the case of US-Iran relations, a series of constraints is preventing the two sides from even talking to one another.

Beyond the constraints, there are issues that are dividing the two countries. The US alleges that Iran is not being transparent about its nuclear program, threatens Israel, funds terrorism, abuses human rights, and promotes anti-Americanism. The Islamic Republic complains about US support for its political opposition and ethnic groups, unilateral and multilateral sanctions, and, most importantly, that the US seeks regime change in Iran. All of these issues certainly explain the conflict between the two countries, but they do not explain the failure to engage in meaningful dialogue aimed at resolving those issues. In order to understand the failure to communicate, one must analyze it procedurally by dissecting each sequential step in the diplomatic process, beginning with engagement.

**Engaging**

The main causes of the failure to engage are mistrust and fear on both sides. For Iranian officials, media reports of American covert operations to destabilize the Islamic Republic, sanctions, suspicion that the US is pursuing regime change, and the accusation of being part of an “axis of evil” have created mistrust of the United States, prompting Ayatollah Khamenei to say that the best response is to not retreat from the enemy, “not even one step.”

However, an even greater cause of mistrust is the US-led Operation Ajax that overthrew the democratic Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953. As Ayatollah Khomeini once said of the United States, “When we have been bitten by a snake, we are even afraid of a piece of rope which from afar looks like a snake... We fear you socially and politically.” The coup has led to a firm belief in the Iranian psyche that the United States and its intelligence agencies intend to cause street disruptions in Iran, topple the Islamic Republic, and install their own friendly leaders. Naturally, this psyche has led to a great deal of mistrust and fear leading to a blockage of negotiating with the United States.

This mistrust and fear of the United States prompted a group of radical Muslim students to storm the American Embassy in 1979, taking embassy officials as hostages for 444 days. Observing that the Shah had been admitted to the US, they believed that the United States government was planning another coup to overthrow their nascent theocratic government.

While their suspicions were partly validated by seized embassy documents outlining espionage and covert links with opposition groups, the view from Washington remains vastly different to this day. To the United States, this watershed event is a scar in US-Iran relations, demonstrating that the Islamic Republic is a revolutionary, ideological, radical government that ignores international norms of diplomacy and therefore cannot be trusted. This American prism has led to a deep mistrust of the Islamic Republic as well as the conclusion that Tehran will not be an honest party at the negotiating table. Events such as attacks on the Khobar Towers and the
American embassy in Beirut, the revelation of Iranian nuclear activities in 2003, and attacks on American troops in Iraq have further heightened this sense of mistrust and fear.

Beyond the mutual mistrust, Iranian pride has challenged the ability of the two parties to engage one another. Iran sees itself as a great civilization with a long history and rich culture. This belief in Iranian greatness extends to scientific developments and has generated national pride for the country’s nuclear program. In fact, a widely published survey by the RAND Corporation showed that 87% of Iranians strongly support the development of peaceful nuclear energy. This national support, deeply rooted in the nation’s self-esteem, has led observers such as former International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Mohammad ElBaradei to advise the United States to take on a more respectful tone that is sensitive to Iranian pride.

While American officials view policy setting as a calculating, rational process of weighing costs and benefits and see pride as a tertiary factor, to Iranians it is a core concern. This dichotomy may be the reason why Americans have failed to appreciate Iranian sensitivity and adopt a language that would effectively neutralize pride. As Iranian officials frequently point out, the dual track policy of “carrots and sticks” is more fitting for a donkey than a proud nation.

Sustaining Talks

Assuming that the two sides can sit at the negotiating table, the next challenge will be for them to sustain those talks by building an agenda and negotiating each item in a diplomatic manner of reciprocating realistic concessions. The main challenges at this step are previous negotiating failures, a lack of honesty and diplomacy, misinformation, and reciprocity.

Previous rounds of dialogue, which failed to produce any breakthroughs, give leaders the notion that any talks are destined to fail. For example, Iranian officials participated in the 2001 Bonn Conference, in which both sides participated in fruitful dialogue aimed at forming a post-Taliban national unity government for Afghanistan. Previously, the two sides had engaged in tactical cooperation and Iran used its links with the Northern Alliance to help topple the Afghan Taliban. This short-lived grace period ended in 2002 when President Bush labeled Iran as part of the “axis of evil.” The Afghan experience and other unreciprocated cooperation have left Iranian officials with the impression that dialogue with the United States is largely worthless. Similarly, the United States believes that Iran will not be an honest negotiator. After negotiating with the P5+1 and voluntarily signing the Additional Protocol in 2003, it later reneged on its obligations and suspended the agreement.

The next challenge to sustaining talks is that both sides are lacking in honesty and diplomacy, attempting to play a win-lose game rather than working for win-win solutions. This may be because American officials believe that they can extract ever more concessions from Iran by wielding the threat of more sanctions. Similarly, Iranian negotiators may believe that they can break apart the coalition supporting sanctions without giving up the level of concessions that
the US is demanding. Essentially both sides are trying to get as much as possible while offering little in return.

Compounding this problem of honesty is a great deal of misinformation surrounding the talks. Simply put, they are not dealing with the same set of information and facts. The US often comes to the negotiating table and lodges a complaint against Iran for killing its soldiers in Iraq, while Iran sees this as an unsubstantiated accusation. Similarly, Iranians have accused the United States of spying on them and supporting violent opposition and ethnic groups, which the US sees as baseless. This environment is not conducive for diplomacy and presents a major challenge for sustaining dialogue.

Finally, there is the challenge of reciprocity and timing, endemic to virtually all negotiations. Because they have little experience in tit-for-tat concessions with one another and are operating in an environment of mistrust, both find it difficult to make the first concession, believing that the other side will see it as a sign of weakness and not reciprocate. This belief creates a disincentive for revealing what your side is actually willing to offer at the negotiating table.

Reducing Tension

If the United States and Iran manage to overcome all of the challenges to engaging as well as sustaining of talks, they will find themselves challenged by the core issue that has separated them for over thirty years: the 1979 Islamic Revolution, one of the most important in human history. This Revolution defined itself as anti-American and continues to remain so to date. Its ethos and mandates still motivate and inform its leaders in their foreign and domestic policies. It is because of this inertial belief system that some Iranian leaders, through the prism of that Revolution, view the United States as “The Great Satan.”

On the other hand, the United States continues to view Iran as a revolutionary country, and objects to its behaviors including defending the rights of oppressed Muslims around the world, exporting the Revolution, resisting the American regional presence, and stoking anti-Americanism. This Revolution changed US-Iran relations from a friendly partner to a conflicting rival. Until both sides change their prism and see each other from a different lens, the situation will continue. The Islamic Republic must see America as a superpower with interests in the Middle East, and the US must see Iran as a regional power with legitimate claims for its regional position.

Third Parties

Beyond understanding US-Iran communication through the procedural framework outlined in this paper, the role of third parties must also be taken into consideration. Third parties present their own set of constrains on dialogue at all levels from engagement, to sustainability of talks, to tension reduction and beyond. Of particular importance are Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Great Britain.
Israel, as the closest American partner in the region, inserts itself in US-Iran relations because it wants to make sure that if there is a path to peace, it runs through Tel Aviv. Surrounded by enemies, Israel prioritizes its national security and views the source of many threats to its existence emanating from Iran. It takes the rhetoric of some Islamic Republic leaders seriously, is alarmed by Iranian support for Hezbollah and Hamas, and is deeply concerned about Iran’s nuclear program. Naturally, Israel is very skeptical of any potential deal between the US and Iran because it worries that its own security concerns may fall by the wayside.

America’s other regional partner, Saudi Arabia, is also largely suspicious of talks between the US and Iran. The Kingdom was founded on the principles of Salafism, a movement in Sunni Islam that is thoroughly anti-Shi’a. Through this lens, Saudi Arabia sees Iran as an ideological Shi’a state and as a challenger to its claim of being Islam’s representative. Furthermore, the Kingdom is worried about rising Shi’a power in the Arab world from Bahrain to Iraq to Lebanon. It views the Islamic Republic as destabilizing the status quo by supporting Shi’a communities, even in its own Eastern Province. Therefore, it remains skeptical of US-Iran talks so long as its concerns about Iran as a radical Shi’a state are not resolved.

Similarly, British officials see Iran as a destabilizer in a region where they have immense oil and business interests. The British Empire’s domain once included large swaths of territory in the Middle East and North Africa. As Lord Palmerston said in 1848, “We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.” Those interests, including access to oil, trade, regional stability, and reliable access to strategic waterways, continue to shape British foreign policy today.

British trade in the Middle East is extensive, including the al-Yamamah arms deal with Saudi Arabia, the single largest defense contact in UK history. Great Britain is concerned about Iran’s threat to regional stability and its behavior toward its Arab neighbors. London remains doubtful that Tehran’s behavior will change and therefore is skeptical about the prospect of US-Iran dialogue, which it sees as likely fruitless.

**Conclusion**

The recent inauguration of a new president in Tehran presents a potential opening for the United States and Iran to pursue engagement and find a diplomatic solution to their grievances. Similarly, while there has been some continuation of Bush policies, the Obama administration has expressed a greater openness for dialogue with Iran. While leaders certainly matter in US-Iran relations, the systemic factors outlined in this paper must also be taken into consideration.

Furthermore, although it is important to consider the issues dividing the US and Iran, it is more useful to conceptualize the process of communication as a series of steps with unique challenges. By implementing this framework, one can conclude that the only way for US-Iran communications to be fruitful will be to effectively neutralize these constraints.
More specifically, to engage they will need to devise a way to reduce the level of mistrust between them, and find a diplomatic language that is sensitive to Iranian pride. To sustain their talks, they must adopt win-win strategies, be honest with one another, deal with the same set of information, and reciprocate in good faith rather than exploit the other sides’ concessions.

If they manage to sustain their talks, they will need to finally come to terms with the issue that has divided them for thirty years: the Islamic Revolution. One solution would be for Iran to essentially give up on its Revolution and for Rouhani to become the Gorbachev of Iran. This would certainly satiate the American desire to see a non-theocratic form of government in Iran. The opposite solution would be for the United States to finally come to terms with the Islamic Revolution and simply accept Iran as a theocratic state that stokes anti-Americanism and wishes to export its Revolution.

Between these two extremes there is a middle ground solution in which Iran essentially relinquishes parts of the Islamic Revolution while the United States stomachs other aspects. For example, Iran could give up on its revolutionary mandate to support Hezbollah and resist Israel, and instead adopt the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation approach, whereby it would cease violence but condition diplomatic relations on a just solution to the Palestinian issue. In return, the United States could forgo its efforts toward destabilization and regime change.

To be sure, all of these solutions will be very difficult. The two sides have little experience in dealing with one another and face domestic political pressures that aggravate their problems. However, leaders on both sides must take these systemic constraints into consideration if there is any hope of seizing this change in leadership as a breakthrough moment for US-Iran relations.
The U.S. – Iranian Nexus: Where does the relationship go from here?

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Abstract

After a decade of war, the U.S. position in the Middle East is at a historical low point. Though we are unlikely to see the U.S. remove themselves from Middle Eastern politics, the willingness and capability to military intervene has been severely diminished. This has meant that the relative power of Iran has increased, and that now, more than ever, Washington must learn the art of negotiation. In order to secure a safe and stable Middle East, Washington and Tehran must reach compromises in their long standing hostility and if not reach peace, reach a suitable détente. However, the geopolitical situation in the Middle East with regards to continuing effects of the Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War are likely to play a significant role in influencing the future relationship between Iran and the United States.

Iran and Iranians in general have been highly wary of their borders, their neighbours, and their armed forces. The result of which has been a highly developed military force, of which this article will examine the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) in particular. The reason for examining the role of the IRGCN is that its capabilities make it a significant influencing factor on U.S.-Iranian relations, particularly in respect to diminishing U.S. willingness to again be bogged down in another Middle Eastern war. Coupled with Iran’s suspected nuclear weapons programme, make the issue of diplomatically restraining and easing Iran a priority for the current Obama Administration.

Over the course of two Middle Eastern wars, we have seen the capacity of asymmetric conflict to inflict grievous damage against the largest military force in the world. This has been a hard lesson learnt by the United States, becoming war weary after over a decade against hardened guerrilla forces. The limited gains by the U.S. Armed Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan have
highlighted a main concern regarding future U.S. policy of armed intervention. This issue is that the protracted wars have resulted in a declining capability in the U.S. Naval Forces in personnel and equipment due to mismanagement of the Navy by the Department of Defense (DoD), the Pentagon, Washington, and the Chiefs of Staff, as well as the effects of budgetary sequestration. It is this issue that will be analysed in the first part of this article, underlining the current status of the U.S. Armed Forces and rather than its willingness, articulates its inability to conduct effective future large-scale naval warfare, particularly against emerging asymmetric threats. The second section will examine Iran’s naval capabilities, specifically that of the IRGCN and its growing capabilities and strategic doctrine. These two sections will culminate in what can be seen as a political transition in Tehran, from open political hostility towards the U.S. to seeking dialogue with Washington and achieving a détente with the foremost naval power. Iran’s nuclear agenda will be critical to any future relationship with the United States and consequently, will remain a significant aspect in bilateral relations. Though the prospect for military conflict has diminished since its height in 2003 under then President George W. Bush, it certainly does not underlie a positive change in the relationship. The future of U.S-Iranian bilateral dynamic needs to be actively pursued by the Obama Administration and Tehran, as it is in their strategic interests to de-escalate their current conflict.

In order to project the future of U.S-Iranian relations, it is important to understand the basis for Washington’s pragmatic approach to military conflict, which has since been referred to as the Obama Doctrine. Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom culminated in the loss of 2,243 and 4,486 U.S. service personnel respectively. A major outcome of these conflicts was significant public opposition to future large-scale U.S. led conflicts. Consequently, Barack Obama was voted in as President of the United States of America in 2008 partly on the policy that his government would end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and return service personnel back home. Having achieved this goal mostly by 2012, Washington has since refused to commit a large-footprint in the Middle East again, clearly illustrated in the U.S. roles in Libya in 2011 and Syria from 2011 onwards. In the case of Libya in March 2011, initial international forces were largely comprised from Britain and France who facing domestic pressures at home, used the Libyan conflict for political posturing. However, the high tempo of action and a lack of useable intelligence put pressure on London and Paris and highlighted their current inability to unilaterally execute wars of choice of substantial distance from their power centres. Consequently, the U.S. was required to intervene and rather than in previous coalition operations was seen to be “leading from behind”. What made the U.S. intervention in Libya different from previous engagements in the Middle East is that Operation Odyssey Dawn was legitimised by the United Nations Security Council through Resolution 1973 as well as the regional Gulf Cooperation Council. The resultant decision by Washington to provide intelligence, aerial, and naval support came to be seen as part of the Obama Doctrine which sought to legitimise military actions through regional and global architecture while also minimising the danger to U.S. service personnel. Importantly, the action in Libya illustrated the U.S. willingness to unilaterally intervene has been diminished, and has sought increased burden sharing, likely to
be a response to domestic economic pressures which have curtailed the U.S. Armed Forces as a principal tool of foreign policy.

The U.S. Armed Forces capability to commit to future large scale wars has decreased in recent years due to the large budget sequestration of the various branches of the armed forces, in particular, the navy. In the US Governmental document, “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense”, the US President, Barack Obama, has stated that there will be a necessity to prioritise certain military investments while continuing to reduce “the cost of business.” Additionally, the paper acknowledges that despite efforts, the capabilities currently present in the U.S. Armed Forces will diminish, with implicit reference to the navy which will see a significant reduction in available manpower. The projections of this is, without a large singular event to substantially increase military funding, the capabilities of the US in the near future will be significantly limited both in absolute and relative terms, especially as many countries increase their A²/AD capabilities.

The primary means that the military decline has occurred is through a combination of budgetary sequestrations on the US Armed Forces, increases in the proportion of US Armed Forces budget to veteran benefits which have increased year on year since 2001, and loss of skills through declining service personnel retention. These three concerns have severely limited the capacity of the U.S. Armed Forces to engage a sophisticated enemy, or be again bogged down in asymmetric conflict such as in Afghanistan. The cost of benefits to veterans currently amounts to an estimated 16 per cent of the total US DoD budget, equating to US$137.4 billion. When coupled with the defence budget sequestration that has occurred due to mounting domestic economic concerns, the US armed forces are placed in a situation in which their capabilities will be restrained to no small matter by funding.

**Figure 1**

Source: www.asia.wsj.com

*Expenses shared by departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Treasury*
Additional effects of the U.S. Defense Sequestration on the Navy

- $500 billion funding cut over the next ten years
- $85 billion cut from the navy in the Persian Gulf (US 5th Fleet) over the next ten years
- $23 billion funding shortfall expected for 2014
- $6.1 billion reduction in Naval Investment Program
- $4.6 billion shortfall in Operations & Maintenance in 2013
- $1.8 billion in savings due to civilian and military pay reductions
- $1.2 billion in costs related to shore facility sustainment deferred
- 66 per cent of US Naval Forces ‘less than fully mission capable’
- 55 per cent decrease in aerial operations able to be conducted in the Persian Gulf
- 50 per cent of US Navy F-18/F-35 over the next decade will be in depot maintenance
- 33 per cent diminished surge capacity
- 20 per cent pay reduction for 800,000 civilians in the U.S. Department of Defense
- 20 per cent pay reduction for civilian teachers at the United States Naval Academy
- 15-20 per cent of all surface ships required maintenance will either be cancelled or deferred
- 10 per cent decrease in size of US Navy fleet since 2003
- 10 per cent of shipyard personnel will be terminated equating to 3,000 personnel
- Employees encouraged to take leave without pay

The shift in US policy regarding military intervention, particularly within the Middle East, is expected to continue for the mid and long term. Consequently, there is likely to be significant geopolitical consequences, such as an increased drive among states that fall within the US security umbrella to secure their own interests and increase their military capabilities. These countries are mainly within the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and can be seen as net importers of security. Conversely, Iran, without the hegemonic presence of willing and capable US force, is likely to utilise the opportunity to increase its security as well, through a combination of geopolitics and defence related expansion and modernisation.
The New Age of Military Power – Iran’s IRGC Navy and the Nuclear Agenda

Nowadays the prospect of huge armies squaring off in pitched battles grows increasingly unlikely as many developing states are adapting military doctrines and equipment that can rival the conventional military hegemony of the United States. In particular, Iran has been highly successful in developing a military force, specifically its naval branch that can engage and potentially defeat advanced adversaries. This has increased the associated costs of military engaging Iran by the U.S., who along with Israel, have stated that military options are on the table if Iran develops operation nuclear capability.

Despite the associated costs of military engagement, it remains an important instrument of governments, and has largely shaped the Iranian-U.S. relationship. The IRGCN has a primary focus on asymmetric warfare and consequently has a military structure catered towards utilising guerrilla style tactics in a naval setting. The result is a naval arm that rather than maintaining a fleet of large ocean-going vessels operates a green water navy comprising various commando boats – The Zodiac Class – missiles boats – the Thondar Class and Type Seraj – patrol vessels, and torpedo boats- Tir Class. In scenarios demonstrated by the IRGCN, these vessels operate independently of each other, maintaining what is referred to as a Mosaic Defence. This tactic facilitates operational latitude for ship captains thus diminishing the importance and importantly, the vulnerability of the IRGCN command structure and communication network.

The effectiveness of the IRGCN Mosaic Defence tactic has been simulated by the U.S. Armed Forces in the 2002 Millennium Challenge of which the results were debated for some time afterwards. For those unacquainted, the Millennium Challenge pitted two U.S. commanders against each other in a simulated scenario composing real and computer elements, essentially designed to compare the U.S. navy and air force against the Iranian armed forces. The initial results demonstrated the ‘red’ group in the scenario, suspected of representing Iran’s capabilities, and could deal a major, if not decisive strike against U.S. assets in the Persian Gulf. A problem associated with the Millennium Challenge though, is that it did not lead to a change in operation doctrine despite illustrating significant shortcomings in U.S. strategy in countering asymmetric naval forces. Consequently, as the U.S. rebalances its focus to Asia, its capability to counter Iran, without a suitable strategic doctrine will be at a noteworthy disadvantage. Van Riper, commander of the ‘red’ team in the scenario stated that the Millennium Challenge rather than having a purpose of being a learning experience for the U.S. Armed Forces, it “shifted to reinforcing existing doctrine and the notions of infallibility within the U.S. military.”

The implication for the U.S. regarding the Millennium Challenge is that the utility of military options available to Washington to put pressure on Tehran is limited. This is partly the rationale behind the U.S. led sanctions programme on Iran which though initially quite flawed, has been refined continually. Lacking any breakthrough though, the U.S. led sanctions programme will not produce the changes that are desired, and again highlight the strong position that Iran finds itself in. Ironically, though Iran would be expected to lose a confrontation with the U.S. in the
event of a full-scale military engagement, it would legitimise the clerical regime and its position against the United States.  

Iran’s naval capabilities are largely defensive in nature though, with the IRGCN having limited ability to project power too far from its base of operations.  

The use of small ships by the IRGCN constrains their operational radius to a few kilometres based on limiting factors such as fuel and food supplies. Increasing their defensive ability is the IRGCN’s interoperability with the aerospace forces of the IRGC which is suspected large cache of short range missiles. Initially, Iran’s missiles originated from Russia and China, however with time, Iran has been become self-sufficient in missile production. This stems from a strategic need perceived by the Iranian regime that self-sufficiency is needed due to its geographical isolation from its patrons Russia, China, and North Korea. Consequently, Iran has developed many short range missiles, such as the Naze’at and Zelzal family of unguided rockets with a range of 100-130 kilometres and 250 km respectively. Iran has also sought long range missile capability, and without a complimentary expeditionary navy or equivalent air force, is largely a deterrent and in the event of war, to strike panacea targets and strategic centres of gravity. Iran’s long range missile programme though is relatively new, significantly increasing its activities since 2008 and as such, lack many
of the technological nuances available to Iran’s western neighbours, specifically Israel and Saudi Arabia. Growing capabilities in Iran’s aerospace capabilities of the IRGC may alter relationships with the aforementioned countries as they become increasing susceptible to Iranian aggression and retaliation.

The lack of willingness by the U.S. to military intervene in Iran has led the U.S. to pursue other hard power techniques of achieving its foreign policy goals in Iran, particularly stopping Iran’s suspected nuclear weapons programme. It is this programme that has been the centre of U.S. – Iranian animosity nowadays, building upon a history of hostility since the creation of the Islamic Republic in 1979. The election victory of Hassan Rouhani on 14 June 2013 may change this relationship though, as Rouhani and key supporters Khatami and Rafsanjani have made public knowledge their intent to re-establish relations with the U.S.\textsuperscript{25} This may have been the reason why Rafsanjani was barred from participating in the Iranian election, as U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry publically endorsed his candidacy. However, U.S. Iranian ties were a key part of the Iranian presidential election, and Rouhani has been elected on a mandate that the relationship will be one of his main policy objectives.\textsuperscript{26} Though Rouhani may seek to achieve a détente with the U.S., it was not reciprocated in Washington, with the Obama administration delivering a thinly veiled criticism of the Iranian regime in his congratulatory message to Rouhani. This reaction by the Obama administration reinforces the emerging Obama Doctrine of refraining from immediate action, essentially being highly pragmatic.\textsuperscript{27}

The rationale behind the U.S. President Barack Obama’s decision not to eagerly engage with Rouhani is that it is a risky endeavour. Iran’s government is not governed by its president, but by the Supreme Leader and this is a situation that Washington is keenly aware. If the U.S. engaged too deeply with Rouhani, it could be set up for disappointment depending on Khamenei’s foreign policy actions. This is not to say that engagement with Rouhani should not occur, but the Obama regime may desire Rouhani to make the first move in order to gauge whether he has the endorsement of Khamenei in affecting foreign policy.\textsuperscript{28} Obama’s decision can be seen as pragmatic, as a premature celebration of a potential pro-Western Iranian government may alienate Khamenei, and additionally, be viewed negatively by his own domestic audience.

The nuclear issue will remain a thorn in any relationship development between the two countries, and will continue to require continual dialogue to achieve even limited success. However, there are two factors over the next few years that may quicken the negotiation process and lead to a successful compromise. The first is that the Obama Administration has little more than two years left in its cycle, and by achieving a nuclear solution with Iran, requiring a compromise, Obama will set a successful legacy for himself seeing as the Asian ‘pivot’ is unlikely to achieve much in the near future. The second factor is that Iran, despite what Tehran states, is suffering from international sanctions against many sectors of its economy.\textsuperscript{29} The rise in living expenditures have placed pressures on the Iranian population and though this has yet to turn into major protests, is a major issue for the clerical regime in Tehran.\textsuperscript{30} Khamenei’s clerical elite may be in control for now, but a sudden and major cost increase in living expenditures may force Iranians to protest, which could have dire consequences on the
Iranian government. Cost of living was a major factor in the Arab Spring protests that unseated several longstanding regimes, and while the situation in Iran is different, the effects on the ground are quite the same.\textsuperscript{31}

Though U.S. led sanctions have been hard hitting, Iran has continued its nuclear programme, making some question what is the motivation, and whether it is worth it. What must be considered is that Iran’s military forces are largely defensive in nature, with limited ability to project beyond their immediate periphery, and any potential nuclear arsenal will exist in this framework.\textsuperscript{32} However, that makes the assumption that Iran desires nuclear weapons rather than simply the capacity to manufacture them.\textsuperscript{33} The difference in these two options is that nuclear weapon possession will increase any future legitimacy behind Israel or the U.S. launching a pre-emptive air strike, of which Israel has a history of doing, such as in Iraq in 1981, Sudan in 2012, and Syria this year. The second option of establishing the capacity to manufacture nuclear weapons but choosing not to do so follows Iranian logic in achieving a brinkman situation and operating just below the threshold for military action.\textsuperscript{34} However, the second option does provide Iran a significant deterrence against regional states, as it could readily manufacture a nuclear weapon if it perceives an urgent decline in its security environment. Deploying of such a weapon may not be an outcome of such capacity as Iran would potentially still lack the ability to miniaturise the warhead to make it effective.\textsuperscript{35} There have been suggestions that this is currently being developed with conventional MIRV style missiles, however, the inclusion of a nuclear warhead has still not occurred.

The U.S. and Israel have argued though that Iran does not need to possess a functional nuclear weapon to still be a nuclear threat to Iran. This would be facilitated through a nuclear sharing programme with Iran’s terrorist networks, namely Hezbollah.\textsuperscript{36} In this case, it has been argued that Iran would deliver nuclear material to its proxies and utilise them to deliver a ‘dirty bomb’, an unsophisticated release of nuclear material to cause damage by radiation poison as oppose to a thermonuclear explosion. Such arguments ignore the fact that Tehran is a rational actor and privileges regime survival above ideological desires.\textsuperscript{37} Furthermore, while it does fit within Iran’s existing framework of supplying Hezbollah and other terrorist networks with materiel, the repercussions to Tehran would negate any potential benefit.

**Where does the relationship go from here?**

As has been elucidated earlier, the current situation in the Middle East favours the Iranian government. The disposition of U.S. forces towards Asia coupled with war-wearyness from engaging in a Middle Eastern war means that Tehran has greater latitude of movement than it has had in over a decade. The main lesson to be learnt from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq is that though the U.S. is the principal military power in the world, its ability to conduct two simultaneous wars of choice is strained.\textsuperscript{38} The effects of the U.S. rebalance towards Asia in a strategic level effort to contain China will significantly limit Washington’s ability and willingness to military act against Iran. A future war against Iran would be a major drain against U.S. resources and though likely to secure overall victory, would be achieved at monumental costs.
Additionally, a war in Iran would compromise the U.S. rebalance to Asia and require a consequential shift in personnel deployments over the Southeast and East Asian region.

Therefore, because military action is in this author’s opinion, highly improbable, it would benefit the U.S. and Iran to establish a dialogue. Current U.S. sanctions as earlier noted are having a significant effect upon both the Iranian regime and the Iranian public the continuation of which may force slight concessions from Tehran. Relative to the hawkish politics of former U.S. President Bush and former Iranian President Ahmadinejad, the current presidents of Iran and the U.S. are more diplomatic. Rouhani and Obama are realist pragmatics and consequently understand the necessity to disengage for a system of hostilities that provides little strategic value to Washington or Tehran. The furthering of these meetings has been recently highlighted in Tehran, indicating positive gestures.

The principal means that Rouhani and Obama will utilise to establish constructive dialogue is for both countries to make some concessions on Iran’s nuclear programme. The potential for such relationship building was seen in the 2013 series of high level meetings in the P5+1 format, which included The U.S., Russia, China, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Iran. As expected the talks did not yield significant progress, however, were illustrative of the desire by both the U.S. and Iran to achieve some level of conciliation. These talks included two rounds of discussions in Almaty, Kazakhstan on 26-27 February and 5-6 April, a meeting of experts in Istanbul, Turkey on 17-18 March, and an informal discussion between E.U. and Iranian chief nuclear negotiators Catherine Ashton and Dr. Saeed Jalili on 15 May. The high frequency of these talks is demonstrative of an increased interest by Iran and members within the P5+1 group to resolve the nuclear impasse.

Compromise between the U.S. and Iran will be paramount in establishing any working dialogue. As hinted at the last round of discussions in Almaty, Kazakhstan, the U.S. might be willing to accept an Iranian nuclear enrichment programme that is limited to 5 per cent. This differs significantly from prior negotiations that were characterised by an ‘all or nothing’ objective regarding the Iranian nuclear programme. Such an objective is inherently confrontational and unlikely to succeed due to the inability to find a common middle ground. By facilitating an environment of negotiation however, it should allow Washington and Tehran to find alternatives suitable to strategic desires as well as appealing to their respective domestic audiences.

The continuing militarisation of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz is another important area for future U.S. and Iranian cooperation and dialogue. Both countries perceive their intents in these international waters to be defensive however, through a process of military exercises and political rhetoric, there has been a dramatic military escalation in the strait. Iran has therefore responded to U.S. military exercises and sanctions by threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz, with the U.S. consequently responding through another military exercise, thus repeating the cycle. The ability of Iran to close the Strait of Hormuz, even for a few days or weeks though does pose a significant threat to many states which rely on the free and open
passage of these international waters for their energy. This capability has been refined through successive Iranian naval exercises illustrating the gamut of Iranian anti-area/area denial capabilities and technologies.\textsuperscript{41} These exercises serve to heighten regional tensions and promote the existing arms race that has enveloped the region since the end of the Cold War.

Russia is likely to be a major partner for Iran over the coming years as it has been since the inception of the Islamic Republic in 1979. A joint naval exercise between Russia and Iran agreed upon on 29 June illustrates a coalescence of objectives between Moscow and Tehran, utilising the U.S. rebalance towards Asia to enforce their regional dominant positions while improving the capabilities of their respective navies.\textsuperscript{42} The exercises between Iran and Russia focused on anti-area/area-denial capabilities, which has been seen by analysts as a specific attempt by Tehran and Moscow to increase their relative military power against the U.S. navy. As the U.S. continues its position of rebalancing its interests towards the Asia-Pacific, the continuation of naval exercises between Russia and Iran will increase as they seek to reassert their influence their historic peripheries of influence. For Iran, this will entail displaying its developing maritime capabilities in an effort to consolidate its political positions within anti-Western states such as Syria, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories, Iraq, Sudan, and potentially Yemen. To achieve this though, Tehran will likely also make heavy use of its Quds Force, a branch of the IRGC specifically tasked with extraterritorial activities including spreading the Islamic revolution to likeminded peoples.\textsuperscript{43}

The goal for the Obama Administration should be demonstrating to the Iranian Government that there is no strategic imperative for Iran to consolidate and expand its area of influence. Washington should communicate to Tehran that its objective is to maintain a stable Middle East that incorporates Iran. Ostracising Iran would only continue the current course of action, and force the U.S. to maintain a larger force than it should have to in the Persian Gulf. While Washington is not expected to leave the Middle East, it acknowledges that it has strategic interests in the stability of the region. Its preoccupation with Middle Eastern events will lessen corresponding to how events in the Asia-Pacific unfold. Accordingly, the U.S. would likely desire to achieve its strategic interests in the Middle East vis-à-vis Iran through existing regional and international architecture, preventing the necessity of reallocating resources to this region.

The U.S. – Iranian relationship is especially complex as it involves many outside factors. Neither party will be able to come to the table unless they each perceive de-escalation in their security environment. The first step in such a process will be Iran’s nuclear programme, after which, subsequent issues can be isolated and dealt with in turn. This process is likely to entail what Rouhani has stated, requiring ‘a balance-between realism and idealism’, and ‘interaction and dialogue will be based on reciprocity, respect and mutual interest.’\textsuperscript{44} Such a major change will require time, and though can be achieved, will likely be a generational achievement. Even so, Rouhani’s abilities to effect change will be further restrained by the desires of the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, who given Iran’s current economic climate, may make the pragmatic and prudent decision of securing his legitimacy, therefore compromise with the U.S. to offset internal dissension.
Conclusion

It is hard to say with any degree of certainty where the U.S. – Iranian relationship is headed. For both states though, cooperation is needed as the current system of hostilities has not produced positive outcomes for either society. Nevertheless, with regards to their relationship, it would seem the U.S. has more to lose from not engaging in constructive dialogue. The U.S. should be preoccupied with the current Great Power rivalry that is occurring across the Pacific Ocean rather than continuing to be trapped in middle power, Middle Eastern politics. If the U.S. has to military engage China at any point in the future, a hostile Iran would overstretched U.S. resources and capabilities at a time that the U.S. can ill afford it. The pacification of Iran should be the Obama Administration’s main objective in the Middle East, coupled with the highly important Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process.

The U.S. is the largest naval power in the world, with its carrier groups able to traverse the seas freely and impose their power merely through their presence. Like the centuries before it, it will be a naval century. The affordability of anti-access/area denial capabilities has resulted in a relative loss in power to the United States Naval Forces to emerging powers all along the ‘World Island’, such as India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, and importantly Russia, China and Iran. At a time when Western European powers lessen their investment in their armed forces, particularly their navies, the developing states are increasing theirs. Iran is likely to continue pursuing its current course of action, developing a highly effective naval arm while simultaneously attain nuclear capability. As history has shown, no state that has desired nuclear weapons has ever been successfully externally prevented from indigenously acquiring that capability. Pakistan, India, North Korea, allegedly Israel have all developed their own nuclear weapons programme, and the U.S. and the U.N. have had to learn to cooperate with these states. The difference in Iran is that the intent behind its nuclear programme is unknown, and though some suspect the programme is for nuclear weapons capability, the fact remains is that it is uncertain. Depending on the decisions of the governmental elite in Tehran, Iran will develop the nuclear bomb, and if it does, it would greatly benefit the U.S. to be an involved partner that can direct their programme, rather than an antagonist that will create increased secrecy.

The future of the U.S. – Iranian relationship is unclear; nonetheless, there has been a slow and subtle process of change within Tehran that may see relations emerge. Iranian President Rouhani has a lot of pressure on him to be a force for change with Iranians electing him on a campaign of readjusting the U.S-Iranian dynamic. The next 4-8 years of his presidency, barring any unforeseen events, will be marked by his ability to create a working relationship with the U.S. that though will likely still be in its infancy, work to the advantage of both states.

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17. Ibid.
34. Ibid.


42. ibid


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Impact of Rouhani’s Election Win on Iran-US Relations

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- Managing editor of four issues of TISRI’s Book of Asia, and Book of CIS (the last issue of Book of Asia was special to relations between Iran and India)
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Introduction
Without a doubt, the recent presidential election in Iran has been the most important political event influencing the Iranian foreign policy. This development will not only leave its mark on the regional and global positions of Iran, but will also have a powerful influence on the balance of power in the entire region. It will also have clear effects on one of the most important international crises revolving around Iran over the country’s nuclear energy program. On June 14, 2013, more than 70 percent of the eligible voters took part in the Iranian presidential polls in which out of eight presidential candidates qualified by the Guardian Council, Mr. Hassan Rouhani, the most moderate of those candidates, was elected as the new president of Iran. The election of Hassan Rouhani, the former top nuclear negotiator of Iran, as the new Iranian president, has led to hot debates and analyses both inside Iran and in other major capitals of the world, including Washington, where Tehran has been constantly the subject matter of important discussions. The lion’s share of the post-election analyses has been focused on the outlook of relations between Iran and the United States and the resolution of the existing nuclear standoff between Iran and the international community.

At any rate, it seems that given the reformist ideas of Mr. Hassan Rouhani, his victory in the presidential election, which came as a surprise, has provided the best
opportunity in many years for the United States to make a basic revision in its relations with Iran. It proved that the revival of new hope in diplomatic interaction is still the best option for achieving a mutual agreement which would also serve the interests of the United States in the Middle East. It will also dissuade the Islamic Republic from taking measures to build nuclear weapons, just in the same way that it discourages military action against Iran because the outcome of such an aggression is unknown and may set the entire region on fire.

Now, the main questions which are important about the impact of Mr. Rouhani’s election on Iran’s foreign policy and relations with the United States are as follows: What path will be taken by Mr. Rouhani in his foreign policy approach in order to solve the existing problems with regard to relations with the United States and to resolve Iran’s nuclear issue? Given the power structure in Iran, how much power and influence does he have to determine the general direction of the country’s foreign policy? What are his advantages for promoting his own foreign policy and what factors will help him? The final question is, what diplomatic approach will be now taken by the United States toward the Islamic Republic? The present article is an effort to provide brief answers to the above questions.

**Foreign policy orientation of Mr. Rouhani**

The background, election mottos, and the method by which Rouhani managed to win the election are key factors for the understanding of his foreign policy orientation. Rouhani is also a lawyer who has obtained his doctorate from a British university. He is not originally a member of the reformist camp. Although he is much more pragmatist than other principlist candidates who lost ground to him, especially the current Iranian chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, there is no doubt that he is an insider to the Islamic establishment. He has been serving as the national security advisor to Iranian presidents between 1989 and 2005, and has been also serving as the representative of the Supreme Leader of Iran at the Supreme National Security Council up to his presidential election win. In addition, Rouhani has been deputy speaker of the Iranian parliament (Majlis) and member of the Assembly of Experts -- the sole authority which according to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic is capable of appointing and dismissing the Supreme Leader. The most important factor which has made Rouhani famous is probably the role he played during the tenure of the former Iranian president, Mohammad Khatami, as the chief nuclear negotiator of Iran. In that period between 2003 and 2005, his skillful management of the case through negotiations with the European troika of France, Britain and Germany (also known as the EU3) brought him the nickname of “diplomat Sheikh.”

The Iranians know and elected Rouhani as a reformist figure. However, he can be best described as a liberal conservative figure. During the past 21 years, he has been heading the Center for Strategic Research of the Expediency Council. The Expediency Council is headed by Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, a former Iranian president, who can be also considered a liberal conservative figure. A week before
the election, two former Iranian presidents, the reformist Mohammad Khatami and Hashemi Rafsanjani, declared their official support for Hassan Rouhani. Three days before the election, the reformist candidate, Mohammad Reza Aref, was requested by Mohammad Khatami to withdraw from the presidential race and by doing so, Rouhani was elected president through the categorical support of reformist and moderate figures.

During presidential election debates, Rouhani promised to use foresight as a norm for the regulation of Iran’s disorderly policies, improve the conditions of the ailing economy of Iran, promote respect for human rights, and replace the aggressive foreign policy of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad with a new policy of renewed interaction with the world. During his first press conference following his election, Rouhani emphasized that he would improve the relations between Iran and the rest of the world. He promised to exercise more transparency in action and mend the country’s positions on various international issues. Rouhani also emphasized that he would do his utmost to bring more transparency to the nuclear case and build confidence with international community.

At any rate, winning more than 50 percent of the votes by Mr. Rouhani clearly proved that the majority of the Iranian people had opted for a policy of moderation and a more logical course in the country’s domestic and foreign policies. At the same time, the fact that the second runner-up, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, had won almost 16 percent of the vote was another indication that the majority of the Iranian people had voted for moderation. Although Qalibaf entered the presidential race as a conservative figure, most people knew him for his management of the municipal affairs of the capital city, Tehran, during his term at Tehran Municipality, and he was considered by most voters as a potent, and of course, moderate, manager. As a result, Rouhani and Qalibaf had earned a total of about 67 percent of the vote in the presidential election. Therefore, the Iranian people proved through their election that they sought to protect the country’s national economic interests, and also aspired for moderation and change in Iran’s foreign policy as well as improvement in the relations between Iran and the rest of the world. As a result, they had reached the decision that Mr. Rouhani was a man capable of pursuing their demands.

**Power structure in Iran**

As said before, the unexpected triumph of “Hassan Rouhani” in the presidential polls without the need to a runoff, has raised new hopes in the exercise of more practical diplomacy and improvement of the country’s economic conditions which are already suffering from tough international sanctions. Such rays of hope are of value, but the potential for change which has been created through the victory of “Rouhani” is by no means unlimited, unrestricted, or even determinate. All told, the president of Iran is not the highest authority in the country. The Western officials, therefore, are wondering whether the result of the presidential election in Iran can have a powerful effect on the standoff in the nuclear negotiations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. They also want to know whether in this system of governance in
which the Leader plays the main role in determining the general policies of the establishment, and in this case the nuclear policies, will the president be able to make a serious contribution to the nuclear negotiations or not? in response, one may dare say that the limits of the influence of president in Iran depend on his own personality as well as the power networks in the country. The issue of the president’s power in Iran is part of the large-scale puzzle of how the political power is generally distributed within the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran. There is also a subtle point to know in order to have a good grasp of Iran’s foreign policy. The indisputable reality of Iran is that the Supreme Leader is the most powerful player in the political scene of the country and has the last say on all major issues related to the foreign policy. However, the political structure in Iran is constantly creating new balance among rival political forces.

Anyway, the power structure in Iran is such that the president is only the second best and, therefore, lacks enough power to bring about a major strategic turnabout in the country’s foreign policy. Nonetheless, he is able to make major changes in international behavior of the Islamic Republic because he enjoys a special position among senior decision-makers of Iran. [The president is also] the head of the Supreme National Security Council, which is one of the most powerful decision-making bodies in the country and controls the implementation of the Iranian foreign policy and also controls the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This is why the Persian calendar years 1368 (1989-1990), 1376 (1997-1998), and 1384 (2005-2006) are characterized as major hallmarks in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran because in those fateful years, the president of the country changed and with him changed Iran’s behavior in international relations. In other words, following those years, various facets of Iran’s foreign policy, including willingness for détente and dialogue among civilizations as well as an aggressive diplomatic approach were shown to the world at an international level and every one of those facets left different legacies for Iran and global standing of the country.

On the whole, although the Supreme Leader plays a high-profile, and in fact the main, role in making the final decision on such issues as relations with the United States and Iran’s nuclear case, the president can also play an influential part in setting the course of the country’s nuclear dossier. The most important tool at his disposal is his words, which can not only influence the public opinion of the Iranian people inside the country, but also shape the understanding of international community of what is going on in Iran. Therefore, his remarks can provide grounds for the activities and various measures taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran. For example, Ahmadinejad’s speeches inside the country about uranium enrichment being an inalienable right of the nation, finally turned the nuclear issue into a matter of national interest. In addition, the president of Iran is also the head of the Supreme National Security Council and this important position enables him to determine the way that Iran’s policies are presented to the outside world. Last but not least, he has the support of those people who have voted for him in order to change the country’s policies.
Advantages and factors influencing the progress of a centrist policy in Rouhani’s administration

It is still too early to predict whether the administration of Mr. Rouhani will be able to manage and improve the outlook of Iran’s long-term foreign policy or not. However, for him and other reformist figures the success in realizing the top priorities of the Iranian foreign policy would hinge on their success to create conditions in which Iran would be able to reduce tension with the world and improve relations with major global powers, especially the United States. He likes the nuclear energy program of Iran to be taken into consideration within the general framework of the Iranian foreign policy. This will make him interested in engaging in serious diplomatic negotiations. However, let's not forget that Rouhani became president when Iran’s nuclear energy program has already come a long way. In 2003, he was bickering with the West over the type of the nuclear energy program that Iran would be allowed to have. Today, however, the main problem is what kind of nuclear energy program Iran should be allowed to continue. Therefore, the basics are different. Despite these realities, the new administration of Rouhani will have advantages in order to bring to home Iran’s nuclear energy program while former administrations could not avail themselves of these advantages:

- The election support accorded to Rouhani has been more powerful in terms of quality compared to all his predecessors. Being known as a centrist figure, Rouhani succeeded to shape a new coalition of political forces through his election campaign. The most important components of the new array of political forces supporting him included moderate technocrats and reformists, disillusioned conservative figures who look for change, as well as the reformist movement of Iran which seeks to have social restrictions reduced. Since Rouhani had attuned its moves to the demands of various political sectors, it seems that most politicians, regardless of their party affiliations, have cautiously conceded to his moderate and centrist agenda. He may be able to really serve the country by creating a kind of balance among the conservatives, reformists, and military figures and also by making good use of his power of lobbying and superb negotiation skills.
- Rouhani is capable of making change because he is not a reformist politician. He is a centrist figure who enjoys the support and the mandate of the reformist figures while having good relations with various power structures, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, the clerical figures and various political sections of the Islamic establishment. Most importantly, he has close relations with the Supreme Leader and is in agreement with him. Although he made use of a reformist literature during his election campaign, he never lost a chance to underline his loyalty to the Leader.
- Rouhani’s last merit is that he was the leader of Iranian nuclear negotiators from the beginning of international controversies over Iran’s nuclear case in 2003 up to the time he was replaced by new chief negotiator in 2005. As a result, the Western states know him as a realistic
person, well versed about the principles of diplomacy, resilient, and at the same time, resolute in pursuing his country's goals and interests.

**What US should do?**

As said before, the varied background of the new president of Iran has made the experts believe that he owns high decision-making power. Also, his position at the central core of the Islamic establishment will provide him with an opportunity to make a bridge between various sectors of the establishment: between the citizens and their political leaders as well as within the government and, perhaps, between Iran and the West. Despite these facts and although it seems that the new window of opportunity in Iran is of high importance, the domestic conditions in Iran do not constitute the sole variable determining the final result of political calculations. The tactics and the approach used by Washington will, at least, play a part in shaping the possibilities which may be needed for the progress of negotiations. Although Rouhani has been positive about improvement of relations, he will only show interest in the continuation of negotiations if the West proves interested in giving concessions to Iran. Rouhani does really have the opportunity the improve relations during his term in office, but if his is not encouraged to do so, he may even make negotiations more difficult for the West. Iran has already seen that how everything may change rapidly. Under the former president, Khatami, Iran's foreign policy sought to bolster relations with the West and Iran, especially was of great help to the United States for the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan following September 11, 2001, terror attacks. In return, however, the then president of the United States, George W. Bush, called Iran part of the Axis of Evil. This, naturally, angered the Supreme Leader and the reformist Iranian leaders of that time and made them more skeptical of the West.

It seems that the key to end the current conditions is for the United States to show respect for the nuclear rights of Iran as per the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which also include the country's right to enrich uranium on its soil. The United States should support nuclear negotiations with Iran via the P5+1 group and also restart direct talks with the country. The Obama administration should also work closely with the US Congress in order to initiate renewed interaction with the Islamic Republic. The US president’s foreign policy team should reach a common understanding with the Congress over the fact that imposing new sanctions against Iran before giving time to Rouhani to take necessary measures will be a grave mistake. The new sanctions will be a punishment against the majority of Iranian voters who have opted for moderation over radicalism and can jeopardize the new opportunity which has been given to the moderate leaders of Iran. the message that the sanctions approach will send to these people is that regardless of who sways power in Tehran, the United States is simply trying to counter Iran through crippling restrictive measures. If Tehran perceives such a message through the enforcement of new sanctions, it would not have powerful motives to sit at the negotiation table, but will have more reasons to go after further development of its nuclear energy
program. The United States should leave all mental doors open to reduction of anti-Iran sanctions and also prepare new proposals to be offered during any future talks.

The next important point is that any plan prepared by the Americans for contact with Iran should convince Iran’s Supreme Leader that the United States is ready to recognize the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and show respect for it. The Leader will never endorse an agreement which would require Iran to withdraw from its positions or accept defeat publicly. And no amount of pressure will make him give in to reconciliation with the West. He deeply believes that any sign of compromise in the face of pressure will produce the opposite result and will lead to further escalation of pressure.

Last, but by no means least, the election of Hassan Rouhani by the Iranian people can be a good test of the goals and seriousness of the United States and its allies to engage in negotiations with the Islamic Republic. In case the United States fails to pass this test, it will confirm the worst suspicions of the Iranian people and make them certain that the United States is not actually seeking negotiations with Iran, but is using the issue of negotiations as pretext in order to weaken Iran through further sanctions and catalyze regime change in the country.

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(2) **IRAN and Russia**

**Russia and Iran**

Richard Weitz, Victor Mizin and Natalia Sharova

**Dr. Richard Weitz**

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Before joining Hudson in 2003, Dr. Weitz worked for the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Defense Science Board, DFI International, Inc., Center for Strategic Studies, Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, and the U.S. Department of Defense. Dr. Weitz is a graduate of Harvard College (B.A. with Highest Honors in Government), the London School of Economics (M.Sc. in International Relations), Oxford University (M.Phil. in Politics), and Harvard University (Ph.D. in Political Science), where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He is proficient in Russian, French, and German.

**Dr. Victor Mizin**

Dr. Victor Mizin, currently the Deputy Director of the Institute for International Studies, and Professor of the Moscow State Institute of International Affairs (University) (MGIMO), as well as the Senior Research Fellow with the Center of International Security at the Russian Academy of Sciences’ Institute of World Economy and International Relations, was recently also a Visiting Fellow at Stimson Center in Washington D.C. and the Diplomat-in-Residence and Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, California.

He has made his career as an arms control, nonproliferation and global security expert in the Russian Foreign Ministry having headed consecutively the Offices of ABM Treaty and Outer Space; Export Control and Nonproliferation and U.N. peacekeeping operations and sanctions. He participated as an adviser in large amount of bilateral and multilateral arms control negotiations, including START I and START II, INF, SCC on ABM Treaty, Conference on Disarmament and U.N. Disarmament Commission, served at the Russian mission to U.N. as a political affairs counselor, and was an UNSCOM inspector and associate.

In the beginning of the 90s, Dr. Mizin was the founding person and a long–time Head of the Office of Export Control of the Russian Foreign Ministry which presided over and directed the Russian government’s efforts (especially, regarding the international cooperation and expertise sharing aspects) in installing a world-class national system of export controls as an efficient tool of the nonproliferation norms’ enforcement.

Dr. Mizin graduated cum laude from Moscow State Institute of International Relations in 1978 and got a PhD degree in political science from the Moscow-based Institute of USA and Canada Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in 1991.
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**Ms. Natalia Sharova**

Ms. Sharova is an international-security analyst currently pursuing a master’s degree in International relations. She has recently interned with the Carnegie Moscow center where she was researching on identifiers of covert nuclear weapons programs. Previously she worked on a nuclear security project at the Hudson Institute and at the British Broadcasting Corporation Moscow Bureau as a newsgathering and research assistant. She has also served as a rapporteur on the Asan Nuclear Forum in Soul. Ms. Sharova is an op-ed contributor whose articles can be found at the National Interest magazine, Voice of America and the Atlantic Community.

Most Russians are probably as happy as everyone else to see Iranian President Ahmadinejad leave office. His policies placed additional strains on the Russian-Iranian relationship. For example, Ahmadinejad’s unpopularity forced Moscow to distance itself from the current Iranian regime even while they seek to support the autonomy and viability of the Iranian state.

Russian officials oppose Iran’s development of nuclear weapons, but believe Iran would need several more years to mate a workable warhead with a ballistic missile. Their opposition to an Iranian bomb program is not due to a concern about a near-term Iranian attack against Russia but to other considerations. Russians worry about the health of the global nuclear nonproliferation regime at a time when many potential nuclear weapons states might appear near Russia. They further fear that Israel and the United States might respond to an Iranian nuclear weapons program with a military strike or, as now, by developing more robust missile defenses that Russian strategists fear might be used to intercept Russia’s long-range strategic missiles. Iran’s nuclear and missile activities are also driving NATO countries to support missile defense programs that Russians fear could eventually degrade their own nuclear deterrent.

Russian officials have always opposed the use of military force against Iran. A major war could encourage Islamist extremism or lead to unpredictable regime change in Tehran, which could produce a more radical or a more pro-Western Iranian government, both of which would harm Moscow’s interests. It is true that a major conflict in the Persian Gulf War could lead to a further spike in world prices for Russian oil and gas, generating windfall profits for Moscow, but Russian territory lies uncomfortably close to the site of any military operation. Another war could also encourage Islamist extremism or lead to unpredictable regime change in Iran. Russians might also fear that a group within Iran might transfer nuclear explosive devices to a terrorist group, which could use them to try to coerce Russia to change its policies in Chechnya.
It is true that, since the revelations in 2002 and 2003 about the extent of Iran’s covert nuclear program, the Russian government has employed a mixture of engagement and pressure to constrain Iran’s nuclear program. Despite Russian denials, this pressure has included slowing down construction at Bushehr and drawing out negotiations to provide Iran with fuel for the reactor, as well as Russia’s more publicized support for several UN Security Council resolutions that have criticized Iran’s nuclear activities and imposed sanctions on Tehran after Iranian officials ignored UN demands to suspend these activities.

Yet, while Russian officials have accepted sanctions as a means to pressure Iran toward negotiations, they oppose the “crippling” sanctions advocated by Israel and some Western governments. Russians object in principle, if not always in practice, to using sanctions or other coercive measures to alter Iran’s behavior, let alone as an instrument of regime change, claiming such measures would be counterproductive and harden the Iranian regime against making further concessions regarding its nuclear weapons program. Russian diplomats have often worked to weaken proposed sanctions. They have lately also been resisting Western efforts to impose new sanctions on Iran for its continued defiance of UN Security resolutions relating to its nuclear research and development program. They regularly oppose U.S. efforts to induce more countries to impose additional unilateral sanctions outside the UN on Iran.

Russians officials argue that foreign threats against Tehran are counterproductive and that the best way to moderate any Iranian nuclear ambitions is to make Tehran’s external environment less threatening. Russian officials have often faulted the United States, whether the George W. Bush or the Barack Obama administrations, for its alleged threatening behavior for blocking a diplomatic settlement and even prompting fearful Iranians to consider acquiring nuclear weapons as a means to guarantee their security. Instead of more sanctions, they call for enhanced dialogue between Washington and Tehran as other cooperative measures to moderate Iranian behavior. Although Russian officials cite humanitarian and tactical ("don’t back Tehran into a corner) considerations, they also want to avoid harming Russian business interests in Iran by measures that would affect the everyday economy.

In the view of Russian analysts, the first steps toward any diplomatic solution must involve reducing ambiguities surrounding Iran’s nuclear program, and compelling Iran to come into compliance with its safeguards requirements under the NPT. Although the United States claims that Iran has a nuclear weapons program, the IAEA has yet to find direct evidence of such a program. Russians advocate negotiating limits on Iranian nuclear research activities. The proposal should apply the experiences of UNSCOM and UNMOVIC, and go beyond the measures included in the IAEA’s additional protocol. If Iran accepts inspections of any facilities that inspectors find suspicious, the world will allow Iran to have a limited, small-scale enrichment program.

The proposal should also include a provision for constant on-the-ground surveillance of Iran’s enrichment program. Such an offer would return the Iranian crisis back to the sphere of negotiable solutions and defuse talk of a military intervention. Iran could be cajoled into
accepting such an invasive surveillance regime in exchange for a face-saving small-scale uranium enrichment program.

Some Russian experts would like to establish an ad hoc inspection team that would have wide-ranging access to investigate Iran's nuclear activities. This team would draw from international specialists who are knowledgeable about all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle and nuclear weapons. Importantly, they would supplement, not replace, the role of the IAEA and would root their mission in the IAEA charter, which provides for extraordinary inspections to resolve compliance problems. The inspectors cannot be drawn from the IAEA, as Iran has humiliated the Agency and it may shy away from this mission. If the inspections regime had success, the IAEA could take over the inspections after a few years. To a certain extent, this would also be easier for Iran to accept.

The Security Council would authorize these special inspectors under Chapter VI of its Charter (notably Article 36) and give them a limited period of time to make an assessment. The authorization would not, at the initial stage, have to make explicit or implicit reference to sanctions or use of military force. But if the inspection team found proscribed nuclear activities, the Security Council would then have stronger grounds than it now has to consider forceful action.

Iran may want to maintain ambiguity to make its nuclear program look more formidable than it actually may be—as has been speculated was the case in Saddam Hussein's Iraq. But Tehran stands to gain more if it opens up to more intrusive inspections. Javad Zarif, the Iranian ambassador to the UN, has stated that Iran is willing to permit "intrusive inspections" at its nuclear facilities and to limit the enrichment of nuclear materials so that they are suitable for energy production but not for weaponry.

As an additional necessary incentive, Russian experts propose offering to convene a multilateral dialogue involving, at a minimum, Iran, Russia, and the European Union. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states would also have an incentive to join the dialogue. In Russians' view, the United States may opt out initially, but should be prepared to participate once it appears that Iran is serious about cutting a deal. The dialogue would consider a broad agenda involving security assurances and economic development.

Russia and the United States have credibly demonstrated over the past twenty years, particularly through the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program, that cooperation can provide greater security for all parties. In addition, Russia's involvement would be in keeping with the spirit of Senator Richard Lugar's concept of extending cooperative threat reduction outside of the former Soviet Union as well as the notion of transforming threat reduction from a bilateral aid strategy to a multilateral toolkit where Russia is a co-equal partner.

Russian experts believe that Russia would play this role if Washington shows its respect for Moscow's ever-growing international clout and its coveted quasi-superpower status, and treats Russia as an equal—or almost equal—partner. Moscow could be persuaded that by acting as the "good cop", it is by no means carrying water for Washington, but diffusing a precarious international crisis while scoring important diplomatic points on its march back to diplomatic dominance. Such an opening can bring a new quality to the bilateral relations
soured in recent months as Moscow attempts to play off a newly-colored foreign policy of grandeur.

In this Moscow-proposed scenario, Russia would eventually be elevated to the symbolic level of an actual U.S. strategic ally while Iran would save face and not have to suffer under sanctions. Moscow, if properly prodded by Washington’s assistance and diplomatic leverage, could become a useful ally for the US, starting with a kind of junior partner status—though, predictably, it would never publicly accept this dependent second-tier role. Due to its imperial past, it is unlikely that Russia will be content with the role of “tutored undergraduate” or accept any kind of financial buyout.

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(3) IRAN and CHINA

The Myth and Imponderabilia of Sino-Iran Interaction

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To Chinese public and intelligentsia, their contours of global knowledge is bizarrely organized, in the sense that they paid too much attention on U.S. and very few other “western” countries, ignoring a considerable amount of countries who have truly defined China’s global existence before the advent of globalization. Having said that, this is by no means to negate China’s continuous researches dedicated to those comparatively neglected cluster of global knowledge, such as Iran, India, Japan, Brazil and Russia, etc..

If I compare Chinese intelligentsia’s knowledge production of Global Cold Spots with natural formation of lake or river and the general public as widespread dry land waiting for irrigation; the meandering and seasonal water flow of knowledge is too dearth to allow any extra “illuminating water” seeping into desert of public knowledge of Global Cold Spots (GCS).

For general Chinese public, Iran is still a faraway and none-of-my-business country, floating up high in a parched dry Eden, endowed with abundant oil and natural gas, reminding Chinese folklores depicted in The Thousand and One Nights or Story of King Shahryar and His Brother. As a personal experience, this book is my bedtime story when I was a kid and still used as traditional nursing stories for Chinese kids by many parents born in 1970s and 80s. To many Chinese public, they loosely and unprofessionally define all the people who wear shoals, robes or veils into one category – these people perceived to be foreigner-like, speaking undecipherable languages, incredibly religious, different cuisine and ethnically diverse.

Ironically, these ludicrous and patchwork conception of Pan-Iran, Quasi-Arabian, Foreign Chinese categorization, did have some profound realistic foundation, evidenced by continuous
but sporadic interaction that can traced back all the way to 2,000 years ago, when Iran be called by Han Chinese as Anxi, literally means Rest-In-Peace. The province Xinjiang (means New Territory or Frontier), was once called Ku-stana which belongs to Scythians Saka Iranian cultural cluster. Only when Xinjiang minorities took the street to fight against Chinese Han rulers and Non-ethnic Han citizens, in 1950s and beyond in the pursuit of an East Turkistan State to which they believe in and self-proclaimed entitled to; would Chinese intelligentsia and governmental figures begin to digging deeper into historico-cultural earth and ground, in order to find out more truth and facts to evidence their governance legitimacy.

At the same time, by following these discussions, Chinese media slightly opens up limited but new perspectival lens to Pan-Iran, Arabian, Xinjiang and ethnic issues. However, this curiosity soon subsidizes and grinding to a halt, when these new geographical, cultural, religious, ethnic, historical clues converged into an Iran-China-U.S. triangle. Accordingly, the media and public will soon shift back to its US-oriented geo-political mode (deciding it’s again US who are bullying and concoct conspiracy toward Iran and China, in order to bring down these two powers and gain access to their resources), pushing all the GCS back into darkness or vagueness of imponderabilia. As a result, those regions situated within GCS tend to be ever under-exposed and less discussed, existed only as a familiar stranger or myth shrouded in past.

Zhang Guangda, one famous Chinese specialist focuses on Iranian and Xinjiang issues, once cited one archeological finding about Khotanese Xinjiang by analyzing the connotations of words appeared in one coin: on one side, versed in Chinese, “24 Zhu Bronze Money” (Zhu, one unit or denomination of ancient China currency system in Han China, dated back to 206 BC – 220 AD); and the other side, versed in east Iranian language “Maharajasa, rajati najasa, Mahatasa Gugramayasa” (means Lugal Lugal meš. King of kings). “Even though diminutively small, in terms of territory, Ku-stana or yú-tián still tried to model after the Persian stereotype who truly presides over a huge landmass.” explained Zhang.

This is coincided with Chinese mainstream governmentality, concerning the issues of Xinjiang’s self-declaration of independence – the efforts to break away from Chinese “political gravity” is futile and laughable, both true in political kinship in historical sense and geo-political contestation in terms of scale and size; China, not any other dissident provinces, is the truly Lugal Lugal meš.
Last but not least, before one political motto of newly elected Chinese president Xi Jinping’s became popular, which refers to an analogy between choosing path for development and selecting shoes for people’s own use – vouched in “only people themselves know the shoes fit them well or not” (I hereby defined as So-shoe-ism)– one Iranian movie has already been a centerpiece of attention for Chinese intelligentsia and public for ages.

This movie is called Little Shoes or The Children of Heaven, depicting a strong-willed boy running desperately and incessantly for a chance to win a pair of new shoes for his poor little sister; finally putting his blistered and bleeding feet awash in crimson ripples stirred by a shoal of golden fish.

The subtitle of this Chinese audience gazing scene could be translated as following: Behold!This poor Iranian Kid, who are running for a pair of shoes that can accommodate his sister’s feet.

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**Iran in the PRC politics**

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**Iran in the PRC politics**

Economical ties of Iran and East Asia are also expanding. Investment in Iranian oil and gas industry from East Asian countries is a clear sign of cooperation. There are obstacles for realization of this plans caused by Iran’s investment legislation that severely limits the inflow of foreign investments in oil and gas sector. Iran, isolated because of its nuclear program development, is also interested in expanding of economical relationship with the countries of the region.

China’s policy toward Iran, as well as in relation to other regions of the world, is quite pragmatic and determined by several basic interests.

**First**, Iran is an important part of China’s energy security system. In 1990s, China promoted the idea of a "pan-Asian continental energy bridge" in order to link the countries of...
Northeastern Asia with the Middle East, Central Asia and Iran, via China and under the auspices of Beijing [Christoffersen 2005].

Iran ranks third among the largest energy suppliers of China after Angola (734 thousand barrels per day) and Saudi Arabia (718 million barrels). In 2005, oil imports were as follows: Angola 14%, Sudan 5%, Russia 10%, Saudi Arabia 18% and Iran 13% [Downs 2006]. As of June 2011, China imported 22% (506 thousand bpd) of oil exported by Iran while Iranian oil accounted for 11% of Chinese imports of crude oil. In 2011, imports of Iranian oil to China totalled 27.7 million tons (approximately 557 thousand barrels per day).

Second, China is one of the largest investors in the Iran's economy, particularly in the oil and gas sector. Since 2001, Sinopec has been developing oil field "Zavareh-kanshane"; the company signed a contract ($2 billion) to develop the "Yadavaran" field in December 2007; the contract ($20 million) for the development of the "Garmsar" deposit in June 2009.

Iran partially covers oil demand of the country's northern regions by importing Kazakh oil. In addition, given the importance of Iran as one of the main suppliers of oil to China, we can assume that we are talking about swap transactions of Chinese companies with the Iranian partners.

CNPC, another Chinese company, signed a contract ($1.75 billion) to develop the "North Azadegan" oil field in January 2009, and a contract ($4.7 billion) to develop the block 11 of the "South Pars" gas field in February 2009. Negotiations are under way regarding the prospects of participation of Chinese companies in the development of the "North Pars" gas field (with subsequent purchase of raw materials produced), as well as in the block 12 development of the "South Pars" deposit promised earlier to Indians.

In addition to oil and gas deposits development, China is actively involved in the modernization of Iran's oil and gas industry. Sinopec signed a contract ($956 million) to upgrade the "Arak" refinery in July 2006. In August 2009 China decided to take part in projects worth $3 billion to modernize Iran's oil refineries (including a refinery in Abadan); in September 2009 Sinopec and CNPC signed a contract with the Iranian counterparts ($4 billion) to increase productivity of Iranian oil fields; in November 2009 Sinopec signed a preliminary agreement to provide $6.5 billion to finance a number of projects in order to develop Iranian oil refining industry.

In addition, a consortium of Chinese companies signed a contract worth $2.2 billion in September 2009 for the production of offshore and onshore drilling rigs and construction of offshore structures in Iran. According to this document, the Chinese company Shanghai Zhenhua Heavy Industry Co. Ltd. (ZPMC) was committed to build 10 offshore and 7 onshore rigs and produce 2 cranes by July 2010.
The issue of China's participation in the development of Iran's pipeline infrastructure is being considered; in particular, China’s participation in the "Peace" pipeline project (Iran - Pakistan - India)\(^3\).

Some analysts believe that China’s efforts to build a network of ports in the Middle Eastern coast of Indian Ocean, which is called "string of pearls", are aimed to secure the access to oil [Kaplan 2009].

China is constructing a port of Gwadar in Western Pakistan. Gwadar is located close to Strait of Hormuz and will allow China to use overland oil transportation in the case of disruption or restriction of sea lanes. Though, American researcher James Holmes argues that U.S. can easily prevent shipment of oil to Gwadar [Holmes 2007].

Ports built in the Indian Ocean and pipelines stretched from them are aimed for transportation of crude oil and other energy resources to the north, to China.

With the completion of the Pakistani port of Gwadar China will be able to monitor shipping through the Strait of Hormuz. Chinese plan to build another port 75 miles east of Gwadar in Pakistan. Moreover, China is building a port for maintenance of their ships on the southern coast of Sri Lanka and port facilities for container traffic in the Bangladeshi port of Chittagong on the shore of the Bay of Bengal. In Burma, Chinese are constructing or upgrading commercial and naval bases and building roads and pipelines connecting the Bay of Bengal with the Chinese Yunnan province [MacDonald et al. 2004]. These port facilities are located much closer to the cities of Central and Western China than Beijing and Shanghai.

Chinese investments in the construction of ports like Gwadar are not limited to economic interests. China seeks an access to Indian Ocean.

Chinese energy policy in Eurasia provides for elimination of any dependence on both Russian and Central Asian energy resources, so China have been creating a new transport corridor of energy resources from the Middle East through Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan.

Third, Iran’s position as a major regional transportation hub is of specific interest to China. Beijing and Tehran signed the "Protocol on Cooperation in the Transport Sector" in 2003, which includes the construction of airports, roads, railways and port facilities on Iranian territory by Chinese experts. It comes to the development of the Chabahar and Bandar-e Khomeini ports, construction of the Tehran - North highway ($260 million), expansion of the Tehran Metro network and the construction of the subway lines in Isfahan, Mashhad and Tabriz. In addition, construction of the dams (Chinese expressed their readiness to invest up to $800 million in the construction of five dams), hydroelectric and thermal power station\(^4\), as well as the production of construction materials were planned.

In May 2009 at a joint Iranian-Chinese meeting on economic issues in Tehran a number of contracts worth in total $17 billion were signed; contracts provide participation of China in
the development of construction sector and railways. In particular, Beijing offered to Tehran to take part in the implementation of the "China-Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran" railway project. Apparently, it is about construction of the "China - Iran" Trans-Kazakhstan railway with a gauge of 1435mm. proposed by Kazakhstan in 2005. It is estimated that the volume of investment in the project should be $2 billion. We recall that in 2005, when the issue was discussed by representatives of China and Kazakhstan, the volume of investment in the construction of the Kazakh section alone was estimated $3.5 billion by the Chinese side (Kazakhstan assessment was $2.5 billion). According to the feasibility study of the project, the length of the railway passing through Kazakhstan should reach 3083 km, Turkmenistan - 770 km, Iran - 70 km. Uzbekistan was not considered for this project.

Hamid Behbahani, the Transport Minister, during a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Liu Zhijun in June 2010 made a counter-proposal to establish transportation network linking China with Europe through Iran.

Due to the relative cheapness of sea transportation, it remains preferential. China began to build ships for the transportation of heavy crude oil and LNG. Introduction of the ships carbon emission tax that was announced in the EU can complicate the implementation of this project. EU policy aimed at the introduction of ship hydrocarbon emissions tax starting June 2012. China is heavily dependent on maritime transport. The ship hydrocarbon emissions tax will directly affect the overall cost of shipping and the cost of Chinese exports. This tax will also affect development of the shipbuilding industry in China. China Shipping ranked fourth with deadweight of more than 90 million tons [Li Bing 2012].

At the same time, large numbers of Chinese trucks and vans were shipped to Iran. The China National Heavy Truck Corporation company alone shipped 10 thousand heavy-duty vehicles in Iran in 2006, and has signed contract with the Iranian company Iran Khodro Diesel to build its trucks in Iran. The Chinese South East (Fujian) Motor Co. Ltd. company shipped 8 thousand Soueast Delica minivans to Iran. In addition, China signed a contract to supply 60 railcars to the Mashhad subway, as well as a contract for the joint production of the "people's car" that will be priced up to 6 thousand dollars.

Fourth, China interested in cooperation with Iran in the military field. Actually, Sino-Iranian contacts began from this cooperation in the late 1990s - early 2000s, when Iran was a major importer of Chinese weapons and military technology.

In the mid-2000s the active Sino-Iranian cooperation in the military and nuclear areas was minimized. Beijing supported the introduction of sanctions against Iran by UN Security Council during 2006-2008. Intensifying Sino-Israeli relations do not contribute to a rapprochement with Tehran. Urgent need in relations with Israel caused by preservation of the EU and the U.S. embargo on arms exports to China, as well as the need to compensate for the lack of modern military technology.
However, the media reported in April 2010 that China opened the missile production facility in Iran. It comes to the anti-ship missile Nasr-1 which is an improved version of the Chinese C-704 missile.

Of particular interest is the Sino-Iranian cooperation in the space sector. H. Shafti, the Iran Space Agency Director, visited China on 2 December 2004. During the visit talks with the heads of the Chinese National Space Agency were held, and number of aerospace facilities was visited in China by the Iranian delegation. As a result of negotiations the memorandum of understanding was signed by aerospace agencies of two countries that included deepening of cooperation in the field of space technology and scientific research. The parties have also confirmed the intention to continue cooperation in the implementation of joint international space programs. The outcome of the Sino-Iranian cooperation in the space sector was the joint launch of Environment-1 satellite carried by the Chinese rocket in September 2008.

Fifth, as elsewhere in the world, China has been actively developing trade cooperation with Iran. Sino-Iranian trade grew from $14.4 billion in 2006 to $21.2 billion in 2009, making China one of the leading trade partners of Iran. The share of Chinese goods in total Iranian imports accounted for 13% in 2009 ($ 7.9 billion); turnover reached $29.4 billion in 2010 and $42 billion in 2011. China is a major supplier of gasoline to Iran. Since September 2009, a third of Iranian gasoline imports were provided by China. Another 30 to 40 thousand barrels per day of gasoline were supplied to Iran through third countries by Chinese.

China has been developing its cooperation with Iran in respect of the tough economic and political sanctions declared by a special resolution of the UN Security Council and imposed unilaterally by the United States and the European Union. According to the Chinese, China's interaction with the Islamic Republic of Iran does not imply a violation of UN resolutions and therefore should not be subject to sanctions. Moreover, China has consistently stressed that it opposes to the situation when "any country puts its laws above international law and introduces unilateral sanctions against other countries."

This PRC's position caused by China's economic interests in Iran, as well as by the desire of China's political leadership to increase influence of China in the international arena; to secure its role as a Third World countries leader and to position it as a "responsible power." This defines the sixth China's interest in Iran - a geopolitical interest.

Hence, China's selectivity of the sanctions against Iran. China strongly opposes the imposition of economic and political sanctions, especially unilaterally. The reasoning of its position consists of a several key points.

First, China believes that economic sanctions against Iran have been put forward by the U.S., not by the decision of the UN. China is an independent country and will not blindly follow the United States, unless the Security Council decides on the matter.
Second, the strengthening of economic sanctions against Iran will only worsen situation in the Persian Gulf and will increase the risk of violence; it will also add uncertainty to the global economy with the debt crisis in the U.S. and Europe and the latent risk for countries with emerging markets.

Third, support of sanctions against Iran would be a serious blow to the economic and strategic interests of China. Iran is a major importer of oil to China, export market for Chinese goods, capital and equipment and a country where China has been carrying out construction projects.

Fourth, numerous economic sanctions do not contribute to the achievement of the required targets; on the contrary they may lead to a serious humanitarian crisis.

However, we should pay attention to the fact that while opposing economic and political sanctions against Iran, China has been actively using them for its own benefit. As mentioned above, the sanctions don’t confuse China. It has been increasing cooperation with Iran and is ready to replace those western companies which refuse to work under conditions imposed by sanctions with Chinese ones. For example, this happened with block 11 of the "South Pars" after Total refused to develop it under the pressure of sanctions.

Similar situation with the imports of Iranian oil. On the one hand, China has rejected the U.S. and the EU calls to reduce purchase of Iranian oil; on the other hand, not only China cut imports by twice in the beginning of 2012, but also made efforts to find alternatives to Iranian oil.

Motives of China's actions are obvious enough. Apparently, China urges Iran, which is caught in a trap because of the economic sanctions, to dumping. China is a major consumer of Iranian oil; it is unprofitable for Iran to lose such a customer. Another issue is that it is unlikely that Iran will agree on the large price decline.

When it comes to the sanctions regime against Iran's nuclear program, China seeks to position itself as a "responsible power." China agrees with the general view that the creation of nuclear weapons by Iran is unacceptable, while the work on the peaceful use of nuclear energy should be continued under the supervision of the IAEA.

As a result, China is quite careful when it comes to the introduction of new economic and political sanctions against Islamic Republic of Iran. In October 2009 Jiang Yu, the Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, responded to a question whether China was going to support the initiatives of some countries to impose new sanctions on Iran: "We hold our opinion that pressure is not the way to resolve emerging problems." In her view, China’s position is to ensure that emerging issues will be resolved "through negotiations and by means of diplomacy."

According to the Chinese, the diplomatic means to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue have not yet been exhausted; the possibility to persuade Tehran to agree on export of a substantial portion of existing low-enriched uranium stocks so far remains. Moreover, Chinese experts
believe that the introduction of new sanctions against Iran will inevitably lead to the enrichment of its low-enriched uranium stocks up to 20% that will put Tehran closer to the nuclear threshold.

On 27 November 2009 China supported the resolution of the IAEA Board condemning Iran for hiding information about construction of a second uranium enrichment plant near the city of Qom. However, in January 2010 China blocked the adoption of a new sanctions against Iran, as it seemed them caused not only by the desire to solve the Iranian nuclear issue, but also to put economic pressure on Iran and indirectly on countries collaborating with it.

In April 2010 it took a lot of time for Barack Obama to persuade Hu Jintao to support global community in the adoption of UN Security Council resolutions. The agreement was reached in exchange for Washington's refusal to seal the deal on the supply of new military systems to Taiwan. China supported the UN Security Council resolution number 1929 adopted 9 June 2010; however, it made every effort to emasculate the text and leave only provisions directly related to the NPT regime.

However, on July 1 the U.S. imposed tougher economic sanctions against Iran unilaterally, while postponing and not cancelling the deal on the supply of arms to Taiwan. China took it as a hoax and the relationship with the United States deteriorated; China's Foreign Ministry issued a statement in which it stressed that "it is necessary to fully, honestly and accurately comply with the relevant resolution of the UN Security Council and it is unacceptable to arbitrarily go beyond sanctions imposed by resolution."

Most likely, this explains rather rigid position of China on current pressure on Iran by the West. Although China is still dependent on investment and technology coming from Western countries and Israel and does not want to completely spoil the relationship with them, destruction of the oil producing infrastructure in Iran is not acceptable for China. This may explain the statement of the of one of China's top generals in the midst of the crisis in December 2011 that "China will not hesitate to rise to protect Iran, even if it will be the beginning of World War III."

Certainly, this threat is unlikely to become a reality. China is aware of the fact that the relative remoteness of and the lack of a common border with Iran makes expansion of the possible US-Iranian conflict into Chinese territory unlikely and China's participation in the Middle East war is unrealistic. However, China emphasizes the importance of relationships with Iran and that China’s involvement in the "anti-Iranian coalition" is impossible.

Endnotes

1. According to some reports, during the 2005-2010 period China and Iran have signed investment contracts worth in total $120 billion.
2. In July 2009 Iran offered China a package of investment proposals worth $48.2 billion. All initiatives were directly related to the Iranian energy sector and, in particular, suggested the creation of seven new oil refineries.
3. Prospects for its construction are still unclear due to the strong opposition from Washington and Pakistan's lack of financial resources. In addition, Tehran does not want to be responsible for the safety of gas transportation outside its own territory, so it insists on payment of gas at the moment of crossing the Iran-Pakistan border.

4. Chinese companies have already built "Talegan" and "Mulla Sadra" power plants in Iran and won the bid for the construction of HPP "Rudbar." China has opened a credit line of $1 billion in order to implement these projects.

5. Chinese C-704 anti-ship missile was first demonstrated at an air show in the Chinese Zhuhai city in 2006 and almost immediately shipped to Iran where it was named Nasr-1. Nasr-1 missile test firing was carried out at the end of 2008. This missile is designed for installation on small ships to target ships with displacement up to 3,000 tons.

6. The Premier Wen Jiabao visited Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar in late January 2012, where he held talks on deepening cooperation in the energy sector and on the increase of imports of oil and gas.

7. In late October 2009 Iran, U.S., Russia and France developed a draft agreement on beneficiation of Iran's nuclear fuel abroad under the auspices of the IAEA. The Agency planned that Iran will send a significant part of its low-enriched uranium stocks to Russia for further enrichment and France will be ready to produce fuel rods from reprocessed fuel for a research reactor in Tehran. The plan failed because of fundamental disagreements among the parties. Western countries insisted on the removal of not less than 70% of the low-enriched uranium stock within a year (according to the IAEA estimates, Iran had 2,065kg of uranium-235 isotope enriched to 3.5% at the time; therefore, it was planned to remove more than 1400kg). Iran agreed to export only 400 kg, and wanted to get nuclear fuel it needed immediately.

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(4)  IRAN and EUROPEAN UNION

Iran and EU’s Chilled Relations: Would the Roles and Bonhomie Revive?

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Abstract

EU role in conflicts resolution is not only significant, it is vital. The organization is emerging as a vibrant body and an honest broker that aims at securing peace and stability without specific partisan geopolitical objectives. In the ensuing article I have argued, how Iran and EU relations unwind and for what reasons their journey to thriving mutual relationship has hit the snags. Despite its efforts to maintain the neutrality, the arena, Middle East, being so complex, remains a haunting challenge. Concurrent major moves that EU has made on principle, ordinarily should have been applauded but appear to have further constrained its ability. The narrative is complex and marred by tangled web of circumstances. Optimism should prevail; however, that EU would be able to contribute a lot to the global effort to sustain the paradigm of peace in Middle East and stay linked to Iran as well.

Introduction

Geostrategic dimensions that Iran enjoys by virtue of its geography are a matter of envy. It is Middle Eastern country, hugs Central Asia, South Asia and maintains long Arabian Sea coast with ability to interdict every fifth litre of world oil which trickles through Strait of Hormuz that is one of the most, if not the most, significant strategic waterway in the world. To the north, Iran has Caspian Sea with unresolved status as it claims to be exclusively with Russia on the merit of historic treaties though in post-Soviet era, several other littorals have come up. When one perceives the connotations of EU’s Wider Black Sea Region¹ perception that embrace the geographic entities beyond the Black Sea to the East/SE to include North and South Caucasus as well, by implications Iran can safely be considered as EU neighbour.

The sagacity would always demand to have the trajectory of Iran-EU mutual relations firmly anchored on respect and cooperation. However the obtaining level of trade and diplomatic relations is woefully chilled. EU accuses Iran of developing Weapon of Mass
Destruction (WMD), citing International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) fears at successive intervals. Some observers in Iran now find total bias in EU stance, alleging that EU has also been coerced to follow US-Israeli agenda to punish Iran for issues away from IAEA scope but under the contrived pretexts of nuclear proliferation.

EU’s act of designating Hezbollah, an Iran’s ally, as terrorist group drew the leader’s response, “Nasrallah argued that the European decision stemmed not from EU values, but rather from “interests and pressures” exerted by Israel and the United States. Otherwise, Israel should have been placed on the same terror list.”2 The development is a considerable setback to Iran, causing further traction on Iran-EU relations as well. Iran persists in insisting that its nuclear facilities are absolutely oriented towards the domain of technological pursuits of non-weapon usages. There are arguments and counter arguments, both sides raising some questions that have no ready answers.

Iran-EU Honeymoon and Spectre of Sanctions

Iran and EU had realised the inevitability of the need to establish exhaustive trade relations in early 90s. With emerging energy crunch and fast-track EU economies, there could not have been better option than to tap Iranian energy resources. In about two decades, Iran and EU were doing booming business. Iran had remained satisfied with EU neutrality which it cautiously pursued by not taking sides about thorny Middle East (ME) issues, invariably ending up at Israel and also engulfing US in the brawl.

Thus their trade graphs steadily swelled. “Iran ranks 7th in exporting crude oil to Europe and a ‘Eurostat report’ states that 27 European states imported 11.4 billion Euros of goods from Iran in the first nine months of the current year (2011)”.3 As the Iranian revenues accrue mainly from oil and natural gas exports with meagre share of other country products, some also label it as rentier state. Thus the West’s ability to squelch nourishing of Iranian line of energy-based economy is far greater than the Iranian ability to evade the dent. In ordinary circumstances, while Iran may be proving herself as gutsy power, the sanctions bolt has certainly hit its economy hard.

The Equation Plummets

EU clamped economic sanctions on Iran on 23 January 2012 when the latest concern peaked about Iranian clandestine acquisition of WMD capability. The Council of European Union declared that it would levy embargo on Iranian exports, freezing all assets of Iranian Central Bank. However, the second blow of ‘SWIFT Sanction’ was even more deadly when, “On 17 March...SWIFT electronic banking network, the world hub of electronic financial transactions, disconnected all Iranian banks from its international networks...” 4 The EU has been persuading Iran to give up its Uranium enrichment venture that Iran did not oblige. Iran considers its sovereign right to develop Uranium
stocks for ‘peaceful’ purposes when such pursuits are not out of the ambit of nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to which Iran is a signatory.

The sanctions bite has been visible and the plea to punish Iran is certainly impacting the Iranian masses when inflation is at peak as a result of massive devaluation of Iranian currency. As regards the drain on Iran economy, “The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that Iran’s shrinking oil exports earned $69 billion in 2012, down 27 percent from $95 billion in 2011”. And another source established that, “The International Energy Agency, a Western watchdog body, has estimated Iran lost more than $40 billion in export revenues in 2012, amounting to around $2.4 billion a month”. The fact that Iranian exports have seen millions of barrel of decline daily means that sanctions have worked though at some cost to EU also.

EU has been posing some pertinent questions to Iran to address during series of negotiations which the Union thinks, remained in the blind alley, mainly because of Iranian intransigence. Iran not only challenges the legitimacy of IAEA reports that could not bring any concrete evidence during series of physical on-site inspections but also asserts that IAEA is spoon-fed by US and Israel when it raises clamour after they go back about the intentions of Iran. What is apparent, on the surface is the issue focusing on development of WMD and Iran’s suspected capability to cross nuclear threshold anytime soon. How does the nuclear issue unwind from the perspective of both sides?

**Summation of the Issue**

The major indicator that chills the spines of the analysts, and rightly too, is Iranian ability to operate the facilities of fuel enrichment plants (FEP), some clandestinely, despite being under IAEA nuclear safeguards. The one at Natanz, according to IAEA report of May 2011, is the major low enrichment facility that operates 53 cascades, containing 8,000 centrifuges to produce Low Enriched Uranium (LEU) to 3.5% level. IAEA report hints by implication that Iran technologically does face some impediments. “On 14 May, 2011, the 53 installed cascades contained approximately 8,000 centrifuges. The 35 cascades being fed with uranium hexafluoride, UF6, on that date contained a total of 5860 centrifuges, some of which were possibly not being fed with UF6.” In other words, the facility was not operating to the optimal capacity. However, there is discernible ambiguity on part of IAEA inspectors also because their technical expertise should have prompted them for exploring the reason for a number of centrifuges that were ‘sleeping’.

The Agency did conduct physical inventory verification (PIV) meticulously that showed, out of 3734 kg of natural UF6 fed into the cascades since February 2007, a total of 3135 kg of LEU had been produced. Iran operates, as revealed by the latest report, 15 nuclear facilities and 9 locations out of facilities (LOFs) where nuclear material is generally used.
Ordinarily these LOFs should have been the red rag, setting in a dangerous trajectory of events but thanks to IAEA officials who confirmed that all of them are located in hospitals. IAEA’s November 2011 report shows total of 54 cascades, an increase by one cascade over ‘May 2011 Report’ when 37 cascades were being fed with UF6 with marginal increase of two cascades from the previous 35 cascades reported. The total production score, after the team conducted PIV, from 15 October to 8 November 2011, stood at 4922 kg of LEU as against previous 3135 kg, thus resulting in an increase to the stock of LEU by 1787 kg. Adding two cascades in about six months shows, on one hand, that the work is in progress at steady pace but also on the other hand, that it is not being pushed on war-footing.

Besides, Iran has Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant (PFEP) at Natanz where six cascades operate, mainly for research and development. Additionally, the Agency suspects that her Heavy Water Production Plant (HWPP) at ‘Arak’ appears to be in operational mode but access to re-inspect the facility has been stalled by Iran. The report adds, “Iran is obliged to suspend all enrichment related activities and heavy water related projects. Some of the activities carried out by Iran at UCF (Uranium Conversion Facility) and the Fuel Manufacturing Plant (FMP) at Esfahan are in contravention...”

Latest figures given by IAEA report of May 2013 are mind boggling. The report has it, “8960 kg (+689 kg since the Director General’s previous report) of UF6 enriched up to 5% U-235, of which 6357 kg (+383 kg since the Director General’s previous report) remain in the form of UF6 enriched up to 5% U-23512 and the rest has been further processed ...324 kg (+44 kg since the Director General’s previous report) of UF6 enriched up to 20% U-235, of which 182 kg (+15 kg since the Director General’s previous report) remain in the form of UF6 enriched up to 20% U-23514...” The holding of 20% HEU means that its indigenous stocks place Iran close to the essential minimum level of weapon grade capability, allowing Iranian scientists to proceed to the next phase of arming its program. Iran has also plausible explanation, maintaining that the purpose of enriching UF6 up to 5% U-235 is the production of fuel for its nuclear facilities and that the purpose of enriching UF6 up to 20% U-235 is the manufacture of fuel for research reactors.

IAEA concedes that its conclusions are based on the observations made during inspections. While these may confirm at the given point of time that Iran does not appear to be close to crossing nuclear threshold, the Agency has no yardstick to measure Iranian intentions. As an alternative, it has to rely on intelligence reports, satellite imagery and possible role of developed nuclear infrastructure in Iran that connect indirectly to Iranian urge for achieving Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) levels, bomb design configuration, trigger mechanism and developing long range means of ballistic delivery for adding
nuance to her achievements. Thus, the military dimension of the Iranian nuclear venture may not exist if Iran’s version of compliance is translated. Conversely, an existential threat looming on the horizon may be a reality if sum total of the reported segments are morphed to evolve the nuclear arsenals’ contours. Therefore, in order to penetrate such an ambiguity, the IAEA contends, “Iran is requested to engage substantively with the Agency without delay for the purpose of providing clarifications regarding possible military dimensions of Iran’s nuclear program…” 12

The account above does give the Iranian thrust line and a reason to the world to worry about. It also points that wavering Iran tends to seek possible redress of major ME issues by presenting bogey of nuclear threat to wear down the opponents. It would be naïve to assume that Iran is oblivious of the consequences it is likely to face. Other than economic sanctions, US and/or Israel could attack Iran to knock out its suspected capability though the attack option might generate global repercussions, spinning out of control of the powerful actors. However, in the meantime, Iran kept lashing, “Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad addressed the UN General Assembly Wednesday ‘to show to the world that my noble nation…has a global vision’ while simultaneously lambasting capitalism and Israel for the world’s ills.” 13

**Intransigent Iran Wants to be Heard**

What Iran expects from the West, particularly from EU whom it has been considering an honest broker that instead of threatening and intimidating Iran, the West should listen to its side of grievances as well. Unfortunately, the things have come to such pass that for Iran every irritant begins and ends at Israel, whether it is Palestinians’ issue, label of a rogue state, killing of its scientists, freezing of its bank accounts, threat of regime change, shooting down of its passenger airliner, stoking insurgency in Iranian Baluchistan, attempts to eliminate its allies, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Bashar al-Assad in Syria and destroying or damaging its civil nuclear industrial structures through cyber war.

Some observers do come out with such arguments that when you bleed country’s people and its leadership for decades by deploying all devices and means available, expecting them to be polite and amenable on dialogue table would be diplomacy-depredation of the worst kind. Reading some symptoms of flexibility from the initial overtures of President elect, Hasan Rouhani, US is sounding more belligerent even though Barak Obama’s administration has shown measured concern, “Congress is considering a new series of hard-hitting Iran sanctions on everything from mining and construction to the Islamic republic’s already besieged oil industry, despite concern from the Obama administration that the measures could interfere with nuclear negotiations.” 14
Conversely Israel takes Iran as deadly existential threat that challenges the very survival of the Jewish state. “Project Daniel boldly advises that Israel take certain prompt initiatives in removing existential threats.” \(^{15}\) It therefore, considers its legitimate right to dilute every threat that poses to the state of Israel even if it has to adopt preemption strategy for which it needs no license, the act being its self-defense. Where international community is failing and EU makes a very potent chunk of it, these are the geopolitical expediencies of the world powers who resort to filtering crucial international issues through the spectrum of their national interests instead of merit whether it needs to blame Iran or Israel. Certainly, Iranian nuclear threat has not crystallized over the week-end but is result of years of lack of transparency of the nuclear club, looking away when the favorites punched NPT but some ‘patrons’ on NPT start pulling the noose when it was a country on the low scale of their liking.

It is also an approach-imbalance of not addressing the basic issues of colossal consequences which has resulted in intensive polarization among the powers who should have been otherwise guarantors of peace and stability on the planet. Iran’s nuclear issue, Syrian crisis, Lebanon standoff, Palestinian festering dilemma, denial of recognition of state of Israel and holocaust, hostile rockets lobbing on Israel, issue of return of Arab territories of pre-1967 war and Arabs/Iran insistence to declare ME as nuclear free zone for the same reason, even if approved by thumping majority in UN in favor of the grieved parties, would be killed at UNSC by one power or the other. In other words, despite the promise of prosperity when some economies are ascending the graph at the speed they never dreamed off, generally the world in 21st Century stands much more fractured and prone to conflicts.

**Paradigm Complexity and Prospects**

The EU attempts to woo Iran away from the trajectory of collision persistently for several years deserve a loud applause. Yet its joining of the sanctioning club led by US would need some debate. It is yet to be seen whether EU would follow the spate of new set of aggressive sanctions being propounded by US Congress to demolish Iran’s mining and construction ability after laying siege around its oil exports. Granting the influence to strong anti-Iran lobbies in Washington, in all probability they would attempt to trash entire range of recent Iranian positive gestures by labeling them as mere eye-wash to buy time. That would leave little justification for the plausibility of dialogues for the US administration and also for EU to view them otherwise.

One does not need to be genius to assess that when EU tended to coax Iran, it held no carrot for it because that carrot, Iran perceives is in firm possession of the ones who are more or less, until now, equally obdurate in their stance towards international contentious
issues concerning Iran. This line of thought is perhaps adding to Iran’s reticence, particularly when, on crucial issues, it has some potent allies too. Emerging Iranian leadership, to succeed outgoing President Ahmadinejad after recently concluded presidential elections has hinted beyond doubt that it would be keen to address the issues that plague Iran. A source quoted, “Just a week before Iran’s election gatekeepers announced the presidential ballot, Rouhani said, one-on-one talks with Washington are the only way for breakthroughs in the nuclear standoff, given that the United States — as he put it — is the world’s “sheriff.” However, the stage Iran has reached by now, gasping under wide array of sanctions including bank accounts freezes, would afford it a little maneuver space in the eyes of its public except for composite dialogues with US.

Now the question may arise, what role EU can play hereafter? Unfortunately, by using the only trump card of clamping economic sanctions, EU has caused dent to its ability to persuade Iran for securing any worthwhile concessions. As long as Iran aims at and pursues ‘cost-benefit approach’, it would be pertinent to assume that Iran knows, it has paid enough cost during last about two decades of drubbing it received in various modes (also connect ILSA). Therefore, Iran would seek more concessions with emphasis that all ME issues are taken up in tandem to reach at meaningful resolution rather than focusing only on its suspected venture to acquire WMD capability. EU is also handicapped by the reality that it cannot give Iran anything except trade and demand compliance of IAEA safeguards and meet inspections criteria. Iran is possibly well aware that that any dialogues progress with EU requiring some concession(s) from Israel would mean deadlock because EU has no clout with Israel.

Finding itself beleaguered, Iran soon hits a sensitive cord that also pleases all Arabs by linking to its proliferation issue the morality theme of achieving nuclear free zone in ME. Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has something to say about a conference, scheduled in Helsinki. NAM strongly condemned the opposition of the US, Russia, Britain and the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to the conference that was originally scheduled to be held in Finland’s capital, Helsinki, in December, upon an agreement reached during the 2010 NPT Review Conference…It also urged the Israeli regime, the only non-signatory to the NPT in the Middle East, to destroy its nuclear weapons, place its nuclear facilities under the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) supervision and carry out all its atomic activities in accordance with international non-proliferation regulations. In Iranian perception, her demand for denuclearized ME would be absolutely transparent and ethics based, more so when some joint sittings on the subject have been convened already. Such developments would certainly be dangerous snare for EU capability to intervene. Hence in the dialogue balance, if Iran is on one side, it cannot be the EU on the other side though Iran, before the EU sanctions had been more confident in doing business with EU and also ‘P5+One’ forum which was, barring China and US,
predominantly European. However if Iran-US dialogues become feasible in the wake of any shift in the stance of Iranian hierarchy, US negotiator would manage elbow space to tie down Iran on dialogue table if convened and entice Iran with diplomatic charm. Where US is not likely to succeed is, once it would need final nod from Israel. Thus the success awaits miracles and if they are not happening, it would require the parties in dispute to keep their faith in the efficacy of talking-diplomacy minus traditional hurling of barbs which, until now, have been down pouringlavishly.

Conclusions

EU intentions and role do not need applause from Iran because over short span of time it has emerged as a proven organization. It is doing remarkably well in helping the countries to recover from the governance issues, bankruptcy and its efforts to insulate Europe including Western Balkan from the perilous future are well cited. While it has played her cards and finds itself with not so significant ability to influence any worthwhile issue with Iran, its indirect support shall remain crucial.

Iran must, even after it engages US, keep its window for EU open and the deliberations at appropriate diplomatic levels should go on. EU does not have the ability to push Israel but it can efficiently prompt US to play the role of an honest broker. Where US fails and follows partisan strategies, EU must intervene as a third umpire to trim US approach. Securing of cease fire during Russo-Georgian war (2008) proved EU’s peace restoring capability, perhaps more than even US.

Iran and Israel must know that smoke screens to mask the realities seldom help in 21st Century when the globalization has enabled human mind to stretch it to the farthest boundaries and thus penetrate the fog as if unknown were known. It is time that bluff game must end. It would afford considerable elbow space to perhaps all actors if Iranian nuclear issue is approached in the wider context of contemplated ME nuclear weapons free zone. This way, a long trail of ‘if’ and ‘but’ would stand excluded. EU should deploy its media support to soften Israeli and Iranian obstinacy by posing question to each of them that if Iran does not show any flexibility, why it should expect Israel or US flexible stance. Simultaneously, Israel be asked same way, why Iran should become flexible if Israel does not reciprocate.

Lingering conflicts or the threat of them must receive due attention in ME like EU is endeavoring in Europe and its peripheries. The Muslim world, the West, Iran and Israel have lot to learn from Iraq and Afghanistan war in the near vicinity, should resist earnestly being sucked into conflicts.
Iran needs to be heard and its legitimate grievances resolved. West must consider lifting sanctions as goodwill gesture to allow Iranian people to breathe. Iran has to alley international community’s apprehensions and presents its case in a manner that fosters peace and stability. State of Israel is a reality and it is Jews inviolable, inalienable sovereign right to exist peacefully within the territories mandated by UN on emergence of Jewish state. Concurrently, continued holding of captured territories in ME cannot be justified by any length of rhetoric. By addressing the main issues, peace would return to ME as a happy consequence. EU is in better position to persuade the actors for comprehensive dialogues even staying in the background and say no to threat of attack by US or Israel on Iran as vociferously as it is saying no to Iranian nukes.

End Notes


3. ‘Iran-European Union Relations’ accessed at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/iran-european-union-relations


11. Ibid


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IRAN AND THE ARABS

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Iran’s relations with the Arab governments of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East are currently under considerable strain. But Iran-Arab world relations have been rocky since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. On the one hand, governments in Iran have sought good relations with the Arabs states; on the other, Iran’s regional ambitions, repeated reversion to revolutionary rhetoric, and support for radical causes have undercut this aim. Periods of improved relations have alternated with periods of tension and outright hostility.

The overthrow of the monarchy in Iran in 1979 was understandably troubling to the conservative monarchies and emirates of the Persian Gulf. Iranian propagandists fanned out across the Persian Gulf states preaching revolution. Iran’s leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, preached a message hostile to kingly power; his deputy, Ayatollah HosseinMontazeri, questioned the qualifications of the Saudi royal house
to serve as the custodians of the Islamic holy places in Mecca and Medina. Relations were further exacerbated when Iraqi President Saddam Hussein invaded Iran in 1980. Fearing the spread of Iranian influence, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf supported Iraq, as did the Arab governments of the wider Middle East, with the exception of Syria and Libya. (The Iranian alliance with Syria, forged during the Iran-Iraq War, has endured to this day.) The Persian Gulf states extended material and financial support to Iraq during the war. Meantime, encouraged by the government, Iranian pilgrims used the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca to engage in demonstrations and sloganeering, clashing with Saudi security forces on more than one occasion.

After the war and Khomeini’s death in 1989, Iran’s new and pragmatic president, HashemiRafsanjani, worked hard to repair relations with the Arab monarchies, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Morocco, and took steps to repair relations with Egypt. And while Iran did not join the Arab alliance with the United States in 1990 to force Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait, a country he recklessly invaded, Rafsanjani, for all intents and purposes, placed Iran alongside the United States and the Arab states against Saddam Hussein. This policy of rapprochement was continued under Rafsanjani’s successor, Mohammad Khatami. But other developments undercut these fence-building efforts.

Radical right-wing Iranian clerics continued to engage in harsh anti-Saudi rhetoric. Iranian officials carelessly reignited a dispute between Iran and a member of the United Arab Emirates over three small islands in the Persian Gulf, causing all the Gulf states to line up against Iran. Iran’s attempt to “play the Shi’ite card,”—that is, to seek influence with Shi’ite communities in the Persian Gulf and in Arab states such as Lebanon and (after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein) Iraq with large Shi’ite populations—was regarded with suspicion and hostility by the Sunni governments that dominate the Arab world.

The overthrow of Saddam Hussein opened a new source of friction between Iran and the Persian Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia. Iran had long been a supporter of Iraq’s oppressed Shi’ites under Saddam Hussein—sometimes openly, sometimes clandestinely. Shi’ite opposition leaders spent many years of exile in Iran. The fall of Saddam and the emergence of Iraq’s Shi’ites as the majority ruling party saw a considerable increase in Iran’s influence in Iraq—a development highly unwelcome to the Saudis.

Iran’s nuclear program and the prospect of Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons has been another source of concern to the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. According to leaked U.S. diplomatic cables, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia urged the U.S.
government to “cut off the head of the snake”—meaning Iran—by launching military strikes on its nuclear program.

It is also the case that Iran sees itself as the dominant power in the Persian Gulf and as a major player in the larger Middle East. Iran’s broader regional ambitions and reach are evident in Iraq, where it extended considerable support to the new government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki; in Lebanon, where it founded and built up the Shi’ite radical movement, Hizbullah, into a major player in Lebanon’s internal politics and into a military force capable of causing Israel considerable headaches on the Lebanese-Israeli border; and in the Gaza strip, where it has supported Hamas in its inveterate hostility to Israel.

On Israel, Iran has sought to present itself as the country most devoted to the Palestinian cause. In this, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei pursues a policy that he believes resonates with the Arab street, with Muslims everywhere, and in the third world in general. Iran has, thus, adopted a policy that considers Israel an illegitimate state that does not deserve to exist and supports the claim of the most radical Palestinian groups to all of historic Palestine. In this way, Khamenei seeks to paint other Arab leaders as weak and too easily subject to American influence on the Palestinian issue.

Iran and the majority of Arab states today also find themselves at loggerheads over Syria. All the Arab states, except Iraq, have supported the opposition to President Bashar al-Assad in what has become a Syrian civil war. But Iran has remained steadfast in its support for Assad—for obvious reasons. Syria came to Iran’s assistance during the dark days of the Iran-Iraq War. Syria is the gateway through which Iran has supplied Hizbullah with arms and other assistance. The two countries have closely coordinated their policies in Lebanon and toward Israel. And Syria remains Iran’s most reliable, and, in addition to Iraq, often its sole, Arab ally.

The Arab Spring also found Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf wide apart. The upheavals in Tunisia, Yemen, Libya, and particularly Egypt were not welcome to Saudi Arabia, a status quo power, and its Arab allies in the Persian Gulf. By contrast, Iran hailed the revolutions in these Arab states. From the Iranian perspective, conservatives Arab states, closely allied to the United States, were being overthrown; America’s long-standing Arab friends were being rejected, and everywhere they were being replaced by Islamist governments. Indeed, Iran sought to portray the Arab uprisings as inspired by the example of the Iranian Revolution.

But the Arab Spring is also an illustration of the dilemma Iran faces in trying to deal with the Arab world. In Syria, Iranian rhetoric about popular revolutions notwithstanding, Iran has had to support a dictator who is killing his own people. In
Egypt, after a promising beginning, friction quickly developed, even before the overthrow of President Mohammed Morsi, over Syria and over what Iran considered a soft line by the new Egyptian government toward Israel.

Iran elected a new president, Hassan Rouhani, in August. Rouhani will try to reverse the policies of outgoing president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose irresponsible rhetoric exacerbated relations with the United States, Europe, and the Arab states. Rouhani is already talking about reaching out to the outside world, repairing relations with Saudi Arabia and other Arab states, and reverting to a policy of foreign policy moderation. Whether he succeeds, or whether we will see a repeat of the cycle we have witnessed since the Islamic Revolution 34 years ago of Iranian moderates reaching out to the Arab world only to be undercut by their radical colleagues, remains to be seen.
A STRATEGY TESTED:

IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND THE ARAB AWAKENING

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Since the Arab Awakening began in late 2010, much Western commentary has come to view it as a serious, perhaps even fatal challenge to the Islamic Republic of Iran. In particular, the ongoing conflict in Syria has been evaluated (at least until recently) as an enormous net negative for Iran’s regional standing. From Tehran, however, things look rather different. Iranian policymakers see the Arab Awakening as, on balance, positive for the Islamic Republic’s regional position. They have crafted Iran’s response to it—including in Syria—to maximize the strategic benefits accruing to Tehran.

The present essay evaluates the Iranian response to recent developments in the Arab world in the context of the Islamic Republic’s established threat perceptions and its broader regional strategy. In effect, Tehran’s response to the Arab Awakening has been an ongoing test and, over time, a powerful validation of this strategy. While unfolding developments in the Arab world continue to present Iran with a complex mix of foreign policy challenges and opportunities, Iranian officials believe that, overall, these developments are steering the regional balance in Tehran’s favor. This essay suggests that they are correct to do so.

Arab States in Iranian Threat Perceptions

The Iranian response to the Arab Awakening is best understood against the backdrop of longstanding Iranian policy toward the Arab world. Since the Islamic Republic's founding out of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Arab states, especially those of the Persian Gulf and the Levant, have been
central points of reference for Iranian foreign policy and national security strategy. This is so for both geopolitical and ideological reasons.

The Islamic Republic was born out of a revolution that, under Grand Ayatollah SeyedRuhollah Khomeini’s leadership, sought as one of its core objective to restore Iran’s sovereignty after a century and a half of rule by puppet regimes beholden to external powers. Since then, decision-makers and policy planners have long identified American and Israeli military power and, just as importantly, American and Israeli aspirations to hegemonic standing in the Middle East as the biggest threats to the Islamic Republic’s security and strategic independence.¹

In the language of international relations theory, a state confronted by a more powerful state chooses between two basic options: it either “bandwagons” with the more powerful state or “balances” against it.² The last Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, chose to bandwagon with the United States and, to a lesser extent, with Israel: he calculated that, by trading off aspects of Iran’s autonomy to partner with these states, he would be better positioned to realize his ambitions for Iran to become a regional hegemon in the Persian Gulf. For the Islamic Republic, though, bandwagoning of this sort is simply not possible. Such an alignment, with the compromises to sovereignty it entails, was a fundamental aspect of what Iranians rejected when they revolted against the last Shah. Thus, from its inception, the Islamic Republic has been irrevocably committed to balancing against the United States and Israel, whose own regional strategies rule out the emergence of other independent power centers in the Middle East.³

In geopolitical terms, the hegemonic agendas that ground U.S. and Israeli strategies in the region comprise three main items:

- First, maintaining a sufficiently large increment of military superiority over other regional actors that none can challenge American and Israeli primacy through conventional military means.

- Second, cultivating a regional balance of power that maximizes American and Israeli freedom of initiative—including, above all, military initiative.⁴

- Third, shaping political outcomes in regional states conducive to pursuing the first and second items.

Ultimately, America’s aim in the Middle East—embraced by successive U.S. administrations, Democratic and Republican—is to consolidate a highly militarized, pro-American political and security order in the region. Under
such an order, Washington’s determinative influence would be embraced by all the Middle East’s major players. At the same time, Israel’s capacity to meet not just its core security needs but also to realize broader strategic preferences—especially regarding the retention of key segments among the Arab territories it had occupied and the maximization of its freedom of unilateral military initiative—would be ensured.\(^5\)

In a strategic environment conditioned by these kinds of American and Israeli ambitions, Iranian policymakers see the Arab world as an essential geopolitical arena for the United States and Israel as they implement their regional strategies. For the Islamic Republic, this also makes the Arab world an equally unavoidable arena for checking America and Israel’s hegemonic aspirations. While rooted in simple geography, these perceptions have been reinforced by hard experience.

At the time of the Iranian Revolution, almost all the governments ruling Iran’s immediate Arab neighbors—Iraq’s Ba’athist regime under Saddam Husayn, Saudi Arabia’s royal order, and some of the smaller Arabian Peninsula monarchies—were opposed to the very idea of an Islamic Republic in Iran. Less than two years after the Islamic Republic’s creation, Saddam’s Iraq—with help from Saudi Arabia, other Persian Gulf monarchies, and the United States—invasion it, killing 300,000 Iranians over the course of an eight-year war of aggression that included the use of more than 100,000 chemical munitions against Iranian soldiers and civilians.\(^6\) Among Arab states, only Syria and (less consequentially) Qadhafi’s Libya supported Iran in this eight-year struggle.\(^7\)

The Islamic Republic came through what Iranians call the “Imposed War” with its territorial integrity intact (the first Iranian war in centuries of which that could be said). Still, even after Saddam’s military was defeated by a U.S.-led coalition in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Iranian policymakers continued to view Iraq as a latent but serious threat, whether through its own actions or—especially after America’s 2003 invasion and occupation of the country—as a platform co-opted by the United States. And Tehran has continued to see the Arabian Peninsula’s monarchical states as, in an Iranian strategist’s words, “authoritarian and security dependent regimes” deeply penetrated by the United States.\(^8\)

For Iran, this dynamic became especially problematic as the Cold War drew to a close, allowing the United States to lead an unprecedentedly broad international coalition in prosecuting the 1991 Persian Gulf War. America’s “victory” in the Cold War and the 1991 Gulf War substantially expanded its freedom of military initiative in the Middle East, enabling Washington to accelerate its project of constructing a pro-American political and security
order there. In October 1991, the George H.W. Bush administration convened the Madrid conference, ostensibly to re-launch the so-called Middle East peace process. In reality, the conference was meant to convince Arab states—especially Gulf Arab states—to buy into a highly militarized, U.S.-led regional order in return for vague promises of American leadership in Arab-Israeli peacemaking.

The George H.W. Bush administration made a point of excluding Iran from Madrid—for, in Washington's view, there was no place in such a regional order for an Islamic Republic determined to maintain its strategic independence. This set a precedent for post-Cold war American diplomacy in the Middle East: all subsequent U.S. administrations have eschewed serious and sustained engagement with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Gulf Arab states, for their part, have largely acceded to this U.S. agenda; today, members of the Gulf Cooperation Council collectively host thousands of American troops and billions of dollars of the deadliest American weapons systems, all poised to attack Iran.

The strategic orientation of Levantine Arab states has also been a longstanding concern for the Islamic Republic. Israeli occupation of Palestinian populations makes Palestine a crucial arena for contesting Israel's aspirations to regional dominance, in the Levant and across the Middle East more generally; this has given the Islamic Republic, from its creation, a strong interest in gaining greater influence over the disposition of Palestine. Elsewhere in the Levant, the Islamic Republic's relationship with Syria, first under Hafiz al-Assad and then under Hafiz's son and successor, Bashar, has been an important asset for Tehran. But, on the other side of the ledger, conclusion of an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979—the year of the Islamic Republic's founding—has made Tehran's goal of containing Israel's regional ambitions much more challenging. Peace with Israel completed a pro-Western recasting of Egypt’s foreign policy that has had profound ramifications for the Middle East’s balance of power. For the United States, Egyptian realignment was an important, almost foundational step in Washington’s project to build a highly militarized, pro-American political and security order in the region. For Israel, the Egyptian military’s effective removal from the Arab-Israeli military equation expanded Israeli decision-makers’ relative freedom of military initiative even before the end of the Cold War.

The disturbing implications of these developments for Iranian interests became evident just three years later, with Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and its subsequent occupation of southern Lebanon. Iranian policymakers saw Israel’s intervention, first of all, as an assault on southern Lebanon’s largely Shi’a population. Beyond considerations of Shi’a
solidarity, they also judged—correctly—that Israel's real objective was to install a pro-Western government in Beirut that would make a separate peace with Israel; in turn, Lebanon's realignment would allow the United States to apply greater pressure on Syria, gradually turning the Levant into a Western platform that could be used to support Iraq in its war of aggression against the Islamic Republic.9

The end of the Cold War and prosecution of the 1991 Persian Gulf War offered extraordinary strategic opportunities to Israel as well as to the United States. For Israel, these developments offered an opening to consolidate a near-absolute freedom of military initiative, which would enable it not just to “preempt” perceived threats but to “prevent” them from arising in the first place—by striking first, with overwhelming force, whenever and wherever it deemed necessary. Israel’s post-Cold War drive for regional dominance meant that it could not countenance another Middle Eastern state with the determination and material potential to inhibit its freedom of military action. In the wake of the 1991 Gulf War and the Cold War’s end, Iran was the only such state in the region; consequently, Israel has worked assiduously since the early 1990s to undermine the Islamic Republic’s regional position, and regularly threatens to use overt military force against it.10 This prospect helps keep Iranian policymakers focused on the Levant as an essential venue for pushing back against Israel’s hegemonic ambitions in the region. Likewise, Tehran remains concerned about Washington’s interest in bringing Levantine Arab states into a pro-American regional order and subverting the Islamic Republic—an interest manifested in U.S. efforts to coopt Syria through the so-called Middle East peace process and, more recently, to encourage the overthrow of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his government.

On the ideological front, Iranian policymakers believe that Saudi Arabia—in many ways the quintessential Sunni Muslim state—has used its longstanding strategic partnership with the United States as a cover to advance its own intensely anti-Iranian agenda. Beyond helping to finance Saddam’s war against the fledgling Islamic Republic, Saudi money has for many years funded the promotion of a severe form of Sunni Islam that regards Shi’a as the foremost enemy for pious believers, ahead of both Zionists (Israel) and modern-day crusaders (the United States).11 In the West, this form of Islam is often called wahhabi, after Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd Al-Wahhab, the eighteenth-century religious revivalist whose program for a return to what he defined as pure Islam provided the ideological justification for the Al-Saud—the family that would subsequently found and lead the modern Saudi state—to assert its control over the Arabian peninsula.12 Saudis themselves—and many Iranians—generally use the term salafi to describe the type of Islam promoted by Saudi Arabia.13 Notwithstanding this
usage, some theologically astute commentators suggest that the kind of salafi Islam sponsored by Saudi Arabia may more accurately be described as takfeeri Islam.\textsuperscript{14}

In Tehran’s experience, the spread of takfeeri Islamism—particularly when linked to support from Saudi Arabia and Sunni-majority states allied to Washington (e.g., Pakistan) for armed jihadi movements targeting Iranian interests—significantly expands the security challenges facing the Islamic Republic. Even before the Iranian Revolution, Saudi Arabia had begun promoting such a version of Islam, using its oil wealth to build mosques, distribute millions of copies of the Qur’an and salafi religious tracts, and provide clerics to Muslim communities around the world. After the Iranian Revolution, Riyadh intensified these efforts as a way of pushing back against the threat that Saudi leaders believed an Islamic Republic in Iran posed, both to their own domestic legitimacy and to the Kingdom’s leading role in global Islam.\textsuperscript{15}

This campaign has, over the course of more than three decades, enabled the emergence of militant takfeeri movements across the Islamic world, with strongly anti-Iranian agendas—movements which, once formed, have frequently escaped strict Saudi control. These militias include al-Qa’ida, (which emerged out of the jihad against the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s), the Taliban (which grew out of Pashtun mujahideen groups and Saudi-funded madrasas in Pashtun areas of Afghanistan), and, more recently, jihadi groups in Iraq, Libya, and Syria (some of which have publicly affiliated themselves with al-Qa’ida).\textsuperscript{16}

**Arab States and the Islamic Republic's Regional Strategy**

The Iranian response to the Arab Awakening must also be understood by looking at the Arab world’s place in the Islamic Republic’s regional strategy. To deal with the threats to its security posed by the United States, Israel, and Saudi-backed takfeeri militancy, the Islamic Republic has developed what can fairly be called a “grand strategy”—a framework for marshaling all elements of national power (diplomatic, economic, and political, as well as military) to defend itself and advance its regional position.\textsuperscript{17} As we will see, this grand strategy provides the conceptual frames and policy tools with which Iranian decision-makers have crafted Tehran’s response to the Arab Awakening.

Protecting vital interests is the first order of business for any country’s grand strategy. Notwithstanding contrary but ill-informed Western and Israeli claims, Tehran has defined its vital interests since 1979 in
fundamentally defensive terms, rooted in standard international law and practice—maintaining Iran’s independence, preserving its territorial integrity, and guarding the political integrity of the Islamic Republic as the authentic expression of Iranian self-determination. In Iran’s case, though, protecting these interests has been exceptionally challenging.

In the language of international relations theory, states that choose balancing over bandwagoning can address the threats that more powerful states pose to their core interests in two ways: internal balancing (mobilizing resources to increase their defensive capabilities) and external balancing (forming alliances with other states). But the Islamic Republic’s options for internal balancing are circumscribed by deficiencies in its conventional military capabilities and its unwillingness to divert spending from domestic needs to correct them. At the same time, its options for external balancing are limited by the dearth of natural allies in its regional environment; prospects for external balancing are further complicated by Washington’s longstanding efforts to build and lead a political and security order covering the Middle East but excluding the Islamic Republic.

These realities create a challenging set of parameters within which Iranian strategists must operate. To compensate for its conventional military weaknesses and lack of strategic depth, the Islamic Republic has established an increasingly robust capacity for “asymmetric” defense and deterrence, developing an ever-expanding array of unconventional military capabilities that it can credibly threaten to use in response to aggression. Contrary to Western and Israeli assertions, Tehran is not resorting to nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons for this purpose; rather, it is relying on ballistic missiles armed with conventional explosives and a range of interrelated systems to disrupt shipping in the Persian Gulf. But alongside these military measures, Tehran has also relied on its relations with an array of regional “proxies”—sympathetic constituencies in other states that are open to strategic cooperation with the Islamic Republic—as a critical policy tool for containing threats to Iranian interests and for enhancing Iran’s regional standing.

Cultivating Proxies. Iran’s geographic, historical, and cultural setting offers it a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and religious connections with peoples and states in its immediate neighborhood and beyond. Over the past three decades, the Islamic Republic has made these connections an important part of its foreign policy and national security strategy, translating them into effective partnerships with indigenous political movements around the region, often with associated paramilitary capabilities. These partnerships have enabled Tehran to prevent nearby states from being used as platforms to attack the Islamic Republic or otherwise undermine its security and
independence. In many cases, Tehran has magnified the payoff from its proxy strategy by picking political winners as its partners—groups that, when given the chance, win elections in their local settings, and win them for the right reasons: because they authentically represent previously marginalized constituencies with legitimate grievances. Iranian proxies’ electoral successes greatly enhance Tehran’s ability to influence political and policy outcomes in a variety of regional settings.

Contrary to agenda-driven characterizations of the Islamic Republic’s proxy ties, this dimension of its foreign policy and national security strategy is fundamentally geopolitical, not ideological, in nature. Since its founding, to be sure, the Islamic Republic has maintained a commitment to Shi’a solidarity: not surprisingly, a number of its most important proxy allies have been Shi’a movements. But Iran’s capacity to exert regional influence through its proxy allies transcends sectarian bounds: alongside its support for Shi’a movements, Tehran has also supported non-Shi’a groups engaged in resistance against the United States, Israel, and/or Saudi-backed takfeeri militants. And neither Shi’a solidarity nor a commitment to resistance has prompted Tehran to seek such allies where it judges that Iranian interests are not seriously threatened or would be better served by other approaches. Instead, it has sought to match ideological commitments to geopolitical needs, supporting local proxies as instruments of influence where that influence is needed to keep neighboring states from being used as anti-Iranian platforms and to push back against the United States, Israel, and/or Saudi-sponsored takfeeri militancy. In the Arab world, this has been an especially salient feature of Iranian policy in Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine.

In many respects, Tehran’s proxy strategy started in Iraq. The Iraqi invasion in September 1980 was arguably the most serious threat that the Islamic Republic has ever faced: even though Saddam was one of Iran’s most dangerous enemies, the American invasion two decades later posed multiple challenges for Tehran. In this threatening environment, the Islamic Republic has throughout relied on local proxies to defend its interests in Iraq.

Tehran began seeking Saddam’s overthrow during the Iran-Iraq War—a clear case, for Iran’s new order, of Shi’a solidarity overlapping with geopolitical imperatives. It also resumed a policy, which Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had started and then dropped, of supporting Iraqi Kurdish oppositionists. After the Iran-Iraq war, Tehran continued backing various anti-Saddam Shi’a and Kurdish parties: it also took in thousands of high-profile as well as ordinary Iraqi Shi’a, housed, clothed, fed, and educated them, and helped train and equip many of them for anti-Saddam militias. Following the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, the stakes in Iraq got even higher for the Islamic Republic. As the George W. Bush
administration set its sights on regime change in Baghdad, all of the Iranian-supported Iraqi opposition parties received permission from Tehran to cooperate in an American-forged Iraqi opposition front. But the Bush administration rebuffed Iranian offers to coordinate policies on Iraq, leaving Iran more concerned than ever that, after Saddam’s removal, American forces would try to turn Iraq into an anti-Iranian staging ground. Iranian policymakers saw the Islamic Republic’s proxy allies as essential to thwarting such a scenario.

After Saddam’s defeat, the Shi’a Islamist and Kurdish parties that Iran had sheltered for twenty years returned home to Iraq, with their militias, giving Tehran multiple options to forestall developments there that threatened its interests. Defenders of the U.S. invasion continue to fulminate against an Iranian “counter-invasion” that challenged American forces occupying Iraq and usurped the George W. Bush administration’s ostensible plans to create a secular, pro-Western democracy there. In fact, Tehran was relatively restrained in exercising its considerable capacity to inflict damage on the American position in Iraq—even in the face of provocations such as the storming of the Iranian consulate in the northern Iraqi city of Irbil and the seizure of Iranian diplomats there by American troops in 2007. Its moderating influence over Iraqi Shi’a militias contributed far more to lowering the high level of violence that Iraq experienced in 2005-2006 than the post-2006 “surge” of American forces.24

On the political front, the Islamic Republic has consistently supported Iraq’s democratization, recognizing that any popularly elected Iraqi government would be, almost by definition, pro-Iranian. American occupation authorities initially tried to promote secular politicians like IyadAllawi and Ahmad Chalabi as Iraq’s post-Saddam leaders. But as Iraq moved from American-appointed governments to elected ones, Iran’s Shi’a and Kurdish allies emerged as Iraq’s most important political players. The governments formed out of each Iraqi election since 2005 have all been grounded in a coalition of Shi’a Islamists and Kurdish parties—and every one of them has had solid ties to Iran.25 The Islamic Republic’s proxy strategy has made it the most influential external force in post-Saddam Iraq, ensuring that Iraq will no longer pose a serious threat to Iranian interests.26

Iran’s use of proxies to resist Israeli expansionism began in Lebanon, drawing on that country’s long-disadvantaged Shi’a community. When Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, Iranian leaders dispatched Revolutionary Guards cadres to help organize Shi’a resistance to Israel forces occupying Shi’a-majority areas in south Lebanon. The insertion of a significant number of American troops, without authorization from the United Nations Security Council, and intelligence officers into Lebanon to support Israel and its
Maronite Christian clients in imposing an anti-Iranian government there (and, if Washington had had the chance, to impose such a government on Syria, too) was highly provocative from Tehran’s point of view. Effectively, it made the official American presence in Lebanon as much a target for Iranian-backed Shi’a resistance forces as Israel. While responsibility for the bombings of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut—where the CIA maintained a large station—in April 1983 and of the U.S. Marine barracks at Beirut International Airport in October 1983 has never been clearly demonstrated, these attacks succeeded in driving American military forces out of Lebanon. 27

In this charged environment, Hizballah (an Arabic compound meaning “party of God”) took shape, over the course of the 1980s and with considerable Iranian input, as Lebanon’s leading Shi’a Islamist resistance movement. The intensification of Iranian-Israeli geopolitical rivalry in the 1990s made Hizballah an ever more important ally for Tehran. The group’s increasingly effective resistance campaign forced Israel to pay a steep price for occupying south Lebanon, culminating in the withdrawal of Israeli forces from their self-declared “security zone” in 2000. 28

Hizballah’s subsequent conduct punctures the conventional wisdom that it and other Iranian proxies are irrationally committed to terrorizing Israelis. Since the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, Hizballah has not carried out a single suicide terror attack against Israel or Israeli interests abroad. 29 But it has, with Iran’s support, continued expanding and improving its military capabilities, preparing for what the movement’s leaders anticipated would be periodic large-scale Israeli military operations in Lebanon. In the summer of 2006, Israel—with the George W. Bush administration’s backing—undertook a thirty-three-day campaign to destroy Hizballah’s military infrastructure. But with Tehran’s backing, Hizballah withstood the attack and emerged triumphant once again. Today its military wing has larger rocket and missile arsenals, with longer ranges, than before the 2006 war. Israeli military planners must now take seriously the risk that strikes against Iranian targets could prompt retaliation not only by Iran but also by Hizballah, on their own doorstep. 30

Under the leadership of secretary-general Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, Hizballah has, with Iranian encouragement, matched its military gains with political achievements. Following the Israeli withdrawal, Nasrallah adroitly mined the popular support that the movement’s resistance activities and social service programs accrued to produce strong performances in Lebanon’s 2001, 2005, and 2009 parliamentary elections. The United States, major European powers, Israel, and so-called moderate Arab states like Saudi Arabia have all been discomfited by Hizballah’s political ascendancy and the concomitant increase in Iranian influence in Lebanon; all have tried in recent
years to counter these trends. But Hizballah has consolidated its standing as Lebanon’s most effective political party and the region’s most successful resistance force—making it, from Tehran’s perspective, a potent check on Israeli ambitions to dominate the Levant.31

In the Palestinian arena, proxy allies have also been crucial to the Islamic Republic’s efforts to push back against Israeli expansionism and boost Iranian influence. Tehran’s initial efforts to forge an alliance with the secular, Arabist Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its long-time chairman, Yasir Arafat, met with scant success. Although Arafat was the first foreign dignitary Iran’s new political order welcomed in 1979, his endorsement of Iraq’s invasion of the Islamic Republic badly damaged the relationship, as did the PLO leader’s repeated attempts to curry favor with Washington by recognizing Israel and calling for peace talks while getting little in return.32 Deepening dissatisfaction among Palestinians with Arafat, his Fatah party, and the PLO created openings for Iran to explore alternative, explicitly Islamist connections to the Palestinian cause. Because Palestinians are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims (with a small Christian minority), ties to Sunni Islamist organizations became the main channel through which the Islamic Republic built up its involvement in Palestinian affairs—a good example of the cross-sectarian quality of its proxy strategy.

Tehran turned first to Islamic Jihad, a resistance movement that had taken shape in the early 1980s and which, though Sunni, took its inspiration from Khomeini’s revolutionary model. After the outbreak of a Palestinian uprising in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem in 1987, a new party emerged out of the Muslim Brotherhood’s Gaza branch, dedicated to integrating the provision of social services with armed resistance to Israeli occupation. This movement called itself HAMAS—simultaneously an acronym for the groups’ full name in Arabic, Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya (Movement of the Islamic Resistance), and the Arabic word for zeal. In contrast to Islamic Jihad, HAMAS did not initially try to establish a relationship with Iran; it sought support instead from Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Arab countries. But President George H.W. Bush determined to exclude HAMAS as well as the Islamic Republic from the “new world order” he planned to create in the Middle East after the first Gulf War. Instead, HAMAS sent a high-level delegation to Tehran in 1992 and opened an office there the following year. The Islamic Republic soon became the movement’s biggest external supporter.33

With the collapse of the peace process at the end of the 1990s, HAMAS began positioning itself to reap the gains from its record of social service, resistance to occupation, and strategic perspicacity. In January 2006, HAMAS capitalized on the esteem it had earned among Palestinians through
its role in forcing Israelis’ withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 and its reputation for incorruptibility to enter politics, winning a striking victory in Palestinian legislative elections. Just as Tehran supported Hizballah’s entry into Lebanese politics, it backed HAMAS’s political debut, giving the Islamic Republic an indirect but decisive influence over the Palestinian issue.34

Cultivating Soft Power. Beyond their on-the-ground impact, Tehran’s ties to its proxy allies are linked to another important dimension of the Islamic Republic’s grand strategy, which we call its “soft power offensive.”35 Iranian decision-makers understand that the Islamic Republic’s opposition to American hegemony and its support for resistance to Israeli occupation are more closely aligned with regional public opinion, especially Arab opinion, than are the policies of regimes that cooperate with Washington. This gives the Islamic Republic putatively large reservoirs of soft power vis-à-vis other regional states.36 Over the last decade or so, Tehran has used these soft power reservoirs to pursue what, in American foreign policy circles, is called “public diplomacy”—the strategic cultivation of public opinion in other countries.37

More specifically, Iran has sought to galvanize regional public’s grievances against the United States and Israel and against their own unrepresentative regimes that cooperate, in various ways, with the United States and Israel. The Islamic Republic, in effect, aligns itself with these publics, and with public opinion itself, to constrain hostile, unrepresentative, and pro-Western neighboring governments from working with Washington to attack it.

The Arab Awakening and the Middle East’s Balance of Power

Tehran’s longstanding reliance on proxy allies and soft power as pillars of its regional strategy has strongly conditioned its response to the Arab Awakening, both in terms of analytic assessments and in terms of policy positions and choices. In general terms, Iranian policymakers have evaluated the Arab Awakening as an opening for the Islamic Republic to leverage its soft power resources and proxy allies—not just to constrain pro-Western Arab governments, but to shift the Middle East’s balance of power affirmatively in its favor.

This perspective is very much at odds with prevailing Western views. By the end of George W. Bush’s presidency, Western analysts were compelled, by polling data and other evidence, to acknowledge that Iran’s posture of resistance had won it approbation among Arabs.38 But with the election and inauguration of Barack Obama, many of these analysts shifted their analytic line, asserting that international criticism of Iran’s 2009 presidential election, the Iranian government’s response to postelection
protests, and rising concern about Iranian nuclear activities had eviscerated public support for the Islamic Republic across the region. As will be discussed below, the evidence for these assertions is flimsy. Nevertheless, they conditioned assessments of the Arab Awakening’s impact by Western analysts—a critical mass of whom has, as noted, come to see it as a potentially fatal challenge to the Islamic Republic.

Early on, to be sure, some pundits and even a few senior policymakers evinced concern that the downfall of pro-Western regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and surging popular demand for greater political participation and more representative governments in other Arab states would undermine Western interests in the Middle East—a prospectively major strategic gain for Tehran. Others, however, thought that Iran would be the big “loser” from the Arab Awakening, because—as U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates emblematically put it in March 2011—regional publics and Iranians themselves would see “the contrast between militaries and security authorities in places like Tunisia and Egypt standing aside while people protest against their government, while security services of the Iranian government ruthlessly suppress and kill those who would criticize or protest.”

Concern that assessments positing strategic gains for Tehran from political change in the Arab world could be correct prompted the Obama administration, in collaboration with Saudi Arabia, to look for opportunities to co-opt the Arab Awakening in order to marginalize Iran. This was an important motive for Obama’s March 2011 decision—which Gates opposed—to intervene militarily in Libya. (The administration’s apprehensions about prospective Iranian gains from the Arab Awakening also impelled its acquiescence to Saudi Arabia’s March 2011 military intervention in Bahrain.) NATO’s intervention in Libya was generally praised in Western policy circles as having boosted the West’s strategic fortunes in the Middle East, by putting the United States and its European and regional allies on the “right side” of the dramatic history unfolding in the Arab world. Many in these circles were even more enthusiastic in interpreting the outbreak and escalation of conflict in Syria as putting the Islamic Republic and its partners—especially Hizballah—on the wrong side of history. Iran and Hizballah’s support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, it was argued, would leave them increasingly isolated in the region and exposed to an even more serious blow from the Assad government’s collapse—an outcome commonly described as inevitable.

Appraisals of this sort contributed heavily to the Obama administration’s decisions, in the spring and summer of 2011, to commence supporting Syrian oppositionists and to call publicly for Assad’s removal.
They also prompted the administration to begin pushing in the United Nations Security Council for presidential statements condemning the Syrian government—statements that would presumably pave the way for resolutions authorizing coercive measures against Damascus under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. Over the next two years, these assessments of the Syrian conflict and its prospective impact on Iran also strongly conditioned mainstream Western discourse about the Arab Awakening and the Middle East’s evolving balance of power.

More recently, the Syrian government’s military gains against opposition forces—achieved with help from Iran and Hizballah—have tempered Western optimism about the relative ease with which Assad might be dispatched. Nevertheless, many Western analysts continue to parse the conflict in Syria as an enervating drain on the Islamic Republic’s strategic position—financially, militarily, and in terms of Tehran’s regional standing, especially with Arab publics. In the prevailing Western view, governments in the region’s Sunni-majority states—including states, like Egypt, where the Arab Awakening had facilitated the emergence of popularly elected leaders—are squarely lined up against the Islamic Republic, primarily over Iranian support for the Assad government. Even HAMAS, it is held, has forsaken its ties to Tehran over the Syrian conflict. Currently, a broad swath of Western foreign policy elites assesses the July 2013 military coup that—with Washington’s acquiescence—deposed Egypt’s democratically elected President Mohamed Morsi as a major setback to the emergence of popular Islamist governments in the Arab world. This, too, it is argued, has deepened Iran’s isolation.

Iranian policymakers see the situation very differently. They calculate—and Iranian experience confirms—that the democratization of Arab societies ends up empowering the Islamic Republic’s natural allies, including not just Shi’a communities but also other constituencies that have been systematically marginalized. Likewise, Iranian elites are confident that any Arab government that becomes more representative of its people’s values, concerns, preferences, and interests will automatically become less enthusiastic about strategic cooperation with the United States, much less Israel, and more receptive to Iranian messages of resistance and foreign policy independence.

Western commentators have been generally indifferent to—if not dismissive of—the potential impact of soft power and popular mobilization on power politics in the Middle East. Zbigniew Brzezinski has been a prominent exception, writing insightfully about a “global political awakening” in which “nearly universal access to radio, television, and the Internet is creating a community of shared resentments and envy that transcends sovereign
Brzezinski believes that, in the Middle East and other regions “scarred by memories of colonial or imperial domination,” a “yearning for human dignity” and “cultural respect” is developing among populations that, “disliking the status quo, are susceptible to being mobilized against those whom they perceive as self-interestedly preserving it.”

Iranian policymakers long ago grasped the potential for this kind of mobilization to challenge existing regimes in the Middle East, a regional order dominated by the United States, and a regional balance of power tilted against the Islamic Republic. Such a perspective is what made the Islamic Republic the nation least surprised by the Arab Awakening and certainly the one most pleased by it. Through their particular analytic prism, Iranian policymakers have appraised the Arab Awakening as an opening to transform the region’s traditional balance of power, defined by conventional military and other hard power capabilities in which the Islamic Republic is relatively deficient, into a balance of influence, defined by aspects of soft power in which it enjoys unique advantages.

To this end, Iran enthusiastically welcomed the popular demands for more participatory politics that brought down pro-Western regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and elected at least nominally Islamist governments to replace them. It reached out, from early on and systematically, to the new governments in both Tunis and Cairo. While Tunisia is obviously less significant to the regional balance in the Middle East than Egypt, the Islamic Republic has concluded multiple trade and economic cooperation agreements with the new Tunisian government; Tunis, for its part, has publicly expressed its full support for Iran’s nuclear program and its opposition to Western military intervention in Syria.

Tehran moved quickly after Hosni Mubarak’s ouster in February 2011 to begin consolidating political support in Cairo for closer Egyptian-Iranian relations. Just two weeks after Mubarak’s removal, a senior Brotherhood official travelled to the Islamic Republic, where he told a University of Tehran audience that, “given the recent developments in the region, we need unity among the Muslim countries and Iran can play an important role in this regard.” Egypt’s military began allowing Iranian military vessels to transit the Suez Canal for the first time since the Iranian Revolution. In August 2012, the newly elected President Morsietraveled to Tehran for the Non-Aligned Movement summit before making his first presidential trip to the United States; Morsi’s visit to Iran was the first by an Egyptian leader in almost forty years. In commenting on Morsi’s trip to Tehran, a number of Western analysts focused on the Egyptian president’s public call there for Assad to leave office, citing it as evidence of Egyptian-Iranian estrangement over the Syrian conflict. But, while Morsi and Iranian decision-makers
clearly disagreed about the conflict, Iranian officials welcomed his proposal for a regional contact group on Syria that would include the Islamic Republic along with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey.\textsuperscript{54}

Over the course of Morsi’s first year in office, Iranian officials grew increasingly concerned about the failure of the new president and his colleagues in the Muslim Brotherhood to gain control over the most important levers of state power in Egypt—the military, the intelligence and security apparatus, “deep state” bureaucracies, and the Mubarak-appointed judiciary.\textsuperscript{55} Tehran was hardly surprised when the U.S.-funded, -equipped, and -trained Egyptian military—acting with American acquiescence and Saudi encouragement—deposed Morsi and his government. Iranian policymakers could take a small measure of satisfaction that the Egyptian military had removed Morsishortly after he endorsed salafi calls for young Egyptian men to join the region’s latest Saudi-sponsored jihad, this one against Syria’s Assad government. More importantly, Iranian policymakers estimate that, while Washington may try to return Egypt to rule by secular authoritarians willing to subordinate their country’s foreign policy to American, Saudi, and Israeli preferences, such an outcome cannot be stable today as Egypt was stable for thirty years under Mubarak. Similarly, Iranian policymakers believe that the profound antipathy of Bahrain’s Shi’a-majority population toward authoritarian rule by a Sunni monarchy and that population’s evident desire for fundamental political change cannot be thwarted indefinitely. In these and other contested political arenas in the Arab world, Tehran thinks that its soft power strategy will position it on what will ultimately prove the winning side.

The Islamic Republic’s reading of the situation in Syria is more complicated than its evaluations of political developments in Tunisia, Egypt, or even Bahrain: likewise, its policy choices are more challenging in Syria than in these other settings. In the view of Iran and its Hizballah partners, the unrest in Syria that broke out in March 2011 initially reflected genuine and legitimate discontent. However, local unrest quickly became a proxy channel for U.S. and Saudi efforts to bring down the Syrian government, in no small measure by turning the anti-Assad campaign into a crassly sectarian anti-Shi’a enterprise: this was followed by the provision of arms and money to anti-Assad fighters, including foreign jihadi militants brought into Syria in ever growing numbers. In Tehran’s view, the quest for coercive regime change in Damascus is motivated primarily by American and Saudi interest in undermining the Islamic Republic’s security and weakening its regional position.\textsuperscript{56} Hizballah, for its part, identifies a “U.S.-Israeli-takfeeri project” that has been unleashed in Syria, aimed at changing Syria’s strategic orientation in ways that would enfeeble Iran and Hizballah’s capacity for resisting American and Israeli hegemonic aspirations in the region.\textsuperscript{57}
Both Iran and Hizballah acknowledge that there are serious political problems in Syria, including the failure of the Syrian government to deal effectively with legitimate grievances felt and, in various ways, expressed by some segments of the Syrian public. Throughout the Syrian conflict, they have consistently advocated for a negotiated political settlement between the Assad government and oppositionists as the only sustainable solution. At the same time, though, they also assess that Assad retains the backing of more than half of Syrian society—a larger popular base than the opposition commands. Iran and Hizballah do not believe that Assad will be overthrown—at least not by Syrians. But, with the infusion of foreign fighters, weapons, and money into Syria, Assad and his government are facing the equivalent of an external invasion, compelling them to defend Syrian sovereignty. By helping the Assad government forestall a de facto foreign occupation of Syria, Iran and Hizballah are preventing America, Saudi Arabia, and others from using their own proxies to bring about regime change in Damascus, thereby tilting the regional balance of power against the Islamic Republic and its allies.

Iranian and Hizballah officials recognize that backing the Assad government has cost the Islamic Republic and Hizballah some of the enormous standing that they had built up with Sunni Arab publics—especially as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states work assiduously to cast the conflict in sectarian terms. Nevertheless, they judge that the damage is manageable in scope, and not long-term in nature. Polls and other evidence appear to bear out their assessment that the decline in Iran and Hizballah’s popularity among Arab publics has hardly been cataclysmic. Diplomatically, too, Tehran retains considerable influence across the region. For example, while HAMAS declined to fight for the Assad government after the Syrian conflict broke out and relocated its external political leadership from Damascus—causing strain in its relations with Iran—it has not called for Assad’s removal. In May 2013, senior HAMAS officials said that they continue to hold that a negotiated settlement between the Syrian government and the opposition is the only way to end the conflict—essentially the same position taken by Iran and Hizballah. And, after the military coup in Egypt that deposed Morsi, HAMAS began working purposefully to repair its relations with the Islamic Republic.

Looking ahead, Iran and Hizballah calculate that, as regional appreciation grows that the Syrian conflict is, at its core, about resistance, the sectarian issue will fade. Iranian officials continue to oppose Western military intervention in Syria: President Hassan Rohani reiterated this stance in his inauguration speech in August 2013. While some influential Western elites continue to press for direct military intervention in Syria, Iran
and Hizballah do not appear to believe that the odds of this are particularly high.\textsuperscript{62} However, if the West does intervene directly in Syria, Iran and Hizballah project that this will quickly turn into an aquagmire, and that the United States and its partners cannot “win” in Syria any more than they won in Iraq. And, in the meantime, the Islamic Republic retains vastly higher favorability ratings with Arab and other regional publics than the United States.\textsuperscript{63}

What this suggests is that the Islamic Republic’s response to the Arab Awakening is well-calculated, based on thoughtful assessments of regional realities and utilizing policy tools which Tehran knows how to wield effectively. It remains to be seen whether the creation of truly independent and representative governments across the Arab world requires the emergence of sustainable forms of Sunni Islamist governance, in between the poles of secular authoritarianism and Saudi-style salafism, or whether existing Sunni Islamist movements and parties can, over time, function efficaciously within “civil state” structures. But Iranian leaders remain confident that it is the Islamic Republic, not the United States and its partners, which is on the right side of history in the Arab world.

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1. On Iranian perceptions of the American and Israeli threats, see Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett, \textit{Going to Tehran: Why the United States Must Come to Terms with the Islamic Republic of Iran} (New York: Metropolitan, 2013), 45-55.
3. For discussion, see Leverett and Mann Leverett, \textit{Going to Tehran}, 27-37.
5. Leverett and Mann Leverett, \textit{Going to Tehran}, 1-4, 328-368.
9. Ibid, 70.
13. The adjective \textit{salafi} comes from the Arabic \textit{salaf}, meaning predecessors; in religious context, it refers to the first three generations of Muslims—the “companions” of the Prophet Muhammad, the “followers” of the Prophet, and the “followers of the followers”—whom \textit{salafi} believers consider the eternally correct model of Islamic practice.
14. In a religious context, the Arabic word \textit{takfeer} refers to the practice of declaring someone claiming to be Muslim as \textit{kāfir} (pl, \textit{kuffār})—an unbeliever masquerading as a pious person. It is a prominent aspect of the kind of \textit{salafi} Islam championed by Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, the 18\textsuperscript{th}-century preacher whose ideas continue to ground the form of Islam officially promulgated by Saudi Arabia, both at home and abroad. For further discussion, see, \textit{inter alia}, Guido Steinberg, “Jihadi-Salafism and the Shi‘is: Remarks about the Intellectual Roots of Anti-Shi‘ism” in Roel Meijjer, ed., \textit{Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement} (New York: Columbia University Press/Hurst, 2009).


18. These are, for example, the goals identified in the Islamic Republic’s military regulations, codified in 1992; see Iran: Complete Regulations of the Islamic Republic of Iran Armed Forces, Near East and South Asia Supplement, FBIS- NES-94-208-S, U.S. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Oct. 27, 1994. Notwithstanding Western and Israeli commentary alleging the Islamic Republic’s determination to export its revolutionary ideology and the phrase sudar-e engelab (exporting the revolution) never appears—notes that the Islamic Republic must “scrupulously refrain from all forms of aggressive intervention in the internal affairs of other nations.” For discussion, see Leverett and Mann Leverett, Going to Tehran, 18-19.


20. The Islamic Republic inherited the powerful U.S.-armed military that Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had built up over the last quarter century of his reign. But, in the wake of the Iranian Revolution, most of the officers who had commanded the Shah’s military either fled or were executed. Washington quickly cut off logistical and technical support; the debilitating effects of this measure were exacerbated by an embargo on military shipments from most other countries during the Iran-Iraq War. Once the war ended, the Iranian government shifted budgetary resources away from the military and toward reconstruction and economic development; over time, the prioritization of domestic needs over defense spending has reduced Iran’s conventional military capabilities to comparatively marginal levels. Today, the United States spends almost seventy times more on defense than Iran does, Saudi Arabia more than quadruple, and Israel nearly double; see International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance 2012 (London: Routledge, 2012).

21. For discussion, see Leverett and Mann Leverett, Going to Tehran, 79-81. On the Islamic Republic’s nuclear program and its place in Iranian strategy, see ibid, 81-90. The Islamic Republic inherited from the last Shah a capacity to produce chemical agents but opted not to weaponize them during its war with Iraq, even though Iraq subjected Iranian soldiers and civilians to years of chemical attacks. Iran joined the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1997. While it retains a basic capability to manufacture and weaponize chemical agents, over the past decade U.S. intelligence has backed away from earlier claims that the Islamic Republic has stockpiles of chemical agents and munitions; see ibid, 81.

22. At the beginning of Tajikistan’s civil war in the early 1990s, Tehran recognized that helping an Islamist insurgency would put it at odds with Moscow and other regional governments; consequently, Iran withheld support and helped mediate negotiations among the warring parties. Likewise, Tehran adopted a relatively “pro-Russian” posture—our Iranian contacts describe it as “neutral”—vis-à-vis the conflict in Chechnya.

23. In the 1970s, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi sought to use Iraqi Kurdish proxies as a lever against Iraq in a border dispute, backing a Kurdish rebellion against Saddam’s rule—but once Saddam signed a border agreement at least slightly favorable to Iran, the Shah quickly dropped his erstwhile allies. (In classified testimony to Congress, then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger defended the Kurs’s abandonment with the observation that “covert operations should not be confused with missionary work.”) After the Islamic Republic began supporting anti-Saddam Kurdish oppositionists, it proved a far more reliable partner than the Shah had been. For discussion, see Leverett and Mann Leverett, Going to Tehran, 66-67.

24. For further discussion, see ibid, 67-69.
25. Ibid., 69. Tehran has reinforced these ties with economic links, including trade, investment, and infrastructure expansion to sustain burgeoning cross-border flows of goods and people.

26. The strength of Iran’s influence was vividly on display when Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s government—which owed its existence to the American invasion—stuck to the terms of the 2008 Status of Forces Agreement governing the deployment of U.S. soldiers and demanded that all American military units leave by the end of 2011. On their own, Maliki and some of his coalition partners would have preferred for some American forces to stay; the Obama administration, for its part, wanted to keep as many as 20,000 troops on an open-ended basis. But Maliki’s government depends on the support of Shia’s Islamist parties with close ties to Tehran, including the Sadrist, who follow the Iranian-trained and supported Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. And the Sadrists, like Tehran, were adamantly opposed to Americans remaining at all, much less in an open-ended arrangement. For further discussion, see ibid., 69-70.

27. For an Iranian perspective on the use of Shia proxies against American military and intelligence assets in Lebanon during the 2000s, see Mohsen Rafiqdoost (one of the Revolutionary Guards’ founders), interview transcript for the BBC documentary Iran and the West, archived at Liddel Hart Center for Military Archives, King’s College, London.


29. Robert Pape and Jane Goldman, Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 28. Some commentators would argue that Hizbullah’s alleged involvement in the July 2012 bombing of a bus transporting Israeli tourists in Bulgaria invalidate this statement. But Gareth Porter has documented that Bulgarian investigators have produced no evidence for the allegation, that Bulgarian prosecutors have admitted it is only an “assumption” or a “hypothesis,” and that there are more plausible alternative “assumptions” and “hypotheses” about the attack; see his “Bulgarian Charge of Hezbollah Bombing Was an ‘Assumption,’” IPS, Feb. 7, 2013, http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/02/bulgarian-charge-of-hezbollah-bombing-was-an-assumption/ and “Bulgarian Revelations Explode Hezbollah Bombing ‘Hypothesis,’” IPS, Feb. 18, 2013, http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/02/bulgarian-revelations-explode-hezbollah-bombing-hypothesis/.

30. Leverett and Mann Leverett, Going to Tehran, 70-71.

31. Ibid., 71-72.


33. Ibid., 73-74. To marginalize so-called rogue actors in the Middle East and to bolster Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin’s interest in negotiating with “acceptable” Palestinians, the Clinton administration pressured Saudi Arabia to cut off funding for HAMAS. A senior HAMAS official who has been intimately involved in the group’s relationship with Iran told us that, but for this U.S. action, Saudi Arabia might have been the movement’s biggest supporter; instead, the Islamic Republic became a willing replacement.

34. Ibid., 74.

35. Ibid., 63. Twenty years ago, Joseph Nye defined soft power as the ability to get others to “want what you want,” which he contrasted with the ability to coerce others via “hard military and economic assets; see Joseph Nye, Bound to Lead: The Future of American Power (New York: Basic, 1990), 31.

36. Iran’s development of nuclear capabilities in defiance of the United States and Israel also feeds into its soft power strategy; see Leverett and Mann Leverett, Going to Tehran, 89-90.

37. Ibid., 90-95. We will discuss the impact of the Syrian conflict on the Islamic Republic’s standing in Arab public opinion in the text below.


Leverett and Mann Leverett, Going to Tehran, 95-97.

Ibid, 97-100.


Discussions with Iranian analysts and officials.


Discussions with Hizballah representatives, Beirut, Lebanon, June 2013; see also the passages on the Syrian conflict in speeches by Hizballah secretary-general Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah on May 25, 2013 (Hizballah’s Resistance and Liberation Day) and June 14, 2013 (Hizballah’s Injured Fighter Day).

More than three years after the Islamic Republic’s 2009 presidential election, the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad remained one of the most admired leaders in the Arab world, see Shibley Telhami, Arab Perspectives on Iran’s Roll in a Changing Middle East, Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, 2013. When asked in 2010 whether Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons would be positive for the region, a strong majority of respondents in a highly regarded annual survey of Arab public opinion said that it would; see the University of Maryland’s 2010 Arab Public Opinion Poll, Aug. 5, 2010, http://sadat.umd.edu/new%20surveys/surveys.htm. In 2011, two-thirds of respondents said that Iran had a right to its nuclear program and should not be pressured to stop it; see the University of Maryland’s 2011 Arab Public Opinion Poll, Nov. 21, 2011, http://www.brookings.edu/fbmedia/Files/events/2011/1121_arab_public_opinion/20111121_arab_public_opinion.pdf. In 2012, high-quality polls by Arab researchers showed that Arab publics’ support for a nuclear-weapons-free Middle East is driven by concern over Israel’s nuclear arsenal and that, until Israel forswears nuclear weapons, regional publics think other countries have the right to pursue them, too; see Nadim Rouhana, “Misreading Arab Public Opinion on Iran’s Nuclear Program,” Foreign Policy, Apr. 9, 2012. And Arab publics continue, by orders of magnitude, to see the United States and Israel as much bigger threats to their interests than the Islamic Republic. For further discussion, see Shibley Telhami, The World through Arab Eyes: Arab Public Opinion and the Reshaping of the Middle East (New York: Basic, 2013), 129-144.

Discussions with senior HAMAS officials in Doha, Qatar, May 2013.


For further discussion, see Hal intahatjulatQusayrwatadāyāthā [Has the Qusayr round ended and what are its implications?].

For representative statements over the course of the Syrian conflict, see, e.g., Michael O’Hanlon, “The


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Iran and the Arab World:

Iran, Syria and the Arab Spring

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EDUCATION
Ph.D. in International Relations, Department of International Relations; Area of Research: The evolution of the Syrian-Iranian alliance within the broader context of Middle East power politics since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and more specifically, the impact of Syrian-Iranian political, military and economic cooperation on the policies of Iraq, Israel and the United States, and the regional balance of power.
M.A. in Arab Studies, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, School of Foreign Service; Concentration in Arab Politics and International Affairs; program included two years of intensive Arabic and Economics.
B.A. in International Studies, School of International Service; graduated with distinction - Cum Laude; Concentration in International Relations, Cross-Cultural Communication & Third World Development; minors in German and Chemistry.
High School Diploma; graduated with distinction - Headmaster's List.
*Honors: Bausch & Lomb Honorary Science Award 1982, Language Arts Award 1982, and Member of the National Honor Society 1981.

WORK EXPERIENCE
Webster University (Geneva Campus) - Geneva, Switzerland, 2006 - Present.
Assistant Professor in the International Relations Department, Adjunct Professor (2006 - 2009) and Full-Time Professor (2009 – Present), currently conducting research on Middle Eastern affairs, and teaching undergraduate and graduate courses on Middle East history and politics (the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Persian Gulf region), Third World issues (political and socio-economic development), and the history of refugee and migration movements.
Visiting Fellow in the Program for the Study of International Organization(s) - PSIO, conducted research and analysis for a monograph/book on the history of the evolution in US policy towards Iraq over the past quarter century.
Political Analyst/Consultant in the Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); specifically responsible for the preparation of regular and timely background reports and analyses on the political, strategic, economic and humanitarian aspects of the situation in Iraq since the 2003 US-led invasion of the country and their regional and international ramifications.
Consultant in the Division of External Relations, collaborated with the Managing Editor and production team on the 2006 edition of “The State of the World’s Refugees” publication; carried out research and drafted specific sections relating to refugee, state and human security issues, including the status of refugees in the post-9/11 international environment, the interplay between refugee and state security, protection of refugee settlements, humanitarian access, the role of the military, and human security in the African Great Lakes and the Balkans.
Political Analyst/Consultant in the Regional Bureau for Central Asia, Southwest Asia, North Africa and the Middle East (CASWANAME); specifically responsible for the preparation of regular and timely background reports and analyses on the political, strategic, economic and humanitarian aspects of the situation in Iraq prior to the outbreak, during and in the aftermath of the 2003 Persian Gulf conflict, including the subsequent Anglo-American occupation of Iraq.
Guest Researcher in the UNHCR Archives and Records Section, Assistant to former High Commissioner Sadako Ogata; conducted archival research for a project funded by the Ford Foundation on the political, strategic and humanitarian aspects of the Persian Gulf war.

**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - Geneva, Switzerland, 1998 - 1999.**

*Consultant in the Policy Research Unit (PRU) of the Center for Documentation and Research (CDR);* prepared an analytical report assessing political and socio-economic conditions in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and their regional implications in order to establish a conceptual framework for a joint UNHCR - St. Antony’s College (Oxford Univerity) workshop on the root causes and dynamics of population displacements in the Euphrates-Indus sub-region; the purpose of the workshop being two-fold: to enable UNHCR to have a better grasp and understanding of evolving trends in this area, and on the basis of the workshop’s conclusions and recommendations, to adopt more effective strategies to deal with refugee issues. Also participated in drafting the workshop agenda, selecting paper writers and discussants, and served as rapporteur during this three-day seminar (23-25 April 1999), held at St. Antony’s College in Oxford, England.

**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - Geneva, Switzerland, 1996 - 1998.**

*Consultant in the Regional Bureau for Southwest Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East (SWANAME);* specifically responsible for the preparation of a series of political background reports on the root causes of refugee crises for a regional consultation process on population displacements in Central Asia, Southwest Asia, and the Middle East (CASWAME). Main foci of research and analyses were the involuntary displacement of Afghans, Tajiks, Iranians, Iraqis, and Kurds; humanitarian traditions in Islamic-Middle Eastern civilizations; and UNHCR activities in the region. Also served as conference officer and speech writer during the opening round of the CASWAME consultations held in Amman, Jordan on 12-13 March 1997. Other duties entailed assisting in various administrative tasks and drafting of relevant documentation in order to lay the groundwork for this UNHCR-led initiative.

**Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) - London, England, 1994.**

*Research Assistant in the Middle East Program;* carried out research on the evolution of Syrian-Iranian relations, Iran's position on the Arab-Israeli peace process since the 1991 Madrid Conference, bilateral relations of both states with Turkey, Iranian policy in Lebanon, and the future of the Syrian-Iranian alliance, for a Chatham House study published in 1995.


*Consultant/Administrator,* served as consultant to the management of U.S. aerospace companies such as Fairchild Communications & Electronics, Litton Applied Technology, and Loral Electro-Optical Systems; formulated business strategies and provided support for their marketing efforts in the Middle East, analyzed regional political, economic and security trends, and oversaw daily operations of the U.S. office.

**Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) - Washington, D.C., U.S.A., 1990 - 1991.**

*Research Assistant in the Energy and National Security Studies Section,* Assistant to the Director of the Bartlett Energy Security Program; conducted research and analysis on various topics relating to energy security issues, including the historical origins of the Iraq-Kuwait dispute, the oil dimension of the Persian Gulf crisis, trends in the U.S. transportation sector, prospects for alternative fuels, the importance of Canadian and Venezuelan oil supplies for future U.S. requirements, the financial impact and economic consequences of the Persian Gulf war on the oil-producing states of the Middle East, and the state of the energy sector in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

**Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) - Washington, D.C., U.S.A., 1990.**

*Research Assistant in the Middle East Studies Section,* Assistant to the Deputy Director of Middle East Studies; performed extensive research and analysis for a study on U.S.-Pakistani relations funded by the Pew Foundation; focusing on the evolution of U.S.-Pakistani relations 1947-1979, the purposes of U.S. military and economic aid to Pakistan after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the overall nature and impact of bilateral and multilateral assistance on the Pakistani economy during the 1980’s. Other responsibilities included supervising interns, and coordinating research and administrative tasks with staff members.

**Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) - Washington, D.C., U.S.A., Summer 1988.**

*Freelance Researcher in the Middle East Studies Section;* researched and compiled material from English and Persian-language sources pertaining to the foreign policy of Iran during the Imperial and Revolutionary periods, for a book on the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran published in 1990.

**Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) - Washington, D.C., U.S.A., 1986 - 1987.**

*Intern in the Middle East Studies Section;* carried out research on the Persian Gulf area, with special emphasis on such topics as the Iran-Iraq war, Revolutionary Iran, Baathist Iraq, Islamic fundamentalism, Arab-Iranian relations and the Iran-Contra affair, and for a book on Islamist movements in the Middle East and North Africa published in 1988.

**PUBLICATIONS**


Iran: Testing the Limits of Nuclear Power, by Jubin Goodarzi, Middle East Economic Digest, 3-9 August 2007, pp. 6-7.


Ayatollahs atomiques?: Analyse de la crise sur le programme nucléaire iranien, by Jubin M. Goodarzi, Revue Militaire Suisse (RMS), Numéro 1, janvier-fevrier 2007, pp. 56-60.


All the President’s Men: Bush’s Aides and the Origins of Iraq’s WMD Programs, by Jubin Goodarzi, Middle East International, 21 February 2003, pp. 28-29.

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Missile Proliferation in the Middle East: The Case of Iran, by Jubin Goodarzi, Middle East International, 18 September 1998, pp. 18-20.


Beyond Iran-EU Relations: Tehran’s Strategic Imperatives, by Jubin Goodarzi, Middle East International, 13 June 1997, pp. 16-17.


Iran & Iraq: Containment or Cooperation?, by Jubin Goodarzi, Middle East International, 2 February 1996, pp. 16-17.


“The chain of resistance against Israel by Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, the new Iraqi government and Hamas passes through the Syrian highway...Syria is the golden ring of the chain of resistance against Israel.”

Ali Akbar Velayati, Senior Advisor for Foreign Affairs to Iran’s Supreme Leader, 6 January 2012

“What is happening in Syria is not an internal issue, but a conflict between the axis of resistance and its enemies in the region and the world. Iran will not tolerate, in any form, the breaking of the axis of resistance, of which Syria is an intrinsic part.”

Saeed Jalili, Head of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, 6 September 2012

There is no doubt that one of the most intriguing developments in modern Middle East politics has been the emergence and continuity of the Syrian-Iranian alliance since its formation in 1979. For more than three decades now, the Tehran-Damascus axis has continued to baffle many observers. Pointing to differences in their respective ideologies, as well as their political foundations and structures, many analysts have been perplexed as to how a revolutionary, pan-Islamic theocracy such as Iran could ally itself with a secular, pan-Arab, socialist republic like Syria. Moreover, while Ba’thist Syria claims to be an ardent supporter and the rightful leader of the pan-Arab cause, Iran champions Islamic universalism and rejects secularism.¹

Generally speaking, there are three important reasons to study and understand the Tehran-Damascus axis. Firstly, the alliance has had a significant impact on Middle East politics over the past three decades, as we have seen again in recent years during the 2006 Lebanon war which pitted Israel against the Syrian and Iranian-backed Hezbollah movement, and Iran’s support for the Assad regime since the eruption of the Syrian crisis in March 2011. Secondly, it has proven to be an enduring relationship that has lasted thirty-four years in spite of the many challenges that it has faced and periodic strains in the relationship. This is no mean feat. It is quite extraordinary when one takes into consideration the volatility and shifting political sands in the Middle East. Thirdly, the alliance is of enormous importance since both countries are situated in key locations in the Middle East, thereby contributing immensely to its geopolitical significance. With regard to Syria, in his classic work, The Struggle for Syria, Patrick Seale argued that those who aspire to control the Middle East must first win over Syria. According to him, “whoever controlled Syria or enjoyed her special friendship could isolate [other Arab states] and need bow to no other combination of Arab states.”² As far as Iran is concerned, many view it as the strategic prize in Southwest Asia and the Persian Gulf region. The country’s critical position is poignantly conveyed in Graham Fuller’s work on the geopolitics of Iran, entitled The Center of the Universe.³

Over the past three decades, the two partners have had some noticeable successes in frustrating the designs and policies of Iraq, Israel and the United States in the Middle East. Through their continuous collaboration, they played a critical role in stemming Iraq’s invasion of Iran in September 1980, and ensuring that Saddam Hussein’s Iraq would not become the predominant power in the Middle East. They were also able to thwart Tel Aviv’s strategy to bring Lebanon into its own orbit, following the June 1982 Israeli invasion of that country and occupation of almost half its territory. Through the use of Lebanese proxies - most notably Hezbollah - Syria and Iran were able to expose the limits of Israeli military power and forced Tel Aviv to withdraw from the territory it occupied between 1984 and 2000. Concurrently, in this same arena, they were able to inflict one of the very
few foreign policy setbacks that Ronald Reagan suffered during his two terms in office as US president in the 1980s. Even in the post-Cold War era, with American predominance on the regional and world stage, the imposition of economic sanctions on both countries, and the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, Syria and Iran have been able to wield considerable power and influence in the Middle East, especially in Iraq, Lebanon and - directly and indirectly - on world oil markets, as events in recent years have demonstrated.4

Furthermore, it should be noted that both Ba'athist Syria and Islamist Iran have been fiercely independent states, whose political elites share certain perceptions and world views, and in fact their secular and fundamentalist ideologies overlap in certain respects. While Iran has tried to use its brand of revolutionary Islam to transcend nationalism, create Muslim unity in the region by surmounting Arab-Iranian political divisions and Shia-Sunni religious differences, and demonstrate its solidarity by actively participating in the Arab-Israeli struggle, Syria, as the self-proclaimed birthplace and heartland of Arabism, has striven to overcome the political fragmentation of the Arab world by acting as a vehicle for Arab unity. Hafez Assad, Ruhollah Khomeini and their successors have viewed the Middle East as a strategic whole and regarded their alliance as a vital tool to assert themselves, to further what they see as in the Arab and Islamic interest, and to increase their room for maneuver by diminishing foreign - particularly American - influence in the region. As a result, to advance their common agenda over the years and decades, both regimes have put longer-term interests before short-term gains.5

With regard to the Arab Spring, when the initial wave of popular protests first began in Tunisia in the winter of 2010-2011 and spread to neighboring Arab countries, Tehran declared its support for the demonstrations, which largely challenged the authority of conservative, pro-Western regimes. Portraying the opposition movements as Islamist, the Iranian leadership confidently declared that the Arab Spring would usher in a new pan-Islamic era in the Middle East and North Africa, in which authoritarian regimes would be supplanted by Islamist governments. From Tehran’s perspective, the tide had finally turned against the West and its regional allies. History seemed to favor Iran and its supporters.6

All this changed with the eruption of the protests in Syria, which caught Iran off guard and put it in an extremely awkward position. Tehran faced Hobson’s choice – two unattractive options. If it chose to stand by its most valuable and longstanding Arab ally, it would be viewed as hypocritical and opportunistic by the masses in the Arab-Muslim world. On the other hand, if it stood by idly and refrained from supporting the Assad regime, there was no guaranteed that if a new government came to power in Damascus it would cultivate close ties with Tehran. Given the circumstances, Iran chose to throw its weight behind the Syrian regime. One senior Iranian official talking about the Arab Spring in the context of the US-Iranian rivalry in the region commented: “Bahrain tripped up the Americans, while Syria tripped us up.” This decision not only tarnished the Islamic Republic’s reputation in the Middle East, but that of its Lebanese ally, Hezbollah, which also backed the Syrian government. Moreover, it had far-reaching consequences for Iran’s power and influence in the region as the crisis unfolded in the two years that followed. By 2013, as the conflict in Syria increasingly assumed a sectarian dimension pitting Sunnis against Shias in Syria and the Middle East, the prominent Egyptian Sunni cleric, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, called on all Sunnis to join the fight in Syria against Shia Iran and
Hezbollah – to which he referred as the “Party of Satan.” Others depicted Shias as a greater threat to the Arab world than Israel. The popularity of Iran and Hezbollah which had peaked in the aftermath of the 2006 Lebanon conflict reached an unprecedented nadir in the Arab-Muslim world due to their steadfast support for the suppression of the Syrian revolt. Furthermore, relations between Tehran and Hamas became strained by the winter of 2011-2012 when the leader of the Palestinian Islamist movement, Khalid Mashal, left Damascus and declared his support for the Syrian opposition.

Tehran initially hoped that by assisting the Ba’histh regime, Damascus would be able to ride out the crisis within a short time. As a result, Iran staunchly supported Assad’s efforts to crush the protests by providing technical support and expertise to neutralize the opposition. The Iranians provided advice and equipment to the Syrian security forces to help them contain and disperse protests. In addition, they gave guidance and technical assistance on how to monitor and curtail the use of the internet and mobile phone networks by the opposition. Iran’s security forces had plenty of experience and had learned valuable lessons in this regard since the violent crackdown against the opponents of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad following the disputed Iranian presidential elections of June 2009. At the same time, according to reports, the Iranians disapproved of the clumsy and heavy-handed approach adopted by the Syrian regime to quell the initial protests. Nonetheless, as the revolt transformed into an armed insurrection, specialist personnel and units from the Iranian security apparatus, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ elite Qods Force, police and intelligence were dispatched and deployed in Syria to assist in defeating armed opposition fighters from the Free Syrian Army and foreign Sunni Islamist groups. However, their numbers were limited, at most in the hundreds (in the two years that followed), and not as opposition sources claimed in the thousands.

By the summer of 2011, as the confrontation in Syria turned into a protracted affair with no end in sight, the Iranian leadership began to worry that it might be on the wrong side of history and had growing doubts about the wisdom of its policy. In order to hedge its bets, Tehran approached some Syrian opposition groups (which were Islamist or did not advocate the toppling of the Assad regime) to assess their stance on various issues relating to Iran, Israel, Lebanon and the United States. However, nothing substantive seems to have resulted from these and subsequent overtures in 2012.

As the Syrian crisis continued into the autumn and winter of 2011, it increasingly assumed both a regional and international dimension. A proxy war began to emerge involving both regional and international actors. Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states began to provide material and financial support to the Syrian opposition. As a result, Iran, Hezbollah, and to some extent Iraq, felt compelled to throw their weight fully behind the Assad regime. Tehran saw the Syrian crisis as providing its regional rivals with a golden opportunity to deny it of its most valuable ally, and diminish its power and influence in the Middle East. On the international level, the US and European Union closed ranks to exert pressure and isolate Damascus. Moscow, which had traditionally been the main supplier of weapons to Syria, continued to ship arms to Damascus. In the UN Security Council, Russia and China consistently thwarted Western efforts to punish Syria and blocked any move that could lay the groundwork for foreign military intervention in support of the Syrian opposition. Both Moscow and Beijing were determined to avoid making the
mistake they had made with regard to Libya in 2011 when they voted in favor of UNSC Resolution 1973. Iran and its allies increasingly came to view the situation in Syria as a zero-sum game, fearing that the ouster of the Syrian Ba’th could pave the way for the emergence of a new regime in Damascus that would be hostile towards Tehran. Consequently, the Iranian leadership made a strategic decision to fully support Assad by providing arms, oil and financial aid.\textsuperscript{12}

In 2012, when the United Nations and Arab League appointed Kofi Annan and later his successor, Lakhdar Brahimi, as special envoys to mediate and resolve the Syrian conflict, Iran welcomed these moves. In general, Tehran is keen to be part of any multilateral initiative aimed at ending the current crisis and to have a role in shaping Syria’s political future. However, the US and its allies seem determined to exclude Iran from any negotiated settlement. Iran’s interest in a political dialogue and possible diplomatic solution has increased over the past year as the conflict in Syria has dragged on into 2013. Although at present neither the Syrian regime nor the opposition seem to have the ability to deal a knock-out blow, with the passage of time, Bashar Assad is losing ground and control of many parts of the country. Large swathes of territory in the north and east of the country are now in the hands of armed groups, including Syrian Kurdish and foreign Islamist militias. Tehran believes that time may not be on the side of the Ba’thist regime, and is looking for options to cut its losses and ensure that irrespective of the outcome of events in Syria, an anti-Iranian government will not come to power in Damascus. Last autumn, Tehran proposed a six-point peace plan to end the crisis. It called for an immediate end to hostilities, the lifting of sanctions, the release of political prisoners, a national dialogue, the formation of a transitional government, and elections for a parliament, constituent assembly and the presidency.\textsuperscript{13} However, the plan was rejected by the Syrian opposition outright since it did not fulfill one of their key pre-conditions, namely, the removal of Bashar Assad from power. More recently, in February, Iranian foreign minister Ali Akbar Salehi held talks with the head of the Syrian National Coalition Ahmad Moaz al-Khatib at the global security conference in Munich, Germany to discuss a political solution to the Syrian crisis.\textsuperscript{14} Concomitantly, Iran has continued to provide military assistance to prop up the Assad regime in order to bolster its chances of survival and to strengthen its bargaining position in the event of a substantive political dialogue with its opponents. Tehran is calculating that if the opposition fails to topple the Syrian Ba’th, it may eventually be amenable at the very least to some form of transitional government that contains some elements from the ancien regime.

It should be emphasized though that with the passage of time, Tehran sees a number of advantages to a negotiated settlement to the Syrian crisis. First, it realizes that the pre-March 2011 political status quo ante cannot be restored; therefore, it aims to contain the damage and extricate itself in a face-saving manner. Second, it is genuinely concerned that the prolonged fighting in Syria will have a knock-on effect and destabilize Lebanon and Iraq. Third, in view of its growing regional and international isolation, Iran would like to demonstrate its importance as a key regional actor involved in helping attain peace in Syria. Fourth, the Islamic Republic is extremely concerned about the growing sectarian polarization and the possible transformation of the conflict into a regional war pitting Sunnis against Shias. Fifth, Tehran knows that it cannot indefinitely provide financial and material support to the Assad regime due to its own economic woes and foreign sanctions. Sixth, Iran may conclude that in the final analysis, it may be more
prudent to facilitate the emergence of a national unity government in Damascus that may not be
Tehran’s ally, but at minimum will not be its enemy either.

In the event the current war of attrition leads to the overthrow of Assad, Iran has in recent months
started to build up a militia force in Syria known as the People’s Army (Jaysh al-Sha’bi) consisting of regime loyalists, Alawites and other groups to ensure that the new regime would not be able to assert control over Syria and would become bogged down. According to reports, the aim is to build up a force which is at least 50-thousand strong and ideally grows to 100-thousand members. Iran wants to have a viable, armed proxy in a post-Assad Syria. In short, Tehran’s objective is to ensure if it cannot have Syria as an ally in the Middle East, others should be prevented from instrumentalizing Syria against Iran in the regional power struggle.

Clearly, the current crisis is the greatest challenge facing the thirty-four-year-old Syrian-Iranian
alliance. If the Assad government is toppled, this would represent a major setback for Iran. In fact, it would be the most significant defeat for the clerical regime since at least 1988, when it was forced to end the war with Iraq and sue for peace. Overall, it could be argued that if such an event were to occur, it would be the greatest loss for the Islamic Republic on the regional level since its creation in 1979. It would also constitute a major blow, particularly in terms of the Islamic Republic’s ideological and foreign policy objectives. Syria has been the only stalwart Arab supporter of Iran. Furthermore, it has served as a major conduit for Iranian arms shipments and material support to Lebanon’s Hezbollah. Since the end of the 2006 Lebanon conflict, Damascus and Tehran have restored Hezbollah as a formidable force with an arsenal of some 40,000 rockets and missiles. The overthrow of the Assad regime could transform the regional situation overnight. Not only would Iran lose its most important Arab ally, but also its ability to provide support for Hezbollah and to influence the situation in Lebanon and in the Arab-Israeli arena would be severely curtailed. In addition to its importance in advancing Iranian ideological and foreign policy interests in the Levant, from Tehran’s vantage point, Hezbollah has become a vital actor to safeguard Iranian national security in recent years since the dispute over Iran’s nuclear program emerged. According to Iranian strategic thinking, potential Hezbollah retaliation against Israel serves as a trip wire for US and Israeli military action against Iran.

Although the current strategy of trying to prop up the Assad regime is partially aimed at
preserving Iran’s ability to project its power and influence in the Levant, the strategy also has several key defensive components. Over the past year, tensions in Iraq have increased markedly, and the confrontation between the Shia-dominated government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in Baghdad and the Sunni opposition has intensified. Armed Sunni extremist groups have conducted bold attacks against Iraqi civilians and the vestiges of the Iraqi state. The success of the Syrian opposition in seizing control of areas in the east bordering Iraq and their growing cooperation with Iraqi Sunni insurgents have contributed to the growing instability in Iraq. This has also alarmed policy makers in Tehran. A poignant example recently was the announcement of the alliance between Al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Nusra Front (Jabha al-Nusra) in Syria. Consequently, there is now a genuine fear in Tehran that if the Assad regime is toppled it may have a knock-on effect in Iraq. This could lead to greater instability and potentially even to the overthrow of the current government in Baghdad and the rise of a Sunni-dominated regime. Iran sees this possibility as completely unacceptable. An alternative scenario is that the Syrian
conflict could fuel Sunni secessionist ambitions in Iraq, and lead to the break-up of the country into Shia, Sunni and Kurdish regions. This would have major security implications for Iran and could produce enormous internal problems, especially in the Kurdish and Arab-inhabited regions of the country bordering Iraq.

It should also be underscored that Iran’s reading of the situation in Syria has been influenced by both its own internal developments and relations with the West. Since the protests following the disputed presidential elections of 2009, and the decision of the US and its European allies (starting in 2010) to impose harsh sanctions on Iran, a sense of embattlement and paranoia has taken hold among Tehran’s ruling elites. Any internal opposition or foreign moves that may directly or indirectly threaten either their survival or interests, are interpreted as part of a grand strategy or conspiracy to topple the Islamist regime. The failure to resolve differences over Iran’s nuclear program through diplomacy – most recently during two rounds of negotiations in Almaty, Kazakhstan – and the continuous imposition of Western sanctions have reinforced Iranian perceptions that Washington’s real ultimate goal is regime change in Tehran.

The Iranian leadership has strong suspicions that no matter what it does to allay concerns regarding the nuclear issue, Western sanctions will never again be fully lifted so long as the Islamic Republic continues to exist. As a result, the policies pursued by the US and its European and Middle Eastern allies with regard to the Syrian crisis have increasingly been interpreted as part of a broader plan to dismantle “the axis of resistance” in the Middle East by toppling the regimes in Damascus and Tehran. Western moves to shun and isolate Iran have therefore reinforced perceptions among policy makers in Tehran that they must take a stand. Iran sees Syria as the first line of defense against a concerted effort by its regional and extra-regional foes not only to bring about regime change in Damascus and the end its alliance with Tehran, but as part of a longer term strategy to isolate and overthrow the Islamic Republic.

At present, Tehran fears the emergence of a crescent of pro-Western (Sunni) regimes stretching from Turkey to Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The nightmare scenario for Iran would be for the Syrian Ba’th to be replaced by a Sunni fundamentalist regime that is staunchly anti-Iran and anti-Shia, and closely allied with Tehran’s regional rival, Saudi Arabia. However, “the mother of all nightmares” for Iran would be if both of the existing regimes in Damascus and Baghdad were toppled and succeeded by governments which are implacably hostile towards Tehran. To date, Iran has done all it can to ensure that Bashar Assad will not be toppled by pouring in men, material and money to bolster his position. In spite of its tremendous efforts and spending billions of dollars to prop up the Syrian regime, the outcome is still unclear. In fact, Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and a number of politicians and members of parliament (majles) have expressed disappointment about the results in the past. 18

In conclusion, to date, the Arab Spring has not translated into a net gain for Iran. While relations between Tehran and the new governments in Cairo, Tripoli and Tunis have thawed, normalization, especially with Egypt remains elusive. This can be attributed in part to the continued political instability in Egypt, but also to the fact that Iran and Egypt have stood on opposite sides of the fence in the Syrian conflict. Their contrasting positions have impeded the
political reconciliation process and accentuated the Sunni-Shia schism. In addition, Tehran and its regional allies have lost a great deal of the political capital they possessed in the Arab-Muslim world due to their steadfast support for the Assad regime and its brutal suppression of the uprising. There is no doubt that the alliance between Iran and Syria is now at a critical crossroads, and its days may truly be numbered. Whatever the outcome, one thing is for certain, the relationship cannot be restored to its pre-2011 status.

Endnotes

4. For more details, see Jubin M. Goodarzi, Syria and Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power Politics in the Middle East, Chapter 1, 2 and 4.
5. Ibid., p. 294.
16. For details on Iranian support to Syria, see “Three-Way Bet: Hizbullah’s Strategic Dilemma in Lebanon,” Jane’s Intelligence Review, November 2011, p. 30.
Iran-Egypt Relations:
Testing Times in an Era of Turbulence and Transition

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Iran and Egypt do not share a history of close relations. Both are heavy weights in their own right; Iran the leader of Shiite Muslim world and Egypt the traditional Arab power. Relations between them have experienced a roller coaster ride right from the middle of Twentieth century. While in 1939, the two countries came together when Egyptian princess Fawzia Fuad married Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the then Iranian crown prince, the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran resulted in breaking off of diplomatic ties between the two nations. The deposed Shah of Iran was given asylum in Egypt where he stayed until he died. Added to that, the Camp David Treaty between Egypt and Israel broke the remaining slender thread of diplomatic relations between the two. The hatred was so pronounced that Iran named a street after the assassin of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat: Khalid Islambouli Street in Tehran. Despite some efforts in the intervening period, nothing changed till Egyptian Dictator Hosni Mubarak was ousted in the popular uprisings, ‘Arab Spring’ in early 2011.

Iran, isolated in the region owing to heavy international economic sanctions due to its stand off on the nuclear programme was looking for allies in the region. It immediately welcomed the ouster of Mubarak and called the popular uprisings in the Arab world as the ‘Islamic Wakening’. It threw in support in favor of the new interim government in Egypt under Supreme Commander of Armed Forces (SCAF) and later urged and supported the rise of Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as a political party. Egypt responded symbolically to this recognition from Iran very early into the revolution, when it permitted two Iranian warships to cross the Suez Canal in February 2011\(^1\), first in thirty years. In his maiden speech at the UN General Assembly on 24 September 2012\(^2\), President Morsi voiced his support for Palestinian nationhood and called it a global shame that the Palestinians still don’t have their own country. He also called upon Israel to join the NPT and professed that there cannot be two different standards on the nuclear issue with respect to Iran and Israel. Both these statements were to the obvious liking of Iran. The Gaza conflict of November 2012 brought the two countries together when they both announced total support for the Palestinians and denounced Israel as well as the international community for inaction against Israel.

During all this, Iran saw it as a strategic opportunity to nurture another powerful partnership, Egypt being special due to the US and Israel factor. Iran, in supporting the Egyptian revolution hoped that the new regime would wean away from the peace treaty...
with Israel and even cut its dependence on US for economic and military aid. It even offered a credit line to Egypt in its nation’s reconstruction plans. Election of Mohammed Morsi of Muslim Brotherhood as the President gave further hope in Iran, owing to the traditional ties Muslim Brotherhood enjoyed with Iran. In Muslim Brotherhood’s rise in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab World, Iran saw it as an opportunity towards the rise of political Islam in the region, a phenomenon with which it could closely associate and forge future ties. In August 2012, Egyptian President Morsi visited Iran to attend the NAM summit, again an unprecedented event in the history of these two regional powers. During his reciprocal visit on 07 February 2013 to Cairo to attend the OIC Summit, Iran President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called on Egypt to form a strategic alliance with Iran. A few days earlier, on 4 February, he had expressed his optimism about the visit and relations with Egypt by saying: “The political geography of the region will undergo a major change if Egypt and Iran take a common stance on the Palestinian cause”. Ahmadinejad’s February 2013 visit was the first by an Iranian President to Egypt in 33 years.

While things were shaping up, in first week of July 2013, President Morsi was deposed by a ‘soft coup’ by the Armed Forces leading once again to an uncertain future in Egypt. Like others, Iran too was taken surprise by the rapidity of events which unfolded in Egypt and has had to recalibrate its stance as regards Egypt. While there is a school of thought who predicts that Iran’s ties with Egypt could go down to the levels of pre ‘Arab Spring’ days, another school of thought says that the ties will move ahead irrespective of the type of future regime in Egypt.

In looking for answers towards the trajectory of future relations between these two powerful countries of the region, there is a need to look deeper into their respective national interests, criticalities and vulnerabilities and examine points of convergence or conflict between the two countries. Also, it is necessary to critically examine Iran’s reaction to the current crisis in Egypt to anticipate its future discourse with Egypt.

**Iran’s Interests in Egypt**

Iran sees developing relations with Egypt as a win-win situation. Its nuclear programme has left it isolated and the sanctions are hurting its economy badly. In such a scenario, Egypt could provide the support Iran is looking for. Iran has other interests common with Egypt.

- Both countries are strong supporters of the Palestine cause and therefore Iran sees potential support from Egypt against Israel, possibly to the extent of abrogating the Camp David Peace Treaty. The ouster of Muslim Brotherhood however has put doubts on any such possibility.
- Common ground with Egypt opens up the possibility of the Sinai desert being used by Iran to get aid as well as arms and equipment across to Hamas in the Gaza Strip. In fact, during the November 2012 conflict, there were reports of Iran’s Fazr 3 and Fazr 5 rockets being fired into Israel.
- Closer ties could potentially draw Egypt closer to Iran than Saudi Arabia, thus altering the regional power dynamics in Iran’s favour.
• Even for Iran’s faltering economy, Egypt could provide solutions if it were to buy Iranian oil and permit Iranian investments in the Egyptian economy.

Issues of Conflict with Egypt

It is however not a story of strong ideological and strategic ties that Iran and Egypt share. Amongst common interests, there are deep rooted points of conflict and divergence too which might come in the way of developing long term ties. Some of the critical issues are highlighted below.

• Egypt is a Sunni Muslim country. Iran, on the other hand, is overwhelmingly Shiite Muslim. Notwithstanding the Iranian regime’s traditional affinity with the Muslim Brotherhood, there are deep-rooted ideological differences between Sunni and Shiite Muslims that need to be overcome.

• The ongoing war in Syria is another issue of conflict. Egypt supports the people’s revolution against President Bashar Assad, has publicly denounced the Assad regime and called for its ouster. Iran, on the other hand, has expressed unflinching support for its strategic ally, Syria, and is providing all support to ensure the Assad government’s survival.

• While Egypt finds ideological and religious affinity with the Gulf region, Iran-Gulf relations are at their worst and could become a restricting factor in Iran-Egypt relations. The problem is compounded since Egypt looks forward to massive economic aid from the region, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which have already announced multibillion dollar aid to Egypt. In fact, Saudi Arabia backed out of a ‘Peace Quartet’ formed on the initiative of the Egyptian President to help solve the Syrian crisis because Iran was one of the members apart from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

• Even during President Ahmadinejad’s visit to Cairo in February 2013, Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, head of Cairo's historic al-Azhar Mosque and University, urged Iran to refrain from interfering in Gulf Arab states, to recognize Bahrain as a "sisterly Arab nation" and rejected the extension of Shiite Muslim influence in Sunni countries, a clear rebuke to Iran.

Iran and Muslim Brotherhood: A Sense of Betrayal and Loss

When Morsi led Muslim Brotherhood Government took charge in Egypt, Iran was hopeful that it would be able to forge strong ties with the Islamist regime. It also saw a wave of political Islam sweeping the region where, in most of the cases, affiliates and branches of Muslim Brotherhood came into prominence (Libya, Morocco, Jordan, and Tunisia). Specifically with Egypt, Iran expected Morsi to annul the peace treaty with Israel and even reduce dependence on US. However Morsi could not do either. Military aid from the US seemed too critical for Egypt to jeopardize in favor of Iranian interests. That is why, perhaps, after the initial bonhomie, there was a creeping feeling of frustration in Iran. Opposing stands of both the nations on the Syria crisis and weaning away of Hamas from Iran (Hamas is supporting the rebels in Syria as opposed to Iran supporting the Syrian regime) added to the widening trust deficit.
Rise of political Islam in the region suited Iran and was the perfect platform to forge closer ties with Egypt and other countries. In a democratic elected President from Muslim Brotherhood, Iran wanted to champion the cause of Islamic democracy in the region which would not only further legitimize its regime but also provide it a leadership role in the region. The fall of Morsi left it devoid of this chance. There is a feeling in Iran that Muslim Brotherhood has itself to blame for the downfall as it could not reach out to peoples’ aspirations which gave the chance its detractors were looking for to overthrow the President.

Iran also saw in Muslim Brotherhood the perfect opportunity to forge ties with the Sunni Muslim world and expand its influence in the region. With the ‘Arab Spring’ and the rise of Muslim Brotherhood in the region, Iran thought that it could reach out to the Sunni nations through its ties with Muslim Brotherhood which otherwise may not have been possible. This would not only enlarge the Iranian influence in the region but also help break the Saudi Arabia led stranglehold on Sunni Muslims.

The ouster of Morsi has thus dealt an ideological blow to Iranian aspirations in the region. There is a clear sense of loss and betrayal in the follow up of the events in Egypt and has raised questions and new challenges for Iran-Egypt relations.

Way Forward

So far, Iran, despite its known support for Muslim Brotherhood has reacted very cautiously to the developments in Egypt, thus keeping its options open. Iran’s foreign Ministry has called the crisis as the Egyptian people’s “legitimate demands” which should be fulfilled. The Supreme leader has not yet publicly reacted but Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami said during Tehran’s Friday prayers that “Instead of inviting the Islamic world to unite, (Morsi’s government) supported the murdering infidels. On political front they dealt with the Zionist regime in a way that was against their previous principles.”

The new interim regime in Egypt would find it very difficult to find common ground with Iran, especially given the circumstances and rapidity by which the Muslim Brotherhood President was overthrown. The overthrow of Morsi would only help in strengthening the hold of US and Saudi Arabia in the region. US interests are clearly evident when, despite the ‘coup’, US declined to qualify it as a coup and has indicated to continued military assistance. Saudi Arabia which did not enjoy good ties with Morsi led government has shown overwhelming support to the interim regime in Egypt, gauging it as a perfect opportunity to bring Egypt back into the Sunni-Arab fold. King Abdullah hailed the ouster of Morsi and said "In the name of the people of Saudi Arabia and on my behalf, we congratulate your leadership of Egypt in this critical period of its history”.

Given the present domestic political situation, regional and global pressures and influences as well as economic difficulties, it is unlikely, at least in the short and medium terms that Egypt would be able to fend off pressures from the US and the Gulf, especially in favor of Iran. Iran on the other hand is taking a slow, deliberate and cautious stand on the crisis in Egypt. It knows that it would be presently difficult for Iran-Egypt ties to
move forward but it cannot also let go of the possibility of Egypt as an ally over a longer period. Newly elected President Rohani in Iran is known for his conservative yet pragmatic approach and could find a way to get around the present situation for better ties with Egypt in future.

For Iran, Egypt would be a crucial ally, especially if Assad regime in Syria were to fall in coming months and Palestine were to move forward towards reconciliation with Israel. In such a scenario, Iran could find it isolated in the region, with very little support and that is the time it would require the support of a major regional power like Egypt. Whatever might be the immediate and short term impact of geo-political developments in the region, Iran-Egypt relations would be a major factor in shaping the regional matrix in the coming times.

3. As the relationship grows, factions fear an Egypt modeled on Iran, Al Arabiya News, 07 February 2013, available at http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2013/02/07/264973.html
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Iran-Kuwait Foreign Relations: Pre and Post Gulf war

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Abstract

Foreign policy is main instrument to fulfill domestic needs at international level. Iran and Kuwait relationship is complex and dynamic in the contemporary Gulf politics. The relationship of Iran and Kuwait has been influenced by Iraq in the region and by U.S.A at the international level. Kuwait provided assistance of billions of dollars to Iraq in Iran-Iraq war to control the hegemony of Iran in region. That affected the foreign policy of both countries. When Iraq occupied Kuwait in 1991, Iran publicly opposed Iraqi occupation and supported Kuwait sovereignty. After the war leaders of both the countries visited each other’s countries in order to make better relations and sustain mutual growth. Kuwait is a good ally of U.S.A in the Middle East and Iran and U.S.A do not maintain good relations due to various factors especially Iranian nuclear programs. So U.S.A factor affects the relationship of Iran and Kuwait. Several events have affected the relationship of both countries but now Iran and Kuwait maintain good diplomatic and economic ties.

Introduction

Foreign Policies of the countries are determined by various factors like domestic factors, international situation and regional conditions. Iran and Kuwaiti relations has also affected in the same manner. Foreign relations of Iran refer inter-governmental relationship between Iran and other countries. After the Iranian revolution of 1979, Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited Iran and congratulated Iranian leadership but, large number of Kuwait’s Shia population, is feared and Kuwait considers Iran as a big threat to its security. Kuwait provided billions of dollars assistance to Iraq in Iran-Iraq war, so foreign relations of Iran and Kuwait became more complicated and deteriorated. During the Presidency of Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami, the relationships improved with GCC countries in particular and Middle East countries in general.[1] Though several events and issues have negatively affected their relations, Iran and Kuwait maintain close diplomatic and economic ties.[2]

Diplomatic Relations
In the beginning Iran maintained a balanced relationship with Kuwait, but after some time Iran’s relationship deteriorated with Kuwait, because Kuwait supported Iraq in Iraq-Iraq war to counterweight Iran in the region.[3] Soon after Iran and Kuwait’s relationship improved when Iraq occupied Kuwait, Iran openly criticised Iraqi occupation and supported sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kuwait. Several visits have been made to boost Iranian and Kuwaiti relationship by leaders of both the countries as well as diplomats.

In February, 2006: Iranian president Mohammad Ahmadinejad visited Kuwait, opening a new chapter in relations between the both countries.

In April 16, 2010: In a meeting with the Kuwaiti emir’s special, Mohammad Abdullah Abu al-Hassan, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad expressed his country’s desire to expand relations with Kuwait: “Iran and Kuwait are two brother countries and have common interests.”[4]

In April 2, 2011: Kuwait expelled three Iranian diplomats accused of spying for Iran since 2003.[5]

April 10, 2011: Iran expelled three Kuwaiti diplomats in response to the Kuwait’s decision to throw out three Iranian diplomats accused of spying inside Kuwait.[6]

In May 18, 2011: Iranian foreign minister Ali Akbar Salehi met with his counterpart in Kuwait and announced: It was decided that the ambassadors of the two countries will return to their posts as soon as possible. The new Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait, Rouhollah Qahremani Chabok arrived in Kuwait.[7]

**Cultural Relations**

As cultural links and relations plays a pivotal role to formulate the foreign policies of the countries. In the past Iran did not maintain close relationship with Kuwait but in cultural aspect Iran has close with Kuwait. Because Kuwait has 30% Shia population and most of them migrated from Iran and are called Kuwaiti Iranian. Iran and Kuwait boost their cultural relationship through several visits paid by the both countries.

April 7, 2013 Iranian minister of cultural and Islamic guidance, Seyyed Mohammad Hoseini visited Kuwait and met the Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahamd Al- Jaber Al-Sabah and called for promotion of bilateral cultural relations. Dr. Hoseini expressed
his hope for early materialization of Kuwaiti Cultural week in Iran and asked for greater participation of Kuwaiti artists and scholars in cultural events taking place in Islamic Republic.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah while expressing his pleasure for presence of Iranian officials in Kuwait called President Ahmadinejad as his brother and said I have special respect for Iranian President. He called for promotion of cultural cooperation between the two countries and said I instruct our Minister of Information to give positive response to any invitation extended by Iran.[8]

**Economic Relations**

In the beginning Iran and Kuwait did not maintain close relations in economic field. But gradually developed close relationship in economic field. When Iraq occupied Kuwait, Iran publicly criticised Iraqi occupation and supported sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kuwait. It was the good symbol to strengthen economic relations in future. USA and United Nation had imposed economic sanctions on Iran. Iran searched for new trade partners in Middle East and ultimately Iran established economic relations with most of GCC countries in particularly and Middle East countries in general. Iran’s trade with Middle East partners accounted for 6% of its total trade with the world in 2000. By 2008 this figure had increased to nearly 13%. [9]

October 16, 2000: Iran and Kuwait trade committees meet to promote Iranian-Kuwaiti trade ties and adopt measures that improved bilateral trade ties between Iran and Kuwait. Trade committee had improved significant progress in a number of areas, Including customs and banking cooperation, visa regulations and trade exhibitions.[10]

September 27, 2006: The Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC) held talks with Kuwait to discuss jointly developing the disputed Arash offshore oil field.[11]

November 18, 2009: Kuwaiti PM Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah visited Iran and met Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Rahimi in Tehran. During the visit he said, "All the Kuwaiti doors will be open to imports of Iranian products and there will be a special port for the entry of Iranian products. In same the conference Iranian vice president said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran has opened its arms for the expansion of bilateral ties between the two friendly and fraternal neighbours.[12]
January, 2010. The head of Iran’s Gas Transportation Company Reza Almasi said that Kuwait has expressed interest in connecting its gas network to Iran’s cross-country gas network. Iran and Kuwait have also been working for establishing submarine pipeline to Kuwait’s border.[13]

February 2, 2011: Iranian Minister of Commerce Mehdi Qazanfari stressed the establishment of a joint trade council in the further expansion of trade ties between Iran and Kuwait. Qazanfari also called for the expansion of cooperation between Iranian and Kuwaiti in private sectors.[14]

Due to the several visits and meetings, economic relationship between Iran and Kuwait has improved tremendously. In 2008, Iran and Kuwait have 229 millions of dollars of trade as compared 5 millions of dollars of trade in 1995.[15]

**Iranian Nuclear issue and Kuwait**

Iranian nuclear issue is the most focused event for Middle East as well as international community. Kuwait is Iranian nearest neighbour. The world especially Western countries have keenly observed the Kuwait’s reaction on Iranian nuclear issue. Kuwait had adopted both methods in this issue. It supports Iran's nuclear rights use for peaceful means and urges Iran to Work with U.N. on Nuclear issue.

October 10, 2010: The Kuwaiti emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah said that all Middle Eastern nations, including Iran, are entitled to have a civilian nuclear program within the framework of International Atomic Energy Agency regulations at an Arab League summit in Libya.[16]

December 24, 2012: The Kuwaiti emir, Sheik Sabah al- Ahmad al-Sabah Urged Iran to Work With U.N. on Nuclear Plant safety in Bahrain at the annual meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council. He also mentioned about the importance of Iranian cooperation with the I.A.E.A., and ensures the safety of the region’s states and its people from any effect of radioactivity.[17]

February 14, 2013: Foreign Ministry Undersecretary of Kuwait Khalid Al- Jarallah said that Kuwait hopes that Iran can eliminate its concerns regarding the Islamic Republic’s nuclear program while attending the celebrations at the Iranian Embassy marking the Iranian Revolution Day.[18]

March 30, 2013: Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah reiterated his
Country’s support for Iran's civilian nuclear program while addressing the Arab League summit in Baghdad. He also demanded Iran to continue its constructive cooperation with international Atomic Energy Agency.[19]

Kuwait has publicly expressed support for Iran’s right to nuclear program for civilian use. Kuwait has also publicly opposed any U.S. military strike against Iran, calling instead for a peaceful resolution to the diplomatic dispute over Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Iran received positive reaction from Kuwait side in this regard.

Conclusion

Historically Iran- Kuwait did not maintain close relations as yet. After the Iranian revolution the leader of Kuwait congratulations and welcomed the revolution of Iran and established foreign relationship. But after some time relations became complicated and deteriorated because of Kuwaiti supports in Iran-Iraq war. After Gulf War of 1991, the foreign relations of Iran and Kuwait tremendously improved because Iran supported Kuwait sovereignty and criticised Iraqi occupation. After the Khomeini the leaders of Iran changed foreign policy tendency towards the Middle East countries and emphasised to improve relations with GCC countries particularly and Middle East countries in general. In recent years Iran has improved relations with Arab countries especially with Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia. So Iranian and Kuwaiti foreign relationship has been improving automatically. U.S.A and U.N imposed sanctions on Iran that is why Iran searched new business partners in Middle East as well as in the other world countries. The fear of isolation and collapse of economy of country motivated Iran to improve relations in the region at any cost. This economic factor also played an important role in improving foreign relations with Kuwait particularly. Ali Akbar Salehi had championed in improving relations with GCC countries. Iran and Kuwait have sought to expand bilateral ties through exchanging several high-ranking delegations. Recently Iranian and Kuwaiti representatives visited each other’s countries and improve relationship but that does not mean that it will remain the same in future.

Endnotes


2. By Will Fulton, Ariel Farrar-Wellman “Kuwait-Iran Foreign Relations” August 1, 2011 Available at www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/kuwait-iran-foreign-relations
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(6) **IRAN AND PAKISTAN**

**External factors in Iran-Pakistan Relations: An Assessment**

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The first decade of the 21st century brought about unpredictable changes in the world politics. This was significant particularly in the aftermath of political upheavals in the preceding decade that had changed the face of global affairs and diffused the cold war situation and also triggered the disintegration of the USSR, one of the super power. End of cold war was no guarantee of a peaceful and cohesive world order, rather several new developments arising out of numerous other factors made the international community worried about the violence unleashed by forces inimical to peace and stability in the world. The new challenges of terrorism could dare to penetrate the highest level of security cover by devastating the World Trade Centre in New York, US, was unimaginable a few years ago. This also brought down the myth that was prevalent about impregnable security apparatus protecting the citizens of world’s most powerful nation. Although, the attack took place on the US territory, but its roots were discovered strongly entrenched in the South and Central Asian region, particularly in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was a different matter that the US was partly to be blamed for the
situation in the region that was designed to suit its geo-strategic interest during the cold war era, without realizing its ramifications in the long run. That was precisely to fight the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979.

The international community supported the US-led war on terror in Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11 to dismantle the Al Qaeda’s terror infrastructure that was not only supported and promoted but also collaboratively by Taliban regime in Kabul. In fact, neighbouring Iran and Pakistan found themselves standing in a crucial juncture of history and had no option other than to support the ‘war on terror’ to dismantle the terror infrastructure for the peace and stability of the world in general and the region in particular.

**Iran-Pakistan Relations During Cold War period**

The bilateral relations between Iran and Pakistan assume importance from the geo-strategic point of view, linked to the region itself. Any solution to the imbroglio that is affecting the region not only requires the participation of countries surrounding the region, but also the active role of both Iran and Pakistan to have any lasting solution. Both the countries, along with Central Asian countries, Russia, China, India, US and Turkey have a major role to play in resolving the Afghan crisis that needs careful handling after the 2014.

The year 2013 has been historic for the two neighbouring countries in the South and West Asian region for several factors. Iran and Pakistan hugged the limelight for various reasons in the last five years. It is a coincidence that both the countries successfully completed general elections in the first half of 2013 to elect their respective governments. It was a matter of great satisfaction that moderate leader Hassan Rouhani was elected as the President of Iran and whereas PML(N) leader Nawaz Sharif as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. The transfer of power, in Tehran and Islamabad, and the formation of government under Rouhani and Sharif in their respective countries is expected to bring about a different approach to the challenges, both internal and external, being faced by Iranians and Pakistanis and also to strengthen their bilateral relations.

**Consolidation of Bilateral Ties**

The first phase of this period saw the consolidation of bilateral relations between Iran and Pakistan. Considering the volatility of the region and their geographical proximity as well as opposition to erstwhile superpower Soviet Union, devising common strategy was the best option to safeguard their own interest against Russia. Iran and Pakistan are located in one of the most important geographical locations having
significant strategic, security, economic and political aspects. Energy-rich Iran is a gateway to West Asia for countries in South and Southeast and Central Asia, similarly, Pakistan is the transit point for South and Southeast and Central Asia through land-route. Iran and Pakistan are not only close neighbours sharing border in an important location but they are also linked with each other by culture, language, religion, ethnicity and traditions since times immemorial. Both countries were part of super-power cold-war rivalry, being on the same side of the fence, since the end of World War-II. Tehran and Islamabad were part and parcel of US policy against communism during the cold war era. The bonhomie that was witnessed between the two neighbours in the aftermath of the creation of Pakistan, had made them close ally in dealing with several international issues together in the region.

The dynamics of international politics and challenges arising out of cold war equation coupled with regional political development in the region has influenced the policies of Iran and Pakistan in a similar manner. In the early years of their relationship, both countries had problems of consolidation compounded by security needs and both aligned themselves with the United States in the post-war era. It is incomprehensible for a student of international relations to compare Iran-US relations of Cold-War era with post-Cold War period. But, Pakistan’s relationship with US remains intact despite numerous crisis in the past.

Iran was the first state to recognize newly created nation in the region, Pakistan, after the partition of India. Both the neighbours soon developed a strong partnership, signing treaty of friendship in February 1950\(^1\). The treaty of friendship helped them strengthening their bilateral relations. In March 1950, Shah of Iran became the first head of state to visit the newly created state, Pakistan. The reciprocity of relations between Iran and Pakistan witnessed both supporting each other’s cause at international level. Iran was a natural ally and model for Pakistan for other reasons as well. Both had majority Muslim populations but remained secular, centralized, and Western-oriented in practice. Both countries granted the other most-favored nation (MFN) status for trade purposes; the shah offered Iranian oil and gas to Pakistan on generous terms, and the Iranian and Pakistani armies cooperated to suppress the rebel movement in Baluchistan\(^2\). The stronger bilateral relations between both Iran and Pakistan was put to test during Pakistan’s military conflict with India. In both 1965 and 1971 wars against India, Iran supported Pakistan diplomatically, militarily and financially.\(^3\)
Both countries became major pillar of support for the U.S. policy in the Middle East. Both were firm U.S. allies and members of the anti-Soviet Baghdad Pact, which was renamed as CENTO after the Iraqi revolution in 1958 when Iraq withdrew from the Baghdad Pact. This was at a time when the Cold War rivalry was behind each and every policy move of US and USSR.

In 1971, however, the geopolitical situation began to shift. The announcement by the British Home Secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home⁴, about the withdrawal of all permanent British forces from the Persian Gulf changed the equation dramatically. The departure of British military presence from the region prompted the United States to fill the vacuum, thereby making Saudi Arabia far more important in U.S. strategic calculus. This was further accentuated by Pakistan's defeat in its 1971 war with India resulting its dismemberment and the creation of a new nation, Bangladesh. Pakistan also sought closer ties with the Arab states in order to isolate India, and thus weakened its ties to Iran, even though Islamabad-Tehran relations remained cordial.

Strains in Bilateral Relations

Several international developments had already triggered new equations in the region, but, the most important domestic political changes in Iran in 1979 that altered some of the strong pillars of relationship between Tehran and Islamabad. The fall of Shah’s rule in 1979 in Iran was a major blow to Iran-Pakistan closer ties since 1950s. Pakistan was worried about Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's anti-American posture and the spread of his radical views across Iran’s eastern border into Pakistan.

In fact, the year 1979 brought about significant changes in world politics, besides Iranian Revolution, Soviet intervention in the neighbouring Afghanistan shifted the cold war confrontation into open conflict in the South and Central Asian region. Islamabad tried to contain the spillover of Iranian revolution by offering an olive branch to Tehran. Pakistan was among the first countries to recognize the new Islamic Republic and was among very few countries in the region that refrained from openly supporting Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war.

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution both took place in the second half of 1979. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan brought the Soviet Union closer to Pakistan's border, transforming the geostrategic environment further, all the more so given India's closer ties with Moscow. On the other hand, it also
enhanced Pakistan’s position significantly as a frontline state for the US and its allies as they were concerned about Soviet Union’s hidden agenda in the region and its implications around the globe. Although the Iranian revolution altered the cordial relations it shared with the US, but, ironically Tehran was in the same side with Islamabad and Washington, resisting Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Ayatollah Khomeini-led Islamic Revolution practically altered the nature of pro-American regime and impacted the politics of the Islamic world to this day. Only a year later, in 1980, Iran-Iraq war commenced and lasted until 1988, almost up to the time when Soviets started to withdraw from Afghanistan. This also could be another coincidence that Iran-Iraq war and Soviet withdrawal took place around same time.

Although Iran and Pakistan were on the same side of the divide against the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, but, they were supporting different resistance groups fighting the Soviet army.

Factors Shaping Iran-Pakistan Relations

It would be worthwhile to discuss the main factors that has influenced the relations between Iran and Pakistan. It is indeed pertinent to search for the reasons that have historically played a role in giving a new direction to their mutual relationship. The factors of convergence made both the countries close ally during 1950s and 1960s but divergence of views on different aspects of global affairs had put a strain on their relations afterwards. What are these factors that influence have shaped Iran-Pakistan relations?

Besides the domestic political compulsions, there are several external factors which cannot be ignored while discussing the issue. It would be worthwhile to mention three factors that played a role in the post-9/11 phase, in determining Tehran-Islamabad relations.

a) Pakistan’s Relations with US

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 altered Tehran’s relations with Washington. The most significant among all was the hostage crisis in 1979. On November 4, 1979, Iranian militants stormed the United States Embassy in Tehran and took approximately seventy Americans captive which lasted 444 days. The Islamic revolution of 1979 and the hostage crisis severely affected the relations between both the countries, at the same time Pakistan’s importance was acknowledged by US through its enhanced engagement in the wake of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. US increased its development and military
assistance to Islamabad as Pakistan became a frontline state in the fight against Soviet presence in Afghanistan. Large and undisclosed amount of money and arms were channelised to the Mujahideen, through Pakistan Military and its clandestine agencies, particularly ISI, to fight Russian Army in Afghanistan. At the same time the break-out of Iran-Iraq war during this period worsened the relations between Iran and US as Washington supported Iraq against Iran. Therefore, as a result of Pakistan’s close relations with US, Tehran-Islamabad relations deteriorated and was not the same as it was in 1950s and 1960s.

b) Hostility between US and Iran

The beginning of the hostility during this phase also marked the initiation of largest amount of US Aid to Pakistan. Both the close ally of previous decades prior to 1979 began to take divergent routes in promoting their respective political and strategic interest. Iran’s aggressive posture in the war against Iraq aggravated the situation further. The US’s discreet support to Iraq became more pronounced in 1987 when Kuwait asked the US to intervene in the wake of Iranian attack on its tankers. Besides the impact of Iran-Iraq was the continuing Afghan crisis also had a negative impact on Iran-Pakistan relations. Although Iran was against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, but it did not side with the same Mujahideen group which was being supported and financed by US and its allies, including Pakistan. Last but not the least, the nuclear issues which was escalated had a major effect on Iran’s relations with Pakistan.

c) Afghan factor

Although the Iran-Iraq war ended in 1988 but it had created a hiatus between Tehran and Islamabad because of the US factor in the war. This was not all, the Afghan crisis after the Soviet withdrawal kept the relations boiling because of Pakistan’s involvement in Afghan affairs, particularly the military and financial support it provided to the Taliban to capture Kabul in 1996. The downturn in their bilateral relations was further accentuated when Pakistan became one of the three countries to recognize the Taliban regime in Kabul. Pakistan’s patronizing Taliban regime became the most significant irritant in their mutual engagements in the recent past. In fact Pakistan suspected Tehran’s role in the sectarian clashes in the country besides disliking its help for the Northern Alliance. Therefore widening the misunderstanding between the two and putting the relationship under strain.
The Taliban capture of the Mazar-e-Sharif, massacred thousand of Hazara Shi’ites and murdered scores of Iranian diplomats, straining Iran’s bilateral ties with Pakistan, which was the sole promoter of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan as part of it’s policy of having ‘strategic depth’ to fight its eastern neighbor, India. The Iranian government put the blame squarely on Pakistan for the dastardly act in Afghanistan and openly accused Islamabad for providing military assistance to Taliban.

In the 1990s, relations between Tehran and Islamabad further nosedived as a result of the rise of anti-shi’ite terrorist activities in Pakistan and the assassination of Iran’s Counsel General, Sadeq Ganji, in Lahore in 1990.

It was a matter of utter surprise that democratically elected successive governments in Pakistan during 1990s allowed the situation to slip out of control by openly supporting and promoting Taliban elements thereby jeopardizing its relations with Iran, which was against the interest of both the countries. Rather, its Pakistan’s faulty policy which has to be blamed for the present state of affairs in the region. International community in general and United States in particular, cannot be absolved of its responsibility as it had turned a blind eye despite their knowledge of Pakistan’s support in training and arming rogue terror elements in the region.

Besides these factors, there are other issues which have influenced Iran-Pakistan relations. In fact it’s external variables that dominate the internal policy making process in both the countries. The nuclear issue is the prime example which is yet to be resolved. Apart from contentious nuclear weapons programme of Iran, the Syria crisis has major impact on its relations with Pakistan. Syria is a strong ally of Iran whereas US and Saudi Arabia are supporting the opposition against President Bashar al - Assad’s regime. This requires Pakistan to balance its act as it cannot be seen with Iran in supporting Syria which will infuriate US and affect its military and economic aid assistance to Pakistan.

Improvement in Bilateral Relations Since 2000

General Pervez Musharraf’s ascendency to power through military takeover in 1999 made an effort to repair the damage done by previous governments in Pakistan’s relations with Iran. He visited Tehran and promised to address the support which was being provided to terrorist activities in Pakistan; subsequently relations between the two countries improved. After the execution of Ganji’s assassin by the Pakistani government in February 2001, Iran gained a new level of confidence in Pakistan's determination to
curb anti-Shiite extremism in that country. Iran and Pakistan’s divergent position on Taliban was reflected throughout Taliban’s rule in Afghanistan. While Pakistan was patronizing Taliban in Kabul, Iran was committed to backing anti-Taliban forces therefore the relations between both the countries were held hostage to some extent due to the developments in Afghanistan. The 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US and subsequent ouster of Taliban rule from Afghanistan helped both the countries to initiate measures for mending of bilateral relations.

Immediately after the Taliban’s ouster from power, Iran's foreign minister, Kamal Kharrazi, paid a two-day visit to Islamabad and reached an understanding with his Pakistani hosts on the situation in Afghanistan. Both sides agreed to assist in the establishment of a broad-based multi-ethnic government in Afghanistan under the United Nations' auspices.

The 1990s which was marked by major upheavals in Iran-Pakistan relations as a result of divergent and often competitive policies over Afghanistan leading to a virtual cold war between two close neighbours. But, the changing situation in the region helped revive the cordial relations. The important turning point in Iran-Pakistan relations was the visit of Iranian President Mohammad Khatami to Pakistan in December 2002. President Khatami’s visit to Pakistan was the first by an Iranian President in 10 years since his predecessor Rafsanjani’s visit in 1992. Incidentally, Iran was the first country that President Pervez Musharraf paid a visit to after taking over as the Country’s Chief Executive.

The nineties indeed was the gloomy phase in Iran-Pakistan relations. The Iranians questioned the nature and thrust of closer Pakistan-US relations; likewise Pakistan watched deepening India-Iran ties with suspicion.

The historic visit of President Khatami to Pakistan had a positive effect on the bilateral relations and provided an impetus to enhanced bilateral engagements at the highest level. Pakistan Prime Minister, Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali paid a return visit to Iran in October 2003 during which both countries agreed to conclude series of agreements including a landmark preferential trade agreement. The high level engagements was carried forward by the visit of Dr. Mohammad Reza Aref, First Vice President of Iran to Pakistan in March 2004. Iran and Pakistan signed several agreements and Memoranda of Understanding to bolster economic and political cooperation between the two countries.
Regional issues influencing Iran-Pakistan Relations

Although Iran and Pakistan have put their bilateral relations back on track after the fall of Taliban regime in Pakistan, but, there are a few issues which have a bearing on their relations. The regional outlook of both are different from each other, while Iran shares a friendly relations with India, contrary to Pakistani perception of New Delhi as a threat to its security and stability. Iran expressed its willingness to mediate between India and Pakistan in easing out tensions that was prevailing between the south Asian neighbors during 2001 crisis. The proposed Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline still remains a non-starter, though there are external factors which are responsible for this ambitious project not taking off despite the region being energy-deficient.

Iran and Pakistan have had to share the spillover of the fallout of decades of political upheaval in Afghanistan, partly in the form of millions of Afghan refugees, many of whom have not returned to Afghanistan since the Taliban's downfall in 2001. Since then, Iran and Pakistan have tried to improve relations strained for a decade by policy differences over Afghanistan. Both sides have realized the importance of sustained peace and stability which is in the interests of the region as a whole.

As a result of their realization of contributing towards resolving the Afghan crisis, both Tehran and Islamabad supported the political process initiated in Afghanistan by the Bonn Agreement. Although it's a different matter altogether that the dubious role being played by Pakistan in Afghanistan is mainly responsible for the resurgence of Taliban since last couple of years. One does not need to have a better proof of Pakistani complicity in fostering the Taliban and al Qaeda elements in Afghanistan which has been proved time and again, the prime example of which was the killing of Osama bin Laden in Abottabad, Pakistan in May 2011.

Besides, there have been divergent perspectives with respect to the presence of foreign powers in the region. Although Islamabad grabbed the opportunity to be part of ‘war on terror’ to avoid any international repercussion in the wake of 9/11 due to its role in promoting terror elements in the region, but Iran was worried about the military cooperation between US and Pakistan.

Conclusion

After analysing different phases of Iran-Pakistan relations, one would get to know the initial bonhomie followed by ups and downs in their engagements. It was their initial
engagement which was mutually beneficial at a time when both were in search of trusted friends in 1950s and 1960s. Iran’s support to Pakistan in its hostility against India during that period proves their bonding which was beyond question. But, as the international situation began to change after 1971, so was the relations between Tehran and Islamabad. The Iranian Revolution and Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 accelerated the pace of their changed priorities as Iran was no more under the regime which had helped build a cordial bilateral relations. At the same time the new military regime in Pakistan was looking for legitimacy and international acceptance which came as a result of Soviet intervention turning Pakistan into frontline country against Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

The formation of new governments in both the countries can play a positive role in forging better understanding which can play a significant role in bringing peace and stability in the region. Iran needs to make Pakistan understand the danger and suicidal policy of supporting terror elements which has started hurting Pakistani interests at home. Moreover, Pakistan should not have any misgivings regarding Iran’s cordial relations with India as both have been traditional friends, therefore, a positive approach by Pakistan could be useful in reviving the ‘jinxed’ IPI pipeline which is in the interest of the three. The previous government in Iran led by Ahmedinejad complicated the nuclear issue by his aggressive approach, whereas it is expected that President Rouhani would be able to handle the issue in a prudent manner. Therefore, the region needs better understanding among the nations to resolve all outstanding issues and Iran-Pakistan are important members of this region.

The withdrawal of ISAF from Afghanistan will need the cooperation of the international community in general and Iran-Pakistan in particular, because of their geographical proximity to Afghanistan. Moreover, Iran-Pakistan could contribute tremendously in stabilizing the war-ravaged nation only if Pakistan realizes the folly of supporting elements inimical to peace and stability to the region. Pakistan and Iran has to devise a policy which is needed for the ethnic harmony in Afghanistan, provided that both of them think similarly.

Iran's and Pakistan's concerns and interests are interlinked in the new regional and international climate. New problems as well as new opportunities have been created for both countries, affecting their bilateral and multilateral relations, since the events of September 11, 2001. Both countries need to devote more energy to boost their economic
trade, enhance their security cooperation, and to identify practical ways to tackle the problems facing the region.

In any case, it’s still uncertain whether Pakistan will be willing to forge a common strategy with Iran on Afghanistan since Saudi Arabia and GCC factor along with its ISI’s would influence Pakistani response on Afghanistan. Therefore, the most important factor that is expected to have a bearing on future Iran-Pakistan relationship is situation in Afghanistan after the US troops withdrawal in Afghanistan.

End Notes

10. Ibid.
15. Ibid.

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Complaisant Pakistanis, Condescending Persians:
Orientalist Observations on Iran-Pakistan Relations

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Disclaimer: The opinions expressed herein neither imply nor suggest the orientation, views, current thinking or position of the university, school or affiliated regional and research study centres.

Only a fortnight after Soviet tanks arrived on Christmas Day in Kabul, the American columnist, sometime presidential speechwriter, and full-time realist, Bill Safire (1927-2009), took cudgels with what was touted as the Carter doctrine in The New York Times wherein he queried what if the Red Army, should it lose more men and material than tolerable during an occupation, were to press further south to ‘clean out the sanctuaries’ of Afghans inside Pakistan.¹ Zia-ul Haq, till his (still) unsolved disappearance in fire, ash, and mangoes, was careful to keep the ‘water in Afghanistan boil[ing] at the right temperature.’² His successors have heeded him when simmering both kettles, Afghan and Indian. And while that godless superpower did not violate Pakistan’s sovereignty, its god-fearing arch-rival was to do so a generation later at Abbotabad. In his touchingly titled, Pakistan: a hard country—favourable, unsurprisingly, with Pakistan’s pseudo-anglicised literati—Anatol Lieven states that the unravelling of the house that Jinnah built could occur by the direct footprint of US troops on Pakistani soil for it would split the barracks, and, a fortiori, Believers within, into pragmatic Pétainists and pious mutineers. Neither Providence nor Jefferson’s ‘manifest destiny’ heirs have done anything of the sort.
Among the confection of conspiracies purveyed about Zia’s elimination was one that both pilot and co-pilot of the ill-fated PAK1 transporter were Twelver Shi‘is who, charismatically charged as is their salvational wont, were intent on avenging the killing of Shi‘i leaders and followers in an increasingly salafised, Sunni state—an ostensible grievance foregrounded in a polarised Pakistan where the rule of law was enforced by an unlawful leadership. In reality it was a ‘mad mullah’ on Pakistan’s western front whose mesmerised minions sought to export their Islamic interpretation of renewal (tajdid) and reform (Islah) eastwards, and who were in no mean measure responsible for communal carnages now erupting in Karachi and elsewhere. They continue to date.

Further, in November 1979, it may be pointed out, fell the beginning of the Islamic new-year and (fifteenth) century. It also heralded the destruction of the British Council and USIS libraries as well as the American embassy in Islamabad. Pakistani mobsters, enraged Muslims to a man, had done so upon learning from Khomeini’s calumny broadcast that ‘it is not beyond guessing that this is the work of criminal American imperialism’ in reference to the troops who had raided, and therefore defiled, the Grand Mosque and its precincts (haram sharif) in Mecca.\(^3\) The raiders were Saudi forces and the raided Saudi messianists, the former backed up by Pakistan’s SSG commandos specially flown in at Riyadh’s request. The enraged who were bussed in from neighbouring Rawalpindi to do the torching were students, Pakistani and Iranian, belonging to the Jama‘at-e Islami and other outfits.\(^4\)

But Washington, clearly, is not the only one to have violated the sanctity of Pakistan in the early hours of May 2, 2011. A reticent report in The New York Times in 2010 declared how Iran’s intelligence minister, Heidar Moslehi, laconically announced that a Pakistan-based Iranian diplomat absconding for over two years was freed after Teheran ‘took the initiative’ in ‘complex intelligence operations’ to secure his release pursuant to Pakistan failing in the same.\(^5\) A year earlier, in October 2009, eleven Revolutionary Guards were arrested for illegally entering Pakistan. This came in the wake of the most audacious attack launched by Sunni-Baloch dissidents who go by Jundallah (‘soldiers of Allah’) which left dead the Pasdaran’s deputy-commander of ground forces plus six senior commanders, nine officers and important tribal chiefs, both
Sunni and Shi‘i. Teheran, publicly implicated Pakistan, alongside Israel and the United States, for this massacre. The Guards seriously mulled about urging Islamabad to permit them to enter and hunt down those perpetrators. Such cross-border violations, then, now and in the offing, cannot be ruled out. Teheran, albeit privately, held Islamabad responsible for the 1998 sacking of its Mazar-i Sharif consulate and slaying of eleven diplomats (VEVAK operatives in all probability) by the Taleban following which they departed to slaughter a large number of Hazara Shi‘is.

That Iran could make short shrift of Pakistani sovereignty, predicated on its low estimation of Pakistan and Pakistanis, politically and socio-culturally, is stale fare for those in the know. Teheran, admittedly, was the first state to recognise the newly-created dominion in August 1947. (It may be pointed out here that Afghanistan, unlike Iran, opposed the inclusion of Pakistan in the newly-established United Nations.) An Iran-Pakistan Friendship Treaty was signed in February 1950 during the Shah’s official state visit to its eastern and western wings. Pakistan had no national anthem three years into its existence. A tune was swiftly adopted given the impending arrival of the Pahlavis. No lyrics, however, were available for a further two years until the selection committee approved those penned by the famed muhajir poet, Hafeez Jullundhari. Although formally recognised as an Urdu paean, the composition is readily intelligible to a Persian speaker for only one of its fifteen lines is, strictly, in Urdu while the remaining lyrics are but Persian, a satisfactory compromise given that Bengali and Urdu agitators in both wings demanded the song to be in their respective language. A national anthem was only officially adopted after the Shah’s visit, four years later, in 1954. And a national carrier, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), was formed a year later, which will be touched upon below.

From the outset, immense store was set by the fact that both Muslim neighbours shared historical, geographic, mercantile, spiritual and literary linkages. Pakistan was more than enthusiastic to be considered the core region of what is the ancient and medieval Indo-Iranian oecumene. It is a contention, admittedly, not unjustified. General surveys in publications make this plain, whether scholarly or ‘popular’-official, some of which were authored by Pakistani intellectuals, patriots still heady in the first flush of
having forged the then largest Muslim polity in the world. It was a given that they—muhajirs who had migrated from India to constitute the cerebral cadre of this new Muslim Zion—were keen to distance themselves from their inexorable and unavoidable commonalities with the Indian (read Hindu) peninsula and now contrive ties with their religious brethren near abroad. This precipitous gaze westward has spawned cock-eyed Pakistanis whose blind-spots dilated with the injection of Pakistan Studies in the national curriculum after 1973, the prescription of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto for a dejected citizenry of a dismembered society.

Much water had flowed under the bridge by then: Imperial Iran was politic and sailed a steady course in its relations with Pakistan and its Indian foe. The Iranians, actually, were quietly proud of the fact that they had balanced and cordial relations. In a democratic, non-aligned India, the moral voice of the Afro-Asian world, the Shah sought an effective counterbalance against the radical, anti-royalist rhetoric of Nasser and his Arab acolytes. But Teheran made clear its stance on Kashmir by culturally couching its prejudice as: ‘Ninety per cent of the people of Kashmir are Muslims and have ties of common culture, tradition and religion with Iran [which] cannot remain indifferent to their lot.’ (Press TV, as an aside, enjoys wide-spread viewership in the Vale or Indian-administered Kashmir, whose indignant residents certainly warm to the outbursts of an audacious Ahmadinejad disparaging the Holocaust or Muslim munafiqs (‘hypocrites’) devoid of credibility and credo (iman), a pervasive notion after the 1979 revolution, especially among Pakistanis, both indigenes and working-class expatriates in the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms, who glowingly extol the austere ayatollah or modest mayor for their principled politics compared to the venality and cupidity of their Arab and Pakistani suzerains.

Iran supported Pakistan in its 1965 and 1971 wars against India. The Shah favoured Pakistan, materially and psychologically, in its 1965 misadventure. Deeds, not words, need not always matter for the latter, when bluntly put, at least convey transparency: Sunni, Hanafi Turkey refused to despatch ‘fellow brother’ troops to assist Pakistan in September 1965 for its military spokesman declared that, ‘we are keeping them for Cyprus.’ A year earlier, in July 1964, Pakistan had joined Turkey and Iran to
form the Regional Co-operation for Development (R.C.D.). Putatively to combat the ‘Red menace’, all three, non-Arab, Muslim states located along the southern tier of the USSR assembled on the platform of shared religio-cultural values only to be distracted and dispersed by domestic exigencies or external expediencies. And the harsh realisation must have dawned by now on others forming alliances solely calculated on the confessional coefficient whose multiplier effect has yielded only embarrassing dividends, be it the Arab League, Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) or the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC).

It would be cynical to merely point out R.C.D.’s achievements such as bartering Pakistani bananas for Iranian buses; visa-free travel for short stays; reduction in surface postal rates to local rates; and travelling exhibitions. A genuine achievement was the construction, with West German assistance, of an aluminium smelting plant in Arak, and its joint ownership by both governments plus an American corporation. Moreover, a shaken Shah who had just watched his neighbour descend into civil war in 1971 was determined, as was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, to prevent Balochistan from ‘doing a Bengal’. Bhutto, bolstered after his 1973 state visit to Tehran, launched an all-out assault on the provincial leadership, one which lasted until 1978 and in which Iran provided funding and hardware appreciably.

Road, rail, and sea links among all R.C.D. states were definitely expanded and enhanced. Part of the proposed Karachi-Teheran-Ankara ‘Asian Highway’ was completed extensively but not entirely. A vestige of this era of co-operation is the N-25 artery between Karachi and Quetta which is still remembered as the RCD highway. An air agreement to form a common R.C.D. airline never took off. By now, PIA was a success story, even by public sector standards, and, as London’s Foreign Office noted, it was loathe to merge with Iran Air or THY, both of whom had limited international networks and prestige than their Pakistani counterpart. (These were halcyon years as Indians and Pakistanis now ruefully recall PIA’s stewardship under Air Marshal Nur Khan and Air India’s under J.R.D. Tata.)

Pakistani aviation’s superiority was no match for Persian pride in their ‘Great Civilisation’ (tamaddon-e bozorg). A point broached by irritated Iranians towards those
opposed to their nuclear programme is that it certainly behoves the status of an ancient nation with an unbroken historical continuity stretching over three millennia and one which has never invaded any of its neighbours for well-nigh half a millennium. These historical verities are then followed up by elaborating on a ‘ramshackle Pakistan’ which is, ‘corrupt, unstable, historically pro-American and basically artificial nation-state’ whose atomic arsenal goes unchallenged. These are captious but compelling conclusions.

Turning to correctives, it merits rectifying here that the much-maligne ‘Kalashnikov culture’ berated by Pakistanis was one abetted and funded by not just Americans exploiting Pakistan as a cold-war proxy. For it was another sponsor closer home who has been responsible since 1979 for the spilling of blood and fomenting bad blood between Muslim sectarians. As mentioned earlier, it was Khomeini’s Iran which sought to export its theocratic radicalism as well as become the self-styled representative of Pakistan’s Shi’s in the wake of Zia ul-Haq’s avowedly Sunni Islamisation moves. Zia’s encouragement to Sunni hardliners, by permitting the Arab funding of militias and madrasas, was a direct response to initial Iranian instigation. The routine kidnapping and murdering of Iranian diplomats, especially during the 1990s, by Sunni militants with tacit ISI support, has shifted from urban centres to Balochistan. There the scenario is further worsened with persecuted Hazara Shi’s ensconced among brooding Sunnis nursing secessionist tendencies across their linguistic homeland which straddles both republics to form the largest province in each of them.

Iranian and Pakistani religious minorities, since 1979, in both heterogeneous societies, have seen a sharp deterioration in their security and status as a crude and narrow exclusivism came to characterise the identities and agendas of both Islamic republics. In so doing, non-Muslims in both states, historically long-standing communities whose contribution to public life has been completely out of proportion to their numerical strength, have chosen to emigrate or exist under immense duress. Conversion, a time-honoured option across Muslim lands, is perennially on the cards to bypass the bane of fearful or impoverished living. Bahaism and Ahmadism, both universal, proselytising faiths deemed heresies by Muslims in the main, have borne the
brunt for nearly a century and a half. Attempts to decimate them have, thankfully, not succeeded. Pakistan, however, is not averse to the presence of Bahais for they openly maintain communal and worship centres. Covertly, however, is how Jews reside in Pakistan, unlike Iran, where they pass off as Christians or Parsees.\(^2\) In Iran they are officially recognised and conduct their affairs overtly if precariously. Pakistan indeed is unique for even in Arab states Jews do not, indeed need not, seek recourse to dissimulation for survival. The predicament of Pakistani Hindus is marginally better than that of their Jewish compatriots. Christians and Sikhs in both countries manage tenuously if tactfully. Zoroastrians, a penurious remnant in the land of their origin, remain a fast-dwindling albeit flourishing minority as Pakistan’s (but also India’s) Parsees.\(^2\) But just as comfortably placed are Pakistani Isma‘ilis who face numerous restrictions in a Twelver Shi‘i Iran. All Pakistani Shi‘is, whether Twelvers or those of other denominations, are able to offer worship across the country as well as in Islamabad—modern Teheran, the capital of an Islamic republic and former OIC summit venue, lacks a Sunni mosque for some 10% of its national populace. Muslim diplomats, predominantly Sunnis, it is reported, gather at the Pakistan embassy’s school for offering weekly Friday prayers.\(^2\)

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10. Several edited works, yearbooks or popular works afford a flavour of this outlook for which see R. E. M. Wheeler, *Five Thousand Years of Pakistan: an*
Archaeological Outline (London, 1950); Pakistan Today and Tomorrow (Karachi, 1951); Iran: neighbour, brother, friend… (Karachi, 195[?]); Crescent and Green: a miscellany of writings on Pakistan (London, 1955); the sumptuous album produced by the official Pakistani panel commemorating the 2,500th anniversary celebrations of Cyrus the Great at Persepolis in October, 1971 which was compiled by Ahmad Nabi Khan, Iran and Pakistan: the story of a cultural relationship through the ages (Karachi, 1971); B. A. Dar, ed., Iran Pakistan: a common culture (Islamabad, 1977); S. Minhaj ul Hassan and S. Abdolhossain Raeisossadat, eds., Pakistan-Iran relations in historic perspective (Peshawar, 2004).


24. As pointed out in the lecture delivered by Houchang Chehabi, ‘The Legal Aspects of Religious Diversity in Iran,’ Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS, London, May 15, 2013. Online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=raPWh9XcPr8&list=PL1z_PGhPjwcrac3fk3gL59gIVGFTOv75e&index=1

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Iran and Balochistan: Human Rights and International Implications

Dr. Richard L. Benkin

[Dr. Richard Benkin is fighting on several fronts to stop the ethnic cleansing of Hindus in Bangladesh. He travels to remote villages and large cities in South Asia, ersatz refugee camps and porous borders to gather evidence, comfort victims, and confront governments and jihadis. His recent confrontations with Bangladesh’s US Ambassador in Washington and its Home Minister in Dhaka made it back to several members of the US Congress and Senate who are working with him on multiple initiatives.

Some of his previous human rights accomplishments include freeing an anti-jihadi Muslim journalist from torture and imprisonment, forcing Bangladesh’s RAB to release an abductee unharmed, and halting an anti-Israel conference at an official Australian statehouse. In 2005, the US Congress honored him for his human rights work.

Benkin holds a doctorate in Sociology from the University of Pennsylvania and has published and addressed audiences worldwide. His book, A Quiet Case of Ethnic Cleansing: the Murder of Bangladesh’s Hindus is available at http://www.interfaithstrength.com/TEMP.html.]

On 15 February 2007, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) issued the following brief press statement:

The members of the Security Council condemned the terrorist attack on a bus in the south-eastern city of Zahedan in Iran, carried out on 14 February 2007, which killed at least 18 people and wounded many more. The members of the Security Council reiterated that no cause can justify the use of terrorist violence. They underlined the need to bring to justice the perpetrators, organizers and sponsors of this terrorist attack, as with all terrorist attacks. The members of the Security Council extended their sincere condolences to the families of the victims and to the Iranian people.¹

Those victims and the target of the attack were all members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and it is unusual to say the least for the Security Council to say anything positive about the IRGC. The Iranian government nevertheless accused the United States of being behind that blast and others² in the capital of Sistan and Baluchestan Province; and while no savvy international observer would dismiss the possibility of US involvement in any efforts to destabilize the regime in Tehran, it would be missing the point to focus on that. The events in Zahedan and others like it had little to do with US foreign policy aims. The attack’s significance is that it happened in a province dominated by a distinct ethnic group that claims the area as its ancestral homeland. The Baloch,³ in fact, make up about two percent of the entire population in Iran, and with other non-Persian minorities comprise about 35-40 percent of the country. Any US involvement would merely underscore the international implications of the Baloch independence struggle in Iran.⁴

So, we begin with some undisputed facts: Non-Persians make up a sizeable minority of the Iranian population; one of those groups, the Baloch, is an identifiable people with autonomy or
independence aspirations; and de-stabilization efforts in the Islamic Republic of Iran are consistent with foreign policy aims of the United States and other powers.

Who are the Baloch?

The historical nation of Balochistan occupies a large swath of land that covers parts of Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. Accurate population figures for the Baloch are difficult to verify because of their dispersion outside of historical Balochistan, intermarriage, and general census issues in these areas. Thus the worldwide Baloch population is variously estimated between 10 and 15 million: about 8.8 million in Pakistan, 1.5 million in Iran, 300,000 in Afghanistan, and the rest outside Balochistan and its immediate environs. As an independent country Balochistan would rank around 75th in population (about the size of Portugal) and 45th in area (about the size of Ukraine). So, we are not dealing with an obscure or insignificant group.

According to Kokaislova, Baloch were first identified as the people in this area in the tenth century. Boyajian, however, suggests they are even older and quotes seventh century writings that refer to baloc, which he believes could be a variation of Baloch. The Baloch themselves trace their origins even further back to Herodotus and other ancient historians who speak of “Maka” in reference to roughly the same territory as Balochistan. They reference it as an important conduit for trade and communication between the ancient Middle East, including the Persian Empire of Darius I, and ancient India. There are also ancient maps that show Alexander the Great and his troops taking a route through an area identified as Gedrosia with borders that approximate Balochistan’s.

In the centuries that followed, the term Baloch came into common parlance and Balochistan was subject to the Khwarazm Empire, Genghis Khan and the Mongols, and later Tamerlane. Then in the 15th century, Mir Chakar united Baloch tribes into an independent empire that stretched over the entire area that today defines Balochistan. After his death, however, the state was torn asunder by civil war and for the next century or so, the Baloch are referred to as brigands rather than a national entity.

Another strong national figure, Mir Nasir Khan, emerged in the 17th century and subjugated the numerous local rulers into a unified Baloch state; and by the time Europeans arrived in the area, they recognized the strategic importance of the Kalat Khanate, as it was then known and still is to a certain extent. In 1839, the British signed an agreement with the Khanate guaranteeing Balochistan’s sovereignty in exchange for safe passage all the way to Afghanistan. When later in the century the British came to believe that Balochistan lost that strategic importance, they reneged on the 1839 agreement and along with Persia and Afghanistan, partitioned the country into Western (Persian) and Eastern (British) Balochistan. The two halves of the nation remain divided to this day with Eastern Balochistan now part of Pakistan.

The tri-national partition of Balochistan for the partitioners’ strategic and imperialist interests had precedent. Russia, Prussia, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire similarly swallowed up Poland a century earlier. Fortunately for the Poles, the dividing powers lost the First World War, and
the victors restored Poland’s sovereignty. No such luck for the Baloch. Their experience was
closer to that of Bengal, which the British split in two a few decades later; and although East and
West Bengal were briefly re-united, they also remain separated today: the former is the nation
of Bangladesh; the latter an Indian state.

The Baloch thought they espied independence when the British departed the region in 1948.
Eastern Balochistan had retained some autonomy under the British, who promised an
independent Balochistan with a shared currency and foreign and defense policy with the new
Muslim state of Pakistan. Six months after the British left, however, in an event that remains
seared into the Baloch identity, the Pakistani invaded and forcibly annexed Eastern Balochistan.
Since then some 17,000 people are believed to have been killed over six decades of Baloch
opposition to Pakistani and Iranian rule.8

Baloch Independence Movement in Iran and International Implications

The Baloch have a long list of grievances against the Tehran regime, including the fact that
between 2004 and 2009, 55 percent of Iran’s hanging victims came from two percent of the
population: Baloch.9 A Baloch web site, “De Unknown Baloch,” lists the following actions by the
Iranian government to deliberately suppress Baloch identity: forbidding the Balochi language in
public places, including schools; demographic manipulation to make Baloch a minority in
Balochistan; enforcing economic deprivation and lack of job opportunities; no Baloch
representation in Tehran; stirring up enmity among Baloch tribes; repression of women in law
even more severe than it is for Shiite women or Baloch males; human rights abuses; and forced
assimilation.10

While the greatest part of Balochistan is situated inside modern-day Pakistan, and historically
the Baloch freedom movement has been more prominent there, Western Balochistan has seen
several terrorist attacks since 2000 that can be tied to Baloch desires for independence. Though
largely episodic rather than part of an organized revolt, they have targeted symbols of the
regime in Tehran; such as the 2007 attack noted above, a June 2005 abduction of Iranian
military and intelligence personnel along the Iranian-Pakistani border, and clashes with the IRGC
and provincial police forces in Iranian Balochistan in December 2008. Captured Baloch have
been hanged, tortured, and subject to punishment including amputations. On January 3, 2008,
Iranian forces fired on a vehicle delivering drinking water to a wedding ceremony on a busy
street in Zahedan.11

Media and others often associate Baloch independence efforts with the radical Sunni group,
Jondallah, or “Soldiers of God,” which the United States and Iran—rarely in agreement—have
designated a terrorist group. The equation of Jondallah with Baloch independence efforts is
problematic for many within the Baloch independence movement. The 35th (and current) Kalat
Khan, Suleman Daud, told the BBC in a 2009 interview that “the only people who are secular in
that region are the Baloch, and if you [the UK Government] want to lose your last ally on the
ground... that is your choice.”12 He has made that point several times since, as well, and others in
the Baloch independence movement also emphasize the secular nature of their struggle. They recognize that some Baloch, especially many youths, identify with Jondallah because of its bold operations against a regime that openly represses their nationality; yet insist that despite Jondallah’s high profile actions, “not all those struggling for Baluch rights in Iranian Baluchistan are religion motivated.”

It is both inaccurate and instructive to equate Jondallah and the Baloch independence movement. **Inaccurate:** The goals of the Baloch independence movement are nationalistic: the establishment of an independent Balochistan. Jondallah’s has repeatedly denied having any nationalistic goals and rather is pan-nationalistic: to oppose Iran’s Shiite theocracy and promote Sunni rights, which applies to several ethnic groups inside and outside of Balochistan. Its significance is tied to the Sunni-Shia divide; Baloch nationalists are equally opposed to Shiite Iran’s and Sunni Pakistan’s occupation of their country without distinction. **Instructive:** On the other hand, it makes tactical sense for the opponents of Baloch independence sitting in Tehran to identify the movement with radical Islam. It could be one reason why the British have not granted the Khan of Kalat the asylum he seeks. It also could be why the United States has been hesitant in its support for this potentially destabilizing effort in Iran—perhaps recalling its support for al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden in their 1980s fight against the Soviets. If there is any tie between Jondallah’s radical Islam and Baloch independence efforts, however, it is a time-limited marriage of convenience. Baloch analyst Abdol Sattar Doshoki told Radio Free Europe that Jondallah’s leader was a “young Sunni religious devotee” who found support among some young Baloch after he had a falling out with the Iranian government. Doshoki notes that the Baloch’s Sunni faith is one reason for their discrimination in Shiite Iran, but ethnicity is at least as powerful. Anti-Baloch laws and forced assimilation pre-date the Islamist takeover in Iran, and “this friction and animosity between the regime and the people always existed.”

Iran’s role as an expansionist Shiite power intensifies its conflict with the Baloch, makes the continued existence of a vibrant Balochi culture an irritant to the overall aims of the Ayatollahs, and places the Baloch at the crossroads of a volatile international conflict. “Baluch are Sunni Muslims though but more because of rivalry against Shi’ism in Iran,” one Baloch told me. “After the Khomeini revolution, Western countries and Saudi Arabia aided the Baluch living in Iran to speed up the freedom fight. Baluch in Iran took this as the best opportunity to speed up their fight against Iranians, they needed money to buy weapons. Well the fight is still going on but for some reasons U.S.A. and other Western powers are not yet ready to take bold steps. This in turn is alienating the Baluch in Iran. India is the top most supporter of Baluch movement in Pakistan but [they provide] only moral support, but they don’t support the Iranian Baluch for their own vital interests with Iran.”

Driving this concern, secular Baloch recognize that without support from democratic powers, increasing numbers of young Baloch will see radical Islamic groups as their best chance to counter the unrelenting oppression from Pakistan and Iran and restore Baloch independence.
In addition to regional powers Iran, Pakistan, and India, all of which are involved in significant international conflicts, a Baloch rebellion would affect outside powerhouses including the United States, United Kingdom, Israel, and Saudi Arabia all of whom have foreign policy interests that would be advanced by Iran’s destabilization. China, which is developing a major port in Eastern Balochistan, could be drawn in as well. During a break at a May 2013 conference in Oslo, the Kalat Khan spoke about the Baloch and Israel, saying, “The world has interests – yours is that Iran shouldn’t be nuclear, and also that Pakistan be weak. I have my interests – independence.” An aide to the Khan added, “If Azeris, Kurds and Baloch revolt against Iran, the country is finished. We believe Baloch, Kurds, Azeris and Jews are natural allies... Baloch independence will not just weaken, but break, both Iran and Pakistan,” he says. “You Jews are just not even 15 million, and only half live in Israel, but every time the Israelis do anything the whole Arab world screams but does nothing.”

The Kurds long ago made contact with Israel and although their situation is more complex due to their independence movements in and opposed by four different countries (Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey); they have at times been supported by outside powers. Iranian Azeris are in the main more comfortable with the Iranian regime than other minorities, but they do have grievances, and their territory in Northwest Iran borders the independent Azeri nation of Azerbaijan. Can a minority alliance, including the Baloch, be Iran’s Achilles Heel?

**Conclusion**

There are many ways that the United States and others can capitalize on the independence aspirations of Baloch and other minorities in Iran to remove one of its major foreign policy irritants. A 2007 British article quotes a former US State Department official agreeing that the 2007 Zahedan “attacks inside Iran fall in line with US efforts to supply and train Iran's ethnic minorities to destabilise the Iranian regime.”

A report prepared for the US Congressional Research Service noted:

> Although ethnic rioting in Iran has not been uncommon in the past, generally incidents of ethnic unrest seem to have risen steadily since President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad took office in 2005. Analysts argue that occasionally individuals and groups have briefly taken up arms, only to calm down again for years or decades. But rarely have so many snapped back at the government so furiously over so short a time... For these rash and abrupt outbursts, minority groups blame Ahmedinejad’s “Shia Persian chauvinism” as a primary provocation, along with the government’s abiding economic neglect.

The report also notes that the “porous border” between Iran and Pakistan and “cross-border cultural or tribal affinities” among the Baloch on both sides encourage Baloch to ignore national laws. It adds that despite its few resources, Balochistan “remains an important region militarily because of its border with Pakistan.” Numerous articles and analyses elsewhere also report the importance of the region, especially as tensions between Iran and Pakistan grow.
Iranian reformers, opposed to the mullahs’ rule tend to support policies that recognize these different cultures and religions and end their discrimination. In the 2009 election, Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karrubi espoused the rights of religious minorities and vowed, if elected, to ensure them as guaranteed in Iran's constitution. Their defeat and arrest, as well as the post election repression of civil activists, seemed to close the door to that option. Whether or not reformers—with the right amount of outside help—will be able to remobilize ethnic minorities and human rights activists remains to be seen.19

The United States and its allies in the war against Islamic radicals, including radical Islamist states like Iran, seem to suffer most when their adversaries set the war’s agenda. This is what happened with the 9/11 attacks, which set in motion a number of US actions from airline security to the war in Afghanistan. A group of terrorists were stopped at London’s Heathrow trying to smuggle liquid explosives on an airplane, and soon Americans were restricted in the liquids they could carry on airlines. Another tried to blow up a plane with a “shoe bomb,” and passengers have been forced to take off their shoes at security checkpoints ever since. On the other hand, the war in Iraq—however one feels about it—took many Islamists by surprise and forced them to move assets to that theater and degrade others.

Insurrections by ethnic minorities in Iran would put the Islamic state on the defensive perhaps forcing it to abandon its expansionist plans in the Middle East. The Baloch in particular, could open a new front for the Iranians to the east, far away from where it wants to concentrate its offensive and defensive military resources. They could seize the momentum in this ongoing war and force the Iranians to abandon their current agenda.

2. After a 2009 attack, for instance, IRGC Commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, claimed that Iran's security services documents indicating that Abdolmalek Rigi, whose organization claimed responsibility for it was “in direct contact” with U.S., British, and Pakistani intelligence services. Aryan, Hossein, “Iran Offers Short-Term Solutions To Long-Term Problems Of Baluch Minority,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, October 22, 2009.
3. To standardize, the people will be identified as “Baloch” or “Balochi” and their homeland as “Balochistan” unless spelled otherwise in a direct quotation.
13. This quote and much of the other information in this article comes from direct statements by individuals inside the Baloch struggle for independence.
15. Personal communication from member of Baluch independence movement.

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Introduction

As troop withdrawal process and insurgent attacks continue side by side with in Afghanistan, there is growing international concern about the how to tackle the ever worsening situation. Clearly the optimism and the enthusiasm that greeted Afghanistan a few years back, are vanishing fast. Political, security, and humanitarian developments at the intersection of the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia are interrelated to such an extent that one issue or country cannot be adequately addressed without looking at every other. Required attention has hardly been paid to the negative spill over effects of the Afghan conflict on neighbouring states, with the notable exception of Pakistan, and to their role in Afghanistan. Another immediate neighbour of Afghanistan, Iran has also been tremendously affected by the instability across its eastern border. The burden placed on Iran as a result of worsening security situation within Afghanistan, in many ways makes its interest in the country more legitimate than many other western countries.
This paper attempts to offer a critical examination of Iran’s influence in Afghanistan and in the process makes two arguments: Firstly, that Iran’s top priority is its own regime’s survival and its regional policies are directed by its national security concerns, Secondly, Iran’s predominant interest is in stabilizing Afghanistan, but as long as Afghanistan remains unstable and unsafe, Iran is likely to play a double game and engage with its regional neighbours based on its equation with US. Beginning with a brief historical background, the paper would focus on the initial period of post-2001 phase and outline Iran’s reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, which gave a brief opening in US-Iran interests. But the past decade, after being included in President Bush’s formulation—“axis of evils”, Iran’s thinking and now fears about America’s engagement in the region has heightened. Perhaps, it is still worth considering the issues where US, Iranian and Afghan interests converge. Conversely, continued or increased tension over the nuclear issue could adversely affect Iran’s willingness to engage on Afghanistan or other regional topics, even when it could entail sacrificing it’s short-term national interest.

Iran and Afghanistan-Historical and Cultural Perspective

Iran and Afghanistan share extensive historical and cultural linkages. What today is known as Afghanistan was once a part of Persia. Iran historically considered western Afghanistan, including Herat, which is currently the second-largest city in Afghanistan, to be an integral part of its territory. Iran was forced to relinquish a direct claim to Herat after its defeat by British forces in the Anglo-Persian War (1856–1857). Many Iranians continue to view western Afghanistan as part of Iran’s natural sphere of cultural, religious, and political influence. Persian cultural traditions are significant part of Afghan existence, for example Norouz/Nowroz, the Persian New Year is celebrated throughout Afghanistan. Iran’s official language Farsi is widely spoken in Afghanistan. There Darbari-Farsi or Dari is spoken by majority of the population especially in Northern, Western and Central Afghanistan by Tajiks and Hazaras. Religion also links Iran with many of its Afghan neighbours. The Hazaras, who make up 10–20 percent of Afghanistan’s population, are predominantly Shi’a and have had close ties with the Iranian religious establishment. Around 90 percent of Iranians observe Shi’a Islam, most Afghans, including Tajiks and Pashtuns, are Sunni Muslims. These religious differences were a major source of bilateral tensions during the Taliban’s reign. The Taliban’s religious and ideological viewpoint has been heavily influenced by Saudi Wahhabism, which maintains that Shi’a Muslims are apostates and therefore not true Muslims. This has led the Taliban, and much of
Afghan society, to discriminate against the Hazaras. In the post-Islamic Revolution era, relations between the two states have been coloured by Iran’s involvement in Soviet-Afghan war, opposition for Taliban rule and interference in Afghan domestic affairs. Despite close linkages, Afghanistan’s relations with Iran have fluctuated over the years, with periodic disputes over the water rights of Helmand river as main issue of contention. Iran’s concern for the Shi’a Hazara minority, its hopes of repatriation of Afghan refugees, concerns pertaining to drug trafficking - among other issues have shaped its policies towards Afghanistan.

After the 1979 revolution, Iranian policy on Afghanistan went through four phases. In the first phase, which coincided with the 1979-1989 Soviet occupation, Iran called for a Soviet withdrawal and aided Afghan Shiites. Iran opposed Soviet intervention and provided limited financial assistance and military assistance to the rebels who pledged loyalty to the Iranian vision of Islamic Revolution. Iran provided refuge to about 2 million Afghans at that time, though in the recent years. It has adopted a stricter refugee policy. In the second phase, after the Soviet Army withdrew, Iran helped the non-Pushtun ethnic groups form a united front. Some moderate Sunnis including Syed Ahmed Gilani, Burhanuddin Rabbani and Mujadadi established close linkages with Iran during this period. During the Afghan civil war, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia supported different warlords. With the emergence of Central Asian Republics in 1991, Iran was worried about the prospect of increased US interest in the region. Taliban was seen with deep suspicion from that context. Iran believed that Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and US were cooperating in consolidating Taliban, which was detrimental to Iran’s interest. In the third phase, when the Taliban seized power in 1996, Iran refused to recognize the government and instead provided military support to the Northern Alliance opposition. In the fourth and current phase, as a response to 9/11 attacks when US decided to attack Afghanistan- Iran gave its verbal support.

Post 2001: the ‘U’ Turn in the Tripartite Dynamics

In 2001 the Taliban and its mentor al Qaeda, were forcefully removed from power after the United States provided air power and intelligence for the Northern Alliance, Iran’s ally. Iranian military advisors rubbed shoulders with U.S. military personnel in the Northern Alliance areas. Tehran even said it would give sanctuary for distressed U.S. military personnel inside its territory. It also allowed the United States to transport humanitarian goods to Afghanistan through Iranian land. Iran reportedly suggested the best targets for U.S. bombers.
Iran also participated in the U.S.-sponsored Bonn Conference in December 2001. U.S. and Iranian envoys worked together at the conference—the most fruitful encounter between the two since the 1979 revolution. Both wanted Afghanistan free of the Taliban and al Qaeda. Iran favoured the return of President Rabbani, but it agreed to support U.S.-backed Hamid Karzai. Iran’s influence was essential for establishment of Karzai Government, as it could put political pressure on non-Pashtun Northern Alliance leaders during negotiations in BONN, Germany to agree on the compromise. The tactical cooperation between the United States and Iran continued, even as they were competing for greater influence in a new Afghanistan. Iranian cooperation with the United States ended in 2002, after President George Bush cited Iran as a member of the “axis of evil.”

Iran gave active financial and military support to Ismael Khan, who initially resumed his role as a Governor of Herat- one of the most prosperous western provinces. Iran’s influence caused concerns for the US and Khan’s independence caused friction with the government in Kabul, leading to his dismissal in 2004. Karzai government however has attempted to maintain cordial relations with both US and Iran. Iran has engaged in reconstruction of Afghanistan, continued supporting its traditional allies and pressed for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the country.

**Iran’s Development Assistance to Afghanistan**

Iran has also played an active role in Afghanistan’s reconstruction since 2001. Iran made the highest pledges in terms of the per capita income of donor countries, it is also the most effective donor in Afghanistan, delivering 93 per cent of the aid promised. At the Tokyo conference in 2002 Iran pledged $560 million for reconstruction, in 2006 in London another $100 million, and in June 2008 in Paris Iran promised an additional $50 million in aid and $300 million in loans. Current annual bilateral trade stands at approximately $1.5 billion. Iran’s major investments in Afghanistan include infrastructure and education. One of Iran’s many development projects included a $100 million university.

According to the Afghanistan International Chamber of Commerce, an estimated 2,000 Iranian private firms, many financed by the Iranian government, operate in Afghanistan. Many of these businesses were located in Herat and aided the city’s economic revitalization after the fall of the Taliban. The Iranian government also directly funded the development of Herat’s transportation and energy infrastructure. A planned railroad will link Herat to the northeastern city of Mashhad, facilitating
much-needed commerce and providing revenue to the Afghan central government through import duties. As a result of ties to Iran, Herat is arguably Afghanistan's most developed and prosperous city today. Iran along with India is also building a road and railway system to link Western Afghanistan with the Iranian port of Chah Bahar to compete with the Pakistani port in Gwadar.\footnote{14}

Although Iran's contributions to Herat province are received with gratitude, the support also raises suspicions locally. “What are they doing beneath it all?” the head of Herat’s provincial council asked a Time Magazine reporter in May 2009.\footnote{15} Commenting on the waving Iranian flags a Herati citizen said: “Look at the way they try to stand out, even compared to the government ministries here. They are not trying to hide their strength”. Iran's role in stabilizing Herat province could partially explain the potential 2011 transfer of several districts near the Iranian border to Afghan security forces.\footnote{16} However, the poor state of U.S.-Iranian relations has thwarted such cooperation. The U.S. inclusion of Iran in the “axis of evil” in 2002, the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, and ongoing tensions over Iran’s nuclear aspirations have been major obstacles to leveraging Iranian influence in Afghanistan. Iranian internal political dynamics also complicated efforts at collaboration.

**Iran's Priorities:**

Iran has major goals in Afghanistan:

- To collaborate with Karzai without abandoning supports for other traditional Afghan allies
- To invest in Afghan reconstruction to create a “sphere of influence” and a security zone in the Herat region\footnote{17}
- To avoid direct confrontation with the United States, while pressuring Kabul to distance itself from the United States and insure that Afghanistan is not used to attack Iran
- To reduce and, if possible, control the flow of narcotics to Iran.\footnote{18}
- Iran has enduring interests in protecting the minority rights of the Hazara, a Shia group numbering 3–4 million in central Afghanistan, who have strong cultural and religious ties to Iran

Karzai has been in a precarious position, as an ally of the United States also seeking friendly relations with Iran. On many occasions, he has paid tribute to Iran’s “unforgettable support,” and for behaving “like the brother of the Afghan people.”\footnote{19} He has visited Tehran many times and has signed economic, cultural and security agreements with Iran. Yet there remains a few sources of tension between the two countries: Firstly, Iran has called for the withdrawal of foreign troops, who back
Karzai, secondly, the issue of an Iranian pipeline going through Afghanistan is not settled. Thirdly, Iran has expressed concerns about Karzai’s policy of Pashtun-ization, which has somewhat marginalized the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras. Fourthly, hosts approximately 1.5 million Afghan refugees, whose treatment is disputed and finally Narcotics trafficking from Afghanistan has created a chronic drug problem and is a serious issue in Iran. On drug trafficking, Iran blames the Karzai government and the United States for failing to curb opium production. Iran is one of the major consumers of Afghan opium, and a favourite corridor for shipping narcotics to Europe and the Persian Gulf. While addiction to opium has increased alarmingly in Iran, revenues from narcotics have financed much of the anti-American insurgency in Afghanistan. Hundreds of Iranian security agents have been killed in clashes with traffickers.

One of the argument, forwarded in this paper is that, whatever Iran does in Afghanistan is first and foremost guided is by its own national security concerns. Iran is seeking and actively working on creating stability in Afghanistan, because for years Iran has suffered the brunt of an unstable neighbour. The influx of millions of refugees since the 1980s, large amounts of drug trafficking and an inconsistent supply of water from Afghanistan’s Helmand River are some of the issues that Iran perceives as a threat to its national security.

Survival and security have been at the centre of Iran’s policies since the end of Khatami’s time as President after 2003, but these priorities have been even more strongly expressed since President Ahmadinezhad took power in 2005 and heavily promoted the Revolutionary Guards Corps both politically and financially. The change in Iran’s domestic scene was forcefully manifested in June 2009 when President Ahmadinezhad was re-elected in a de facto coup d’etat backed by the Revolutionary Guards Corps and the Supreme Leader, escalating into months of social unrest and the worst legitimacy crisis since the 1979 revolution. A lot has been said about the ‘Ahmadinezhad effect’ on Iran’s policies at large, yet his approach on Afghanistan and Pakistan has been relatively less highlighted partly because the power and political priorities of the Revolutionary Guards Corps in this respect are difficult to ascertain.

In several occasion, Ahmadinezhad has followed confrontational diplomacy which has enraged the international community. In 2010 at the UN conference in New York when he claimed that it was the US and not Al-Qaeda who had masterminded 9/11. But at the same time it is important to note that at least part of the Revolutionary
Guard elite, which has ascended politically during the last few years, works to safeguard and promote Iran’s regional position and stronghold. In contrast to the ideological foreign policy of the 1980s aimed at exporting the Islamic revolution, during the last decades Iran’s foreign policy has been far more motivated by national security concerns. However there are people within the conservative factions of the ‘second generation’ of the Islamic Republic – people like Mohammad Qalibaf, Ali Larijani and Ali Shamkani – who argue for a more tempered approach in order to expand Iran’s regional influence – not through an ideological bashing of the enemies, but by behaving in a “reasonable manner while increasing its power”.

Iran’s Position on Taliban

Iran and the Taliban are ideological enemies, and restoring power to the Taliban in Afghanistan would pose a grave national security threat to Iran. Yet in 2007, NATO claimed that it had intercepted a shipment of explosively formed projectiles from Iran, destined for Afghan insurgents (It is possible that rogue elements were responsible for the flow of the arms, as there is a huge black market in arms dealing). Mohsen Milani argues, if the Taliban is getting support from Iran, both parties know that is not because Iran likes the Taliban or vice versa. It is because, as the saying goes, the enemy of my enemy is sometimes my friend. An academic from Tehran University, responding on the issue argued that, it is essential to talk to Taliban; “like it or not they are Afghans and situation there cannot be addressed without taking their view into account”. His opinion was in favour of a power sharing mechanism with Taliban - this perhaps might not be a departure from what Iran present stand on Taliban is. Iran is also concerned that successful negotiations between the Taliban and the United States would involve Pakistan and Saudi Arabia—and once again empower them in Afghanistan. Iran wants America to bleed, but its reported support for the Taliban appears to be tactical and limited, as Iran is determined to avoid any direct military confrontation with the United States.

In June 2013 the Taliban signalled a breakthrough in efforts to start Afghan peace negotiations by announcing the opening of a political office in Qatar and a new readiness to talk with American and Afghan officials. It is seen by some as a significant step in peace efforts that have been locked after the Taliban walked out and accused the United States of negotiating in bad faith. American officials have long pushed for such talks, believing them crucial to stabilizing Afghanistan after the 2014 Western military withdrawal. As anticipated by US President there have been “lots of bumps in the road” and as expected it is going to be a long, hard process if
indeed it advances significantly at all. Iran which has been vocal against presence of American troops in its neighbourhood has reacted positively to this development.

Iran's Equation with US: Impact on major Regional Players

In early 2012, the US Administration declared that it would focus on regional engagement as a vital component of its plan to withdraw US military forces by 2014 and has signed Strategic Partnership Agreement with Karzai Govt. For Iran, though the NATO commitment to withdraw combat forces was a welcome move; the discussion of a long-term strategic relationship between Washington and Kabul might not be one. This ambiguous condition—short-term versus long-term interests—has not been conducive to early engagement. Given the other stresses in US-Iran relations, it appears that the policy community in Iran is simply not interested in making practical accommodations, and may well believe that its strategic interest in preventing a long-term US presence in Afghanistan is paramount.

Pakistan and India are two important regional players with serious stakes in Afghanistan. Some analysts argue that Iran's main foe— but also conversely, a possible partner—in Afghanistan is neither Pakistan nor India, but the US. This does not necessarily only mean that Iran will seek to undermine the United States by fuelling attacks against the coalition forces, although they are continually accused of doing so, but also that Iran will prepare itself for possible attacks by the US and that Iran wants to show that they have the means to retaliate on Afghan soil. The argument therefore is that, even though Iran’s predominant interest is in having a stable Afghanistan as its neighbour yet perhaps it would continue to play a double game and engage with its regional neighbours according to the US-Iran equation at that point of time. There is no doubt that Iran engages with Afghanistan in its own right, which are crucial for both country’s interests but Iran's position Vis-a-vis Afghan Govt and Delhi and Islamabad's interests in Afghanistan is clearly governed by their relations with US. There is no doubt that the issue of Afghanistan's future could be used to broker the nuclear impasse between Iran and the West, a point often made. However, at the moment it is hard to see Iran playing an unambiguously constructive role in Afghanistan as long as the relations to the US are enveloped in mutual mistrust.

India and Pakistan can also help shape Iran’s attitudes and activities for the post-2014 Afghanistan. Of the two, India appears to have the strongest alignment with Iran’s interests. They have shares historically important relationship and more recently have
enjoyed close energy and trade relations. Since oil and banking sanctions were beefed up in late 2011, India surpassed China, at least temporarily, as the number-one customer of Iranian oil, putting India in a squeeze between Tehran and Washington.\textsuperscript{32} Most Indian foreign policy experts believe that the government feels obliged to accommodate Washington on Iran’s nuclear program, but trade and energy relations are hard for New Delhi to give up.\textsuperscript{33} They share a concern about Islamic extremism, whether Afghan or Pakistani, in origin. While India today is more confident, open to the west, yet with its huge investment in Afghanistan, it may share Iran’s inclination of preparing for a post Karzai era that will groom non-Pashtun political forces as potential allies or agents of influence.

Pakistan and Iran have not been natural allies and share deep distrust about their respective responsibility for Baluch separatism, and they represent two opposite poles regarding Saudi Arabia’s role in the region. However, it is still possible to find a common ground. Iran will also want to avoid giving Islamabad the impression that is has any kind of formal pact with New Delhi at Pakistan’s expense; Iran would more likely want to maintain normal relations with Pakistan despite their many substantive differences over Afghanistan, Baluchistan, Shia-Sunni tensions, and relations with the United States.

Change of Guard: How will the new President of Iran impact the existing equations?

On June 14, 2013 Iran’s Presidential elections took place and the nation chose Hassan Rouhani as its new leader. Given the rightward shift of Iranian politics over the last decade, he appeared to be the lone moderate choice that people had in this election. Over the past decade the nation had witnessed intense political pressure and diplomatic slatemate over its nuclear programme which has led to tremendous economic mismanagement and external pressure. The verdict of the people, as TV/radio broadcaster Karim Sadjadpour puts it can be seen as “the meteorological equivalent of a light rain after eight years of drought.”\textsuperscript{34} Rouhani was Iran’s lead nuclear negotiator in Khatami’s regime. Rouhani has been particularly critical of Ahmadinejad’s foreign and nuclear policies, in addition to his “superstitious” religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{35} He depicted Iran’s diplomatic position under his watch as more favourable for regime interests during his campaigns. He claimed that Iran’s nuclear programme progressed under Khatami’s presidency without provoking external powers. It is believed that he is one of the few candidates who could appeal to reformists and moderate conservative alike. It is obvious that the new President will bring in a whole new team, and some believe Rouhani will be able to bring more kind of
professional managers and technocrats into the system, those types of moderate forces that have been purged over the last decade. However, on critical issues such as ideological principles of the Islamic regime and the Iranian revolution, resistance against America, rejection of Israel’s existence, support for groups like Hezbollah, for the Assad regime in Syria, position on post 2014 Afghanistan, it is argued that the new President’s influence is likely to be more tactical that strategic. It would be unfair to expect that he would bring a significant departure of the principles followed so far by Ahmadinejad, however as opposed to the previous regime, perhaps now Iranian diplomacy is likely to be carried out with a relatively moderate posture. The Afghan President on his part, expressed his gladness over the calm and peaceful environment of Iran’s June 14 election and the high voter turnout, describing the event as another democratic step in a neighboring country. Karzai expressed optimism that bilateral relations between his country and Iran would further expand under the new Iranian administration.

Conclusion

To sum up, it can be argued Iran's balancing act in Afghanistan is shaped by a need to maintain a close alliance with its neighbour while countering U.S. hostility towards Iran. For these reasons, Iranian support for insurgent groups battling coalition forces may continue despite Iran’s otherwise-positive economic efforts and political influence in Afghanistan. As of mid 2013, even after the change of guard in Iran, the prospect for a productive US-Iran dialogue on any topic appears to be remote. Tehran today is more focused on the reality of US withdrawal, rather than ensuring that it is done in a way that assures stability of Afghanistan. Still, Iran has the potential of playing a significant role in stabilization of Afghanistan and in containing or in the negotiations with Taliban as US troops draw down from Afghanistan. The U.S. focus on the Iranian nuclear program has, to some extent, hindered the pursuit of other U.S. interests vis-à-vis Iran. U.S.-Iranian cooperation in Afghanistan can serve as a first step in reducing tensions between the two nations. This might appear to be a tall order, given the distrust and hostility the two countries share among themselves but no one knows what lies in the future. History has shown that events can conspire to bring arch rivals together as demonstrated by US-Iran cooperation is establishing Karzai government in 2001.


18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.


22. Ibid


24. Ibid.
25. Discussion was carried out between the author and Prof. Bahram Amirahmadian of Tehran University, during his visit to MAKAIS, Kolkata on 4th January 2013 (Approximate time 1.30 pm).


33. Ibid


Iran-Afghanistan Relations Post-2014

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General
Iran and Afghanistan share a 936-km border which runs through several deserts and marshlands and flanks the Afghan provinces of Herat, Farah, and Nimruz. The two countries also share several religious, linguistic, and ethnic groups that create a cultural overlap between the two neighbours. Iran has a population of 66.4 million and it is one of the world’s few Shia-majority states, with the Shia Muslims comprising 89 percent of the population or 58.6 million of people. On the other hand, Afghanistan is predominately Sunni Muslim (80 percent, roughly 27 million people), it however does have a sizeable Shia minority, which accounts for nineteen percent of the population or roughly 6.2 million people.¹ The Hazaras which make up roughly nine percent of Afghanistan’s population or 2.9 million people are the major Shia group in the country. They are a Persian-speaking ethnic group which is concentrated mainly in central Afghanistan. Sizeable Hazara communities are present in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan.

Over last thirty years Iran has seen a revolution in February 1979 and has been the focus of US power play in Persian Gulf. Its neighbour in the East, Afghanistan has had its history shaped by invasions by the two super powers; the USSR in December 1979  and the US in 2001. The Islamic revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran coincided with the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The Russian occupation lasted nine years while the US has been in Afghanistan for the last thirteen years and counting. Afghanistan has had a period of communist government (1978-92), civil war (1992-96) and few years under the Islamist Taliban. Consequently Iran-Afghanistan relations have borne the imprint of these tumultuous events, latest being that of the presence of the US led NATO/ISAF in Afghanistan. As per current indications US and NATO/ISAF will ‘drawdown’ from Afghanistan by the end of 2014.

This paper briefly looks at Iranian interests, its foreign policy and policy outcomes with regards to Afghanistan, over the last decade. Given the influence, both direct and indirect, the US policy towards Iran has had on Iran’s relations with Afghanistan; the paper also dwells on the US interests in Afghanistan and its policy towards Iran. Having obtained an assessment of these issues, the aim of the paper is to estimate likely texture of the Iran-Afghanistan relations in the near term, focusing on the period of the US drawdown from Afghanistan at the end of 2014. Given the complex nature of events in Afghanistan, Iranian standoff on the nuclear issue and a host of other factors impinging on the geopolitical situation in South Asia, the paper concludes with desirable actions Iran must undertake for the benefit of its relations with Afghanistan and that of the region as a whole.
Tenets of Iran’s Foreign Policy
Iran's policy is motivated by a combination of genuine security threats, ideological aspirations, and institutional interests. One of the main anchors of Iran's foreign policy is the need to be recognized as a major regional power, "something that will entail making a stop in Tehran a sine qua non for solving any regional issue or problem." According to Parsi, Iranian view on region, especially of its neighbours, consists of two perspectives. The first perspective focuses on the Iran’s prestige and position it has ascribed to itself in the international environment. It stresses the inevitability of Iranian importance and dominance in the region. This perspective is ideology agnostic and does not belong to any particular religion or political camp. The second perspective, which is pan-Islamic, overrides sectarian boundaries and rifts, originates from the 1979 revolution and its peculiarities. It relates to the Islamic Republic, its revolutionary zeal and the need to prescribe to other nation systems (Parsi: 2013).

The other cornerstone of Iran’s Foreign policy is containing “radicalism” (or Sunni-Wahabism), which is the natural fallout of Iran being a nation with 89 percent of its population being Shia Muslims.

Iranian Interests
Besides its stature, and the need to contain Sunni “radicalism”, Iran’s more long-term interests in Afghanistan include managing its border (including with Pakistan), Baluch insurgency, controlling the flow of narcotics into the country, repatriation of Afghan refugees, minority rights and access to water.

- **Border Issues**
  Iran shares a 936-km border with Afghanistan and has worked with Afghan security forces to control border crossings where billions of dollars worth of illicit drugs and smuggled goods cross each year. It has invested in surveillance equipment (including drones), and training customs and border police. Iran engages with Pakistan and Afghanistan on regional counter-narcotics efforts, including joint operations and Border Liaison Offices.

- **Baluch Insurgency**
  Iran is wary of the suspected US role in the Baluch insurgency that has plagued southeastern Iran for decades. An estimated 1–2 million live in Iran’s Sistan-Baluchestan province, and according to some accounts have been subjected to discrimination particularly under the current government of President Ahmadinejad. However majority of the Baluch reside in Baluchistan province of Pakistan and a fairly large number in southwestern Afghanistan. Cross-border activity from Pakistan by the insurgent group Jundullah has increased since 2009. Besides the covert US support to the group, the involvement of the Israeli Mossad has also been suspected. According to some analysts the Baluch issue is one of the principal Iranian concerns that shape Iran's policies towards Afghanistan and cooperation with the west.

- **Narcotics**
  Afghanistan is responsible for more than 90 percent of the world's illicit opium production, and more than half of that product is smuggled across the Iranian-Afghan border. Furthermore, a third of Afghan heroin, which accounts for more than 90 percent of world
supply, is trafficked through Iran. Iran itself has a significant drug problem, with at least three million opiate abusers in the country and the highest rate of opiate abuse in the world—about 2.8 percent of the population aged 15 to 64. And opiate abuse is rapidly rising. Iran has committed itself to combating the drug epidemic within its borders, cracking down on domestic opium cultivation and interdicting drug shipments from Afghanistan. However, Iran realizes that to effectively deal with drug abuse it needs to develop a constructive relationship with Kabul in the field of counternarcotics.

• **Refugees**
  Iran has hosted more than three million Afghan refugees during various cycles of Afghan instability. The majority of these refugees came from the Tajik and Hazara communities. Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Iran has continued to host two million Afghan refugees, although one million of these refugees are said to be unregistered and therefore have no legal permit to reside in Iran. According to Tehran, the Afghan refugees represent a significant burden on the economy and society of Iran, but the situation in Afghanistan has not allowed the return of these refugees to their home country. While some have been integrated into the Iranian economy and others leave marginal lives at the edge of Iranian society, others are still in camps and would be ready to be repatriated once circumstances permit.

  The Afghan government does not have the capacity to deal with such a sudden influx of repatriated refugees. On occasion, Iran has used forced repatriation of Afghan refugees as leverage on the Afghan government, and some returnees have reported harsh treatment by Iranian security forces, thus damaging Iran's image and creating cultural tensions between the two societies. Iran’s enduring interest remains in facilitating more normal conditions in its eastern neighbor so that Afghans can return home.

• **Water**
  Iran’s arid east relies heavily on waters that originate in the mountains of central Afghanistan. For more than a century, disputes over the water flow into Iran have impacted the relationship, and a treaty signed in 1973 was not sufficient to oversee water management. Demographic pressures, drought, and ambitious development plans for Afghanistan have combined to make this a more acute issue in Iran-Afghan relations. Some in Iran even see international (US/NATO) efforts to build power-generating dams for Afghanistan as part of a strategy to weaken Iran.

• **Minority Rights**
  Iran has enduring interests in protecting the rights of the Hazara who have strong cultural and religious ties to Iran. Consequently its investments in infrastructure and reconstruction projects have tended be in the Hazara-populated areas, including Herat. Iran also has ethnic and linguistic ties to other Afghan minorities including the Persian/Dari speaking Tajiks, Ismailis.

**US Policy on Iran**
A discussion on Iran’s Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan cannot proceed without evaluation of the US interests in the region, particularly in Afghanistan and the US’s Iran policy. Afghanistan stands out as an area where the animus originating in the 1953 CIA-led coup in Iran and the
Iranian revolution of 1979, have overshadowed (and does so even today) the long-term common interests of the U.S. and Iran. A policy position maintained only to the detriment of the US, Iran, and Afghanistan interests and cooperation. A position clearly exhibited by the fact that Pakistan's actual nuclear weapons and proliferation activity is considered less threatening than Iran's potential ones by the US and the fact that US continues to charge Iran with providing support to the Taliban, while engaging with Pakistan despite its far larger support to the Taliban. This deeply entrenched animosity between Iran and the US has served the interests of the Pakistan military, Taliban, and al-Qaida.

A major cross-over point in the US policy for the region came in 1998 when al-Qaeda attacked US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, after which doing ‘business’ with the Taliban was put off the US agenda. However US persisted with its policy objective of sidelining Iran under the dual containment policy of the Clinton administration maintained against Baghdad and Tehran. Next major event was the 9/11 attack on the US and its decision to retaliate in Afghanistan, during the course of which Iran not only cooperated with the US, but actively helped it establishing support bases in Central Asia. US-Iranian cooperation occurred both in the field, in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and in diplomacy (Rubin:2008). The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarded these events as an opportunity to increase cooperation with the US in Afghanistan to include a wider set of issues. It was reported that Iranian officials at some stage even offered to work under US command to assist in building the Afghan National Army.

The Bush administration, however, rejected the initiative and instead, charged Iran with "harboring" Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who had sought refuge in Tehran after having been abandoned by Pakistan for the Taliban in 1995. In response Iran expelled him. US officials also charged Iran (astonishingly) with establishing influence in Heart and alleged that some members of al-Qaida had taken refuge in Iran. These charges came despite the overwhelming fact that the surviving core leadership of al-Qaida sought refuge in Pakistan where they remain even today (Rubin: 2008). Thus the Bush administration even after the events of 9/11 saw Afghanistan as a secondary diversion from its broader strategic interests in the Persian Gulf and Middle East including containment of Iran.

These events of the past decades have heightened Iran’s thinking and fears about US engagement in the region and it currently views its interests in Afghanistan through the prism of US-Iranian enmity. Iran now believes that it’s direct and indirect cooperation with the U.S. in Afghanistan especially during the period of US intervention to remove Taliban and immediately after, did not decrease the tension in their relationship since the U.S. has a separate agenda. It has even been suggested that, possibly, the ultimate strategic objective of the US intervention in Afghanistan, was containment of Iran.

Iran’s Position on US in Afghanistan

Iranian officials and independent experts characterize Iran’s strategic concerns about a long-term US role in Afghanistan as an “existential threat” to the Islamic Republic, and that, US may use Afghanistan as a base to attack Iran and effect a regime change. The issue of ‘Regime Change’ has been a significant factor in the US-Iran relations. Analysts believe that as long as the U.S. position lacks clarity about its support on overthrowing or subverting the Islamic Republic by the use of force, Tehran is not likely to place its common interests with the U.S. in Afghanistan over its strategic opposition.
Many regional experts argue that Tehran does not believe that a stable Afghanistan with a large, long-term U.S. troop presence is in its interests. Tehran worries that if Afghanistan is stabilized, Iran will have pro-US government on its flank. There is also a view that Iran despite the existing differences with the US, can still have good relations with Afghanistan as this could result in reducing Chinese influence in south and central Asia and also decrease Afghanistan’s dependence on Pakistan. However, Iran’s main objective is to increase its own security and overcome the threat of military action. Iran believes that the US, despite its opposition to Iran's nuclear program, will not compromise Afghan interests.

In May 2005 the Afghan government asked the U.S. to sign a Declaration for Strategic Partnership, which was signed by Presidents Karzai and Bush in Washington. Iran responded by asking President Karzai for a similar agreement which among its provisions would commit Afghanistan not to permit its territory to be used for military or intelligence operations against Iran. The message from Iran was that it would accept Afghanistan’s strategic partnership with the United States, but only if it is not directed against Iran. President Karzai is reported to have conveyed that he would like to sign such a declaration, but that his government was not in a position to prevent the US from using its territory against Iran. A few months later, in January 2006, US again reportedly pressurized Karzai from travelling to Tehran to sign economic agreements between the two countries.

In the summer of 2007, there were calls in the US for regime change and a pre-emptive attack on Iran's nuclear program causing Tehran to formally change its policy toward the US in Afghanistan. The previous Iranian position was that even if the US attacked Iran, it would not respond in Afghanistan as Iran’s bilateral interest in stability in Afghanistan and in supporting the Karzai government as a safeguard against the Taliban and al-Qaida outweighed any advantage that would result from attacking the U.S. presence. Now, if Iran were attacked by the U.S. its troops in Afghanistan would be vulnerable to Iranian retaliation.

**US-Iran: Common interests**

Both, US and Iran, have a stake in a stable Afghanistan that is not under Taliban control. The US and Iranian interests converge over basic governance issues such as improving border controls, controlling the flow of drugs and other contraband, provision of basic amenities in the cities and in vulnerable provinces, and training provincial level law enforcement forces. The two countries may also agree and tacitly cooperate with Afghanistan in reintegrating moderate Taliban affiliates into the national security forces, and on strengthening the central government’s institutional capacities and its ability to represent the country’s diverse political and ethnic groups through democratic free and fair elections. They would also like to see Afghanistan emerge from decades of conflict into a more reliable trading partner, transit route, and competent state that can prevent non-Afghan non-state actors from operating on its territory.

Iran according to its stated policy participates in the multilateral meetings organized by the US and Afghanistan, and has endorsed the broad guidelines developed at the recent meetings in Istanbul (November 2011) and Bonn (December 2011) for the future of Afghanistan. It however, but refrains from engaging the US bilaterally or independently of multilateral events. Iran emphasizes the regional approach as an appropriate alternative to an international approach currently being adopted.
Factors Influencing Iran's Afghan Policy
The main driver of Iran's Afghan policy is the notion that the more stability and development in Afghanistan, the more secure will be Iran's interests and the confidence that Iran can and must secure its interests in Afghanistan despite foreign competition. Its priorities are principally in the areas where its interests are prominent; West Afghanistan where the demographic ties are strongest (Laipson: 2012). Iranian policy therefore takes the approach that Iran is the guardian of Afghanistan's Farsi speakers—Tajiks and Hazaras—and its Shia. And as a natural outcome it needs to prevent Pashtun dominance of Afghan national politics which in turn positions it to follow a course counter to the Pakistani interests and at times pursue options that weaken writ of the government in Kabul. However is important to note that the Iranian sentiment of guardianship does not resound equally with the constituency whose interests it seeks to safeguard.11

• Pakistan Factor
Iran has always avoided entering into open conflict with Pakistan, in particular due to the need to secure Islamabad's cooperation on the Baluchistan issue. Yet, objectively, the competition and the rivalry are there, and it is quite likely that it will become more explicit in the phase following the departure of US/NATO forces. Not only does Iran oppose Pakistani hegemony which would lead to its own exclusion from Afghanistan, but it is also wants to keep Taliban power in check to counter traditional Pakistani support of Pashtun radicalism.

• US invasion of Iraq
The US invasion of Iraq and its aftermath may have led to a new Iranian perspective of the US 'expeditionary' action in the region. While on one hand, the US quickly deposed Saddam, the only enemy the Islamic Republic actually fought a conventional war with and who had occupied part of its territory. On the other hand, the US failure in nation building and stabilizing Iraq after the defeat of Saddam exposed gaps in US approach and its lack of understanding of local challenges and dealing with them. In the aftermath of the US intervention in Iraq, Iran through covert support could establish a Shia dominated government relegating years of Sunni authority. This ensured that there would be no new territorial threat against Iran from that country, and enhanced Iran’s position in the region (Parsi: 2013). The Afghan story could also unfold in a similar manner leaving Iran stronger and secure.

• Nuclear Ambitions
The mounting tensions over Iran’s nuclear activities and increasingly harsh sanctions related to those activities, particularly economic sanctions, have made it difficult for Tehran to agree on engaging directly on ideas for short-term cooperation with US and EU for two reasons; one, apprehension that any cooperation could be misconstrued as an Iranian concession (Laipson: 2012). Two, the crippling effect of the sanctions on the everyday life of the citizens makes any rapprochement politically difficult. At the same time sanctions have driven Iran to view Afghanistan as a means to break international isolation and generate commerce.

Iran’s Afghan Policy
Wary of a Sunni-fundamentalist Pashtun state on its eastern border, Iran viewed the rise of the Taliban in 1994 and their seizure of Kabul in 1996 as a serious security, ideological, and economic threat. After the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, Iran had broadened its contacts in
Afghanistan from Shi'a groups to non-Pashtun groups. Tehran also supported groups such as the Shiite Hazara parties and the influential Tajik commander Ismail Khan in Herat province. However like Pakistan, they did not get much success in their attempts to create stable coalitions capable of governing the country.

As Taliban gained ground in Afghanistan, Iran moved beyond its ideological support for Shi'a parties to a strategic policy of supporting all anti-Taliban forces. This led to its support to the formation of an anti-Taliban coalition composed of mostly Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara factions—including Hezb-e Wahdat. This United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, also known as the Northern Alliance, led by Burhanuddin Rabbani and his military commander Ahmad Shah Massoud. Iran also settled its differences over Tajikistan with Russia, and the two states brokered the 1997 peace agreement in order to assure a consolidated backing for the Northern Alliance. Iran, along with Russia, provided arms and funds to the Northern Alliance throughout the civil war, while Pakistan and Saudi Arabia supported the Taliban.

The Taliban, for its part, had backed Sunni Islamist militants who were launching attacks against the Iranian regime. In 1998, Taliban forces captured Mazar-e Sharif and massacred thousands of Hazara civilians, in addition to nine Iranians with diplomatic credentials. Incensed at the killing of its diplomats and the Taliban's horrific treatment of Shia minorities, Iran with the intent to retaliate positioned a quarter of a million troops along the Afghan border. However, a military confrontation between Iran and the Taliban was averted, but when the US-led coalition invaded Afghanistan in 2001 to overthrow the Taliban, Iranian support was available (ISW: 2013).

In the aftermath of the Taliban's ouster Iran subsequently pursued a complex policy towards Afghanistan. It has sought greater influence over the government in Kabul, and remained wary of the U.S. and NATO presence in the country. Iran has a multilayered approach towards Afghanistan that addresses the needs of the Afghan people and reminds the international community, particularly the US, of Iran's relevance to international goals in the region. (ISW: 2013).

**Support to the Taliban**

The US policy to isolate Iran from its affairs in Afghanistan and the Iranian requirement to hedge their position seems to have prompted Iran to assist the Taliban in a limited way. There were claims that the Quds Force of the IRGC was supplying some IEDs and other supplies to groups fighting in Western Afghanistan. The amount supplied was sufficient to act as a warning or signal, but was not enough to change the military balance significantly as the intention was only to make US insecure in Afghanistan (Rubin:2008). There are recent reports that Iran has permitted Taliban to open an office in the border city of Zahedan. However the US position to charge Iran with providing support to the Taliban, while remaining publicly silent over Pakistan's far larger support to the Taliban did not help the situation.

**Defence Cooperation**

The presence of US/NATO troops in Afghanistan leaves little room for defence cooperation between Iran and Afghanistan. However, after Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi had declared Iran's willingness to offer military/training assistance for Afghan security forces, a joint defense commission of Iran and Afghanistan was formed. In December 2011 following the defense commission meeting in Tehran a memorandum of defense agreement between Afghanistan and Iran was signed. The agreement has seen little traction but has symbolic value.
Reconstruction and Development Aid

According to analysts Iranian involvement is not limited to unofficial cooperation with militant forces, but in fact includes official efforts to influence the Afghan administration. (Tahir: 2007). Tehran has sought to exert influence over Afghan affairs through economic assistance. Iran pledged US$ 560 million at the Tokyo Conference on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan in 2002, and an additional US$ 100 million at the 2006 London Conference. Much of the Iranian aid to Afghanistan has been very rightly spent on infrastructure creation; mainly transportation links between Iran, Afghanistan, and the Central Asian Republics, which also served the national interest of Iran. A 123-km road linking Herat in western Afghanistan to the Dogharoun region in Iran has already been completed and work is underway to link Afghanistan to the Iranian port of Chabahar on the Gulf of Oman.

There is also a multi-billion-dollar project to connect Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan via rail, and construction of the first leg from the Iranian border to Herat is already underway. Such transportation links with Iran provide the land-locked and isolated Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics with an outlet to the world economy, increasing commerce in addition to Iranian influence. However, Iranian aid to Afghanistan has not been limited to transportation infrastructure and has included support for a variety of projects, such as the construction of a dental college and a water research facility.

Trade

Commerce between the two countries—minus petroleum—amounts to over a billion dollars a year. Afghanistan represents a significant untapped export market for Iranian products. Of late there have been reports that due sanctions on the nuclear issue Iran has been trying to push in more goods into Afghanistan. Bilaterally Iran has sought to foster closer economic ties with its eastern neighbor ever since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. Iran has attempted to integrate Afghanistan in regional/ multilateral trade arrangements including transport compacts. In 2008, Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan agreed to form the Economic Council of the Persian-Speaking Union. Also remittances from Afghan laborers in Iran amount to a considerable, 6% (around $500 million) of the Afghan GDP (ISW: 2013).

Transit Trade

Afghanistan is becoming increasingly dependent on Iran for its transit trade through the ports of Chabahar and Bandar Abbas as a result of the tense Afghan-Pakistan relationship. Afghanistan receives key imports such as electronic equipment, cars and spare parts besides Food, clothing and other essential products are also supplied through Iran. Some regional experts argue that Iran is using the political tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan in its favor, leveraging the fact that Iran is the only route by which Afghanistan can maintain foreign trade ( Tahir :2007). This reality limits Washington's options to pressure Tehran since if Iran blocks its border, the Afghan economy could collapse.

Education

This is another area where Iran has exerted tremendous influence in Afghanistan particularly in the western region. It has earned Iran the goodwill of the Afghan people. A library set up with Iranian grant at the Kabul University is reported to be very popular.

Future Tangibles

Given the complex and dynamic nature of events in Afghanistan, some are which are in the process of unfolding, while some would reveal their impact in the future, in a stand-alone manner
or in conjunction with the situation prevailing at the moment, it makes an assessment of the Iran-Afghan relations post 2014 virtually “a shot in the dark”. It would more prudent to identify factors which will have significant effect on the Iran-Afghan relationship. Some of these are discussed below:

- **Continued US Presence**
  The U.S. military presence in Afghanistan is the single most influential factor impacting the turn of events and development of relationships in and outside Afghanistan. Considered in Tehran as an existential threat, Iran believes that the U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan in the foreseeable future though in different format. It to that end would do what is necessary to make sure that Afghanistan would not be a base for US operations against Iran.

- **US-Iran Thaw**
  Some U.S. officials such as David Petraeus, the ex-commander of American forces in Afghanistan, believe that the U.S. and Iran can cooperate to bring stability and peace to Afghanistan. With election of moderate Rouhani as the President, there is a growing opinion that negotiations rather than confrontation is the way forward with Iran.

- **Regional Mechanisms**
  According to Boroojerdi the ex-deputy foreign minister of Iran and current parliamentarian: “one of the Principles in Iran’s policy to promote regional security is that Afghanistan crisis can only be solved through regional mechanisms by regional neighbouring countries. Iran believes the settlement of crisis in Afghanistan through regional means may lead to decreasing influence of the U.S. and Western countries. It is support from Afghanistan's neighbours such as Iran which can provide impetus to the idea of a regional security mechanism and put an end to this cycle of external intervention in Afghanistan.

- **X Factor- Syria**
  The history of Afghanistan shows that the Pashto nationalism, Afghanistan geography and its ethnic configuration have determined its destiny. NATO forces have dealt with a fourth factor i.e., the political Islam. It is this factor that gives strength to the likelihood that Afghanistan in the future may have to deal with a situation similar in nature to the one playing out on Iran’s western borders- in Syria.

- **Afghan Constitution**
  The resurgence of the Taliban has put the current Afghan constitution under threat of being drastically amended at the cost of some progressive, plural and gender sensitive aspects. Analysts feel that liberals in Afghanistan may find support from Iran on the issue as Iran is aware that a religion-based regime in Kabul could only be radical Sunni. Hence it favours political formulas, laws which may have a religious inspiration, but should be constitutionally secular.

**Conclusion**
Finally, which issues should Iran’s foreign policy on Afghanistan address for a favourable impact on the region? One issue that can do with US-Iranian cooperation is the need to hold a presidential election in April 2014, according to the Afghan Constitution. Iran is in a position of
influence with many of the leaders who might challenge President Karzai and can either aggravate or mitigate the aftermath. If the security situation worsens to the point that it may not be possible to organize a contested election, Iran's cooperation would be indispensable for convincing key leaders to accept any alternative, such as a Loya Jirga.

As events in Afghanistan appear to come a full circle, the second initiative that Iran can take is to attempt what it had done earlier—consolidate all Anti-Taliban forces cutting across sectarian and ethnic divide. This will counter Taliban politically as well as militarily. Taliban will not be able to overwhelm the opposition piecemeal at the same time will ensure equitable representation in the government at Kabul in the eventuality of a political compromise.

After the drawdown of NATO/ISAF and despite the proposed presence of training teams from certain NATO/ISAF countries there would still be a requirement to assist in training and capacity building of the Afghan National Security Forces. This is one area where U.S.-Iranian cooperation in building the Afghan security forces would constitute a major CBM in not only Iran-Afghan relations but also for US-Iran relations. It would also serve to balance the Pakistani influence exerted through the Taliban.

It would be a fair assessment, given the present circumstances that the key to any meaningful Indian role in Afghanistan lies with and through Iran. It would serve Iranian interests and counter balance Pakistan's geopolitical leverage with Afghanistan if Iran supports and engages in regional trade and transportation linkages.

What Iran should avoid is best indicated by the negative fallout of its 'Herat model' of soft power projection. One; let the Afghans practice their own brand and interpretation of Shia Islam. Similarly, despite common ethnic and linguistic roots Afghans, especially those in Western Afghanistan have their own traditions, customs and practices—allow them to evolve and decide how to move forward without prescribing the Iranian way. Lastly, do not overwhelm the local Afghan industry and trade with Iranian products nor make them an adjunct to Iranian manufacturing.

It is a strange paradox that a discourse on Iran-Afghan relations spanning the recent past and looking into the near future has to dwell on US intentions and policy objectives in the region. The US presence is so overbearing that Russian interests and Chinese involvement take a back seat. Nevertheless U.S. interests would be best served by supporting efforts to extend and improve governance and security in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, thereby depriving al-Qaida and its epigones of refuge on either side of the border. Engaging Iran as one of Afghanistan's key neighbors as US and NATO/ISAF withdraws would enhance prospects for a peaceful exit; improve prospects for peace in the region and meaningful Afghan-Iran relations. Successful engagement with Iran would necessarily address Iran's legitimate security interests on its eastern frontier, as well as its broader economic and political interests in Afghan stability.

Endnotes:

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Afghanistan and Iran share several religious, linguistic, and ethnic groups that create cultural overlaps between the two countries. These two countries also share a 582-mile (936-km) border in the west of Afghanistan. After Pakistan, Afghanistan shares the largest border with Iran. The Afghan-Iran boundary crosses through several deserts and marshlands, where the provinces of Herat, Farah, and Nimruz separate the border. Under the auspices of the UN, Tehran participated in the Bonn conference, and was instrumental to the final agreement, which established the Afghan Interim Administration in December 2001. Thus Iran played a key role in Afghanistan’s state-formation and reconstruction process in the immediate aftermath of 2001. Amongst the neighbors of Afghanistan, besides Pakistan, Iran has the capacity to influence stability in Afghanistan. However, Iran has usually pursued a sophisticated policy towards Afghanistan. It has sought greater influence over the government in Kabul, and remains wary of the U.S. and NATO presence in the country.

1. Contribution of Iran in Reconstruction and Development Process of Afghanistan

Considering the Afghan-Iran economical ties after 2001, Iran pledged US$ 560 million at the Tokyo Conference for the Reconstruction of Afghanistan in 2002, and an additional US$ 100 million at the 2006 London Conference. Most of the Iranian aids to Afghanistan have been spent on infrastructure projects mainly transportation links between Iran, Afghanistan, and the Central Asian Republics, illustrating clearly the national interest of Iran. A 76-mile (123-km) road linking Herat in western Afghanistan
to the Dogharoun region in Iran has already been completed, and links Afghanistan to the Iranian port of Chabahar on the Gulf of Oman. It will reduce Afghan dependence on the Pakistani port of Karachi, because Pakistan continues to be hampered by border delays and regulatory disagreements especially in Karachi port that often require high-level intervention in trade and cost Afghan business owners in the meantime. In January 2009, President Hamid Karzai and Indian Foreign Minister Mr. Pranab Mukherjee inaugurated a new road between Zaranj and Delaram, connecting Nimruz Province to Chabahar in Iran. This 215km highway, financed by the Indian government building its Border Roads Organization, and was completed at the end of 2008. The road had encouraged Afghan businessmen to shift their transit of goods from Karachi harbor of Pakistan to Chabahar port in southern Iran. Iran has encouraged this trade, granting Afghan exporters a 90% discount on port fees, a 50% discount on warehousing charges, and giving Afghan vehicles full transit rights on the Iranian road system. Trade between the two countries reaches over a billion dollars a year. There is also a multi-billion US$ project to connect Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan via rail, which the construction of the first leg, from the Iranian border to Herat has already started.

Such transportation links Iran to the land-locked Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics with a passage to the world economy that would increase trade and of course Iranian influences. However, Iranian aids to Afghanistan have not been limited to transportation infrastructure but also included some other projects in health care and water research facility. Despite of several intolerable conditions exist especially in the border, hundreds of thousands of young and sometimes old Afghan laborers enter Iran illegally for work, mostly in the construction sector.

2. Trade Relations

The government of both Afghanistan and Iran are in favor of expanding economic and business ties, which is important for both countries from national to regional and international perspectives. According to Mr. Ahady Minister of Commerce and Industry of Afghanistan “Afghanistan’s trade with Iran has grown to more than $1 billion annually, placing Iran in the second position after Pakistan’s $3 billion including transit trade via the Pakistani port of Karachi. The next-largest trade partners are China and
India”. He also pointed out that the estimated $1 billion commerce with Iran includes oil and fuel, as well as some consumer and industrial goods. In reality and by existing of smuggling of goods, I guess the volume of trade between these two nations will be higher than it indicates in recorded statistics.

According to Mohammad Qorban Haqju the CEO of Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Iran's exports to Afghanistan in 2008 stood at $800 million. In 2009, Iran was one of the largest investor in Afghanistan, mainly investing in the construction of roads and bridges as well as agriculture and health care projects. According to the reports, in 2012 the trade volume between Afghanistan and Iran had reached USD 1.3 billion.

Since Afghanistan represents a significant unexploited export market for Iranian products, therefore; Iran has sought to foster closer economic ties with its eastern neighbor since 2001. For example, Iran has attempted to reduce Afghanistan’s economic dependence on Pakistan by allowing this land-locked country to use the Iranian port of Chabahar to import and export goods as an alternative to the Pakistani port of Karachi. After Karachi, Chabahar is the shortest route for Afghan businessmen to get to waters (see the map below).

![Key Border Points](source: UNODC)

This southern sea port of Chabahar has already connected to Afghanistan with a newly built road, which will rapidly raise the trade between Afghanistan and Iran and allow
Afghan goods to reach foreign markets without relaying in Pakistan. Similarly this new trade route will also facilitate Indian goods to reach Afghan and other Central Asian markets very easily. Similarly, Iran and India have agreed on transit of Indian goods to Afghanistan via the southern Iranian port of Chabahar in a bid to ease its exports to Afghanistan. World trade experts believe that this corridor will cause a jump in regional trade and economy. Furthermore, Iran has encouraged Afghan businesses to relocate their international offices from the United Arab Emirates to Iran. In 2008, Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan agreed to form the Economic Council of the Persian-Speaking Union. Iranian Authorities always ask the Afghan government to facilitate Iranian companies to invest in Afghanistan. This issue could have three different messages:

First, economical necessity;

Second, involvement of Iran in Afghanistan especially after 2014;

Third to showcase the Iranian economic leverage to grab American attention.

If the United States would like the Afghans to stand on their feet economically, then, as per Iranian believe they could not be ignored as part of this equation.

3. Challenges affected Afghan-Iran Relations

Despite of huge number of opportunities, there are many challenges that has affected Afghan-Iran relations, which mainly go to somehow political, cultural, economical and social suspicious interference of Iran in Afghanistan. These challenges had already existed but increased day by day especially after 2001 when the United States and its partners enacted and intensified the economical sanction against Iran.

Narcotics, migrations, the presence of US troops in Afghanistan, water sharing, and cultural and religious influences are the main challenges impacted the two nation’s relations in all parts including economics.

As, Afghanistan is the source for more than 90 percent of the world’s illicit opium production, therefore, more than half of that percentage is smuggled through the Afghan-Iran boundary. Furthermore, a third of Afghan heroin, which accounts for more
than 90 percent of world supply, is trafficking through Iran. Iran is not only the shortest transit route to main consumers in Middle East, Europe, and beyond but also a major consumer market for opiates. Although there are some agreements signed between authorities of the two countries, especially in terms of introducing alternatives to the poppy corps such as saffron, but it seems it’s not enough to stop production and trafficking of narcotics through Iran to the other parts of the world.

Likewise, in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion and the subsequent civil war, Iran became home to more than three million Afghan refugees. Since 2001, Iran has continued to host two million Afghan refugees, although one million of these refugees are said to be unregistered and therefore have no legal permit to reside in Iran. According to Tehran, the Afghan refugees represent a significant burden on the economical and social affairs of Iran. On the other hand, the situation in Afghanistan has not allowed the return of these refugees to their hometown. Nevertheless, Iran has increasingly politicizing the presence of illegal Afghan workers and refugees there. Tehran has repeatedly used the refugees issue in order to put pressure on the Afghan government in Kabul and its American and European allies. Thus Kabul is increasingly annoyed and distressed by Tehran’s policy towards refugees. Iranian government officials triggered a crisis when they deported 62,000 illegal Afghans in 2007. Yet, in response to an Afghan delegation’s visit from Tehran in December 2008 and fears that forced repatriation during the winter months would spark a humanitarian crisis, the Iranian government temporarily halted the refugee repatriation until March 2009. In spite of that, over ten thousand Afghans were forcefully deported from Iran only in the early weeks of January 2009. These types of forced repatriation especially during the cold winter are continued till now and badly affected the relations of the two nations.

Moreover, the presence of US troops under the ISAF and individually, seems to be a critical and suspicious issue for Iran. This issue for Iranian government and politicians strongly effect Afghan-Iran good relations that existed before 2001. Nowadays, Iran is very worried about lingering of US troops in Afghanistan after 2014. This concern of Iran emanated from the fact that the Afghan government and the US are negotiating on a long-term security agreement, which would set the timeframe for the military presence of US
troops in Afghanistan after 2014. For this reason, Iran started in recent months a hostile movement to support anti-American attitudes through intensifying of its efforts to influence policies in Afghanistan. It seems that Iran’s strategy towards Afghanistan is reminiscent of its maneuvering in Iraq, where Iran helped the insurgency movements and persuaded Iraqi politicians not to give way on allowing the Americans a small military presence beyond 2011.

The water sharing is another challenging point related to Afghan-Iran Relation. It goes to 1973, while Afghanistan and Iran have a comprehensive treaty on the Helmand River water rights. There are tensions on the lack of verification and enforcement of the water flow into Iran. The Kamal Khan Dam, which regulates the flow of water to Iran’s Sistan Balochistan province, is a source of animosity on both sides. Additionally, Iran always opposed to the construction of Samla Dam in Chesht district, which located 170 KM away in the east part of Herat province. The contract for construction of this dam was awarded to an Indian company and was scheduled to be completed several years ago. Although there were official visits of Afghan and Indian authorities including India’s past Ambassador from the construction process of this dam in 2007 announcing the 70 percent completion of the work, but it has not been completed and utilized yet. According to the local people and authorities, the Iran government interferes in the process by putting different kinds of pressures; for instance, they create security problems through supporting of insurgency in the area, to delay the completion and utilization of the Salma dam.

Similarly, the flow of unregulated Iranian funds to specific groups for doing illegal activities such as cultural, media and religious related affairs have caused problems in Afghan society that affected Afghan-Iran relations. According to Daud Moradian, a former foreign ministry advisor of Afghanistan, “Iran spends $100 million a year in Afghanistan, much of it on the media, civil society projects and religious schools. It is using Afghanistan to send a message to America that it can't be messed with. Afghanistan becomes a managed battlefield as a result”.

Nowadays, the Iranian exports of goods to Afghanistan has decreased by 56% because of the severity of international sanctions on Iran, the limitation of money transfer from
Afghanistan to Iran (not more than USD 20,000), the deprecation of Iranian currency against dollar, and shutting down of the financial transactions with Iran. According to Khan Jan Alokozay, the Vice Chairman of Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI), Iran has stopped exporting 30 items of merchandise goods to Afghanistan. This has caused increase in prices in Afghan markets, where after Pakistan most of the goods are import from Iran. In addition Iran has also destabilized Afghan markets by purchasing large amounts of foreign currency mainly USD, a countermeasure against international sanctions on its nuclear program. Similarly, Iran always follow the harmful so called “Dumping Policy” toward industrial activities especially in Afghanistan's third largest city, Herat, situated just 80 miles from the Iranian border. It has resulted to the bankruptcy of several companies, which were activated in Herat industrial parks.

Last but not least, since early 2008, Iran's actions have taken a more sinister turn. U.S. and NATO troops have intercepted shipments of Iranian-made arms in Afghanistan, including mortars, plastic explosives and explosively formed penetrators that have been used to deadly effect against armored vehicles in Iraq. Therefore, if we review the history of Afghanistan relations with its two neighbors (Pakistan and Iran), previously Afghans had negative views only against Pakistan for their interference into internal affairs of Afghanistan; however the recent policies of Iran have compelled the Afghan people to have a similar vision about Iran too.

**Conclusion**

Considering the facts and challenges pointed out in this paper, it can be stated that the Afghan-Iran relations have never enjoyed a stable, crystal clear atmosphere and the two countries have never found an opportunity to improve their relations in healthy conditions. Gradually, it become nowadays like a dilemma. Despite the facts pointed above, Iran’s vision and its own role in Afghanistan politics is inconsistent and it seems connected to other factors, such the nuclear standoff, the Saudi Arabian and Arab dynamics, the U.S. presence post-2014, regional alignments and competition, the state of its economy and domestic political stability. For these reasons, Iran focuses on shaping its sphere of influence, accelerating a Western withdrawal, and assuring that its interests
are protected here. Iran is concerned that an unstable, opium producing and radicalized Afghanistan can be a major threat to its interests, as experienced in the 1990s. However, at the same time it is not in favor of a Western-influenced Afghanistan as well. Therefore, taking into account these two conflicting scenarios and all other factors mentioned in the paper, Iran will try to prioritize its strategic and security needs in order to influence the course of events in Afghanistan to the best of its abilities.

After more than 3 decades of civil war in the country, for most Afghans “except some interest groups”, the US and its other allies under the ISAF are the rescuer of Afghan people from several calamities emanated from civil war. Therefore, majority of Afghan people are in the favor of signing strategic agreement between Afghanistan and the United States, which seems to be a contestable point from Iranian side.

To this end, the Afghan government has to balance its short and long term interests with the US and Iran; the two major players and conduct a good level of diplomacy to promote stability in the region. Likewise, Iran should not further damage its relationship with Afghanistan by interfering in its internal affairs very much. Afghanistan as an independent country has full right to establish or get rid of relations with any other country considering its national interests. If the Iran fosters a constructive role in bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan and the region, I think the US is also not opposed to a relationship between Afghanistan and its western neighbor Iran.

Supporting of specific groups and interfering in Afghanistan internal issues will not secure the interest of Iran in Afghanistan anymore. Wise versa, these types of partial interferences will increase distrust of Afghans toward Iranians and will destroy Afghan-Iran historical long term relation.

**Bibliography**


Iran’s Foreign Policy For Afghanistan

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Areas of Interest : National Security Strategy-Civil-Military Relations-Afghanistan, Pakistan, and South Asia Regional Issues

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Iran and Afghanistan share a long and rich history. Culture, language, religion, economics, and international relations all have tied these two neighbors closely together for thousands of years. Indeed, through much of the past three millennia, what is today Afghanistan and Iran were joined in various forms and along various borders as parts of common empires, confederations, or kingdoms. In many ways this long history has a tendency to bind the two nations, at least superficially and near the common border; in other ways, the history tends to be divisive, sowing seeds of doubt and mistrust. But in the years since the fall of the Taliban, Iran has generally been a helpful neighbor, interested in seeing a stable and moderately prosperous Afghanistan to its east. While there have been points of contention in the last twelve years, on the whole relations between Tehran and Kabul have been cordial, if somewhat guarded. Each capital realizes it needs its neighbor to one degree or another.

For much of the past 2500 years, the Hindu Kush has been part of various larger Persian empires. The Achaemenid, Parthian, Sassanian, Il Khanate, Safavid, and AfSharid dynasties all incorporated much of what today is Iran and at least the western portions of present day Afghanistan (in some cases stretching all the way to the Indus River in present day Pakistan.)\[1\] The city of Herat was once the capital of the Persian Areia region, and has a long history as a
In the 15th Century, Herat served as the imperial capital of the Timurid Empire, and the peoples of the region continue to enjoy strong ties today. Dari, the Persian dialect of much of Afghanistan, shares its linguistic heritage with Persian. Culturally, the cities of Herat, Balkh, and Mazar-e-Sharif have significant cultural ties to Iran. And, much as was the case centuries ago with the ancient silk routes, economic links between Iran and western Afghanistan are growing increasingly important – for both countries. Religious ties also exist, with predominantly Shia Iran particularly interested in the welfare of the Shia Hazara in central Afghanistan. So there are at least four strands that can potentially pull the two nations closer: language, history, culture, and religion.²

But governments generally do not build policy on the basis of history, culture, or language. Nations and governments devise foreign policy based on national interests and sustained national values. Iran is certainly no different in this regard. Iran must weigh not just the relationship with Afghanistan when designing its foreign policy, but, perhaps more importantly, its global relationships, economic well-being, influence in the broader region, and – given the construct of the Islamic Republic of Iran – religious and ideological considerations. Two of Iran’s largest considerations when developing its policy toward Afghanistan are the protracted standoff with the United States and the ongoing, simmering conflict with Saudi Arabia.

**Iran’s Policy For Afghanistan Viewed Through the Three Transitions**

Given that much of the west is focused on the period beyond 2014 after which point the U.S. and NATO will have withdrawn most, if not all, of their military forces, it might be useful to look at Iran’s foreign policy toward Afghanistan through the three main transitions that are already well underway and which will continue to play out over the next decade (the period President Hamid Karzai has labeled the “Transformation Decade.”) The three transitions are a) the security transition, including complete transfer of responsibility for waging the counterinsurgency to the Afghan National Security Forces; b) the governance transition, including the 2014 Presidential elections and the 2015 Parliamentary elections; and c) the economic transition, marked by the uncertainty and potential devastating impact of the rapid cessation of billions of dollars of assistance and incidental expenditures associated with the presence of large numbers of foreign forces.

**Security**

Although Iran shares a 582 mile (936 km) border with Afghanistan, Iran feels no pressing direct military threat from the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). In fact, Iran has made offers over the past decade to assist with the training of the ANSF. After the fall of the Taliban, during the Bonn Conference and shortly thereafter, Tehran made credible offers of assistance to train and equip a new Afghan Army. The Iranians undoubtedly had expectations of increased economic trade and potentially lucrative reconstruction opportunities, but they also enjoyed being seen as a formidable regional and international player, on near-equal terms with the U.S., E.U., and others at Bonn.³ The United States rebuffed the offer, but it stands as evidence that
the Iranians were keen to see a well-trained and disciplined force on their flanks rather than the assortment of warlords and local militias that have existed in Afghanistan for the last nearly 40 years. That the U.S. rejected such an offer of collaboration says more about the U.S. calculus regarding Iran than it does about U.S. desires to build a credible ANSF, at least in 2002.

Iran sees its security interests in Afghanistan through several lenses. First, Iran remains concerned about the continued presence of foreign, and particularly U.S., forces in Afghanistan. Secondly, Iran continues to host nearly a million Afghan refugees, and has a sizeable Afghan foreign worker population. Thirdly, Iran has become increasingly concerned about the flow of drugs, particularly heroin and opium, into Iran from Afghanistan.

The presence of foreign forces on Afghan soil poses perhaps the gravest perceived threat to Iran. As a result, Iran has felt the need to adopt a hedging strategy. Tehran was opposed to the Taliban rule of Afghanistan, and saw the Sunni Taliban as both an ideological and a security threat. The ejection of the Taliban in 2001 was appreciated by Iranian leaders, and most likely led to the willingness to support the establishment of a new Afghan government and investment of millions of dollars in infrastructure development. But the protracted presence of the foreign troops under U.S. leadership was also a thorn in Iran's side. After being included in President George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil," Iran withdrew overt support for coalition objectives and eventually settled upon the two-pronged hedging strategy of support to the central Afghan government (to be discussed later) and low-level, marginal military support to the Taliban forces continuing to fight the U.S. and NATO.

Indeed, at its peak, Iranian support to elements of the Taliban was overtly antagonistic towards the United States. U.S. General Dan McNeill, the NATO ISAF commanding general in Afghanistan in 2007, "described an incident in 2007 in which several vehicles were monitored crossing from Iran into western Afghanistan. McNeill said that NATO forces, after engaging the vehicles, found that one contained small-arms ammunition, mortar rounds, and more than 300 kilograms of C4 demolition charges. Other convoys from Iran carried rocket-propelled grenades, 107 millimeter rockets, and improvised explosive devices." Most alarming, and lethal, was the reported transfer of "explosively formed penetrators (EFPs)," shaped charges that when used as part of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) could wreak havoc on HUMVEEs and lightly armored vehicles. The transfers of EFPs were reputedly linked to the Iranian Republican Guards Corps.

But the Iranians are hedging to a certain extent. They have no affinity to the Taliban. In fact, they were and continue to be steadfastly opposed to any return of power to the Taliban. But they are also at loggerheads with the United States, and are willing to take calculated risks in making the U.S. efforts in Afghanistan as difficult and bloody as possible. There are even reports that Iran has harbored "eight top Taliban leaders" in Iran. Concurrently, though, Tehran continues to send support to Kabul, including "bags of cash" to President Karzai, and plays a constructive role in reconstruction and development in western Afghanistan. The Economist Intelligence Unit sums up the military component well: "Iran's Afghan policy has been to make life uncomfortable for the occupiers but without destabilizing its own borderlands." Tehran
accomplishes this by providing limited training to the Taliban, light weapons and ammunition, and then directing them to Afghanistan’s south and east, the areas predominantly supported by the U.S. military.

The hedging is calculated, metered, and, based on the paucity of reports of Iranian military support in 2012 and 2013, apparently on the decline in advance of the continued withdrawal of foreign forces. But if President Obama unexpectedly decides to retain a large troop presence in Afghanistan, an outcome seen as highly unlikely at the time of this writing (July 2013), and barring any unlikely breakthrough in relations between Washington and Tehran, we should also expect to see the Iranians increase military support to the insurgents.

The refugee issue is a major factor, and one the Iranians have attempted to exploit on several occasions. There remain nearly one million refugees in Iran, as well as perhaps 500,000 "documented" workers. The resident workers send sizeable remittances back to Afghanistan, and do mostly menial, manual labor in Iran. While the Iranian government sees the continued presence of large numbers of refugees in Iran as a liability, both financially and from a security standpoint, there are elements of the government that seek to exploit their presence. There are reports that the Iranians seed the ranks of the "repatriated" Afghans with IRGC-QF agents when they are sent back to Afghanistan.

The drugs and narcotics issue is more straightforward and out in the open. Although a bit of an embarrassment, Iran acknowledges a huge, and growing, drug problem. According to the UN Office of Drugs and Crime, Iran has over one million drug addicts, and a staggering 2.26% of the population uses opiates – the highest national rate worldwide. Although much of the drug use could probably be attributed to economic and social factors inside Iran, there is no doubt that the vast majority of the opiates in Iran come from Afghanistan, the source of 98% of the world’s illicit poppy production. Iran, interestingly, does not directly blame Kabul for the flow of drugs, but instead cites the easy trafficking as evidence of the U.S. and NATO failures in Afghanistan. Tehran continues to offer cooperation along the border with Afghan forces, and counterdrug cooperation is a frequent topic of negotiation between the two countries. Unfortunately, Afghanistan’s capacity to interdict lags, and Iran’s growing demand places even greater wealth and leverage in the hands of the narco-traffickers. The drug problem, and in particular the growing criminal syndicates that are powerful enough to challenge the state, is a legitimate concern for Iran, and one that deserves greater cooperation and collaboration from the western powers should they remain in Afghanistan post-2015.

Governance

As previously noted, Tehran provides both direct and indirect support to the political and governance sectors in Afghanistan. Iran has a vested interest in a stable government to its east, and it has a particular interest in protecting and expanding the influence of the Shia Hazara community and the trade-friendly Tajik and Uzbek population. But the Afghan Pashtun majority views the Iranians with skepticism. The Pashtuns see Iran as pro-Tajik, pro-Hazara, and pro-Shia. The Pashtuns do not consider that Iranian support for the Tajiks and Hazaras can be a net gain
for the nation of Afghanistan, but only a net loss for the Pashtuns. This narrow-minded view overlooks the considerable support Iran has provided to Afghanistan over the past decade. Iran sees the Pashtuns as pro-Taliban, and against any power-sharing with the elements of the former Northern Alliance: Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras. Iran will attempt to play a moderating role in the run-up to the 2014 Afghan presidential election, by supporting a wide array of candidates both financially and through the various media outlets in Afghanistan that are increasingly under Iranian ownership or control.

Additionally, recognizing that the institutions of governance continue to lag well behind the expectations of the Afghans, the Iranians are providing targeted support to specific populations in Afghanistan. While these efforts are superficially humanitarian assistance and public support, they are also an ingenious method of furthering the links and ties of the Afghan people, particularly the younger generation, to their western neighbor.

The Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation (IMRF) has 45 offices throughout Afghanistan, with major presence in Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Zaranj. The organization provides food, shelter, and health clinics. But the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee also provides religious education, culture, and political activism. In addition to Afghanistan and domestic efforts inside Iran, the foundation is active across a number of countries including Pakistan, Somalia, Palestine, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, Tajikistan, Syria, and Lebanon. According to the Iranian Journal of Public Health, by the end of 2008 over 8.6 million people had received assistance from the foundation, including nearly 850,000 students.

These political and cultural links also help Iran pursue one of its interests along a political line of action: derailing any reconciliation between the Taliban and the Karzai government. Tehran has opposed any effort that would legitimize the Taliban politically, and have gone to lengths to undermine any outreach from President Karzai. Iran is suspicious of the roles of Saudi Arabia and Qatar in brokering any deal, seeing the hand of the Saudis as an effort to extend Sunni influence in the region. By building strong political and cultural links in the governance sector, the Iranians intend to oppose any return of Taliban influence and blunt the Saudis. The efforts of organizations such as the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation and other direct support to Afghan political candidates and coalitions are a piece-part of the broader Iran-Saudi Arabia proxy war that is playing out through the Middle East and South & Central Asia. Additionally, although there is wide recognition that the U.S. and western governments have provided significant assistance to the Afghan people, there is also a general belief that very little of the overall assistance has reached the people most in need, instead being siphoned off by corrupt politicians and bureaucrats or U.S.-based contractors. Although the IMRF’s objectives are on a small scale, the Iranians can claim that they are directly benefiting the truly needy in Afghanistan, and compare favorably against the “corrupt” and exploitative American efforts.
Economic

Arguably the centerpiece, or most important, pillar of Iran’s Afghanistan policy is economic development and trade. Iran sees considerable economic opportunity, and necessity, in trade with Afghanistan.

While Afghanistan has been dependent upon Pakistan for access to the port of Karachi for decades, Iran has made a concerted effort to provide a viable and economically feasible alternative via the port of Chahbahar. Iran’s early investments and contributions following the Bonn conference were not solely to assist the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Afghanistan. It was also to secure increased trade and shipping opportunities for Iran. After 2001, the newly empowered Afghan Interim Authority, which included a number of former Northern Alliance leaders with less than cordial relations with Pakistan, began a concerted effort to route trade through Iran. In fact, the fledgling government managed to negotiate a series of trade deals signed between the Afghan Commerce Minister and Iran, India, and the Central Asian states. In accordance with the deals, Iran significantly reduced transit fees and port charges in an attempt to encourage increased use of Iranian ports. India, as mentioned, has also contributed, and partnered with Iran, in seeking alternative trade routes into Central Asia that bypass obstinate Pakistan. A perfect example of this partnership is the 135 mile road connecting Chahbahar to the Afghan province of Nimroz. Chahbahar is now arguably the most cost-effective port and the most efficient transit route for Indian goods into Central Asia. India, Afghanistan and Iran all benefit as trade and shipping increases through western Afghanistan, eastern Iran, and out through Chahbahar.

Iran and Pakistan began diplomatic relations cordially immediate after Pakistan’s independence. Pakistan maintained close ties to Tehran following the Iranian revolution in 1979, and supported, at least diplomatically, Iran throughout the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. However, despite the long period of close relations, the two countries have drifted apart, at times confrontational, since the end of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Iran opposed Pakistani support to the Taliban, and continues to be wary of the potential Pakistani support to Sunni extremists. Iran supported the Tajik and Uzbeks of the Afghan Northern Alliance, and were particularly concerned about the plight of Afghan shia Hazaras, routinely and harshly persecuted by the Taliban.

Iran has been one of the largest donors of reconstruction and development aid to Afghanistan, pledging $560M at the Tokyo Conference (2002), $100M at London (2006), $50M at Paris (2008), and agreeing to up to $300M in loan guarantees. Iran’s investment in highways, electrical transmission lines, natural gas pipelines, and railways will provide increasing economic opportunity to western Afghanistan and improved access to the markets of Central Asia. Again, this assistance is not simply out of compassion. Iran expects to realize significant economic gain from the infrastructure investments in the mid- to long-run, and, perhaps in part, offset some of the economic hardships seen inside Iran as a result of the international sanctions spearheaded by the United States.
In fact, trade between Iran and Afghanistan has already seen dramatic increases. *Jane’s Islamic Affairs Analyst* reported in February 2013 that “much focus has been put on presenting Tehran as an economic necessity for Afghanistan. . . . As late as December 2012, Iranian media quoted an official as suggesting that Iran now provides 25% of all Afghan imports.” Most estimates indicate that Iran-Afghan trade has grown from $500M in 2006 to $2.2B in 2012. If the infrastructure development can continue (a highly skeptical proposal as the West withdrwa) trade between the two countries, and beyond via the Iranian ports, will continue to grow.

**Summary**

Iran will continue to play a significant role in the future security, political, and economic stability of Afghanistan. One can only expect Iran’s influence to increase as the United States and the international communities disengage from Afghanistan. The opportunities for Iran to increase its proxy wars against Saudi Arabia and, to a lesser extent, the United States, will likely increase. We should expect to see increasing Iranian involvement in the political maneuverings leading up to the April 2014 Afghan presidential elections, further efforts by Tehran to frustrate any Taliban reconciliation, and increased cooperation with India to pursue greater trade access to Central Asia via western Afghanistan. Any tensions between Iran and Pakistan have been held in check by the large presence of the United States and ISAF forces in Afghanistan, but could re-surface post-2014 as a major factor for the Afghans, particularly if unrest in Pakistani Baluchistan threatens to spill over into Iran.

The heart of Iran’s foreign policy for Afghanistan is not ideological, religious, cultural or linguistic linkages – it is the economic opportunities for an increasingly isolated Iran and an Afghanistan fearing abandonment by the U.S. and the western powers. Economic ties, perhaps not the “New Silk Road” once championed by Washington but a more realistic, western Afghanistan/Iran version, will be the linchpin of the Tehran-Kabul relationship. As Alex Vatanka recently opined, “if the U.S. wants the Afghans to stand on their feet economically, then Iran is the inevitable part of the equation.”

Finally, do not expect much change to the Iranian policies for Afghanistan as a result of the June Iranian presidential election of the “moderate” candidate, Hassan Rouhani. Prior to his election, Rouhani told Tehran University students, “Some think they must fight with the rest of the world, while others think we have to surrender, but there is a third choice, which is to have constructive interaction. We have to go on with the world based on our national interests.” Although he may be less inflammatory toward the United States, the issues that drive Iranian Afghan policy, most notably the economic linkages, will not change. And, it must be noted, the policies are ultimately subject to the approval and oversight of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Rouhani may be able to change the public tone, but the policies will likely remain unchanged.
*Tehran nearly went to war with Taliban-ruled Afghanistan in 1998. After the Taliban killed 18 Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e-Sharif, Iran mobilized their Army and massed nearly 100,000 troops on the border. For a description of the four major periods of tension between Iran and Afghanistan (1962 Helmand River water dispute, the Afghan Communist period c. 1978, the Taliban rule, and the recent prolonged presence of foreign forces) see “Iran as a Regional Player in Afghanistan”, by Prof. Dr. Muhammad Saleem Mazhar and Naheed S. Goraya, in Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business, vol. 3, No. 7, November 2011. ijcrb.webs.com

ENDNOTES

3. Torfeh, pg. 111-112.
8. Torfeh, pg 118.

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Iran-Afghanistan Relations: New President, Old Politics?

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Watching today’s western media, it seems that Iran is not only a part of the so called ‘Axis of Evil’, it’s the epicenter of it. Being largely portrayed as a state which is an irrational actor, extremely guided by ideology, on track to acquire nuclear weapons by all means. In addition Iran is characterized as a state which is one of the prime supporters of terrorism worldwide, the ‘invisible hand’ behind all kinds of insurgenies, destabilizing not only the Middle East but its South Asian neighborhood as well. To call its image dubious is an understatement. Be it as it is, such categorizations do not help assess Iran’s foreign policy in an objective manner, especially not with regards to Kabul. Furthermore, this depiction distracts from the important questions which should be asked: How far is Tehran willing and able to play either a constructive or destructive role in the stabilization and reconciliation process in Afghanistan? And is Iran’s Afghan policy an outcome of a coherent, comprehensive and rational concept or determined by short-term responses to certain developments? Will the foreign policy under the new President Hassan Rouhanichange, and what how will this impact Iran-Afghanistan relations?

Basically one must state, that Iran is increasingly gaining importance in the whole region. Some analysts even argue that Iran is the real beneficiary of the US/NATO military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan. First, they brushed two major regional adversaries of Shia Teheran aside - the Iraqi Ba’th and the Afghan Taliban – both Sunni - which were seen as threats to Iran’s political and socio-cultural existence. Second, the subsequent power vacuums that were created, due to the disastrous post-invasion periods in Afghanistan and Iraq lead to tremendous difficulties for the US/NATO, thus paving the way for Iran to extend its activities and influence in the respective countries. Being shocked by the pace at which the regime of Saddam Hussein was ousted and Baghdad was captured, Iran’s security circles were obviously pleased to observe the limitations of foreign (US) military operational capacities in its sphere of influence. This was only a boost for the self-confidence of Tehran’s religious as well as political leaders and strategic thinkers but also for Iran’s regional prominence. Consequently, Iranians continue -despite increasing international pressure and isolation- to actively safeguard their interests in Afghanistan. A phenomenon, which is without doubt justified to a large extent. However, despite the fact that Teheran’s objectives have changed over time as the political landscapes beyond its eastern borders have been in turmoil it is difficult to identify immediate and concrete goals or a clearly defined agenda. Nevertheless a set of core matters determining the bilateral relations between Teheran and Kabul remain resilient. These cover the respective goals such as stability at the Iranian-Afghan border, a Teheran-friendly government in Afghanistan, pushing back the strong influence of Pakistan and Saudi-Arabia in order to prevent an encirclement of Iran by a potential “Sunni wall” (Iraq-Pakistan-Afghanistan) as well as avoiding dominance of its arch-rival, the USA in the region. Having this in mind, Iran is especially focused on ensuring
national and regional security, fighting terrorism, preventing the production and trade of narcotics, economic cooperation, and finding a solution for the refugee problem. Most significant for Teheran is the issue of security confronting the country's leadership with a difficult ideational and strategic dilemma. On one side it seeks for a stable Afghanistan which is guaranteed at the moment by a strong presence of foreign troops but on the other side, the presence of US-troops in its immediate neighborhood is for obvious reasons a thorn in the flesh of Teheran's decision-makers. The likelihood of a long term presence of US troops and the maintenance of bases in post-2014 Afghanistan casts a shadow on the relations between Kabul and Teheran. Therefore, it is no surprise that on each occasion Iran demands the complete withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan. Iran, and especially fundamentalist clerics, are convinced that particularly the presence of US troops only complicates the Afghan scenario and that regional problems have to be solved by the regional countries themselves. Foreign presence would only aggravate the situation.

Another area of concern is extremist militancy. Since it existence Iran is confronted with local and cross-border terrorism such as militant groups operating from bases in Afghanistan and Pakistan, supporting anti-government activities in the Iranian province of Sistan-Balochistan. Nevertheless, like Pakistan, Iran also gets the blame by several analysts of being ambivalent in its ‘war against terrorism’. Although no definite proof for these accusations is made public, there is no doubt that interaction between Tehran and militant outlets like Al-Qaida exist and that Iran is involved in supporting militant groups and religious fanatics. Unambiguously Iran has its independent agenda when it comes to fighting terrorism. If the regime in Teheran feels threatened by terrorists they act cooperatively especially in regional frameworks. However, it seems that when the Iranian strategic establishment is convinced it can gain a strategic advantage it tries to instrumentalize terrorism, often in order to maintain a balance of power between the different factions in Afghanistan. In this context, combined with having a long history of exercising influence, one can also imagine that there is periodical, low scale Iranian support for militant oppositional forces, even for the adversarial Taliban in order to show the US that Teheran is able to challenge them in the region at any time.

Additionally, the fact that Afghanistan is one of the greatest producers of opium and heroin, in other words after the production of narcotics were more or less eliminated, in the last years the country regained the label of being a ‘drug economy’. This is creating serious problems for Iran, not only because Iran has the highest rate of opium consumers but also because it suffers from the extensive drug trafficking which uses Iran as a gateway to Middle East and Europe. Security Forces for example are permanently involved in violent clashes with drug traffickers, leading to the death of around 4000 officers in the last three decades. Furthermore, police and army are increasingly getting involved in narcotic related corruption.

Another burden of bilateral relations is the issue of Afghan refugees on Iranian territory. Since the beginning of the Soviet Invasion in 1979, Iran has been confronted with a massive influx of refugees. Hosting more than one million of them -some sources claim two million- Afghanistan has one of the greatest refugee populations worldwide without receiving any adequate recognition and support from the international community. In addition, Tehran has to deal with a tremendous amount of economic migrants offering cheap labor, creating domestic tensions between unemployed Iranians and Afghans. Iran's policy of forced repatriation of the economic migrants lead to additional serious confrontations between Tehran and Kabul. An area of success is doubtless Teheran's economic assistance in western Afghanistan, building massive infrastructure in order to integrate the bordering Afghan
provinces into the economic system of Iran. There is a general agreement among analysts that Teheran’s primary goal of development activities for Afghanistan is to ensure its own political influence through economic interweavement and to weaken the ties between Kabul and the areas of its western territory. However, Iran is not trying to provoke Kabul too much and applies—at least temporarily—more tactical, conciliatory than confrontational, aggressive rhetoric in order to achieve its major goal, the establishment of a stable Afghanistan which is strong enough to ensure peace and security but also weak enough to give in to Iranian influence.

To sum up, it seems that Iran’s policy towards Kabul is rather incoherent and short term orientated, responding to certain political events and trends. Until now Iran did not develop a sustainable, cohesive overall strategy or fundamental doctrine regarding its eastern neighbor. Despite the fact that some Iranian interests conflict with each other, one can state that in general, the country shares numerous common interests with the international community in Afghanistan. A fact which is often overlooked in the light of the Iran-US deadlock created by the nuclear conflict as well as by antagonistic perceptions of liberal democracy and human rights. However, these bilateral tensions seriously hamper a cooperative and collective approach of all actors involved, including significant regional players such as Iran. Subsequently Iran only partly utilizes its capacities in playing a constructive role in Afghanistan which would be beneficial for all. Therefore it is in the very own interest of all actors involved to intensify the dialogue with Teheran and include the country in developing a comprehensive regional solution for Afghanistan. Today, due to the fact that Iran has a new President, there is some hope that the deconstructive attitude in Iran’s foreign policy enforced by former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will come to an end. Nevertheless, one must also state that the new Iranian Hassan Rouhani belongs to the same school of clerics which defined and legitimized the confrontational attitude of Iran, maintaining a firm grip over society ever since the fundamentalist revolution took place in the country. In sum, it seem that Iran will most likely not experience large scale alterations within its foreign policy agenda under Rouhani.

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(8) **IRAN and ISRAEL**

My enemy’s enemy is my friend – Israel and Arabs against Iran?

**Dr. EHUD EILAM**

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On mid July 2013 Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that his country would not wait ‘until it’s too late’ to stop Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon.\(^1\) It was a warning to Iran, another one in the long struggle of Israel to prevent Iran from producing the bomb.

Assuming the United States would not bomb Iran\(^2\) Israel would have to rely on her own forces in a strike on Iran. Any such attack, due to the distance from Israel to Iran, which is more than a thousand kilometers, would be an air offensive. Israeli planes would have to fly over Arab states like Jordan and / or those in the Gulf like Saudi Arabia. Iraq is also on the way from Israel to Iran but Iraq does not have an air force like that of Jordan and Saudi Arabia which could intervene in the campaign.

Israel destroyed an Arab nuclear reactor in Syria in 2007\(^3\) and in Iraq in 1981. In both cases the attack served the interests of Arab states such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Even in 1981 when they backed Iraq against Iran they were not pleased that Iraq would become too strong, let alone possessing nuclear weapon.\(^4\) This kind of worry was realized after the Iran – Iraq war when in 1990 Iraq conquered Kuwait instead of focusing on Israel. A nuclear Iran too could go after the Arabs and not confront Israel.

There are some secret business ties between Israel and Arab Gulf states.\(^4\) Furthermore Saudi Arabia that considers Iran as a threat opposes strongly that the latter would have a nuclear weapon.\(^5\) Other Arab states including in the Gulf think the same.\(^6\) For them and Israel Iran is their common enemy. Although Israel and Arab Gulf states are not exactly natural allies, because of the Arab – Israeli conflict they are not sworn enemies either. Over the years Arab Gulf states have been assisting other Arab states and non state organizations against Israel. Yet since Israel was established the contribution of Arab Gulf states to the struggle against Israel was mostly in the political, economic and financial levels almost without actually sending any troops to fight her. Generally speaking from Israeli perspective Arab Gulf states are considered to be relatively moderate i.e. willing to accept her existence. They have been supporting a Palestinian state side by side to Israel, according to the Arab peace initiative to end the Arab – Israeli conflict. \(^7\)
The Iranian threat creates a common interest between Israel and Arab Gulf states. Considering the importance of the subject they can collaborate against Iran if only temporarily, indirectly and in specific areas. Of course they could wait and see if the sanctions on Iran would convince her to accept restrictions about her nuclear project. The biggest hope of Israel and Arab Gulf states is that there would be regime change in Iran following some kind of mutiny or an uprising, in the spirit of the turmoil in the Arab world that would be more powerful than the unrest in Iran in 2009. But if this does not happen, Arab Gulf states and Israel could attack Iran.

Arabs and Israelis, officially or not have been fighting together several times against Arabs, if only in different sectors. It occurred in Lebanon in 1982 when Arab Christians had an alliance with Israel against the PLO or in recent years in the West Bank when the security forces of the Palestinian authority collaborate with Israeli security forces against the Hamas. So if Arabs and Israelis have been confronting Arabs they could do it against non Arab state, Iran. The latter is Muslim like Arabs but under Shiite rule, while Arab Gulf states and of course Israel are not.

Israel that has more than 350 F-15 and F-16 could launch an attack on the Iranian nuclear sites. Theoretically Arab Gulf states could participate in that raid due to their proximity to Iran, which gives them very comfortable springboard. They also have quite a military strength. Saudi Arabia alone has more than 250 advanced aircraft, many of them different types of F-15. The Saudi air force is not ready for offensive operations oversea. Yet the UAE has about 140 F-16 and Mirage 2000 and is considered to be the best military in the Gulf. His air crews gained praises for their performance in air–ground attacks in the war in Libya in 2011. However, there are many military problems that would make it very difficult for F-16 and F-15 from Arab Gulf states and Israel to fight together. There is no option, certainly an open one for coordination in advance let alone running joint exercises. The political obstacles are so huge that they actually rule out this option. Therefore Arab Gulf states could contribute to an Israeli offensive against Iran mostly by allowing Israeli planes to fly over them. They might also provide Israel with some information that has to do with their common enemy like the strength and deployment of Iranian fighters that could try to intercept Israeli planes.

**The Iranian response**

An Israeli assault on the Iranian nuclear infrastructure might start a war that would destabilize the Middle East. An Israeli strike on Iran particularly a successful one would make Iran eager for revenge. Iran could attack not only Israel but Arab Gulf states as well, accusing the latter for assisting Israel if it is true or not. There would be at least two separate fronts in the Middle East alone: one. The Levant where there is Israel and the pro Iranian Hezbollah and the Gulf.

Iranian military build up like producing missiles causes concern among many states including Israel and Arab Gulf states. Israel would probably be hit by the Shahab – 3, Iran’s long range surface to surface missiles. Israel’s anti missile system, the Arrow, might shoot down those missiles. Israel could retaliate with her planes and long range surface to surface missiles. Both sides would consider if and how to continue bashing each other according to their casualties and damages in all levels including the political
one. They might reduce the flames and go back to running their prolonged cold war that has been going on since the early 1980s. 17

Israel would face another front, a more dangerous one, in her northern border with Lebanon. There the Hezbollah, the most powerful non state organization in the region, would start firing his 60,000 rockets and missiles that were deployed in Lebanon exactly for that purpose. 18 The Hezbollah might be able to launch into Israel up to 1,500 rockets every day and the war could last for a month. 19 Israel would retaliate and commence a large air and ground offensive. Arab Gulf states, as in the 2006 war in Lebanon between Israel and the Hezbollah, would not oppose and even secretly support an Israeli attack on the Hezbollah. The Sunni Arab states would like to see the end of the grip this Shiite organization has on Lebanon, clearing the way to their Sunni allies there to seize control.

The Hezbollah’s base in Lebanon is far away from the Gulf so this guerrilla and terror force could not harm Arab states there at least not with his projectiles. But Iran is very close to those Arab states. From the other side of the Gulf Iran could bash those states with missiles that don’t have sufficient range to reach Israel. Iran could focus on Arab objectives such as oil and natural gas infrastructure in Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE. Iran could also disturb the importing of oil from the Gulf by blocking and spreading mines in the Hormuz Straits. Yet such Iranian actions could entangle the United States in the war 20 which Iran might not want.

Iran might retaliate in a more indirect way like with cyber warfare 21 and “sleeper calls” that would commence terror attacks, not only in the Gulf. Either way a war with Iran could cause turmoil in the oil market. Arab Gulf states would be aware of all those ramifications in advance and might not be willing to pay the price of an Israeli strike. On the other hand their assumption might be that if Iran gets nuclear weapon her dominance would be such that Arab Gulf states would lose much more.

Arab Gulf states and United States’ forces could hit back hard at Iran. Iran depends on oil and natural gas as well and her sites are in or not that far from the Gulf, within reach of air strikes from there. Also following an Israeli attack the Iranian air force, which is already quite weak, might absorb heavy casualties after confronting Israelis planes. This would reduce Iran’s ability to intercept American and Arab planes if and when they bomb Iran’s oil and gas sites. Without this energy infrastructure the Iranian regime would not last for long, since it would not be able to give his people their basic needs and they would topple him. Therefore the Iranian leadership might restraint her response against Arab oil and gas sites even if the Iranian flag ship, the nuclear program, would take a major blow because of an Israeli strike. The Iranian regime is aware that even if it survives and try to rebuild the nuclear sites this effort would require huge budgets. Without oil revenues it would be almost impossible to finance that. A mutual assured destruction of the oil and gas industries in both sides of the Gulf could therefore deter Iran from attacking such sites in Arab Gulf states. This could help convincing the Arab Gulf states to allow an Israeli strike in Iran.

**Jordan, Israel and Iran**

The Hashemite kingdom, that always has to look out from her neighbors, suspects and
fears the spreading of Iranian influence particularly considering the Iranian grip on Iraq and Syria since with both of them Jordan has a border. Currently Jordan is worried mostly about the civil war in Syria, which increases Iran’s hold there. Jordan tries to pave her way in this issue between Iran on one side and Arab Gulf states on the other. Iraq is not yet an Iranian province and also it might not survive as a state following her ongoing internal fights. Either way the Iranian advance deep into the Arab world could increase if Iran has nuclear arsenal. Jordan could be the next target for Iranian expansion.

Iran does not need to invade Jordan directly but as usual to rely on proxies in order to save her strength and to officially declare that it does not wish to expand on the expense of other countries. Yet it is clear that Iran wishes to increase her influence in the region. Iran could try to undermine the Hashemite kingdom from her position in Syria and / or by approaching the Palestinians who are the majority in Jordan but don’t rule her, promising them the control of the state if they help Iran to overthrow the current regime. In spite and actually because of that Jordan would avoid joining an Israeli attack on Iran, fearing Iranian retribution. The Hashemite kingdom would be satisfied if Iran’s power diminishes but a clash between Israel and Iran might be too risky for Jordan, even without Jordanian participation.

In the war in 1991, following the conquest of Kuwait by Iraq, the Hashemite kingdom was caught between Israel and Iraq. Jordan had to maneuver and not to annoy any of those two powerful states. Jordan then supported Iraq yet without fighting with her and in the same time Jordan kept her ties with Israel. In the future Israeli planes on their way to Iran and back might pass over Jordan. The latter might tolerate that without trying to intercept them with her fighters. It has about 60 F-16. But an ongoing exchange of punches between Israel and Iran, following the first Israeli strike, would put Jordan in the middle. Jordan would be in a tough spot if planes from Israel cross it again and again. This might be one the most important tests in the complicated relationships between Israel and Jordan ever since the former was established.

All in all Iran with a nuclear arsenal would be a growing danger to Israel and Arab states such as Jordan and those in the Gulf. A military cooperation between Arab states and Israel in order to neutralize together the Iranian nuclear infrastructure would probably not be feasible. At most Arab states would allow Israeli planes to cross their countries. Iran could retaliate against Israel and Arab Gulf states as well but the ramifications of retribution against her oil and gas industries might limit her response.

4. http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/4495b17c-f3a7-11e2-942f-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2ZzrDScSH
7. On a possible revival of the Arab Peace Initiative see http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/01/world/middleeast/kerry-welcomes-arab-plan-for-israeli-palestinian-talks.html?
10. On the Saudi air force and the UAE: http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/GWmYTZsK2dijYscG9V/full
13. On the secret war between Israel and Iran see: Yoaz Hendel and Yaakov Katz, Israel vs. Iran: the shadow war (Dulles: Virginia Potomac books 2012)
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(9) **IRAN and INDIA**

**Indo-Iranian relations in the 21st century**

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India and Iran share long-lasting legacies of culture which they are trying to revive as they progress from transition as regional powers to Great Powers in 21st century.

India’s relations with Iran have seen twists and turns in history where they have been close at times and shared common interests. India despite having followed a continental defensive orientated strategy since Independence had always looked up to Iran for friendship only in times of need whereas Iran had traditionally looked more for its increased role in the Middle-East occasionally wanting to play a diplomatic role in Afghanistan in that case being on the same page as New Delhi.

**India and Iran in Central Asia**

Every aspiring Great Power tries to project its own power outside its own “Sphere of Influence” through hard power military base. In that context, India offers a curious case as it tries to graduate from being a regional power in South Asia with a continental strategic orientation to great power aspirations in Indo-Pacific adding a maritime dimension to its existing strategic culture, Central Asia falls slightly out of its radar logically.

However, India’s only military base outside its territory is in Central Asia’s Tajikistan named Ayni which is near Iran. India’s strategic orientation since independence has been primarily defensive which in fact worked well during the Cold War between Soviet Union and the United States. But with the end of the Cold War, New Delhi began to work its own strategic priority especially in the 1990s that a forward presence in Central Asia is required facilitated with the emergence of Tajikistan as an independent nation.

It was backed by a clear strategic goal to have increased influence in Central Asia keeping in clear view of the fact that an anti-Indian Taliban was gaining ground in Afghanistan with tactic support from Pakistan. India's military intelligence established contacts with Tajik counterparts to get more access to the then Northern Alliance to fight out Taliban all before 9/11. At that point India was running a military hospital on the Tajik territory close to the Afghan border to serve the injured Northern Alliance soldiers.
Ayni air base in Tajikistan happens to be India's first and only foreign military base since Independence in 1947. Ayni lacks the classic military operational aspect as it still needs the tick off from Russia for having India’s fighter aircrafts. According to media reports, India has spent $70 million between 2002 and 2010 to renovate the Ayni base. India has extended the Ayni runway to 10,500 feet and installed state-of-the-art navigational and air defense equipment there.\(^1\)

It could be argued that despite the inter-service rivalry between Indian Army and Air force, the latter’s repeated prodding in containing the Pakistani army’s presence in Afghanistan and Central Asia was the reason behind India looking to have a Air Force base in Tajikistan though with limited operational capabilities.

If the Air Force base has to be operational then it will also have the logistics for sharing intelligence with say Russia and may be even Iran all that can be first achieved if Tajikistan gives a nod.

In other words, Tajikistan itself might be reluctant to play host to India’s increased military presence which might annoy Moscow. With reluctance from both Tajikistan and Russia, there is a very little chance for India to project its ambitions in Central Asia.

However, there is just one variable which can work in India’s favor. With the withdrawal of the U.S.-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) troops from Afghanistan in 2014 and with increased Pakistan army’s involvement in region, there is every chance that there might emerge a consensus for India to play a role in the Central Asia region. Under that context, Indian establishment might ask Russia to consider its case for upgrading the existing facilities in Ayni as an exchange.

All this depends on how situations start unfolding in other part of the world or to be precise in the newly coined Indo-Pacific region. It's understood that the United States' strategic priorities has started shifting from Middle-East oriented counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations to more Indo-Pacific-oriented aimed at containing China’s increased maritime presence.

India is already on board with Washington on that and so as many countries in Asia-Pacific starting from Australia, New Zealand, Vietnam, South Korea, Japan, and Indonesia. Pakistan, an all-weather friend of Beijing, will be clever enough to exploit the new Cold War between Washington and Beijing for its own economic gains.

Russia is the key player and in many ways one can argue the decider if Washington and Beijing gets in a classic Cold War for resources. In that case, Moscow will try to extend its leverage both on its East and West by not allowing for any increased NATO presence first in Central Asia and so in Eastern Europe. Further, Washington might also be pressured to allow increased Russian military presence in the Central Asia and even in Afghanistan for it to concentrate its own military assets in the Indo-Pacific region aimed at containing China.

Therefore, the argument could be extended on how Moscow will allow for India’s increased presence in Central Asia with a military base in Ayni. Further, India will be under pressure on whether to extend itself in Indo-Pacific region by strengthening its naval presence and joint-warfare capabilities or by giving more teeth to its existing continental warfare oriented army-air force combination.
In other words, it could be argued what will be New Delhi’s strategic priority either aimed at containing China’s presence in Indo-Pacific along with Washington or checking by Pakistan’s increased involvement in Afghanistan.

For sure, with the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, China might want to have Kabul as a spring board for having more access to resources in Central Asia which might not go well with Moscow. In that case, with increased Chinese presence in Central Asia and with fissures in the existing détente between Moscow and Beijing, India might be welcomed by the former to have greater military presence in Central Asia starting with Ayni which might be welcomed by both Moscow and Washington even if the variable option that the Taliban doesn’t increase its existing foothold in Afghanistan with active support from Pakistan intelligence and army.

This opens up a new chapter in the existing Great Game in Central Asia. If China wanting to play an increased role in Central Asia for its resources with tactic support from Pakistan, then Moscow will not hesitate to allow India’s increased military presence in Central Asia which includes having a base in Ayni by which it can share active intelligence. It’s here that both Tehran and New Delhi can start to have a common strategic interest.\(^2\)

**India and Iran’s Common interests**

India and Iran have several common interests. Both countries have shared the common political ideal of a stronger global South and an independent West Asia. Both have compatibility in trade which runs to US$ 14 billion. And even more via third countries. India imports about 11 per cent of its oil needs from Iran. Iran absorbs a vast amount of Indian labour. Iran is the closest and most natural route between India and Central Asia and India and West Asia for its growing energy requirement and other resources. India and Iran want a stable Afghanistan which is possible through a collective regional solution. Then what’s the problem?

Iran is a major player and influences the politics of the troubled West Asia. It has contradictory and complex relations with most of the individual countries of the region. For example, Iran had a war with Iraq but the hostility was overcome after Iran assisted most factions of Iraqi leadership during the US occupation. Now the two are allies. Iran is a strong regional player and can help achieve stability in Afghanistan whom they share a border with. Earlier, like India, Iran had supported the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Iran is a strong supporter of an independent Palestine with a Hamas leadership. Iran is a rival to Turkey and Saudi Arabia in regional geopolitics.

Iran has one major geopolitical adversary and that is the US-Israel alliance. Iran’s independent stance, its commitment to Palestine, military strength, nuclear ambitions, support to radical Islamic groups in the region and other such positions, have made the US-Israel axis their enemies. The US interest is to change the political system in Iran and stem its power. Iran was a US ally until popular struggles toppled the Shah of Iran’s regime and the Ayatollahs came into power. Now, the US has used Iran’s nuclear programme as an alibi and imposed economic sanctions against it in order to cripple its economy and cause internal rebellion. The United States have targeted the Iranian rial so that it cannot be exchanged for any other...
international currency. They would like all the world to follow this and want India to be part of this game plan.

The US and Israel have put massive pressure on India to distance itself from Iran, stop importing Iranian oil and vote against Iran in the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on sanctions against its civil nuclear programme. India has twice gone along with the US in the vote in the IAEA in 2005. The Indo-US nuclear deal had conditionality that India supports the US on Iran.

India also stalled the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline project that would have delivered gas directly to India as they were wary and unsure of both security and price issues. But this must have pleased the US and Israel also.

The US has stopped its banks and international transaction agencies like the Asian Clearing Union from making any transactions with companies that deal with Iran. India decreased the oil trade by 2-3 per cent. But recently, India has made it clear to the US that it is not going to make any further cuts in oil imports and trade with Iran. India also managed to get waivers from the US on this count.

India had announced several investments in Iran just last month. These include a railway project from Chabahar to Bam that has a free trade industrial zone. This is potentially a big investment for India at a time Iran needs friends and is likely to reward those who stand by it. The Chinese and Russians have similarly invested in Iran. Similarly, the Zaranj-Delaram road that India is helping to build links up with Afghanistan and is important for the Indian geo-strategic perspective. At a time, when Pakistan is resisting Indian road building in Afghanistan and Indian workers have been killed, India needs such alternative linkages. Similarly, the oil that India is getting is a beneficial deal.

Of course, India has been careful in the diplomatic language it uses when explaining its relations with Iran, taking care to show that its ties are linked to stability in the region, especially concerning Afghanistan. India also continues to oppose Iran’s nuclear programme. This is not a bad tactic, and certainly more sophisticated then jumping on to the bandwagon of sanctions like the Europeans have done. China and Russia on the other hand have clearly emerged as leaders because they have put pressure on Iran to stop its nuclear programme, offered Iran methods to ensure it restricts itself to just nuclear power and not enrich uranium and also stopped the US and Israel from attacking Iran’s nuclear facilities, as they have threatened to do.

Thus, by pushing its agenda on oil and trade, India has retrieved its position to some extent, more so because it needs Iran, just as Iran needs India at this most critical juncture. As for the US, most of its policies in West Asia are backfiring. Its strongest ally Turkey who assisted the West in the civil war in Syria is facing the worst backlash from its own people, even though the Turkish economy grows by 5 per cent every year.

Iran and India had established stable relations, with some ups and downs. Currently, these are on the up again. To keep these important geopolitical, economic and social relations on track, India will have to ensure that it hold up its spine and not bend before big power interests.
Iran is as important a geopolitical ally as any other. The elephants in the room are the US and Israel.

In past few years both India and Iran have been working towards managing its energy and economic cooperation under the shadow of the US and European Union (EU) sanctions. Despite the tightening of sanctions, India cannot halt the import of crude oil from Iran given its dependence on Iranian oil. Iran was India's second largest supplier of oil but now it has slipped to sixth position. India imported 16.083 million tones of oil in 2010-2011 and 14.689 million tonnes of oil during 2011-2012. Though India reduced oil imports from Iran, it is trying to expand trade in other commodities like tea, pharma, automobile, electronics, spare parts and agricultural products. India has already approved USD 364 million (20 billion rupees) fund to provide reinsurance to local refineries that process Iranian crude oil and the quantum of the fund can be raised in future.

India and Iran have also been working to build the regional transport networks – International North South Transport Corridor, which will help connect South, Central and West Asia to Europe for regional economic development. Equally important is the regional security dynamics, particularly the developments in Afghanistan in the post-2014 scenario. In addition, the unfolding of Syrian crisis and the impact of the 'Arab Spring' has implications for both India and Iran.

West Asia is going through the phase of political transition. With the changing global and regional security environment, new geopolitical alignments as well as changing balance of power are taking place. Iran an important player in the region is confronted with both internal and external challenges. Domestically, it is preparing itself for the upcoming presidential elections in June and struggling to manage its economy because of the sanctions. Externally, it is trying to overcome its current isolation because of its standoff with the West on its suspected nuclear weapons programme. So far Iran has been able to manage both these challenges by developing strong political, economic and strategic relations with the states in the region and beyond, hoping that such ties can it through the difficult times. While the region reorganizes itself, Iran and India look towards consolidating their bilateral relations. Both the countries are significant actors, whose role can't be overlooked in terms of their political and economic involvement in the region. Today, the regional complexities demand new ways and means of cooperation between India and Iran.

India has recently given the green signal in helping Iran build the port of Chabahar and is building a highway between Zaranj and Delaram. This signals a good turn in India's Iran relations, particularly at a time when the United States is taking unilateral coercive measures to corner Iran and putting pressure on India to decrease their relations with that country.

**Regional connectivity**

On regional connectivity, both sides agreed to work on a trilateral transit agreement involving Afghanistan. A draft agreement is expected to start soon. India's participation in Chabahar port project has been under discussion for the last few years but the decision to upgrade the Chahbahar port was conveyed during the EAM's visit. As a follow up, India’s Secretary from the Ministry of Shipping will visit Tehran to discuss the cost and related aspects on port project. It is important to note that the Iranian port of Chabahar (previously Bandar Beheshti), located on the
Makran coast of the Sistan and Baluchistan province of Iran criss-crosses some of the most important international corridors – East-West, North corridors, South corridor and TRACECA4 - and can be considered one of the most strategic transit locations. It is often referred to as the ‘Golden Gate’ to the landlocked Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries and Afghanistan. Chabahar has immense potential to connect the business centers in South Asia (Mumbai, Jamnagar, etc), the Middle East (Dubai), Central Asia (Turkmenistan) and Afghanistan (Milak). It is close to the mainline shipping routes connecting Asia and Europe and is 700 km away from the capital of the province of Zahedan and 2,200 km away from Tehran. The distance from Chabahar to Milak on the Afghan border is 950 km; it is 1,595 km to Dogharoon on the Afghan border; 1,827 km to Sarakhs on the Turkmen border; and 120 km from the Pakistan border. Iran plans to use this port for transshipment of a variety of goods - tea, eatables, electronics, building materials, heavy equipments, etc. – to Afghanistan and Central Asia and equally maintain the Bandar Abbas port as a major hub for trade with Russia and Europe.

From India’s point of view, the strategic importance of Chabahar is immense. It not only gives access to the oil and gas resources in Iran but also provides access to Central Asian Republics. India and Iran have already taken initiatives to enhance connectivity through bilateral agreements. In April 2008, an important initiative was taken by both countries when India and Iran signed an agreement to establish a new rail link between Iran and Russia. India offered assistance for technical training of personnel, railroad signalling projects as well as the supply of locomotives and spare parts. The trilateral agreement between the governments of India, Iran and Afghanistan to develop the Chabahar route through Melak, Zaranj and Delaram will also facilitate regional trade and transit and thus contribute to regional economic prosperity.

Enhancing bilateral trade and economic cooperation

The need to increase trade and economic cooperation between India and Iran is a strong imperative though the current level of economic engagement does not reflect the close relations between the two. India and Iran bilateral trade during 2011-2012 was USD 15,968.03 million as compared to 12,887.52 million in 2007-2008. The major portion of this trade is imports of petroleum products by India from Iran. Therefore, in order to sustain the level of trade interaction, it is important that Iran imports more from India. Agriculture, pharma, medical equipments and aeronautics are some of the identified areas where cooperation in future could be enhanced. It is ironical that Iran imports wheat from the US while it can do the same from India. During the EAM’s visit, both countries have decided to increase the bilateral trade to USD 25 billion in the next four years. Another significant area where cooperation can be expanded is banking. In addition, India and Iran have agreed to explore the prospects of joint investment. These can happen in both oil and non-oil sectors like electronics, automobile, Information technology, and infrastructure. Iran is offering production sharing contracts (PSCs) on exploration of oil block in Iran to Indian companies. This offer of PSCs was repeated by the the Iranian foreign minister during the recent Joint Commission meeting in Tehran. The Indian EAM reacted by saying, “We have an offer...to participate in one of their oil fields ...We must now respond”. Despite attractive PSCs, Indian firms are not sure about investing large sums as the risks are still too high owing to the sanctions. Capabilities in the industrial sector of both the countries were highlighted and both sides agreed to diversify their cooperation.
While economic diplomacy remained the highlight of the EAM’s visit, there was neither any mention of the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline nor the liquefied natural gas (LNG) deal. In the case of the IPI, there is security and pricing related problems while on the LNG deal, Iran is yet to respond. After India voted against Iran in the IAEA in 2005, Tehran called of this deal. It was communicated by the Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman that “Iran will revise these (economic) relations, and these countries (that voted against Iran) will suffer. Our economic and political relations are coordinated with each other”. Iran is a significant source of crude oil for India and will remain so in India’s future energy demands. In recent times, India has had to reduce its crude imports from Iran because of the prevailing sanctions which impose restrictions on shipping and payment options. India and Iran are trying to find ways to overcome this problem. While India complies with UN sanctions, it does not recognize unilateral sanctions imposed by third countries. Despite these difficulties, India will continue to import crude oil from Iran because of its proximity and also because Iran has remained a reliable partner. Iran has regularly supplied crude oil to Indian refineries despite the recent difficulties of delayed payment. More so, it is not possible to reduce the imports drastically from Iran. Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPCL), India’s biggest buyer of Iranian crude, declared earlier in January 2012 that it would continue to purchase Iranian oil. However, the very nature of sanctions imposed by US and EU has made the international trade environment significantly restrictive vis-à-vis Iran.

According to recent reports, Iran will develop three of its oilfields - Tossan, Esfandyar and Soroush – which are located in the Persian Gulf. Iran has also announced that it will implement 11 plans by July-August 2013 with the goal of increasing oil production by 175,000 barrels per day (bpd). Its oil minister has stated that Iran’s oil output is projected to increase by 1.5 million bpd by 2016.

There are other ways of enhancing energy cooperation between the two countries. Since Iran, as has been suggested, has a strong petro-chemical base, it would provide investment opportunities to Indian companies and they can export finished products to India. Moreover, the feasibility study of deep sea pipeline project has been carried out and the prospects will soon be discussed. If Iran expects India to be its true partner in energy cooperation it must give due attention to revisit the India-Iran LNG agreement signed in January 2005, according to which Iran was to export 7.5 million tonnes of LNG per annum over the 25 years starting in 2009.

**Cooperation on regional security issues**

The region is passing through the turbulent phase. There are huge political uncertainties particularly in Afghanistan, Syria and some of the West Asian countries. Without Iran’s inclusion durable regional security architecture will not be sustainable. Iran controls the entry and exit to the Straits of Hormuz through which vast amount of oil passes. The uninterrupted oil supplies from the Persian Gulf remain important for India and the global economy. Any military attack on Iran can interfere with the safety of oil supplies through the Straits of Hormuz. Military conflict in the region can lead to massive rise in global oil prices affecting the global economy. Iran is equally an important player in Afghanistan and had played constricive role after 9/11 by offering full support to the US in ending the Taliban rule. Both India and Iran have stakes in the stability of Afghanistan. Can the two countries cooperate? In past, India-Iran and Russia have jointly cooperated on Afghanistan. During the recent visit of the EAM, developments in Afghanistan and Syria were discussed at length with a
focus on stability and efforts to deal with increasing violence and the challenges that a possible return of Taliban would bring. In the light of the US withdrawal in 2014, India and Iran need to evolve strategies to help Afghanistan in rebuilding their country. These efforts could include building infrastructure connecting Afghanistan with Central Asia via Iran, by working together in sharing information to ensure that Taliban does not return in Afghanistan. In the past India has worked with Iran, Russia and Tajikistan. In addition, regional countries like Russia and China will have to play a far more active role in Afghanistan’s economic development. At the same time no durable solution can be found without Pakistan’s constructive role in Afghanistan.

Iran’s concerns over the current crisis in Syria were also expressed during Salman Khurshid’s interaction with his counterpart, Ali Akbar Salehi and Ali Larijani, the Speaker of the Iranian Majlis. On the Syrian crisis, India and Iran would want an end to violence and a peaceful resolution taking into account the aspirations of people of Syria. Both support the Geneva Communiqué, which includes the “6-Point Plan of Kofi Annan”. For Iran, stakes are high in Syria, and not surprisingly is thinking about diplomatic initiatives to resolve the Syrian crisis by getting the major non-aligned countries together. However, it needs to be seen how far Iran’s proposal of involving NAM countries would reach and to what extent India will be willing to play more active role in resolving the Syrian crisis under the initiatives of Iran. For India, its relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are equally important. In fact, the stakes are high in the Gulf, where more then six million Indians work. The GCC countries are India’s largest trade partner with trade in 2011–12 about $124 billion, far outstripping the financial volumes of such ties with any other region of the world.

Enhancing Cultural and People-to-people Contact

To give further push to the cultural ties and increase people to people contact between the two countries, the Indian Cultural Centre was inaugurated in Tehran during the EAM’s visit. India did not have a single Culture Centre while Iran had many Culture Centres in India. Therefore, opening up of the Centre is significant from a historical and cultural context. To enhance people-to-people contacts, the two sides felt the need to liberalize the visa regime. During this visit many MoUs were signed.

Iran’s controversial nuclear programme has been a sensitive issue with India since India’s vote against Iran at the IAEA in 2005. Iranian perception has been that because of its historical ties and as a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement, India should have been more sensitive towards Iran and not have followed the Western line. India’s position has been very clearly articulated on this issue. It has been emphasized that Iran has a right for peaceful use of nuclear energy while fulfilling its obligations owing to its membership of Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). India has urged all sides to resolve the issue diplomatically through discussions and negotiations. During the recent visit of EAM, Iranian shared information on its nuclear program and informed about the resumption of talks with P5+1 which is likely to start this year.
Iran in South Asian Association of Regional Co-Operation

Iran is an observer nation in SAARC. Afghanistan became a SAARC member in 2007. The representation of SAARC as major regional block is increasing and is rivalling the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), African Union and European Union. China has sought to become a member of SAARC, besides four other countries - Mauritius, Iran, Australia and Myanmar wants to become from an observer nation to a permanent one.

In conclusion

For India, Iran continues to remain important for various reasons: energy security, for countering Pakistani Taliban in Afghanistan, for access to trade and transport connectivity with Central Asia and Afghanistan and, to some extent, for managing the domestic political dynamics. India does not want to be a victim of the US policy in West Asia. However, equally important for India is its strategic partnership with the US and its also important for the US to court Tehran for its overall geo-political objective. In the current context, the real test for India and Iran is to maintain and sustain the current momentum.

Notes

1) India relies on Ayni for its Central Asian presence, (Central Asia News Agency, December 12)
2) Iran: India's Gateway to Central Asia
   http://www.idsa.in/strategicanalysis/36_6/IndiasGatewaytoCentralAsia_MeenASRoy
3) Iran: A Developing Grand Strategy
4) Recalibrating American Grand Strategy: Softening US Policies Toward Iran In Order to Contain China

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Indo-Iran Strategic Partnership: Opportunities and Challenges in the 21st Century

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The present paper seeks to explore the opportunities and challenges to India’s strategic partnership with Islamic Republic of Iran. Among the countries in West Asian region, Iran is strategically important for India from the energy, security and economic perspective.

India and Iran enjoy close cultural, linguistic and religious links for centuries. Both sides had established diplomatic links way back on 15 March 1950. Despite sharing civilisational affinities and historical links, partnership between India and Iran has never been consistent. Partnerships between the two countries have seen both ups and downs during the Cold War period due to their divergent foreign policy priorities. Although diplomatic relations continue to persist, but no major change could take place immediately after the dissolution of the erstwhile Soviet Union which resulted to the Cold War end. However, it was the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to Iran in September 1993 that not only cleared the past misunderstanding but opened the way for restoring close relations between the two sides for the mutual benefit. The visit was a landmark visit which will be remembered in the history of India-Iran relations. It also led to a shift in Iran’s approach towards India in the Kashmir issue. In a sharp deviation from the past, it was on March 1994, Iran for the first time pressurised Pakistan from presenting the resolution alleging India’s human rights violation in Kashmir. The ties were further cemented by the visit of Iranian President Akbar Rafsanjani to India in April 1995.

India and Iran enjoy multi-faceted strategic partnership encompassing political, economic and defence. They enjoy complementarities of interests on a wide range of areas. The partnership has the potential to serve bilateral interests which will definitely have regional and global ramifications. The real significance of this partnership lies in the significant role that both countries are expected to play in the twenty-first century challenging world. Iran being the largest and most populous Islamic nation which possesses a major attributes of a regional power in the oil-rich region of the Western Asia is the key to India’s ‘Look West’ policy. Iran is a strategically important country for India to gaining access to Afghanistan and Central Asia. However, in recent times, India-Iran relations have worsened over Iran’s nuclear activities and India’s stand on it under US pressure and Tehran’s stand on Kashmir issue between New Delhi and Islamabad. One of the major events that really put a brake on the closer ties between the India and Iran was New Delhi’s votes at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) against Tehran. The paper will make an attempt to answer for these questions – What is the geo-strategic significance of Iran? How far it is important for India to engage Iran from our country’s national interest’s perspective? What are the major issue and constraints to India’s strategic partnership with Iran?

Geo-strategic Significance of Iran
Islamic Republic of Iran assumes enormous strategic significance owing to its strategic location. India will need to engage Iran from the long-term strategic perspective owing to its geo-strategic location at the crucial junction of South Asia and Middle East. It links Central Asian Republics (CARS) and the Caucasus region to the Arabian Sea. It shares coastlines with the Persian Gulf in the south and the Caspian Sea to the north, with significant energy reserves in both areas. It is also located close to Persian Gulf which is...
the largest energy exporting hubs in the world. Iran is bordered by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan to the north. On the Eastern side, it is flanked by Afghanistan and Pakistan, on the south it is washed by the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. While on the West, it is bordered by Iraq and on the northwest by Turkey. By virtue of its geo-strategic location, Iran possesses one of the major attributes of a regional power in the West Asian region.

From the Indian perspective, its location close to Pakistan and Afghanistan plus CARs makes it very vital and too difficult to ignore. Iran also holds the key to serving India's interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Map Showing the Geo-Strategic Location of Iran in Middle East

Source: http://www.bibijon.org/iranimage/articles/iran-brief.htm

India's Interest in Persian Gulf and Iran's Role

Persian Gulf has without any doubt attracted the attention of other major regional and global powers of the world such as the United States, Russia, China, India and so on. India has over the last many decades develop keen strategic interest in Persian Gulf due to the presence of rich oil and gas resources which is crucial to meeting our increasing energy demands. India has developed a great interest in the stability and security of the Persian Gulf. India's interests in the Persian Gulf region is very well reflected in the fact that four million Indians reside in the Gulf and send valuable remittances home to their kinsmen, making them hostages of the local security situation, but also signifies India's rising interest in the Gulf. This rising interest takes place in a context dominated by three interacting and profound strategic trends: India's rise as a major Asian power with continental aspirations throughout all Asia, American dominance of the Gulf, and the visible Indo-American strategic partnership. India is very much keen to playing a significant role in ensuring lasting peace and security of the region.

Indian interests in the Gulf are to ensure reliable, uninterrupted and regular access to supplies and to tie into the expanding network of the growing north-south corridor trade from Russia and Central Asia through Iran to India and beyond. Indeed, Indian analysts regard the Gulf as the priority source of its anticipated energy needs for the long-term, hence its importance to India grows commensurate. Like other countries, India also sees energy and overall economic security and defense as being inextricably connected to each other. And such interests also mandate a close relationship with Iran that is quite unlike the posture of frozen hostility that characterizes U.S. relations with Iran. Likewise, India maintains
that the Gulf must remain a stable and unimpeded source of energy. India not only depends on a stable supply of oil and gas from the Gulf, it is also now seeking to gain equity investment, through the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), in local energy projects.

Former Indian Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee in his November 2003 program, asserts that India will both seek to develop its long range capabilities of power projection to the Gulf and seek more defense cooperation with local states. This cooperation will progress to more bilateral exchanges and exercises and greater sharing of defense advice with friendly nations. To realize those goals, he argued that strategic partnership with Washington is essential so that India always has the option of U.S. support for its objectives. Since Iran is the pivotal country in the region’s security calculus, it has a key role to play. Given its strategic location, it has a crucial role to play in ensuring strategic security in the Persian Gulf. Iran has to take the initiative role in terms of working closely with other Arab countries for the said purpose. Speaking on the occasion of 40th anniversary of establishment of Iran-Oman relations, Iranian Foreign Minister has categorically noted that regional states play a pivotal role to guarantee security of the Persian Gulf and such an important goal would be achieved only through collective participation of regional states free from foreign intervention. He also added that, “The Islamic Republic of Iran has for long time been supporting collective security cooperation in the Persian Gulf by the littoral states.” Further he urged the need for action plan that would be the sole way to achieve lasting security in the region.

Political Dimension of Strategic Partnership

The Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee official visit to Tehran by the turn of 21st century was important in terms of gaining political understanding between the two countries. It was during this strategic visit, both sides signed some of the major agreements in the areas of trade, technology and energy. It also set the momentum for closer interaction on the way to progress towards a strategic partnership. Then it was during the visit of Iranian President Mohammad Khatami on the eve of our country 54th Republic Day celebration in 2003, both sides signed a declaration on the strategic partnership agreement. The Delhi Declaration (January 2003) in a follow up to the Tehran Declaration (April 2001), affirmed their growing strategic convergence needs to be underpinned with a strong economic relationship, including greater trade and investment flows. Both the Tehran Declaration and Delhi Declaration reflect mutual commitment on the part of India and Iran to take a partnership to a strategic level from a futuristic perspective. They also identified complementarity of interests in the energy sector which should develop as a strategic area of their future relationship. Iran with its abundant energy resources and India with its growing energy needs as a rapidly developing economy are natural partners. Besides, both sides were resolved to exploit the full potential of the bilateral relationship in the interest of the people of the two countries and of regional peace and stability, and recognizing that the 21st Century holds unbound promises of welfare and progress through peaceful application of science and technology, promoting knowledge based societies, and tackling fundamental problems such as disease, hunger and environmental degradation.

Despite of all these developments, political understanding between the two countries has continued to remain low for several reasons such as the US pressure on India, Iran’s deteriorating relations with the US and last but not the least Iran’s stand on Kashmir in support of Pakistan. To further consolidate the political ties, both sides will need to find consensus on these issues. It has the potential to block the ties from moving further forward.

During the last few years, there has been frequent high level visit by the officials of the two countries, reflecting their mutual eagerness to expand the relations and work closely for the betterment of the region. From time to time, effort has been made from both sides to strengthen and expand the strategic ties. It can be said that more the exchange of high-level officials from both sides, the better will be the understanding and that will open up more scope for cooperation in multi-dimension areas (See table 1 & 2). There emerged a political understanding that their cooperation would further the cause of peace and security in the Gulf region.
Table 1: Selected High-Level Official Visits from Iran to India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Visits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani visits India to discuss about the bilateral relations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2001 | Deputy Prime Minister of Iran, Mohasen Aminzadesh visits New Delhi for dialogue on strategic issues.  
      | High-level Iranian defence delegation led by Brig. Gen. Hussein Dehghan visited India for the first meeting on ‘Joint Working Group on Defence Cooperation.’ |
| 2002 | Iranian Secretary to the Supreme National Security Council, Hasan Roophani visits India to discuss on a range of bilateral issues of concerns to both sides. |
| 2003 | Iranian President Mohammad Khatami visits India as a Chief Guest at the Republic Day function.  
      | Iranian Trade Minister Mohammad Shariatmadari visits India to discuss on economic and trade ties. |
| 2008 | Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited India. |
| 2012 | Iranian Foreign minister Dr. Ali Akbar Salehi visited India, as President’s special envoy, to invite PM for the 16th NAM summit. |

Table 2: Selected High-Level Official Visits from India to Iran

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Visits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visits Iran to discuss on the prospects of bilateral ties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Indian Vice President Shri K. R. Narayanan visits Iran.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Indian Foreign Secretary Raghunath visits Iran for review on economic cooperation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee visits Iran</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2002 | Indian External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha visits Iran and meet Iranian counterpart on the sidelines of UN General Assembly.  
      | Kanwal Sibal, Secretary of the External Affairs Ministry visits Tehran for the second India-Iran strategic dialogue. |
| 2003 | Indian Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Madhvendra Singh visits Tehran for discussion on strategic cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.  
      | Indian National Security Advisor, Brajesh Mishra visits Tehran. |
| 2007 | The then Ministry of External Affairs, Pranab Mukherjee visited Iran and exchange views on both bilateral and regional issues.  
      | Indian Foreign Secretary, Shivshankar Menon visited Tehran to discuss on the prospects of strategic partnership. |
2011
Indian National Security Advisor, Shivshankar Menon visited Iran.
Indian Foreign Secretary of India, Nirupama Rao visited Tehran.
Hon’ble Speaker of Lok Sabha, Meira Kumar paid an official visit to Iran
leading a multi-party Parliamentary delegation on the invitation of Majlis Speaker Dr. Ali Larijani.

2012
Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh visited Iran to attend the 16th Nonaligned
Movement (NAM) summit held in Tehran

2013
Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid visits Iran for the 17th
meeting of the India-Iran Joint Commission.


It was during the recent visit by Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid to Iran, both sides signed three Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs). They include:
• MOU between Institute of Standards and Industrial Research of Islamic Republic of Iran (ISIRI) and Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS).
• MOU between the Foreign Service Institute, Ministry of External Affairs, Republic of India and School of International Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran.
• MOU on cooperation in the field of water resources management. Moreover, both sides during the discussion identified four major areas for cooperation. They include regional connectivity, enhancing bilateral trade and economic cooperation, cooperation on regional security issues, enhancing cultural and people-to-people contact.

Defence and Maritime Security Dimensions
Defence and security cooperation between India and Iran in the post Cold War period was limited. The turning point came in April 2001 when Indian Defence Minister visited Iran wherein both sides discuss on the scope of expanding defence and maritime security cooperation in tune to the changing global and regional security scenario. It was during this visit both sides after having a detailed discussion signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on defence cooperation. The visit had no doubt set the momentum for further exchange of visits at the military level and opens up the scope for cooperation at the strategic level. In a follow up to the defence minister visit, Iran defence delegation visited India where the first meeting of India-Iran Joint Working Group (JWG) on defence cooperation took place. Defence cooperation between the two countries is vital to the regional security. It was during the visit of India’s Defence Secretary, Yogendra Narain to Tehran, both sides discussed on the prospect of arms sales to Iran including Indian Konkurs anti-tank guided weapons and spare parts. It was during these visits, both sides also discussed on holding military related training and joint military exercises involving all the branches of the armed forces.

The gaining defence ties got a further boost up when Iranian President Mohammad Khatami paid a state visit to India in January 2003 as the guest of honour on the eve India’s Republic Day. It was during this landmark visit both sides signed an accord in which they have agreed upon future Iranian access to Indian military technology. Both sides seeks to upgrade defence cooperation in the areas of Sea-lane control and security, joint naval exercises, Indian assistance to Tehran in upgrading its Russian made defence systems and establishment of joint working groups on counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics. India conducted first ever joint naval maneuvers with Iran in the Arabian Sea. After a gap of almost three years, India and Iran conduct the second naval exercises. Such exercises would hold the key to ensuring maritime security. Besides, Indian navy also provided training to Iranian navy sailors leading to U.S expressing dissatisfaction over India’s moving closer to engaging Iran at the strategic level as it would undermine the former effort to isolate Iranian regime. In this regard, Indian Defence Minister, Anthony has made it very clear that ‘India’s relations with the US and Iran were independent of each other. India
has very friendly relations with Iran. It will continue to do so. India’s friendship will not come in the way of
good relations with any other country.’

Terrorism poses a serious threat to the national security of both countries. India in particular has been
facing this problem for the last many decades abetted by rival nation Pakistan. In this regard, both India
and Iran ‘reiterate their resolve to strengthen the international consensus and legal regimes against
terrorism, including early finalization of a comprehensive convention against international terrorism… Iran
and India agree to continue joint cooperation to address the issues of international terrorism and
trafficking in narcotic and psychotropic substance.’ Both sides are against making any kind of distinction
between good and bad terrorism. Iran has also come under tremendous attack from the terrorist. For
instance the October 2009 attack on Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was attributed to Pakistan-
based Jundallah. Unlike Pakistan, India and Iran interests converge on stopping the reemergence of
Taliban in Afghanistan.

India and Iran being maritime countries, with a major stake in keeping the Gulf waterways open
for trade and energy flows there is a need to strengthen naval cooperation to ensure maritime security.
Ensuring maritime security is of utmost importance both strategically and economically given their
growing dependence on sea for overseas trade and in particular to India’s search for energy security. India
and Iran has a vast and varied maritime interest that needs to be furthered and protected. These interests
include energy security, fisheries, mining, and maritime trade, etc. Equally vast and varied are the
complex maritime security threats and challenges. They are threats from terrorism and piracy, smuggling
of illegal goods such as drugs, gun running, environmental pollution and movement of contraband. The
maritime interests of both countries encompass both the exploitation of the sea resources such as off-
shore hydrocarbon explorations under the nation’s jurisdiction and the protection of national integrity
ranging from military intervention, anti-terrorism and anti-piracy actions. However the present level of
defence and maritime cooperation is still limited to few areas. To broaden the existing level of defence
cooperation and explore more areas of strategic defence cooperation, it becomes imperative for both
sides to hold a strategic defence dialogue without allowing any third factor to loom large on the bilateral
strategic cooperation between India and Iran. Any further progress in the defence and maritime
cooperation between the two countries would depend on several factors such as Iran’s nuclear activities
and India’s stand on it under US pressure; Iran’s hostile relations with the US and Israel and Tehran’s
stand on Kashmir issue between New Delhi and Islamabad.

India, Iran and Regional Security

There are tremendous scopes for cooperation between India and Iran over the issue of regional security.
A secure, stable, peaceful and prosperous neighbourhood is central to security construct of both
countries. India continues to pursue active and collaborative engagements with her neighbours with a
view to promoting mutual understanding and regional peace and stability. India and Iran strongly
believe that their strengthened bilateral relations will be mutually beneficial and enhance regional peace,
security and stability. Both sides share the same view that security in Central Asia and in particular to
Afghanistan is vital for their security. Any kind of instability and insecurity in Central Asia and
Afghanistan will definitely have its spill over implications on the security of New Delhi and Tehran. The
close strategic convergence over the situation facing the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Afghanistan
offer tremendous scope for cooperation between the two countries. Both India and Iran are in favour of a
stable civilian government and denounced the Taliban government. The interests of both sides converge
in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Among the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, Iran has the capacity to influence long-term
stability there. Iran shares a 560-mile (900-km) border with western Afghanistan, While India does not
share any direct border with Afghanistan. Given India’s positive interest in Afghanistan and the Pakistan
search for a strategic depth in Kabul, it becomes imperative for India to engage closely with Iran to serve
the mutual interests of both countries. Unlike Pakistan, India and Iran have expressed serious concern
over the reemergence of Taliban regime, which is the key to lasting security in the region thereby
expanding trade ties with Afghanistan and Central Asia. India and Iran has genuine strategic interests in
assisting Afghanistan to become a functioning and responsible state in the region. Tehran has since 2001
offered support toward major reconstruction projects in Afghanistan. In November 2011, Iran has made an announcement that it has spent more than $600 million on Afghan infrastructure.19

India has a significant role to play in ensuring that Afghanistan move on an upward development trajectory. Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai during his visit to India in February 2005 has made a strong remark that ‘India has been with us every step of the way over the last three years. I would like to thank India, on behalf of the Afghan people, for its tremendous contribution to the rebuilding of Afghanistan.’ India has a strong strategic and economic interest in Afghanistan. India’s long-term strategic interests entail the re-establishment of a peaceful, stable and friendly Afghanistan. India’s interest in Afghanistan is part of its overall larger desire to be able to protect its interests well beyond South Asia. Afghanistan is central to India’s closer economic and security engagement with Central Asian Republics and Persian Gulf. India is closely working with the international community to bring lasting socio-economic and security stability in Afghanistan which continue to face lots of domestic problems. India has been one of the important regional donors towards Afghanistan’s reconstruction and development programmes. It has committed to invest US$ 2 billion (including US$ 500 million which Indian Prime Minister has committed during his visit to Afghanistan last year) to the effort during the last more than one decade. 20

Besides, India and Iran is also concerned about the security of Central Asia which is key to global and regional security requiring cooperation among the regional and major powers such as Russia, Iran, China, India, Pakistan, etc. The common interest amongst the regional and global powers seems to be stability and security in the region. Cooperation rather than competition is in the need of the hour to ensure lasting peace and security in the region. CARs states at present face a multiple security challenges. The major security challenges facing the Central Asian regions are terrorism, drug trafficking, arms trafficking, organized crime, separatism, ethnic conflicts, etc. The issue of terrorism has been the major problem affecting all of the Central Asian states. It has brought about social and political disorder, chaos and instability in the region. The issue has assumed a critical one owing to sharing their borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan. Central Asia is concerned about these two countries that have become the launching pads for terrorism. 21 It is in the common interests of India, Iran and CARs to deal sternly with all form of terrorist activities and work together to eradicate the menace of terrorism and other related activities.

Untapped Economic and Trade Dimension

India-Iran enjoys economic and commercial ties covering many sectors. However, the trade relations have traditionally been buoyed by Indian import of Iranian crude oil resulting in overall trade balance in favour of Iran. The total volume of the bilateral trade between the two countries has moved from US$ 536.85 million in the year 2001-02 to US$ 15968.04 million in 2011-12. The present level of trade volume is quite below the actual potential. In 2011-12, India’s exports to Iran were valued at US$ 2,411.33 million and its imports at US$ 13,556.71 million (refer to table 3). India’s exports had a meager increase from $1,231 million in 2004-05 to $2,411 million in 2011-12. The major items of Indian exports to Iran include inorganic chemicals, articles of iron or steel and cereals which account for a significant 50.6 per cent of India’s total exports from Iran (refer to table 4 & 5).

However, to expand economic and trade cooperation, both countries hold regular bilateral talks on economic and trade issues at the Indo-Iran Joint Commission Meeting (JCM). The 17th meeting of the India-Iran Joint Commission was held this year in the month of May in Tehran. During the 16th JCM meeting in New Delhi, six MoUs / agreements were signed between the two sides:

(i) Air Services Agreement;
(ii) Agreement on Transfer of Sentenced Persons;
(iii) MoU on Cooperation in New & Renewable Energy;
(iv) MoU on Cooperation in Small Scale Industry between National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC) and Iranian Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organisation (ISIPO);
(v) Programme of Cooperation on Science & Technology and
(vi) MoU on Cooperation between Central Pulp and Paper Research Institute of India (CPPRI) and Gorgan University of Agricultural Science and Natural Resources (GUASNR).

Discussions are going on between the two countries for finalizing a Bilateral Investment Promotion & Protection Agreement (BIPPA) and a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA). Once it materializes, it would help to further consolidate trade and investment ties.

Table 3: India-Iran Bilateral Trade From 2000-01 to 2012-13 (in US $ Millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>India’s Exports to Iran</th>
<th>Growth Rate (%)</th>
<th>India’s Imports from Iran</th>
<th>Growth Rate (%)</th>
<th>Trade Turnover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>226.97</td>
<td>49.27</td>
<td>211.23</td>
<td>-80.61</td>
<td>438.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>253.03</td>
<td>11.48</td>
<td>283.82</td>
<td>34.37</td>
<td>536.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>654.73</td>
<td>158.75</td>
<td>258.30</td>
<td>-8.99</td>
<td>913.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>918.11</td>
<td>40.23</td>
<td>266.82</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1184.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>1,231.39</td>
<td>34.12</td>
<td>410.21</td>
<td>53.74</td>
<td>1641.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>1,188.35</td>
<td>-3.50</td>
<td>702.46</td>
<td>71.24</td>
<td>1890.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>1,446.48</td>
<td>21.72</td>
<td>7,618.55</td>
<td>984.55</td>
<td>9065.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>1,943.92</td>
<td>34.39</td>
<td>10,943.61</td>
<td>43.64</td>
<td>12887.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>2,534.01</td>
<td>30.36</td>
<td>12,376.77</td>
<td>13.10</td>
<td>14910.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>1,853.17</td>
<td>-26.87</td>
<td>11,540.85</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>13394.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>2,492.90</td>
<td>34.52</td>
<td>10,928.21</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>13421.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>2,411.33</td>
<td>-3.27</td>
<td>13,556.71</td>
<td>24.05</td>
<td>15968.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13 (Apr-Dec)</td>
<td>2,068.08</td>
<td>8,471.64</td>
<td>10539.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Directorate General of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

Figure 1: India-Iran Bilateral Trade From 2000-01 to 2012-13 (in US $ Millions)

Source: Directorate General of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

From the above table and figure, one can observe that there has been sharp increase in India’s import from the Islamic Republic of Iran. India’s imports from Iran have contributed more towards reaching the
present level of trade volume that what it exports to the latter. Initially, the trade balance was in favour of India but by the year 2006-07, it has started tilting in favour of Iran. Balance of trade remained unfavorable for India due to heavy imports of crude oil from Iran. India’s trade balance with Iran which showed a surplus of US$ 651.29 million in the year 2003-04, turned into a deficit of over US$ 8 billion in 2010-11 owing to sharp increase in oil imports. By the year 2011-12, the trade deficit stood at over US$ 11 billion.

In 2010-11, Iran was India’s thirteenth largest trading partner, with a share of 2.1 per-cent of India’s total trade. During the same year Iran was the seventh largest source of imports for India, with a share of 3 per cent of India’s total imports, and the twenty fourth largest export markets with a share of 1.1 per cent of India’s total exports. 22

Table 4: Trends in India’s Exports of Major Commodities to Iran, 2001-2010 (US$ million)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HS Code</th>
<th>Commodities</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Inorganic chemicals</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>465.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Articles of iron or steel</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>104.0</td>
<td>130.2</td>
<td>94.7</td>
<td>123.1</td>
<td>175.2</td>
<td>345.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Cereals</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>565.4</td>
<td>265.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Iron and steel</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>149.7</td>
<td>133.6</td>
<td>180.1</td>
<td>180.3</td>
<td>199.4</td>
<td>192.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Machinery &amp; instruments</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>75.1</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>144.3</td>
<td>118.8</td>
<td>140.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Organic chemicals</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>100.6</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Electrical, electronic equipment</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>90.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Coffee, tea, maté &amp; spices</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>76.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Manmade staple fibres</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>67.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Pharmaceutical products</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Manmade filaments</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Rubber and articles thereof</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Meat and edible meat offal</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>Vehicles other than railway</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Miscellaneous chemical products</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Mineral fuels &amp; oils</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>337.0</td>
<td>687.7</td>
<td>870.6</td>
<td>983.1</td>
<td>287.8</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Residues, wastes of food industry</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Plastics and articles thereof</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Paper &amp; paperboard</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Trends in Iran’s Imports of Major Commodities from India, 2001-2010 (US$ million)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HS Code</th>
<th>Commodities</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Mineral fuels, oils</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>5077.0</td>
<td>8388.2</td>
<td>12827.1</td>
<td>95844.4</td>
<td>6798.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Ores, slag and ash</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>157.3</td>
<td>252.6</td>
<td>193.0</td>
<td>306.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Organic chemicals</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>141.0</td>
<td>149.8</td>
<td>205.6</td>
<td>204.2</td>
<td>373.4</td>
<td>277.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Fertilizers</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>161.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Inorganic chemicals; precious metal compound</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>231.5</td>
<td>106.7</td>
<td>140.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Plastics and articles</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>107.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Salt, sulphur, earth, stone</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>156.3</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>49.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Edible fruit, nuts</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>519.0</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Miscellaneous chemical products</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>Zinc and articles</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>121.2</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>312.1</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Iron and steel</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>162.1</td>
<td>140.8</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Machinery &amp; instruments</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Cereals</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

India’s share in Iran’s major imports is still low, which highlights the potential for enhancing exports of the items included in table 5 to Iran. The potential items of exports to Iran would include Machinery & instruments, Iron and steel, Electrical, Electronic equipment, Vehicles other than railway, Plastic and articles, Mineral fuels & oils, Optical, photo and medical apparatus, Pharmaceutical products, Residues, wastes of food industry, Sugar and sugar confectionery, Misc. chemical products, Aluminium and articles, Edible fruits and Oilseed. It is up to India and Iran how they are able to garner the potential of expanding trade ties.

This would require both sides to conduct economic and trade dialogue on a regular basis wherein they can discuss issues and concerns to economic and trade ties and explore more and more areas for cooperation.

**Energy Dimension**

Energy sector remains one area which offers tremendous scope for cooperation between India and Iran. The close cooperation in the field of energy would benefit both sides and India in particular when at present it does not possess sufficient energy resources to meet either current or future requirement. India will need the support of Iran to meet its growing energy demands not only supplying energy but also by acting as a gateway to Central Asian energy resources. It is a well known fact that Iran has the world’s third largest crude oil reserves and the second largest natural gas reserves. Among the countries of the West Asian region, Iran alone has proven oil and gas reserves of 137.6 billion barrels and 1,048 trillion cubic feet (tcf) respectively. It is the world’s fourth largest oil exports. India given its increasing oil consumption and demands offers remarkable market for Iran’s energy resources.

**Irán’s Major Oil Infrastructure**

**Irán’s Natural Gas Infrastructure**


India’s energy requirement is linked to both – achieving high Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate and stretching its economic status in the world. To meet its growing energy demand, India at present imports around 80 per cent of its crude oil requirements but it is expected that by 2025, it will grew to 90 percent resulting in oil demand of around 325 million tones. While for natural gas, its current demand is 166 million metric cubic metres a day (mmscmd) which is projected to increase to 443 mmscmd by 2017. India’s oil and gas production and consumption during the period from 1998 to 2011 are given in figure 2. If India has to take advantage of the Iran’s energy resources, it would need to invest heavily in the later energy sector. This can be reflected from the statement made by Iranian deputy oil minister for planning, Mohsen Khojasteh-Mehr that ‘Iran crude oil output could drop by 1 mbd over the next five years unless some $150 billion is invested in the energy sector.’ He further stated that ‘with the requisite investment, Iran could raise the daily output by a million barrels from its current production of 3.7 mbd.’

Exploiting the potential of energy cooperation between India and Iran would depend on how they mange to agree on the US factor. Since the last few years, the US factor looms large on energy cooperation between the two sides. With the Iran-US relations showing no sign of improvement in the distant future,
it has been the consistent approach of US to prevent Indian companies from doing business in Iran. In doing this, the primary US intention has been to prevent Iran from getting the benefit out of the energy revenues but has the potential to severely affect India’s dire energy requirements. In that context, it becomes imperative for India not to allow any third factor to impede its strategic partnership with Iran. Under pressure from US, Indian company Reliance in June 2009 stopped exporting petrol to Iran to avoid possible restrictions on its sales in the US, which was the biggest market for the company. This has resulted to decrease in Iran’s refined fuel imports by almost 95 per cent from 2007. This was followed by Reserve Bank of India’s decision to discontinue the Asian Clearing Union (ACU) currency swap mechanism that was used by India to pay Iran in December 2010. Moreover, India decided to go ahead with TAPI pipeline instead of IPI pipeline project. All of such instances led many in India to question over New Delhi’s autonomy in its decision making process.

Iran in particular is very much interested in the development of the IPI gas pipeline project as it would benefit in the following ways:

a. create significant job opportunities and economic prosperity of the provinces on the pipeline route;
b. enhance Iran’s strategic positioning both at the regional and global level; and
c. regional economic integration. 

Excluding US factor, energy cooperation between the two countries would bring significant benefits. India and Iran have in 2005 signed major deals on oil and gas which without any doubt would bring huge relief to meet pressing energy security challenges of our country. But the agreement remains only on paper requiring closer political understanding between the two sides should it has to come into action. If it materializes then it would release 7.5 million tons of LNG for a period of 25 years.

Figure 2: India’s Oil (thousand balers per day) and Gas (billion cubic feet) Production and Consumption from 1998-2011

![Graph showing oil and gas production and consumption from 1998 to 2011]


The oil and gas proven reserves of Gulf countries are given in table 6 as shown below. It can be observed from the table that Iran has second largest proven oil reserves among the Gulf countries. In the case of gas, it ranks first among the Gulf countries. India ranks high among the world’s leading oil and gas importers. Annually, it imports about 12 per cent of its oil needs. In 2009-10 alone, India imports about 22 million tons of crude oil valued at about US$ 10 billion from Iran.
Table 6: Oil and Gas Proved Reserve of the Gulf Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Oil reserves in billion barrels</th>
<th>Gas reserves in trillion cubic feet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>262.3</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>136.3</td>
<td>974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>115.0</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>101.5</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>97.8</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>728.2</td>
<td>2509</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Victory of Hassan Rouhani’s and Its Implications for India-Iran Relations

With Hassan Rouhani’s victory as the new President of Islamic Republic of Iran who will be replacing Ahmadinejad, there seems to bring new ray of hope for the improvement of closer ties between India and Iran. Hassan Rouhani coming to power is an opportunity India must not miss to capture. India at this juncture must look forward to expanding close relations with Iran that would help to serve our country’s national interests and not allow any third party to come on the way. It is high time for Indian foreign policymakers to take note of the changed mood in Iran and reached a hand out towards the newly elected government. And in that case preference should be given in the fields of economic cooperation which would be the key to the recovery of the economies of both sides.

Unlike his predecessor, it seems that the new President of Iran would be keen to working closely with the United States on multi-dimensional aspects including the issue of nuclear weapons. President elect Rouhani will seek to reduce the tensions with the United States which definitely would hold the key to bringing back stability in country’s economic progress. Iran’s economy is suffering due to the Western sanctions led by Washington over the issue of Iran’s nuclear programme. Such a western move have shrunk vital oil sales and isolated the country from international banking systems.

However, the key challenge ahead of Iran is the fact that the main decision maker in the country is the supreme leader. The president is the second most important figure, especially in domestic affairs and is responsible for the performance of the government and for shaping and implementing economic policy. The supreme leader decides on international matters relating to nuclear issue. Nevertheless, Mr. Rouhani has made it very clear after his victory that ‘there would be no direct talks until the United States stopped interfering in Iran’s domestic politics.’ Further he said that ‘all should know that the next government will not budge from defending our inalienable rights.’ In regard to Iran’s nuclear peaceful nuclear programme, he emphasized that ‘Like those of his predecessor, his government would not be prepared to suspend uranium enrichment, something he had done as a nuclear negotiator in 2004 as a trust-building measure in discussions with European countries. We have passed that period. We are now in a different situation.’ But at the same time he has also made it very clear to the world that, “first, we are ready to increase transparency and clarify our measures within the international framework.
course our activities are already transparent, but still we increase it. Secondly, we will increase the trust between Iran and the world." The United States on the other hand have expressed willingness to engage the Iranian government directly to resolve the nuclear dispute. 28

Concluding Observations

Should India has to strengthen its strategic space in the global decision making, it would need to engage with the major regional and global powers of the world without making any distinction between good partners and bad partners plus it must ensure that it does not come under the pressure of any other country in its foreign policy making. The future of India’s relations with Iran would depend on how New Delhi successfully manages to balance its close relations with both Tehran and Washington. Secondly, it would also depend on improvement in mutual understanding between Iran and US which is less like in the distant future owing to divergent foreign policy priorities and the clash of national interests. The key challenge ahead of this partnership lies in not allowing it to be bogged down by these issues; instead focus on maintaining and sustaining the current momentum. 29

Ensuring India’s security, promoting its socio-economic development, maintaining the country’s strategic autonomy and working towards a more just global order are integral to the policy. India aspires for a peaceful and secure periphery, expanding ties with its extended neighbourhood, cordial and balanced relations with major powers and mutually beneficial partnerships with developing countries. India’s foreign policy also has a strong multilateral dimension with the country working closely with partners in international bodies and fora to tackle global challenges of today such as terrorism, climate change, sustainable development, energy and food security and cyber and space security. India seeks reform of international institutions to reflect the global reality of the present day world and to ensure an appropriate role for India. 30

To extract the potential of the strategic partnership in the coming decades or so, it becomes imperative for both India and Iran to understand each other interest and concerns and at the same time not to allow any third factor to hamper the bilateral strategic ties. Although there is no such clash of interests between the two countries but the third factor has played a part in preventing the partnership for progressing in way that would not only serve bilateral interests but at the regional and global level. It is highly suggestible that Indian establishment engages constructively with Iran from an independent perspective irrespective of the interests of a third country. Engagement and not isolation should govern future Indo-Iran relations. 31 The hostile relationship between Iran and the United States prevents New Delhi from developing sound strategic ties with Tehran. An improvement in India-Iranian relations would contribute significantly to stability in Afghanistan. Alok Bansal, a senior fellow at the Centre for Land Warfare Studies, has very rightly pointed out that, lingering tension and looming war clouds within the region pose grave threats to India’s interests. It is therefore imperative for India to try and mediate between the US and Iran. 32

Endnotes


5. Ibid., p. 40.


11. K.N. Tennyson, n. 1, p. 156.


13. Gulshan Dietl, n. 8, pp. 875-76.


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India and Iran – narrowing the separation?

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Note / Disclaimer: This article is a piece of research and not an Op-Ed. The topic and author's current vocation are mutually exclusive. Any opinion expressed in this article is solely that of the author and in no way reflects the official position of the Govt. of India.

On 27 December 2010, India's Central Bank had issued a directive, regarding the payment mechanism for trade with Iran. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced that:

"In view of the difficulties being experienced by importers and exporters in payments to and receipts from Iran, the extant provisions have been reviewed and it has been decided that all eligible current account transactions including trade transactions with Iran should be settled in any permitted currency outside the Asian Clearing Union (ACU) mechanism until further notice."

After about two and a half years' negotiations and head-scratching, the two countries could finally evolve an acceptable solution. Iran has agreed to take payments for oil it sells to India entirely in rupees after US and western sanctions blocked all other payment routes.¹

India has been, since July 2011, paying in Euros to clear 55 per cent of its purchases of Iranian oil through Ankara-based Halkbank. The remaining 45 per cent was remitted in rupees in the accounts the Iranian oil companies opened in Kolkata-based UCO Bank.

At a time when the rupee is on a downhill vis-à-vis dollar, the rupee payment mechanism with Iran against crude oil imports has offered some path for its upliftment.

According to UCO Bank, crude oil import from Iran by state-owned Indian Oil Corporation under the rupee payment mechanism during the last 13 months has been worth $7 billion. Incidentally, UCO bank is the only Indian bank designated to receive the oil payments in rupee from oil importing companies.

Indubitably, this is soothing news for both Tehran and New Delhi. Furthermore, the move indicates that the Foreign policy establishment at South Block is pursuing an independent foreign policy paradigm – fundamentally based on the plank of national interest.
In fact, erasing all doubts, India’s relations with Iran received a straight drive from none other than India’s erudite Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh. On a state visit to Tehran in August 2012 to participate in the Non-Aligned Movement Summit, he bludgeoned all speculations:

“There are of course difficulties imposed by western sanctions, but subject to that I think, we will explore ways and means of developing our relations with Iran.”

Views and Narratives: Scholarly and Analytical

In this contentious and highly debated matter of India-Iran relations, it is noteworthy to delve into what analysts and scholars have commented.

In the innovative article “Why Iran Should Get the Bomb” in the Foreign Affairs magazine, Kenneth N. Waltz writes:

“Israel has made it clear that it views a significant Iranian enrichment capacity alone as an unacceptable threat.”

Rather interestingly, he further comments:

“In fact, by reducing imbalances in military power, new nuclear states generally produce more regional and international stability, not less.”

“Israel’s regional nuclear monopoly”, comments Waltz, “has proved remarkably durable for the past four decades.”

Actually, Waltz is stressing on the age-old, yet time-tested concept of “Balance of Power”. It is worthwhile to remember Bismarck’s policy in pre-1880 Europe in this regard. By carefully engineering power blocks, he could ward off any major war. As per Waltz’s thesis, similar situation could be created in the Middle East today.

Noted Indian analyst Harsh V Pant and his co-author Julie M Super are categorical as they predict quite affirmatively:

“Indian interests will continue to shape New Delhi’s policies toward Iran. Increased pressure from the US may not be the deciding factor in India-Iran ties.”

In fact, the authors seem to be positively skewed toward India’s foreign policy paradigm. They write:

“New Delhi’s continued emphasis on strategic autonomy undercuts efforts by Washington to influence Indo-Iranian relations.”

And the authors seem hopeful that “Washington may find value in considering New Delhi’s potential role as an interlocutor in reaching out to Tehran.”

Energy security, according to Pant and Super, is a major concern for India that has necessitated a delicate balance of relationships amid the competing interests of the US, Israel and Iran.
The authors are confident that talks of an Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline will also continue despite US criticism and a lack of progress in that direction. Probably, Pant and Super attempt to underscore the nuances of diplomacy that South Block clinically executes.

Through the paper “India and Iran relations: Sustaining the Momentum”, Meena Singh Roy laments:

“Iran was India’s second largest supplier of oil but now it has slipped to 6th position.”

Taking an obvious cue from Dr Singh’s visit, reports Singh Roy, External Affairs Minister (EAM) Salman Khurshid visited Iran in May 2013 and therein the decision to upgrade the Chabahar port project was ‘conveyed’.

Actually, India is interested in investing in the Chabahar container terminal project as well as the Chabahar-Faraj-Bam railway project. Bam is on the Afghanistan border and is connected to Zaranj-Delaram road in Afghanistan. The Delaram-Zaranj Highway, also known as Route 606, is a 135 miles long two-lane road connecting Zaranj in Nimruz Province, near the Iranian border, with Delaram in neighboring Farah Province.

It connects the Afghan-Iranian border with the Kandahar-Herat Highway in Delaram, which provides connectivity to other major Afghan cities. Route 606 reduces travel time between Delaram and Zaranj from the earlier 12-14 hours to just 2 hours. The highway was financed fully by development grants from India. It was designed and constructed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) of India.

During the visit of EAM, developments in Afghanistan and Syria were discussed at length. In a post-2014 Afghanistan, both India and Iran will have common stakes. A fanatic Taliban-dominated Afghanistan can be detrimental to both a Shia Iran and a Pakistan-wary India.

Insofar as Syria is concerned, India and Iran both support the Geneva Communique; which includes the 6-point Plan of Kofi Annan. However, Iran is much more deeply involved in a so-called neo-Cold War scenario in Syria since Hezbollah and Israel are at definite loggerheads. Whereas India’s stance in a civil war ridden Syria is more philosophical and ideational.

Naturally, it seems a collision between New Delhi and Tel Aviv is evident if the former goes on in its reconciliation with Tehran. However, it is germane to note what Ambassador Prakash Shah opines at FPRC Journal:

“It is well known in diplomacy that a country’s relations with another country are never at the expense of its other bilateral relations. Independent foreign policies pursued by each country should not blind either India or Iran to the benefits of closer bilateral relations.”

Interestingly, much like Pant and Super, Shah also finds credence in the hypothesis that “in fact, India can work for US-Iran rapprochement.”
On the other hand, and quite starkly, executive editor of Iranreview.org, Mahmoudreza Golshanpezhoooh seems rather critical when he opines⁶:

“the Iranian public opinion was shocked by India’s positive vote for the anti-Iranian resolution at the Security Council. We presume that India is not with us anymore. However, no presumptions are permanent.”

Quoting a voice of an Indian intellectual; we find that Dr Asghar Ali Engineer disapprovingly asserts:

"It is so unfortunate that Iran had supported India on Kashmir issue and yet we supported American stand on nuke issue and alienated Iran. Since then, our relations cooled off."⁷

Such an assertion may not hold much ground now after Dr Singh’s visit to Tehran in 2012 and India’s positive posture vis-à-vis Iran, without however, totally disbanding its position with respect to Iranian nukes. India is firm on its principles as well as on its autonomy in framing foreign policy in a multipolar world. Pragmatism coupled with national interest defines the contours of India’s foreign policy architecture.

**Deductive Logic?**

As a possible inference, it may be stated that India – Iran bilateral relations hinge on the following aspects:

First, US and Israel factor - that is, how both these countries view the development of Iranian nukes and Tehran’s stance towards IAEA norms. Though USA will be far more rational in its approach, Tel Aviv can be more demanding from its partners and allies. But the moot question is whether India is an ally of Israel in the Middle East? In a best possible mode, India is a strategic and defence partner with Israel. Keeping in mind what Ambassador Shah said, and in general what India pursues as a matter of policy, India’s relations with Israel and Iran may go ahead independently, one relation flourishing without hampering the growth of the other.

Second, Iran’s domestic pulls could turn out to be vital. It will depend on the theocracy and the incumbent regime as to how they react to Western sanctions. Though termed irrational by Western media, Iranian regime might not be that puerile to choose the path of self-destruction. Rather, they may skillfully tread the diplomacy of brinkmanship as was the case during the recent crisis curling around the geography of Strait of Hormuz.

Third, Iran’s stance towards nukes remains critical in how India and the rest of the globe perceive Iran and its motives. If Tehran pursues a clear and conscientious nuclear policy for peaceful civilian purposes, then it is not at all a matter of wild guesswork that India will not specifically be on the belligerent side to thwart such moves by Tehran through resolutions.

In sum, India’s dual pursuit of Energy Security and Strategic Co-operation will largely define its relations with not only Iran, but with major powers and blocks, viz,
Russia, Gulf Co-operation Council, Central Asian Republics, USA and Israel. Iran would be no exception.

Notes:

1: “Iran agrees to take all oil payments from India in rupees”, The Economic Times, Jul 14 2013
2: “Why Iran Should Get the Bomb?”, Kenneth N. Waltz, Foreign Affairs, July/Aug 2012
3: "Balancing Rivals: India’s Tightrope between Iran and the United States”, Harsh V. Pant and Julie M. Super, Asia Policy 15, January 2013
5: in FPRC Journal No. 6, 2011
6: ibid
7: ibid

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Iran's New President

And an Opportunity to Improve Bilateral Relations with India

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Here is one of the regular issues which arise my curiosity every day: I walk part of the distance between my house and my office in downtown Tehran every day and habitually pass in front of the Indian Embassy in Tehran in order to see how many Iranians are in line behind the mission’s door or, more importantly, what measures has the Embassy taken to attract Iranians and what publicity items are on display outside the building?

Unfortunately, save for a time or two, I neither saw Iranians lined up in front of the Embassy, nor on any occasion I came across a communiqué, poster or any other measures which would indicate a dynamic and lively interaction between the Embassy staff and the ordinary Iranian people on the street. Of course, I know that there are tens of reasons which can possibly explain this situation: perhaps security authorities of the host country have forbidden them, or maybe I do my daily walking too early in the morning. At any rate, the external manifestations of India’s presence in Iran, either by the Embassy, or in terms of the coverage of that country’s news in the Iranian media, and even from the standpoint of cultural, economic, and social interactions between the two countries, are by no means acceptable and never measures up to what we must see in reality. Here, there is no sign of the diverse, colorful, and tolerant India.

A review of the history of the two countries’ relations, especially enormous civilizational intermingling between the two nations, will shed more light on the existing void in relations. More interestingly, both in political and non-political spheres, there are a host of common components between Tehran and New Delhi which not only prove that relations between the two countries are quite close, but show how necessary and fundamental they are. All told, a realistic approach to the
main causes behind the current situation of bilateral relations between Iran and India should unavoidably take the following points into consideration.

1. Numerous grounds for having common interests

There are many cultural commonalties between India and Iran. Although cultural manifestations in two countries are somehow different in various fields, the cultural influence of each country on the other country's society is so profound that no Iranian or Indian will feel a stranger in either of the two countries. Perhaps one can assume that cultural propinquity has led to some kind of identity-based closeness between Iranians and Indians. This bilateral influence is also of interest in the field of politics. Iranians cannot believe, or perhaps understand, why Indians are not seriously pursuing the peace pipeline project, which they have apparently abandoned under pressures from the United States? Why they vote against Iran when the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency is passing resolutions against the Islamic Republic? Why they have been regularly giving positive votes or have simply abstained when the United Nations Security Council or the General Assembly, have been adopting resolutions against Iran during the past years? Why they have been cooperating with the United States and European countries for the intensification of sanctions against Iran? And there are many other unanswered questions. Perhaps, one of the reasons why Iranians cannot understand these issues is the sense of closeness and respect that has persistently existed between the two nations and Iranians believe that it is a two-way feeling.

On the other hand, Iran and India have many common interests in the region as well. The restoration of security and peace in Afghanistan is important to both countries; both of them advocate promotion of democratic approaches in the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf; the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean are of high significance to both Tehran and New Delhi; both countries believe in the necessity of the regional issues being managed by regional states; and both countries know the value of long-term and sustained interactions in all fields of economy, especially in the field of energy.

2. Existing challenges

In addition to the aforesaid common grounds, there have been also certain differences between the two countries in terms of the ways they have chosen to implement their foreign policies. Iran’s sensitivity about the quality of relations that India has with the United States and Israel, and India’s sensitivity about Iran’s close ties to China and Pakistan are among the most challenging issues which currently exist between the two countries in the field of foreign policy.
However, even a simple comparative report written on the common grounds as well as challenges in the two countries’ relations will invariably prove the upper hand of the common grounds.

With the above facts in mind, here are some recommendations which may prove useful for the further improvement of bilateral relations between Tehran and New Delhi, especially in view of the election of a new government in Iran:

**Firstly**, the Iranian president-elect, Mr. Hassan Rouhani, said in his first press conference following his victory in the presidential election that his administration is bent on improving Iran's relations with all the regional governments on the basis of mutual respect. “Mutual respect” is a principle which has been used to promote bilateral relations by both the Iranians and Indians and with which the two nations are more familiar than any other principle of bilateral interactions. Therefore, both sides should put their focus on the opportunity offered by Iran's presidential election and show their willingness and interest in further improvement of bilateral contacts. This issue should go well beyond mere diplomatic interactions and lead to a few positive actions during, for example, the first six months after the Mr. Rouhani’s administration takes office. If India is currently ranking the fifth among global importers of Iran’s crude oil by importing, at least, 2.9 million barrels per day of Iranian crude, a first step could be an effort by India to boost the import of Iran’s crude oil and manage the United States’ pressures in this regard. This is especially true when taking into account that most refineries in India have been already tuned to work with Iran’s light crude oil.

**Secondly**, a bilateral focus on cultural issues can be a good beginning for the improvement and further expansion of all-out ties. Both Iran and India enjoy enormous soft power capacities. Perhaps, the influence of the Bollywood on the Iranian society is not as powerful as what it once was, but India has been always an attractive destination for the Iranian tourists most of whom associate India with its tourist resorts, especially the monumental Taj Mahal. Iran, on the other hand, has huge capacities for the attraction of Indian tourists. Being in a country whose civilization has been intermingled with a major part of India’s history will be certainly quite enthralling for the people of India. I am quite certain that when exploring Iran’s historical sites, Indians will find much more tilework compared to any other country whose inscriptions and paintings are similar to the tilework in their own country.

**Thirdly**, throughout the past three decades which have passed since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran, the relations between Iran and India have been marked with many ups and downs. However, one interesting hallmark
has been consistently observed through that period: Iran and India have never looked upon each other as enemies. Meanwhile, the common feeling toward each country in the public opinion of both countries has been generally positive. This is a precious capacity which should be valued by both countries. Politicians and policymakers from both Iran and India should pay attention to it and, as said before, take advantage of the opportunity offered by election of the new government in Iran, which is known for its moderation and realism in the area of foreign policy, in order to further energize the process of improvement and expansion of relations in all areas of mutual interest.

I hope in less than a year I would witness during my daily walks that even the building of the Indian Embassy in Tehran is showing signs of both the dynamism and beauty of the expansion of bilateral relations.

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INDO – IRAN RELATIONSHIP- A SURVEY

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INTRODUCTION

Like human relations, international relations between and among countries become significant particularly when the world is being referred as a global village. The relationship of nations carries implications not only in the relationship status of two or more countries but also generates a situation in the region. If the relationship is friendly, the atmosphere of the region remains filled with good oxygen which
produces peace but if it is reverse, the entire environment becomes smoky and poisonous. Therefore, inter-national relationship is significant from all dimensions.

**INDO IRAN RELATIONSHIP – A HISTORICAL SURVEY**

India and Iran share strong civilisational ties. During the pre-historic times, the Indus Valley Civilization as well as the Proto-Elamite and Elamite Civilisations of Iran has evidence of economic interactions. Even trade linkages existed between the two civilizations through the ocean routes. Later, the cultural and diplomatic relations also existed between Iran’s Safavid dynasty and the Mughal dynasty in India. (1) India-Iran relations span centuries marked by meaningful interactions. In fact, Indo-Iran relationship dates back to the period of **Indus Valley civilization**. It was located in India and Pakistan(Pre-Partition India), and was contemporary with the **Proto Elamite** and **Elamite** civilisations in **ancient Iran**. The Indus people, and their ancestors, had trade links with Iran, the ancient civilization of **Mesopotamia**, and **Egypt/Nubia**. We also find a close similarity in the decorated pottery which has been excavated at **Susa**, located in the western part of Iran, with that of the Kulli culture in the north-west of the **Indian subcontinent**.

Due to huge migration of Indians to Iran, particularly, the North Indian people, we can discover a close affinity of **cultural, linguistic and ethnic characteristics** between the two countries. It is not that India and Iran had always maintained good and friendly relations all along, rather the graph of relationship has frequently changed depending on a current situation. It may be pointed out that during the **Cold War** period, relations between the **Republic of India** and the erstwhile **Imperial State of Iran** suffered a lot and the relationship has also witnessed ups and downs. Since India was a follower of the principle of Non-Alignment, India fostered strong military links with the Soviet Union while on the other hand, Iran maintained close ties with the United States. Since at that point of time, the world politics revolved round the bipolar power structure controlled by United States of America and that of Soviet Union, the different countries under the umbrella of these two great powers unleashed friendship and enmity accordingly. The relationship between the
two countries got a revitalisation following the 1979 revolution. The relations between Iran and India were strengthened greatly and have fostered and maintain many avenues of cooperation.

But due to Iran's continued support for Pakistan and due to the fact of India's close relations with Iraq during the Iran–Iraq War, the relationship status became gloomy to a considerable extent. But the relationship between the two countries got a new boost in the 1990s when India collaborated with Iran to support the Afghan Northern Alliance against the Taliban. This helped as a booster to a closer tie between the two countries. This incident may be referred as a mild turning point in the relationship between the two countries. The relationship of the two countries has many dimensions. On the one hand, the two countries share some common interests but on the other, their policies at the world level are diametrically opposite. This factor has occasionally contributed for deteriorating the relationship between the two countries. As it is known that the two countries share some common strategic interests, but India and Iran differ significantly on key foreign policy issues in many areas. While India has expressed strong opposition against Iran's nuclear program and both the nations continue to oppose the Taliban actions and activities, India continued to support the presence of NATO forces in Afghanistan, while Iran reflects an opposite stand in this regard.

There is no denying the fact that Iran is the second largest supplier of crude oil to India, supplying more than 425,000 barrels of oil per day, and consequently India is one of the largest foreign investors in Iran's oil and gas industry. Accordingly, India is heavily dependent on Iran so far as oil energy supply is concerned. But the relationship between the two countries received a big jolt due to adoption of diametrically opposite policies on the international plane.

In the year of 2011, the $12 billion annual oil trade between India and Iran was halted due to extensive economic sanctions against Iran, forcing the Indian oil ministry to pay off the debt through a banking system via Turkey. Indo-Iranian relations were further strained due to the fact that as of December 14, 2012, India’s
"moving towards Washington." was not taken by Iran in a positive manner. This lead to a great deterioration of the age old tie between the two countries.

INDO – IRAN RELATIONSHIP DURING PRE-ISLAMIC PERSIA AND VEDIC CIVILIZATION ERA.

It must be stated that the languages of the northern, western, central, and eastern regions of India belonging to the Indo-Aryan family have originated from the same source as the Iranian languages. The Indo-Iranians were a semi-nomadic people originating from the Central Asian steppes, via the Oxus river valley.

Vedic Indian people referred to themselves as Aryas. In Ancient central and northern India, it was also referred to as Aryavarta, meaning "abode of the Arya". Ancient Persian, such as Darius in his Behistun inscription, referred to themselves as (Ariya), from which the word "Iran" originated. Hence it is very much clear that the relationship between the two countries has a long historical root.

INDO – IRAN RELATIONSHIP DURINGachaemenid period and MAURYA period

The records of history show that Achaemenian art and architecture had a significant influence on northwestern part of Maurya India. Even before the Mauryan period of history, there is heavy evidence of writing in northwestern India. It has been suggested that the idea of issuing decrees by Ashoka was borrowed from the Achaemenian emperors, especially from Darius. The animal capitals of pillars in Mauryan imperial art were the inspiration for Achaemenian pillars. The use of this means of propagating official messages and the individual style of the inscriptions in ancient Iran and Greece is similar. Apart from this, trade expanded mainly because Achaemenids introduced coinage, which facilitated exchange. India exported spices like black pepper and imported gold and silver coins from Iran. All these mark that India and Iran used to maintain relationship from a long historical period. Again, under the reign of King Ashoka of the Indian Maurya Empire, Buddhism was helped to spread throughout the eastern regions of Iran. A great number of Buddhist missionaries were sent to spread the teachings of Buddha, and rock edicts set up by Ashoka state that he sent some to his North-West territories, which included the eastern territories of modern day Iran. It can
therefore be deduced that religion, particularly, Buddhism played a key role in the bonding of relationship between India and Iran.

**INDO – IRAN RELATIONSHIP DURING GUPTA AND SASSANID PERIODS**

So far as the historical records are concerned, it is seen that the Sassanian period in Persia (226–651 CE) coincided with the **Gupta** period (308–651 CE) in India. It is further seen that the Sassanian monarchs used to maintain relationship with the Gupta Empire. Pulakesin, the ruler of the **Deccan**, was known in Persia, and there were frequent embassies between Persia and India. Further, there were trade transactions which bonded the relationship of the two countries. It is also evident that the two countries had close tie with regard to cultural aspects. It is evident from the fact that one of the murals in the **Ajanta** caves near **Mumbai** depicts a Hindu king with men in Sassanian dress. It can naturally be deduced that there were close tie between the two countries.

**INDO – IRAN RELATIONSHIP AND BUDDHIST INFLUENCE**

So far as the relationship between India and Iran is concerned, Buddhism played a key role. Buddhism as a religion became widespread in Persia within a span of few hundred years of its emergence in India. During the reign of Emperor **Ashoka** of the **Maurya Empire**, Buddhism as a religion spread throughout Iran significantly. A huge number of Buddhist missionaries were sent to spread the teachings of **Buddha**. The rock edicts set up by Ashoka carry the evidence that he sent some of the Buddhist missionaries to the North-West territories, which included the eastern territories of modern day Iran. Therefore, it is very much clear that like many other countries, Buddhism contributed a lot for a close affinity between India and Iran.

**INDO – IRAN RELATIONSHIP IN MODERN TIME**

The current substantive thrust in India’s relations with Iran is largely as old as the demise of the Cold War. With the fall of Communism and its eventual removal, the Cold War vision of a bipolar contest between the first and the second world became redundant. The two countries shared a border till 1947 and share several common features in their language, culture and traditions. Both the countries have diplomatic relations as well as people-to-people links. India’s relationship with West Asia as a region is dramatically different than a generation ago, when from 1947-1990, India was too ideological toward the region, as was reflected in its subdued
ties with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. Today, however, it is these three states around which India is developing its new West Asian strategy, with New Delhi taking special care to nurture all these relationships and pursue its substantial regional interests.

Yet another factor that could constrain India–Iran relations is India’s ties with the Arab Gulf states, especially with Saudi Arabia.\(^3\) In fact, the relations between Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, which are marked by competition and rivalry, have posed challenges for Indian foreign policy in recent times.\(^4\)

India has a long tradition of relationship with Iran. The Noble Laureate poet of India, Rabindranath Tagore paid a visit to the Iran Parliament as a guest as early as in 1930.

As per record, Independent India and Iran established diplomatic links on 15 March 1950. The Shah visited India in February/March 1956 and Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru visited Iran in September 1959. Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi visited Iran in April 1974 and Prime Minister Shri Morarji Desai visited in June 1977. The Shah, in turn, visited India in February 1978. In this way, the visits and the counter visits have acted as a cementing bond in the friendship between the two nations. Further, the Iranian Revolution in 1979 opened a new phase of attachment between India and Iran. It was marked by exchange of high level visits of Indian Prime Minister Shri Narasimha Rao in September 1993, Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in April 1995 and Indian Vice President Shri K. R. Narayanan in October 1996. The bond got a new twist and the relationship was further consolidated and enhanced at the turn of the millennium with visits by Prime Minister Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee in 2001 and a return visit by President Mohammad Khatami in 2003, when he was also the Chief Guest at the Republic Day function. The Iranian President Dr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited India on 29 April 2008. The status of relationship was further enhanced with the visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki who led a high-level delegation to India in November 2009. This visit provided an opportunity to set the agenda for bilateral
relations to be pursued by the two governments. The discussions covered a whole range of bilateral issues including economic cooperation, energy security, expansion of bilateral trade, surface transport, and regional issues and common concerns about terrorism.

The Delhi Declaration focused on international terrorism (in the wake of 9/11) and shared concerns about US unilateralism in Iraq. Both countries also articulated a mutual interest in pursuing enhanced cooperation in areas of science and technology and most significantly, underlined a commitment to forge defence linkages and develop strategic relations.

In fact, terrorism has become a common concern for all nations of the world. India’s strong equities in Iran and the importance of Indo-Iranian relations was reiterated in no uncertain terms by the Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao in a speech at a seminar jointly organised by India’s Institute of Defence Services and Analyses and Iran’s Institute of Political and International Studies in New Delhi in July 2010.(5)

Again, the visit of the External Affairs Minister Shri S.M. Krishna to Tehran from 15-18 May 2010 in connection with the 14th G-15 Summit also contributed a lot for consolidating the relationship between the two countries. The visit of the Hon’ble Minister of State for Human Resource Development Dr. D. Purandeswari to Tehran in connection with the 9th Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) Ministerial meeting during 26-27 March 2011, and again, the visit of Shri Gulam Nabi Azad, Hon’ble Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare to Iran were directed to furthering the steps for enhancing the bond of relationship between the two countries.

It is important to note that the Indo-Iran relationship mainly revolves round the commercial ties. There are significant trade ties, particularly in the field of crude oil imports into India and diesel exports to Iran. Iran’s positive attitude to India was further proved by the fact that Iran frequently objected to Pakistan’s attempts to draft anti-India resolutions at international organizations such as the OIC and the Human Rights Commission. The support extended by Iran to India helped to strengthen the bond of relationship between the two countries. On the Indian side,
India welcomed Iran’s inclusion as an observer state in the SAARC regional organization.

So far as other aspects are concerned, there is a small Indian community in Iran. There is a Sikh Temple (Gurdwara) located in Tehran, as well as small Hindu temples in Bandar Abbas and Zahidan. They were built in the 19th century by Indian soldiers in the British Army. There are also small communities in India who trace their ancestry to Iran. Again, a growing number of Iranian students are enrolled at universities in India, most notably in Pune and Bangalore. The growing Iranian film industry looks to India’s Bollywood for technical assistance and inspiration. Lucknow continues to be a major centre of Shiite culture and Persian study in the subcontinent.

So far as diplomatic aspects are concerned, in the 1990s, India and Iran supported the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan against the Taliban regime. They continue to collaborate in supporting the broad-based anti-Taliban government led by Hamid Karzai and backed by the United States.

**INDO – IRAN ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP**

India and Iran are tied up with economic relations very deeply. Iran's trade with India crossed US$13 billion in 2007, an 80% increase in trade volume within a year. India-Iran economic and commercial ties have traditionally been buoyed by Indian import of Iranian crude oil. India imported about 22 million tons of crude oil valued at about $10 billion in 2009-10, which makes it the third largest market for Iranian crude. India-Iran trade in 2009-10. India’s exports to Iran include petroleum products, rice, machinery & instruments, manufactures of metals, primary and semi finished iron & steel, drugs/pharmaceuticals & fine chemicals, processed minerals, manmade yarn & fabrics, tea, organic/inorganic/agro chemicals, rubber manufactured products, etc. India has interests with the GCC in economic, political, security and strategic fields. In recent times, both sides have been looking for new areas of cooperation and are trying to improve the relationship. Economic relation has been the backbone of India-GCC ties, with trade and business growing steadily. The Gulf supplies around two-thirds of India’s energy requirements. (6) India’s engagement with West Asia including Iran has always been a balancing act hovering between economic necessities and strategic pursuits. (7)
OIL AND GAS

Iran has an enormous reserve of natural gas, which according to a 2008 estimate stands second only to Russia. In 2008–09, Iranian oil accounted for nearly 16.5% of India’s crude oil imports. Indian oil imports from Iran increased by 9.5% in 2008–09 due to which Iran emerged as India’s second largest oil supplier. About 40% of the refined oil consumed by Iran is imported from India.

In June 2009, Indian oil companies announced their plan to invest US$5 billion in developing an Iranian gas field in the Persian Gulf. In this scenario, India’s policymakers are well aware of the need to diversify sources of energy supply. This is where Iran comes into play: the Persian Gulf nation accounts for roughly 10 per cent of the world’s total proven petroleum reserves (Country Analysis Briefs January 2010). It should be stated that Iran in 2007 accounted for 17 per cent of India’s crude oil imports making it the second-largest supplier of oil after Saudi Arabia at 23 per cent. Again, the power and fertilizer sectors account for nearly three-quarters of natural gas consumption in India. Although India’s natural gas production has consistently increased, demand has already exceeded supply and the country has been a net importer of natural gas since 2004. Moreover, there is still no agreement, for example, between India and Iran on the price of the gas or between India and Pakistan on the tariff to be paid for transportation across latter’s territory. Due to the uncertainties involving this pipeline, the Indian government’s 11th Five Year plan does not project any gas supply from this route. In mid-2009, Pakistan signed an agreement with Iran to secure 750 million cubic feet of natural gas per day through the pipeline, without India’s participation in the negotiations.

CONCLUSION

As a concluding observation it may be stated that so far as the relationship between India and Iran is concerned, it has a long historical root from very ancient times. The graph of relationship has many ups and downs. On many occasions the two countries have come very closer and again on others a distance was created but that
were not a very long time problem. It could be repaired by diplomatic ties and relationship.

Though defence ties between India and Iran have been clouded in secrecy, a number of reports from secondary sources seem to suggest that India would cooperate with Iran on upgrading the latter’s Russian-supplied weapon’s system, supply conventional military equipment and spare parts, provide expertise in development of military hardware and train Iran’s armed forces. Let us hope that the two countries would maintain a good relationship and contribute towards world peace environment because any tense relationship might endanger the world peace.

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India-Iran Relationship: Future Prospects and Challenges

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India and Iran are going to be strategic partners in the post 2014 Afghanistan. Iran holds a key position as far as India’s contiguous vicinity is concerned. India is a booming economy. According to World Bank India’s economic growth is likely to accelerate to over 6 per cent during the current financial year April 2013-March 2014.1 India’s GDP nominal stands at $1.824 trillion, which is 10th largest in the world, whereas GDP PPP is $4.684 trillion.2 Such a huge economy would need huge energy base to support its economic development. This is the reason that India is
eyeing to get access to energy rich Central Asia and Afghanistan via Iranian seaport of Chabahar.

Iran is second largest oil supplier to India which accounts for 12% of its annual requirements worth $12 billion. But due to the US pressure these imports may see a sharp decline in coming years.

India and Iran were closely aligned during Taliban government in Afghanistan. They supported Northern Alliance against Taliban, because Tehran and New Delhi were barred from Afghanistan during Taliban regime. The alliance between India and Iran is mature now; they are going to get strong foothold in Afghanistan through infrastructure projects.

The return of Taliban regime would be unacceptable to India and Iran, because they know that Taliban would never allow them to play any role in Afghanistan. This is one of the greatest challenges they face while playing Afghan gamble.

India and Iran are in close economic relationship, although the volume of trade between both countries is not comparable to America or Israel. But despite that Iran’s importance cannot be ignored in India’s strategic calculus. Trade between both countries stood at $15,968.03 million during 2011-2012 as compared to $12,887.52 million in 2007-2008. The major segment of this trade is import of oil from Iran.

Iran is vital for India because of its geographical propinquity and commonality of interests in the region. During the EAM’s visit, India and Iran pledged to boost their bilateral trade to $25 billion in the next few years.

Relationship between Iran and India is based on mutual cooperation and understanding. India imports 70% of its oil needs and it is expected that in next few years this demand may reach at 90%. India needs a country that can help to overcome its energy deficiency whereas Iran is in search of support by a country like India at regional and global level to move forward with its nuclear program and also achieve its regional interests vis-à-vis Afghanistan and Central Asia.

India and Iran have convergence of interests, both countries want to move on with long term energy pacts, both want to secure their economic and strategic interests in Afghanistan and counter any radical (Taliban) regime in Afghanistan that may hurt their interests in the post 2014 situation.

In August 28, 2012 Indian PM Manmohan Singh on his visit to Iran to participate in NAM summit clearly expressed his government’s desire to have close relationship with Iran.

He said: “there is lot of interest in doing business with India and getting Indian investment in infrastructure. There are of course difficulties imposed by western sanction, but subject to that I think we will explore ways and means of developing our relations with Iran”.

He has been realistic in his approach that there are challenges imposed by the US
and other western nations. But despite all these challenges India is willing to take risk and go ahead with Iran on several infrastructure projects in Iran and Afghanistan.

Apart from Indian PM’s assertion in 2012, in May 4 2013 Indian foreign minister Salman Khurshid and his Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Salehi under the framework of joint commission highlighted four major cooperation areas.

1. Regional connectivity (Iran to Afghanistan and Central Asia).
2. To enhance bilateral trade and economic cooperation
3. Cooperation on Regional Security issues (Afghan war, US Withdrawal and reconciliation process in Afghanistan) and
4. Enhancing cultural and people-to-people contacts.

India and Iran are closely working on these lines. India has pledged to support Iran on the up gradation of Chabahar port. Iran's Chabahar Port lies 72 kilometers West of Pakistan's Gwadar Port, and is connected to the city of Zaranj in Afghanistan's southwestern province of Nimruz. Chabahar port is very significant as far as India’s doorway to Afghanistan is concerned. This port is also referred to as the 'Golden Gate' to the landlocked Central Asian States and Afghanistan. This port would provide India access to Afghanistan and Central Asian States. It would reduce India, CAS and Afghanistan’s dependence on Pakistan. India and Iran have also taken some important steps in April 2008. Both countries have agreed to establish a rail link between Iran and Russia. All these initiative would give boost to regional trade and investment.

Despite all these opportunities there are fears in the minds of Indian and Iranian policy makers that these infrastructure projects would face severe security threats from Taliban. In light of such security threats the investment and development projects undertaken by India and Iran would be impractical. Iran and India are also facing some challenges.

First, it is Western pressure, previously India voted against Iran at IAEA. There is a possibility that in future if US-Iran nuclear standoff gets worse, then India would have no other option but to choose the stronger party----the United States. India is in strategic deal with the US and Israel. India will never sacrifice its nuclear deal for Iran; it would never strain its relations with the US and other countries in nuclear suppliers group. Israel is a major supplier of weapon and equipment to India; it is open secret that Israel would never want Iran to become a nuclear weapon state or get stronger economically with the help of any other country. It is obvious that India would choose Israel over Iran in future because of Israel’s standing in the world.

Second major challenge for India and Iran would be the security of these projects. According to an Indian official close to the project although "India's plans look to exploit Afghanistan's mineral reserves, the threat to any rail development from the Taliban and other militant groups would be so great that it would have to be regarded as a strategic rather than commercial project. "They could blow it up at any time". 
The road and rail links connecting Iran with Afghanistan and Central Asia would face extreme danger of sabotage and assault. Anti-India and anti-Iran forces in Afghanistan would do their best to hinder these projects. It is imperative for Iran and India to first settle Afghan issue amicably and take on board all stake holders over these issues, only then such projects would succeed in Afghanistan.

Third challenge could be Pakistan’s possible response to such partnership, which may reduce Pakistan’s importance in this region. Afghanistan may again become a battleground for extended proxy war among Iran, Pakistan and India. Pakistan’s possible response to such partnership cannot be overlooked. It is a possibility that Iran and India may again use northern alliance to control Afghanistan, which may provoke Pakistan to align with Taliban. Such a scenario would be dangerous for the future of Afghanistan. There is a possibility of civil war in such a situation, which may plunge Afghanistan into further mayhem and turmoil. The best way out from this quagmire is collaboration and cooperation among Pakistan, India, Iran and Afghanistan. Afghanistan should never be used as a proxy ground by any country.

Other important challenge for India would be its close relationship with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The GCC states are largest trade partners of India. In 2011-12 the trade with GCC crossed $124 billion mark. GCC’s and Iran are in ideological clash and their relationship has never been cordial. India would have to take some tough decisions in near future. It cannot ignore importance of GCC states. Therefore, it is necessary for India to assess overall strategic situation of the region, Western sanctions against Iran and Pakistan’s response. India and Iran must move forward with the aim of regional peace, stability and prosperity. Both these countries must work together with other regional countries and create a new silk road for long term prosperity of the region, only then we can ensure long term peace and stability in Afghanistan.

End Notes

6. Ibid.

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A Review of Indo-Iran Relations based on Constructivist Approach

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Abstract

Understanding the bases of different dimensions of "New Delhi-Tehran Axis" have become significant in analyzing the implications of their relations for the structure of equilibrium of power in both regional and international levels. Regarding to this matter, a comparative review of the evolution processes of transitional trends in Iran and India's foreign policy approaches with an emphasis on the role of different internal, regional and international elements to shape these approaches would prepare efficient instruments to analyze foreign relations between the two countries. In this paper, the author has tried to examine the effective elements in Iran and India relations in a constructivist framework. Based on this theoretical approach, recognizing the identical features of the countries in different period of time could be useful to understand the role of these identities in constructing national interests and determining foreign relation trends between the two states.

The main object of this research is to analyze the role of identical and normative elements in shaping the dominant foreign policy approaches of Iran and India and their impacts on Indo-Iran relations. By categorizing Iran and India relations into three period of time during 1947 to 2013, the author has tried to show how dominant identities and norms of foreign policy approaches in these countries have changed the structure of bilateral relations between them and their policies toward each other.

Keywords: Iran, India, foreign policy, Identity, Constructivism

Introduction

Foreign policy of different countries mostly involves strategies chosen by the states to safeguard their national interests and to achieve their goals in international relations. Based on such a kind of definition, the approaches in the field of foreign policy studies
are strategically employed to develop interactions between different nations and improve bilateral and multilateral peaceful cooperation based on their national interests. In fact, the purpose of studying foreign policies is to provide a convenient basis to understand the foreign policy trends through states’ decisions and actions in the international arena. However, it is noticeable that historical experiences, institutionalized beliefs, and ideas shape the way nation-states behave in the international system. During the construction of foreign policy, actor’s strategic preferences are motivated by a cultural system operating at the domestic level. As a result, considering states features and national identities are constructive instruments to understand the bases of their foreign policy.

Relation between Iran and India, the two ancient civilizations, is as long as the history. New Delhi and Tehran have pursued a robust relationship with each other as two major Asian powers. However, the contemporary politico-economic relations between these two Asian powers are affected by different internal, regional and international elements from various dimensions. In fact, the existing realities of the regional and international arenas and also the dominant internal ideologies have dictated different foreign policy approaches to the foreign policy makers of both sides, especially during recent years.

Understanding the bases of different dimensions of "New Delhi-Tehran Axis" have become significant in analyzing the implications of their relations for the structure of equilibrium of power in both regional and international levels. Regarding to this matter, a comparative review of the evolution processes of transitional trends in Iran and India's foreign policy approaches with an emphasis on the role of different internal, regional and international elements to shape these approaches would prepare efficient instruments to analyze foreign relations between the two countries. In this paper, the author has tried to examine the effective elements in Iran and India relations in a constructivist framework. Based on this theoretical approach, recognizing the identical features of the countries in different period of time could be useful to understand the role of these identities in constructing national interests and determining foreign relation trends between the two states.

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Indo-Iran relations. By categorizing Iran and India relations into three period of time during 1947 to 2013, the author has tried to show how dominant identities and norms of foreign policy approaches in these countries have changed the structure of bilateral relations between them and constructed their policies toward each other.

**Constructivism as an Instrument to Analyze Foreign Policy**

The domination of a new international structure based on common values, identities and norms of different countries in an international society after the cold war is caused a new trend of creation the new style of governments in the different states of the world. So their common values could have a great challenge with the self-help system which offered by neo-realists and interdependency system which offered by neo-liberals.

The 1990s have witnessed the emergence of a new ‘constructivist’ approach to international relations theories and analyses. Rejecting the rationalist precepts of neo-realism and neo-liberalism, constructivists advance a sociological perspective on world politics. They emphasize on the primacy of normative over material structures, the role of identity in the constitution of interests and action, and the mutual constitution of agents and structures. i

Constructivists disagree with materialistic point of views, suggesting that states are social actors, whose behavior follows domestic and international rules. From this point of view, the arena of states interaction is also social in nature. ii Therefore, either the domestic or international system do not exist on their own. Their existence is the product of an inter-subjective awareness amongst persons who live in that world. Thus, each system is constituted by human ideas not material forces. It is a human invention or creation, not a physically built thing but purely an intellectual and ideational one. People at a particular time and place create a body of thought and a set of norms to organize their world system. iii It means that structure is constructed by social practice and determined primarily by shared ideas and by the way states define their identities and interests through social interaction rather than given by nature or material forces. So this is the process of international interaction which determines interests, not the structure of the international system.
Constructivists consider that how ideational structures determine the ways that actors redefine themselves. These norms tell actors who they are, what their goal is, and what role they should play.\(^{iv}\)

In this regard, identities are significant because they provide the basis for interests, which in turn develop the process of defining situations. In fact, constructivists create the necessary room for the identities and interests of international actors to take a central place in theorizing international relations. Now that actors are not simply governed by the imperatives of a self-help system, their identities and interests become important in analyzing how they behave.\(^{v}\)

Many constructivists analyze international relations by looking at the goals, threats, fears, cultures, identities, and other elements of "social reality" on the international stage as the social constructs of the actors.\(^{vi}\) Martha Finnemore has been influential in examining the way in which political units are involved in these processes of the social construction of actor's perceptions of their interests. In *National Interests in International Society*, Finnemore attempts to "develop a systemic approach to understanding state interests and state behavior by investigating an international structure, not of power, but of meaning and social value".\(^{vii}\)

"Interests", she explains, "*Are not just 'out there' waiting to be discovered; they are constructed through social interaction*".\(^{viii}\)

Such interests and identities are central determinants of state behavior, as such studying their nature and their formation is integral in constructivist methodology to explain the international system. But it is important to note that despite this focus onto identities and interests, constructivists are not necessarily wedded to focusing their analysis at the unit-level of international politics. Constructivists such as Finnemore and Wendt both emphasize that while ideas and processes tend to explain the social construction of identities and interests, such ideas and processes form a structure of their own which impact upon international actors. Their central difference from neo-realists is to see this international structure as being primarily ideational rather than material in nature.\(^{ix}\)
This leaves us with the question of how constructivists account for variation in states’ foreign policy behavior, or which independent variable they place their bet upon. Foreign policy is an instrument at the disposal of a country to protect and promote its national interests. While the national interest would be forever, its content will vary with time and circumstances. It follows that the policy has to be flexible and must keep in tune with changing national, as well as international, environment. As constructivism is relevant to foreign policy because decision makers create their own world in which they perform a particular foreign policy, it seems that there are three ways in which constructivism contributes to foreign policy analysis:

- understanding identities and interests

- understanding decision-making process (bargaining and arguing)

- understanding the interaction between the international and the domestic levels of analysis

For understanding identities and interests of the countries, constructivists seek to understand how interests are constructed through a process of social interaction. They believe that interests are not just given (or “defended”), but are defined. Based on this idea, material facts are important, but it is the social context that gives meaning to them.

In fact, state policy makers create the social world within which they conduct foreign policy in interaction with other states. The actors deal with social construction that shapes national identity. The construction of identity substantially informs what defined as the national interest. Dual process of articulation and interpellation is of central importance in understanding the construction of identity and the national interest in foreign policy. Through this process, visions of the foreign policy behavior including definition of one own state, other states, and their positions have been created.

On the other hand, for understanding decision-making processes based on bargaining and arguing, constructivist scholars believe that actors do not simply represent particular views and interests, but also “discover” their interests through a social process (arguing
and persuasion). Arguments themselves, however, are enabled and legitimated by the broader social discourse in which they are embedded.

And finally, to understand the role of the interaction of international society and states in shaping foreign policies, constructivists think that the increasingly tight global-local nexus demands a more interactive, multi-level framework of analysis.\textsuperscript{x}

Based on these frameworks, it is possible to say that states’ national identity construct the country’s foreign policy and its strategic doctrine. However, states’ national identity does not emerge in a vacuum, but rather from the interplay of a number of factors: domestic and international; state and non-state; strategic and non-strategic. The nature of political structure, history, culture, norms, values and policy makers’ ideological perceptions constitute the internal and external determinants. As a result, an important determinant of states’ strategic culture is its national identity. Strategic culture may be defined as “the socially constructed and transmitted assumptions, habits of mind, traditions, and preferred methods of operation—that is, behavior—that are more or less specific to a particular community.”\textsuperscript{xi}

Following Gray’s definition of strategic culture, as above, we may say that Iran and India’s strategic culture are amalgamation of their historical and civilization identities, which have witnessed different groups of people representing various norms and ideologies in different period of time. In continue, by analyzing Iran and India’s foreign policy identities during recent decades, the author will try to demonstrate the impacts of identical changes on Indo-Iran bilateral relations.

**Iran’s Foreign Policy Identity during Pahlavi Era**

Iranian identity has always been changed for historical, political and social reasons. The country has tended to be in the center of Persian civilization. However, the dual and paradoxical position caused a multifaceted identity for Iranians. Iranian multifaceted identity means its complexity and development. As a result, foundation of Iranian identity can be layered and composed of three layers: pan-Iranism, pan-Islamism emphasizing Shi’ism, and modernism.\textsuperscript{xii} In each period and according to the culture and identity of the ruling elites, specific layers of identity are emphasized. The dominance of each discourse
led a fundamental change in the fields of economy, politics, culture and society. The situation also influenced the field of foreign policy strongly.

In the time of the Pahlavi’s Dynasty, nationalism and modernism were prominent however it did not mean ignoring Islam. Since the days of the Shah (Iran’s leader before revolution), Iranian officials have argued that Iran’s size, historical significance, and self-professed cultural superiority merit a basic role for the state in the region. As a result, many of Shah’s policies were related to revive ancient Iranian Empire.

On the other hand, Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah era are considered a very important period in the history of modernity and significant development took place in this era. Especially in the Mohammad Reza Shah era, the most significant political and cultural element was modernism. Creators of Pahlavi’s post-dialogue attempted to achieve the latent power of Western nationalism via new identity from historical texts and signs. Dominance of positivism and new method of positivist had led Iranian elites to this conclusion that west is the destination of non-western societies including Iran. Therefore in learning knowledge and in the theory and practice field via positivist way, the West was the symbol of some values such as progress, individualism and secularism.\textsuperscript{xiii} The deep impact of collision with the West led to the creation of new cultural codes which challenged many elements of traditional culture. The challenge is the major issue in the last two hundred years and the main focus of political and social conflict.\textsuperscript{xiv}

As a result, in the foreign policy arena during Cold War, Iran played a pro-western policy and continued to have friendly but very careful relations with the Soviet Union and eastern bloc countries.

\textbf{India’s Foreign Policy Identity after Independence}

In India also ideas and beliefs have constituted the state’s strategic outlook and behavior. When India became free in 1947, it was the beginning time of Cold War. On that period of time, the strategic as well as philosophical vision of India’s first Prime Minister has had an undeniable impact on the construction of Indian foreign policy. Jawaharlal Nehru’s vision for the Indian state to remain non-aligned and independent in its foreign
policy decisions were “entrenched in the Indian mindset”. Nehru’s opposition with violence and preference for moral and strategic restraint kept India away from Cold War competitions at a time when the world was being divided into two ideological camps.

India, under Nehru, did not wish to become a part of any bloc and adopted a new policy, which is known as non-alignment policy. Nonalignment had its origins in India's colonial experience and the nonviolent independence struggle led by the Indian politicians. The principles of nonalignment, as articulated by Nehru and his successors, were preservation of India’s freedom of action internationally through refusal to align India with any bloc or alliance; nonviolence and international cooperation as a means of settling international disputes; the Panch Shila or the five principles of peaceful coexistence, as the basis for relations between states; opposition to colonialism and racism; and international cooperation to alleviate poverty and promote economic development.

Nonalignment was a consistent feature of Indian foreign policy during the first decades after independence and enjoyed strong, almost unquestioning support among the Indian elites. It also brought India considerable international prestige among newly independent states that shared India's concerns about the military confrontation between the superpowers and the influence of the former colonial powers.

On that period of time, India not only opposed colonialism, imperialism and racism and supported freedom struggles of different third world countries, but it had advocated active role and pleaded for a common united front of the third world countries in the UN. It believes that the non-aligned group of nations, by virtue of its massive number, could play a constructive and meaningful role in the UN by stopping the superpowers from using this world body for their own designs.

The Foreign Relations of Non-aligned India and Aligned Iran

After independence of India in 1947, the two governments established diplomatic links on 15 March 1950. Nehru’s policy towards Iran was based on mutual regional

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2. The main principles of Panch Sheel were: 1. Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty 2. Mutual non-aggression 3. Mutual non-interference in domestic affairs 4. Equality and mutual benefit 5. Peaceful co-existence
cooperation, Panchshila and non aligned policy. However, due to US intervened in Iran in 1953 to overthrow Dr. Mohammed Mossadeq over the issue of oil nationalization and based on the structure of International relations during Cold War era and Iran’s sympathy to the western bloc, some obstacles prevented improving bilateral relationship.

On the issue of Indo-Pakistan relations, Iran was the first country to recognize the newly-independent state of Pakistan in 1947. During the Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's reign, Iran moved closer to Pakistan in many fields and the two nations worked closely with each other. Pakistan, Iran and Turkey joined the United States-sponsored CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) defense treaty which extended along the Soviet Union's southern perimeter. Iran is also believed to have assisted Pakistan financially in its development of a nuclear program after India's surprise test detonation Smiling Buddha in 1974.

Simultaneously, Iran tried to negotiate against the confrontation between India and Pakistan several times. Although during Indo-Pakistani war on 17 September 1965 Iran supported Pakistan's claim over Kashmir which confined this support to political statements and limited logistic aid, though it gave extensive relief support. After the war, the Shah offered to mediate, and during the separate visit to Pakistan and India he urged both sides to settle their differences peacefully. But in the late 1960s Iran transferred to Pakistan large number fighters which were used against India in the war of 1971.

Iran also attached particular importance to the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD), a tri-partite social and economic alliance linking Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan. RCD which came into being on July 21, 1964, following a summit conference held in Istanbul by the three respective Heads of State.

At political level, the basic objective of Shah was to reduce Indian dependence on Soviet aid and motivate this country to depend more on the western bloc. He also wanted to secure the approval of India for his Persian Gulf policy and for his concern for the safety of the Indian Ocean against the expected Soviet entrance.

Based on his policy, the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean should be declared a "nuclear-free peace zone". A slight reluctance was noted by Indira Gandhi during her
visit in 1974 and avoided the approval on this matter except on the matter of a "peace zone". Mrs. Gandhi's reluctance was based on the facts of the growing fear of the Shah's military build-up and his aspirations toward the domination of the Indian Ocean, on the one hand, and her country's friendship with the Soviet Union, on the other. Lastly, it was agreed by both sides that a constructive relationship based on political understanding and sound economic cooperation would make for real stability and lasting tranquility in the region.\textsuperscript{xx}

In general, it seems that Indo-Iran relation in this period of time was full of doubt and untruthfulness. The two sides followed different ideologies and strategic cultures which made the gap between them deeper. As a result, although there was not any problem or barrier to improve relations in the real world, but the ideational differences and identical disparities make them unsuccessful to establish close relations between the two countries.

\textbf{Iran’s Foreign Policy Identity after the Islamic Revolution}

Since the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iran’s foreign policy has been dominated by a new set of revolutionary values and discourses. Revolutions are unique socio-political phenomenon that conduce specific foreign policy behaviors. In addition to its revolutionary attribute, the Ideological and Islamic characteristic also differentiates the Iranian political system from other revolutionary systems.\textsuperscript{xxi}

The revolutionary discourse redefined domestic and foreign policy fundamentally and presented different criterions for defining “itself” and “other” in the national and trans-national field. Based on this new approach, ideological and traditional discourse dominated modernist discourse. The culture and identity of ruling elites emphasized on whole community. Thus Islamic components and elements of elites influenced on orientation and political behavior of Iran’s foreign policy.\textsuperscript{xxii}

On the basis of the ideological discourse, the Islamic Republic of Iran undertook commitment towards all Muslims, and unsparing support to the oppressed of the world. The practical reflection of this principle in Iranian foreign policy was manifested in rejection of domination and defending the rights of all Muslims.\textsuperscript{xxiii} Article 152 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (adopted on 24 October 1979) explains that
“The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based upon the rejection of all forms of domination, both the exertion of it and submission to it, the preservation of the independence of the country in all respects and its territorial integrity, the defense of the rights of all Muslims, non-alignment with respect to the hegemonist superpowers, and the maintenance of mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent States.”

In the Constitution, necessity of movement towards establishment of a united single world community to rescue deprived and oppressed nations throughout the world also has been emphasized. Article 154 in the constitution of Iran emphasizes “the Islamic Republic of Iran supports the rightful struggle of oppressed people against their oppressors anywhere in the world while completely refraining from any interference in the internal affairs of other nations.” Under this general doctrine, Iran’s priority was to maintain a "unity" among the Muslim nations of the world, and eventually among all the "oppressed" people, against the oppression of the existing world system. For some time, this policy was called "exporting the revolution" abroad. The policy was applied wildly for the first few years. Iran became the centerpiece of travel of all liberation movements. Iran was also a supporter of the opposing streams of great powers. To this end, more attention has been paid to relations between nations than to relations with states.xxiv

On the other hand, the position of superiority and inferiority in the hierarchy of international system which reminds a Western maker structure made stronger sense to anti-hegemonic identity in Iran’s foreign policy discourse. Revolutionary Iranians’ words and deeds were directed to rioting against hierarchy of international system and the concept “Anti-Imperialism” had been crystallized in the policy of the “Neither East nor West” that considered as the Iranian version of “Non-Alignment”.xxv

It is considerable that the discourse of “enemy” also has been one of the main Iranian post revolutionary discourses which after the Islamic revolution entered into the Iranian political language. This discourse mostly "is fueled by the history of intervention,
manipulation, and exploitation of the country by foreign powers, which have left Iranian people more suspicious of foreigners.»\textsuperscript{xxvi}

And finally, the Islamic Republic was built on the assumption that the bipolar world system, divided between Eastern and Western blocs was not to provide justice and security for all nations of the world, but it was only aimed to serve the interests of the two superpowers and their satellites. As a result, the Justice- based discourse consists one of the major principles of Iran's foreign policy since the 1979 Islamic revolution. The Islamic Republic of Iran sees the international system as unjust and unfair system which must be replaced by a just, fair and virtuous order. By following this approach, Iran became an active member of the Non-Aligned Movement under the Cold War, expressing a harsh opposition toward the interests of both the United States and the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{xxvii}

In addition, Iranian revolutionary officials followed four essential policy goals in declaring anti-Imperialism and non-alignment policies: “(1) to achieve autonomy in foreign policymaking (2) to avoid a costly involvement in the American-Soviet rivalry (3) to end Iran's dependence on one ideological camp and (4) to improve ties with all states (except Israel and the former South African regime).\textsuperscript{xxviii}

\textbf{India’s Foreign Policy Identity during 1970s and 1980s}

By following a non-aligned policy, India's international influence and its prestige and moral authority were high during the years after independence. However, ideas and perceptions of national identity usually change over time. In India, strategic imperatives,

\textsuperscript{3} Throughout the past two hundred years, Iranians have been feeling very unsecure about the "great game" of world major powers. For instance,
- Iran lost a large part of its territories to Russia during two major wars in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, as Napoleon’s France chose to leave Iranian allies alone against the Tzar’s aggressions;
- Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in the light of the military occupation of the country in 1941, conducted by Russian, British, and American troops;
- Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq’s nationalist government was overthrown in 1953 through a coup d’état made by Britain and United States;
- Mohammad-Reza Shah never received the same security guarantees from the United States as other American regional allies such as Turkey (which was accepted into NATO) or Israel;
- Ayatollah Khomeini’s revolutionary government, supported by the majority of Iranian people, was beaten by the military aggression of a fully-armed and fully-supported Saddam Hussein, during an eight-year war (1980-1988).
threats posed by other actors and international military interventions had altered the outlook of India’s strategic culture. As a result, the dominant norms and identities established during Nehru which defined Indian foreign policy became in contrast with emerging trends and their evolution had changed India’s strategic outlook.

During the years after independence, India had always demonstrated tremendous enthusiasm for its moral leadership, especially among the newly independent Asian and African nations, in a world polarized by Cold War ideology. Its guiding principles were nationalism, anticolonialism, internationalism, and nonalignment. However, after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956--when New Delhi tilted toward Moscow--criticisms grew against his inconsistency in condemning Western but not communist aggression. xxx

During next decades, New Delhi's international position among developed and developing countries faded in the course of wars with China and Pakistan, disputes with other countries in South Asia, and India's attempt to balance Pakistan's support from the United States and China by signing the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation with the Soviet Union in August 1971. As a result, although by appealing to the economic grievances of developing countries, Indira Gandhi and her successors exercised a moderating influence on the Nonaligned Movement and diverting it from some of the Cold War issues and also hosted the 1983 summit, India’s influence was undercut regionally and internationally by the perception that its friendship with the Soviet Union prevented a more forthright condemnation of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, India's program to build the military might necessary to defend its territory and security interests became intertwined in its foreign policy. New Delhi’s defense buildup--particularly its covert nuclear weapons program and its drive to develop ballistic missiles--affected relations with many countries. In fact, India's refusal to sign the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons stemmed as much from Pakistan's similar stance as from India's belief that the treaty discriminated against the development of peaceful nuclear technology by nonnuclear weapons states.xxx

In the 1980s, New Delhi improved relations with the United States, other developed countries, and China while continuing close ties with the Soviet Union. However, relations with its South Asian neighbors, especially Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal,
occupied much of the energies of the Ministry of External Affairs. India's involvement in the internal affairs of its smaller neighbors in the 1970s and 1980s tarnished New Delhi's image as a nonaligned nation.\textsuperscript{xxxi}

Furthermore, despite the commitment of Congress leaders to the secular ideal, communal tensions and the rising influence of Hindu political parties pushed the Indian government increasingly to identify Indian greatness with Hinduism. The inability of Indian leaders to restrain anti-Muslim communal violence and the Kashmir policy of the Indian government resulted in continual tensions in relations with Muslim countries. Thus, internal security and domestic political considerations, which stemmed from the perceived goals of building national identity and preserving national unity, permeated India's relations with other countries.

In addition, of the many changes to have informed Indian foreign policy since the 1970s, it is possible to identify a marked shift from idealism to pragmatism, with national self interest taking precedence over the norms and ideals that constituted the ideational heritage of the national movement. In fact, before the economic changes introduced in the early 1990s, a change in India's foreign policy from 1970s is observed. As a result, while India still acted as spokesman of the Third World a turnaround has taken place from a close economic and military relationship with the Soviet Union as `natural ally' in 1970s to a `strategic partner' of the USA in 2000s.

**The Foreign Relations of Semi-aligned India and Non-aligned Iran**

Although India’s Friendship with the Soviet Union made some concerns for the Iran’s pro-western government during 1970s, however, the two events in 1979 - the installation of the Islamic regime in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in support of the pro-Soviet Marxist regime in Kabul - complicated India's relations with Iran.

The revolutionary Iran withdrew from CENTO and dissociated itself from strategic cooperation with the United States and other Western countries. Based on the "Neither East nor West" policy, Iran condemned both the United States and the Soviet Union as equally malevolent forces in international politics. The revolutionaries embraced that the materialist ideologies were ploys to help maintain imperialist domination of the Third
World. Consequently, a major foreign policy goal from the time of the revolution has been to preclude all forms of political, economic, and cultural dependence on either Western capitalism or Eastern socialism.

Based on such a kind of new approach, Iran hands of friendship towards the members of Non-aligned movement reached. However, the new government did not face warmly welcomed by India. It seems that Iran and India passed across the different ways and followed different approaches toward the structure of international relations during the last decade of the Cold War era. During 1980s, India was trying to change its conventional non-aligned policy to a functional approach to improve its relations with both Blocs gradually. During the second half of the 1980s, Rajiv Gandhi began leading in a direction significantly different from his mother's socialism. He improved bilateral relations with the United States — long strained owing to Indira's socialism and close friendship with the USSR — and expanded economic and scientific cooperation.

On the other hand, the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran has inspired the entire Muslim world, including Muslim minority in the Sub-continent. Although most Muslim communities in India are Sunni, however, their leaders welcomed Islamic revolution in Iran based on Shiite teachings. The Kashmiri Muslims invited Ayatollah Khomeini to stay in Kashmir when the Iraqi regime announced he should withdraw this country in 1978. In December 5, 1978, the Islamic leader of the Iran's revolution sent a letter for the religious leaders and also the people of India to describe the Iranians' situation under the Pahlavi's reign and their struggles against the regime's discriminations. He also invited "the great nation of India" to support the movement of "the oppressed people of Iran". xxxii

In regional level, New Delhi, which traditionally had had close relations with Kabul, condemned the Soviet invasion only in the most perfunctory manner and provided diplomatic, economic, and logistic support for the Marxist regime. Conversely, Iran's post-revolutionary relations with the Soviet Union and its allies have been significantly less dramatic. Iran severely criticized the Soviet Union for dispatching its troops into Afghanistan and took the lead several months later in denouncing Moscow at a conference of foreign ministers of Islamic countries.xxxiii
India also was worry about Iran-Pakistan relations in the new circumstances. However, after the 1979, the new Islamic government distanced itself the Pakistani government as the latter was a formal strategic ally of the US, and received military supports from western countries to play the role of the main ally of the West Bloc in the south Asian region. This matter changed Iran's position about its Islamic neighbor and Tehran's new government was not the potential supporter of Pakistan any more, a situation favorable to India. Iran also frequently objected to Pakistan's attempts to draft anti-India resolutions at international organizations such as the OIC and the Human Rights Commission to bond its relations with India. Nonetheless, both Pakistan and Iran opposed the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan and coordinated their covert support for the Afghan mujahedeen.

In addition, it seems that Iranians and Indians looked at the concept of non-alignment from two different aspects. While this strategic concept emphasized on a kind of “Negative equilibrium” in Iran’s foreign policy and its background went back to Mossadegh’s policy and oil nationalization era in Iran during 1950s, for Indians this concept gradually was faced with an evolution from an ideological to a pragmatic mean, which facilitated to improve relations with both East and West based on their national interests. This differentiation in their impressions about this concept was the basis of looking upon the world from different worldviews and could be considered as one of the main barriers to expand bilateral relations between the two countries.

**Iran’s Foreign Policy Identity after the Cold War**

Foreign policy is changeable; it changes with time and circumstances. With the end of Cold War, world politics became totally change and many challenges emerged in front of nation-states in terms of their foreign relations. Iran is also influenced by the structural changes in the international system. During the first two decades after the end of the Cold War, the Islamic Republic of Iran gradually has turned to the moderate form of Iranian identity such as tolerance and compromise in the encountering domestic and foreign issues.
Although in this period of time the two elements of Pan-Islamism (Shi’aism) and nationalism are the components of Iran’s foreign policy, like other revolutionary states, practical considerations have sometimes led the Islamic Republic to inconsistency and subordination of some ideological concerns. Iran’s silence policy toward suppression of Muslim Chechens in Russia, or Uyghurs in China, because the Iranian state has important strategic ties with both China and Russia that need to be preserved in the state interests are two instances of this new moderate and pragmatic face of Iran’s foreign policy.

The policy of “export of revolution” has been also replaced by the policy of “Islamic solidarity” which is more consistent with political conditions of the contemporary era. Contrary to the previous policy, the policy of Islamic solidarity offers a new method for promoting the revolution by presenting the Islamic Republic of Iran as a proper model for other Islamic countries.xxxv

It also seems that in the recent decades, by reviving the initial values of revolution in the field of foreign policy, the following of the radical and confrontation policies with the international system were depended on the cultural and identifying minutes of ruling elites in each period.xxxvi The transition of power from pragmatists to reformists and then to the radical politicians and the changes happened in Iran’s dominant foreign policy approaches during these transition of power have proved that decision-makers’ mind can be considered as one of the main mechanisms of identity impression on foreign policy of the Islamic Republic.

The Iranian case also shows that how dominant international norms can stimulate states to reconsider their previously held interest and identity to be consistent with internationally held norms at given time. The emphasis on the development of global liberal values especially by powerful countries during 1990s prompts Iran to behave more cooperatively and President Khatami tried to increase Iran's peaceful and cooperative relations with other countries. In this period Iran accepted voluntary suspension of the uranium-enrichment aimed at building confidence on the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. It was also during this period that Iran introduced a peaceful identity of the self by the idea of “dialogue among civilization”. This idea was welcomed by international
society and became an intersubjectively shared idea in world politics, so that the year 2001 was called by the Union Nations the “Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.”

However, confrontational and aggressive reactions by the international community toward Iranian foreign policy in 2000s intensified the country's social discourses over uranium enrichment program and strengthened its anti-Jewish/anti-American stances which have been continued until today. With the weakening of the liberal and democratic values expressed by the Bush administration (such as his 'Axis of Evil' Remark, attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq, and threatening Iran by the possibility of an assault on Iran's nuclear facilities), Iran's foreign policy especially when Ahmadinejad came to power transformed into more radical. The West’s aggressive policy-- which was seeking to cut off Iran from the world economic and trading systems, and supporting a regime change in this country--just increased Iran's tendency toward radicalization and the justice-seeking policy was pursued with more enthusiasm in the Ahmadinejad's administration.xxxvii

As a result, Iran in its foreign policy is still counter-hegemonic and tries to challenge the monopolizing cores of oppressive power in the international system. For practical realization of the counter hegemonic aspiration, the country is seeking for “purposeful cooperation, coalitions and alliances among anti-hegemonic forces at individual, state and nongovernmental levels. To this end, Iran has extended its efforts to forge counter imperialism fronts in third world, Islamic world and Asian continent” xxxviii

The Islamic Republic of Iran in line with its "anti-hegemonic" and "anti arrogance" discourses, pursues two major strategies: "Look-East Policy" and "South-South Alliances". By “Look-East policy” Iran tries to build close relations with the Eastern powers especially china and Russia. Iranian officials believe that an anti U.S. axis with nuclear powers such as Russia, China, India and Iran is capable of establishing a pole of major powers in Asia, opposing the unilateralism of America.xxxix By “South-South Alliances” Iran has managed to expand its influence over areas outside of its own region and even beyond the Muslim world, notably in Latin America, Asia and Africa, however through ways which would not end up in open conflicts.
On the other hand, as mentioned before, historically and geographically, Iran feels different kind of threats, coming from world powers to regional neighbors. The US military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as its military presence in the Persian Gulf area and Central Asia, have escalated Iranian security concerns in the past decade. Iran thus seems somehow surrounded by American troops. The US governments have talked about "all options on the table" with regard to Iran, which implies the possibility of a military attack. This kind of aggressive language has become common in recent American debates on Iran, and it has understandably alarmed the Iranians.

Israel also poses another security threat against Iran at the regional level. The hostility between the two sides has lately increased to the boiling point, and there have been constant talks about a possible Israeli strike against Iran. Iran-Arab relations also have always been turbulent over the past decades and Iran cannot feel completely secure from its Arab neighbors. This mistrustful situation is also deteriorated by the Shi’ite-Sunni division in the region and the fact that the major conservative Sunni states, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, are very much afraid and skeptical of the expansion of Iranian/Sh’ite influence in the region.

These bitter experiences have influenced the Iranian political psyche so much so to conclude that Iran should maintain its security on its own and without relying on other power’s support. On this basis, in the 1990's Iran began pursuing an indigenous nuclear fuel cycle capability by developing a uranium mining infrastructure and experimenting with uranium conversion and enrichment. The Islamic Republic of Iran is seeking to internalize more advanced technologies and knowledge as an efficient response to the international boycotts. Nowadays, by pursuing an indigenous capabilities, technology and knowledge especially regarding nuclear fuel cycle Iran tries to eliminate its reliance on foreign powers.xl

Furthermore, as one of the world's oldest civilizations, there is a great sense of cultural and historical pride among Iranians. The culmination of this civilization is considered to constitute Iran’s ‘strategic personality’ or ‘culture.’xli Based on nationalism, Iranian policy-makers try to activate the historical pride and seek to make a collective idea over the nuclear program. From this aspect, nuclear program is a means to show to the world
powers that Iran is capable to meet its highest technological needs without having their support. Even many Iranians who oppose the Islamic regime believe that Iran should continue its nuclear program despite disagreement and pressure from the some great powers and believe that US pressure on Iran to give up its uranium enrichment "is a conspiracy by the western powers to deny or prevent Iran from acquiring advanced technology and keep Iran backward and dependent on the West".xlii As a result, Iranian leaders treat nuclear policy as a "national issue" and have been able to turn the nuclear issue into the proclaimed position of the 'Iranian nation'. xliii

India’s Foreign Policy Identity after the Cold War

The world politics after 1991 emphasized the need for a fundamental rethinking in India’s foreign policy like many other countries. It was a major challenge to India to make coordination with international situation in this new circumstance. The end of cold war generated new challenges and created many options for foreign policy makers of India. The challenges included balancing the relations with global powers, building a new partnership with regional organizations, expanding the influence in Asia, Africa and Latin America, making NAM more relevant according to new conditions, enhance India’s economic and energy security, UN reforms and permanent membership of Security Council and active pursuit for multipolar world.

In twenty-first century, foreign policy of India is going to be very different from what it was when country became independent. India is undergoing a series of unprecedented social and political revolutions that, collectively, alter its overall approach to international affairs. A new, post-Cold War generation of leaders has adopted very different positions than their predecessors did.xliv The end of the Cold War saw India replace the idealism in its foreign policy with a pragmatic approach as it sought to develop new and meaningful relationships that would aid its global ascendancy. In fact, with her long-term and short-term national interests, India’s foreign policy becomes closer to realistic approach.

India’s economic liberalization, initiated in the early 1990s, allowed it to build its new foreign policy on the thrusts of economic diplomacy. Economic growth requires stability, and Indian leaders have spoken repeatedly of their objective of maintaining a stable
regional environment for growth. This has been largely responsible for New Delhi’s attempts at normalizing its relations with Pakistan and not intervening as aggressively in neighboring countries.

Furthermore, the collapse of the USSR, the close ally to India during cold war, was one of the greatest challenges that India faced to make a balanced relation with super powers. India needed to determine its policies towards the other global powers like America, China, Russia, Japan and European Union. Regarding to India’s main foreign policy objective to achieve global power status, it has tried to keep the United States as the focal point of its new foreign policy. India and the US have been cooperating in several areas including in defense and technology. The highlight of their cooperation in recent times has been the civil nuclear energy cooperation deal that has been signed between both countries. The Indo-US bilateral relationship progress through the next step in strategic partnership initiative (NSSA) is also notable. America and India agreed to expend co-operation in three specific areas viz. civilian nuclear activities, civilian space program and high technology trade. 9/11 terrorist attack reinforced a perception of a broader political and strategic similarity of interests pulling India and the US together. However, although it is necessity of age that, to make closer relation with super powers but India’s tend to US is questioned to its independent foreign policy. For instance, India’s vote against Iran in IAEA raised many critics about India’s new foreign policy approach even inside this country.

India has also tried to improve its politico-economic cooperation with the other powerful countries in the world and make strategic partnership with Russia, Japan, and EU. It not only becomes a big trade partner with superpowers but at the same time India’s position at an economic and strategic nexus in Asia, Africa and Latin America is also gaining significance. India has realized that due to the shift in priority from military competition to economic competition, strong economic ties become necessity of states and if it wishes to expand its global influence, then it must continue to diversify its engagement in the international sphere. This realization has propelled India to deepen and widen its trade-driven relations with third world countries.
On the other hand, although non-alignment was the doctrinal foundation of India’s foreign policy, but the end of cold war and emergence of unipolar world politics has forced India to bring changes in her foreign policy. The end of bipolarity made the foundation of non-alignment movement irrelevant. Nevertheless, NAM members have tried to make it more relevant in other sense, such as opposing the neo-imperialism, peaceful settlement of disputes, restructuring and democratization of UN, establishing new international economic order, demand for the North-South dialogue based on the mutuality of interests and benefits, and South-South cooperation. In fact, although NAM is facing fundamental problem and challenges, but by redefining and modifying the objectives of the movement and its role it is trying to overcome these challenges. However, while India shares the concerns of Russia, China, Iran, and many members of the Nonaligned Movement about the preeminent position of the United States and other developed countries, different national interests and perceptions make it improbable that India can turn cooperation with these countries to its advantage on most international issues. As a result, The 1990s saw India shedding its non-aligned image and pursuing the membership of other multilateral forums such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

India has also revised its nuclear policy during recent decades. India’s foreign policy, in its early years, was shaped by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s idealistic world view. He opposed any kind of nuclear programme in India. Global disarmament was his dream. But, China’s war in 1962 and China’s nuclear test in 1964 set the stage for India’s nuclear weapons program. Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri gave the green signal for a peaceful nuclear explosion in 1964, yet, in his speech in Parliament he also maintained that India would never make the bomb. India conducted its first nuclear test in May 1974 and in 1998, India tested its own nuclear capability and justified this on the basis of threats to national security.

In general, it seems that although most of the part of the structure of India's society is based on traditional values deeply rooted on its ancient culture and civilization and the process of social modernization is not completed yet, however, the political structure of this Asian giant is in a kind of compatibility and adaptation with the new world order. A
democratic federation system based on globalized values gives India a critical instrument to enter in an interaction with the world society and prepares a scene to play there as one of the imperative actors especially from the regional and continental perspectives. In fact, India is the most western and liberal among non-western powers, but it is rooted in Asia; the means that gives India this opportunity to deal with both sides easier than other powers.

Foreign Relations between Aligned India and Semi-aligned Iran

With the end of the Cold War, relations between Iran and India entered a new stage. During 1990s, Iran tried to follow détente policy and emphasized on a new "Look to the East" policy to improve its relations with the Asian powers. At the same time, India also was looking for a better position as an emerging power in the international arena. The two countries began to improve their relations in different politico-economic and strategic aspects. However, two decades after the collapse of the USSR, still there are deep differences between the new foreign policy approaches of the Iranian and Indian policy makers. In fact, they look at the new structure of the international relations from different perspectives.

Fourteen years after Iran's revolution, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visited Iran in September 1993. Key developments in this visit included discussions on the construction of a pipeline to supply Iranian natural gas to India and allowing India to develop transit facilities in Iran for Indian products destined for the landlocked Central Asian republics. When Iranian president Hashemi Rafsanjani visited India in April 1995 to sign a major trade accord and five bilateral agreements, Indo-Iranian relations could be seen to be on the upswing. The trend was consolidated and enhanced at the turn of the millennium with visits by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in 2001 and a return visit by President Mohammad Khatami in 2003, when he was also the Chief Guest at the Republic Day function.

India was interested in forging a long term strategic relationship built around energy security and transit arrangements. Iran also was ready to work with India to provide viable and rapid access to Afghanistan, Central Asia and Russia. In January 2003 the two
countries launched the “New Delhi Declaration,” a strategic partnership “for a more stable, secure and prosperous region and for enhanced regional and global cooperation.” Since then, Indian firms have entered different economic contracts with Iran's government especially in the field of energy industries.

In its 2005-2006 annual report the Indian Ministry of External Affairs claimed that Indo-Iranian cooperation had “acquired a strategic dimension flourishing in the fields of energy, trade and commerce, information technology and transit.”

India’s biggest quest to secure energy resources overseas could be most successful in Iran, where the Indian Oil Corporation, a state-run company, reached a January 2005 agreement with the Iranian firm Petropars to develop a gas block in the gigantic South Pars gas field, home to the world’s largest reserves.

The Chabahar container terminal project and Chabahar-Faraj-Bam railway project are some other aspects of the bilateral cooperation between the two countries. Situated on the Makran Coast of the Sistan and Baluchestan province of Iran, Chabahar is officially designated as a Free Trade and Industrial Zone by the Iranian government. India has assisted in developing the port that will give it access to the oil and gas resources in Iran and the Central Asian states. Charbahar is seen as a project by the Indian government as a response to the challenge thrown by the Chinese, who are building the Gwadar Port in Pakistani Baluchistan.

Both countries also have set up joint ventures such as the Irano-Hind Shipping Company, the Madras Fertilizer Company and the Chennai Refinery. It also obtained stakes in the development of Iran's largest onshore oilfield, Yadavaran, as well the Jufeir oilfield.

A big part of the India-Iran energy deal was the proposed construction of a gas pipeline from Iran to India via Pakistan (IPI), which would provide India with a steady source of Iranian natural gas. The pipeline has been referred to as the "peace pipeline" because

4. The Yadavaran oil field is a Sino-Indian-Iranian collaboration with India holding a 20% stake, China 50% India and 30% with Iran.
creating economic linkages between India and Pakistan would likely encourage more stable relations between the two historical foes, which have fought three wars since their independence in 1947 and experienced different military crises in the past decades.

From the regional aspect, the first regional cooperation between the two countries in the new post-Cold War era was about Afghanistan. It was in war-torn Afghanistan in the 1990s that India and Iran discovered they shared common security concerns from the threat posed by the Pakistan-backed Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Both India and Iran extensively supported the Afghan Northern Alliance against the Taliban regime. They continue to collaborate in supporting the broad-based anti-Taliban government led by Hamid Karzai and backed by the United States.\textsuperscript{iv}

On the other hand, when it comes for Indian energy security or Caspian Sea region’s energy transportation, the importance of Iran’s role becomes undeniable. Iran not only sits at Hurmoz chock point in the Persian Gulf but also has direct access to both land masses of east and west energy rich CSR. The Iranian route, therefore, is the easiest and cheapest gateway for Central Asian oil and gas.\textsuperscript{v} India already has a toehold at the Iranian port of Chabahar, which it is helping to develop into a commercial port with access to both Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan as a transit point for Indian goods and services.

The turning point for Indo-Iranian regional cooperation was an agreement, signed in 2000, committing both countries to establishing a North-South trade corridor. The corridor stretches from ports in India across the Arabian Sea to the southern Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, where goods then transit Iran and the Caspian Sea to ports in Russia's sector of the Caspian. From there, the route stretches along the Volga River via Moscow to northern Europe.\textsuperscript{vi}

India also welcomed Iran's inclusion as an observer state in the SAARC regional organization and both countries joined Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as the observers in 2005.

However, some internal and external impediments have appeared in the process of improving Indo-Iran Relations during recent decade. The 9/11 attacks on the United
States gradually changed the context in which Indo-Iran ties had previously operated. The US increased its pressures to bring Iran's nuclear plan to a halt and encouraged the other major powers to consider it as a threat against international collective security. To isolate Iran because of its nuclear program, the United States has expressed strong opposition to the proposed pipeline with Iran, which would give Iran an economic advantage and increase its leverage and influence in South Asia.

Definitely, the Indo-US nuclear deal was conditional to India supporting the US on the Iran issue. The two sides have signed a deal which bestows on India’s nuclear capability a legitimacy that has not come the way of any other state outside the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The U.S.-India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Act (also known as the Hyde Act), signed in December 2006, contained a “Statement of Policy” which included riders designed to ensure India’s support for U.S. policies regarding the Iranian nuclear issue. In particular, India was “to dissuade, isolate, and if necessary, sanction and contain Iran for its efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction, including a nuclear weapons capability and the capability to enrich uranium or reprocess nuclear fuel and the means to deliver weapons of mass destruction.”

U.S. officials also continually remind India and Pakistan that U.S. legislation sanctions any company investing more than $20 million annually in Iran's oil and gas industry. Consequently, the IPI project and all other Iranian projects to supply India with energy have been beset by multiple problems which have frequently been compounded due to the effects of the US-led pressure on Iran’s trade and foreign investment in Iran.

As of May 2009, India officially announced its decision to remain noncommittal in IPI project due to a combination of factors, including price disputes with Pakistan, anti-Iranian pressure from the United States, security concerns, and the possibility of less expensive domestic alternatives. On the other hand, in June 2009, India’s Reliance Industries Ltc halted gasoline exports to Iran to avoid possible restriction on sales in the United States, which has increased pressure on companies selling gasoline to Iran. Consequently, that same month, Iran and Pakistan signed a deal to begin construction without India’s participation. As it runs out of time and options, Iran is looking to China as a possible end consumer of the Iran-Pakistan pipeline.
In the field of nuclear policy, New Delhi and Tehran have long held significantly different perceptions of the global nuclear order. Iran was not supportive of the Indian nuclear tests in 1998 and backed the UN Security Council Resolution asking India and Pakistan to cap their nuclear capabilities by signing the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). With the conclusion of the U.S.—India nuclear deal, Iran warned that the pact had endangered the NPT and would trigger new ‘‘crises’’ for the international community.\textsuperscript{lxii}

On the other hand, despite close relations and convergence of interests with Iran, India voted against Iran in the International Atomic Energy Agency, which took Iran by surprise, a "hurt" Ali Larijani was reported as saying: "\textit{India was our friend}".\textsuperscript{lxiii} Tehran signaled its anger over India's votes against the Iranian nuclear program at the IAEA meetings in different occasions.\textsuperscript{5} Though India has stated that it supports Iran’s nuclear technology development for the peaceful purposes, it believes that Iran should comply with the restrictions of the NPT as it is a signatory to it. Nevertheless, India’s government has made it clear that it does not wish to see the emergence of a new regional nuclear weapons power in the region.

The vote remained a contentious issue between Iran and India for some time, but regular dialogue has helped in not letting it remain one.\textsuperscript{lxiv} However, although India voted to take the issue of Iran’s enrichment activities to the UN Security Council, it has since repeatedly insisted on a peaceful resolution to the conflict and stated it will not support any threats of violence made against Iran for its nuclear program.

\textsuperscript{5} India's shift in policy toward Iran created a furor in the Communist Party and other leftist parties on whose votes Prime Minister Singh’s Congress Party–led coalition relies for a parliamentary majority. These parties objected to India’s IAEA votes. They argued that the government was abandoning its foreign policy autonomy and becoming subservient to Washington. The nationalist party of Bharatiya Janata also accused the government of betraying Iran and “capitulating” to the United States. Top Indian policymakers have tried to quell the criticisms by arguing that India voted in its own national interest. They also point out that India is not alone: both Russia and China, Iran’s strongest backers, also voted for the resolution to refer Iran to the UN. The communists, however, have not given up their criticisms.
On the other hand, one of the most significant provisions of the New Delhi Declaration sought to upgrade defense cooperation significantly between the two countries. Improved military relations would include Indian training of Iranian troops, satellite services, and joint naval exercises in the Persian Gulf.\textsuperscript{lxv} Previous instances of military interaction include the training of senior judge advocates general from the Iranian Army by India’s Institute of Military Law in Kamptee since 2008.\textsuperscript{lxvi}

This defense relationship, however, remains not only sporadic and tentative, but also limited by India’s growing defense linkages with Israel.\textsuperscript{lxvii} In the early 1990s, India stepped back from its staunch anti-Israeli stance and support for the Palestinian cause. Besides practical economic and security considerations in the post-Cold War world, domestic politics--especially those influenced by Hindu nationalists--played a role in this reversal. In December 1991, India voted with the UN majority to repeal the UN resolution equating Zionism with racism and in 1992 India established diplomatic relations with Israel.

Israel and India share intelligence on terrorist groups. They have developed close defense and security ties and Israel is India's second-biggest arms supplier, after Russia. Israel also is training Indian military units and discussing an arrangement to give Indian commandos instruction in counter-terrorist tactics and urban warfare. India’s trade with Israel has increased and India becomes Israel’s second-largest trading partner in Asia in non-military goods and services.

India’s ties with Iran complicate its burgeoning relations with Israel, while Iran is keen to expand its relations with the most important country in the sub-continent; definitely it has serious concerns about India's foreign policy toward the West Asian region and a vast military cooperation between India and Iran's regional enemies could not be tolerated by Tehran's government. On the other hand, many members of the US Congress also continued to demand that Washington make the nuclear deal conditional on New Delhi’s ending all military relations with Tehran. They cited a visit by Iranian naval vessels in June 2006 to the Indian port of Kochi for five days of joint exercises, which included training for Iranian cadets, as an example of activities that needed to cease.\textsuperscript{lxviii}
Furthermore, India has tried to improve its military presence in the Persian Gulf region. It has a substantive defense relationship with the Arab world. India and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf enjoy strong economic and military ties. Nowadays, Saudi Arabia is the chief supplier of oil to India’s booming economy, and India is now the fourth largest recipient of Saudi oil after China, the United States, and Japan. India’s trade and energy security is linked to the security of the Straits of Hormuz. With this in mind, the Indian Navy regularly visits Persian Gulf ports and trains with states in the region. India also has cultivated close security ties with major PGCC countries. The defense cooperation agreements that India has with these states are similar to the ones it has with the United States and the European Union members.

Defense cooperation between India and these countries is also extensive and involves training military personnel, joint exercises, and service-to-service information sharing. India also has maritime security arrangement in place with Oman and Qatar. In 2008, a landmark defense pact was signed, under which India committed its military assets to protect "Qatar from external threats".

This military cooperation has raised Iran’s security concerns about India’s presence in the Persian Gulf region. As a result, Iran’s position on several other issues crucial to India has run counter to Indian interests. Tehran has been critical of how the Indian government handled protests in Kashmir, and the Indian government was forced to issue a demarche, protesting against Iranian interference in Indian domestic issues.

Consequently, the biggest area of difference between Iran and India is likely to be Tehran's nuclear program. India has categorically stated that a nuclear-armed Iran is not acceptable. On the other hand, India’s ties with the United States have dramatically expanded in the last few years, and this has already emerged as a significant factor shaping Indian foreign policy toward Iran. It seems that the shadow of the United States...

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6. In November 2010, Iran's Supreme Leader issued a message to Hajj pilgrims in which he called upon Muslims worldwide to support the Kashmiri people in India's Jammu & Kashmir state. This message came at a time the Kashmiri youth have been protesting against human rights violations by Indian security forces. In his message, the Iranian leader noted that the need for solidarity with the Kashmiri people is "a great obligation" upon the Muslim ummah. (Jahan News, November 21, 2010)
will loom large over Indian foreign policy in the years to come, especially if the conflict between the United States and Iran intensifies.

Meanwhile, a deeper engagement with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf will also blunt domestic criticism that Indian foreign policy has become too obsessed with Washington’s foreign policy agenda. In fact, India’s relationship with the Middle East as a region is dramatically different than a generation ago. From 1947—1989, India was too ideological toward the region, paying insufficient attention to Indian national interests, particularly in its subdued ties with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. Today, however, India is developing its new Middle Eastern strategy around these three states, with New Delhi recently taking special care to nurture all these relationships and pursue its substantial regional interests. Therefore, India is now focusing on pragmatic engagement with all sides and has tried to shed its Cold War-era covertly ideological approach toward the region. With these regards, Delhi’s halting attempts to improve its relations with Tehran are a small piece of a much larger strategic puzzle.

**Conclusion**

During recent decades India and Iran have described their relationship as a "civilizational" and "historical" one, dating back thousands of years. The efforts allowed them strengthen their ties and find common grounds for co-operation from cultural to economic to strategic co-operation. However, over time, the basis for the relations between Iran and India has shifted from being civilizational to economic, in other words, from idealist to a realist approach.

However, still there is a long way to call these two countries as strategic partners. Nowadays, the Indian government is aware that Iran is looking for improving bilateral relations with India, and economic relations between the two would go a long way in helping India grow as an economic, political and regional power. Nevertheless, despite having the second largest Muslim population in the world and centuries-old cultural, historical and political ties with the largely Muslim populated Iran, New Delhi lags behind Beijing which paradoxically shares less commonalities with Iran than India.
While China is pursuing a long-term measures vis-à-vis Iran, Indian administration has not prescribed a similar doctrine for its foreign policy.

Regarding to this matter and based on our theoretical framework, it seems that the main problem is rooted in the essential differences between the structures of the political systems of Iran and India. In fact, the most important gap between the two sides is placed in their different discourses and different perceptions about the structure of international relations and its necessities. Different mentality approaches ruling on the political structures of these societies also play a significant role in forming a contradiction in their interests. Certainly, the main outcome of this gap is that achieving a functional foreign policy approach to improve bilateral relations has become inaccessible during last decades.

Nowadays, the Indians have found joining the bandwagon of the universal trend of support for western globalized values and patterns, an undeniable necessity for their developmental projects. As a result, the attitudes of India towards the question of safeguarding its economic security have been defined in an identical framework. That is to say that in order to secure its national interests in various spheres including energy, it prefers to contain itself, complying with the rules of the game in a globalized international system rather than acting based on the principles of the free market in a competitive fashion and overtaking its rivals in this sphere. For this reason, Iran’s oil embargo imposed by international organizations or great powers such as the European countries and the United States, not only is not considered as an opportunity for India’s preemption, but by accepting the rules of this new game, it is resorting to a wait and see policy. In such circumstances, it is no surprise if talks over the gas transit pipelines take two decades and does not progress. Indians have become obliged to the international system for safeguarding their security vis-à-vis other rivals and adversaries, i.e. China, so they cannot act outside this framework.

In a nutshell, by examining Indian foreign policies towards Iran, it can be well understood that India is heavily influenced by the structure of the international system and global trends for protecting national security and thus it does not independently enter into cooperation with Iran. In fact, it may be argued that the variable of energy
cooperation with Iran for India is the one dependent on the overall security approach of the two countries within the new structure of collective security at the international system level. Therefore, if Iran wishes to continue its look at the East policy in the foreign policy-making apparatus in political and economic areas, considering the replacement of the western powers with the Asian powers and expansion of relations with them, it should take note that continued cooperation with India is not possible except within the framework of the order governing the structure of international relations. In fact, within the past decades particularly in the post-Cold War era, a new conceptual framework has taken shape among the political entities and a new discourse has come to govern such relations. Beyond this framework using a terminology separate from the terminology defined within the predominant discourse, it is impossible to negotiate and cooperate with the other nations.

However, it is notable that the potential for economic and developmental gain from oil and natural gas will force these countries to reassess their roles and policies in national security issues. Potential economic collaboration and gain can lead to a possible transformation of social and political discourse between the countries, perhaps even leading to mediation and resolution of regional and international conflicts. In addition, although India has taken some steps against Iran's interests in international level and has taken somewhat of a rhetorical beating from Iran’s government, but the negotiations between the two countries have continued, and it appears that pragmatism is winning out in the battle for Indo-Iran’s foreign policies.

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Dilemmas and Convergences in Indo-Iran Relationship: 
A Tight Rope Walk

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India’s policy towards West Asia has often been viewed through the prism of the country's relations with Iran. Today the relations of India with Iran stands dramatically changed with a shift in its stance since the nineties of the earlier century. There has been a shift from ideological considerations of the past to a solid realist understanding of interest based considerations in India’s foreign policy towards Iran. One can actually look at it as a pragmatic India looking for energy security and also trying to match up the moves of the other two players within the subcontinent, namely Pakistan which has already moved ahead in its pipeline deal with Teheran, and China which has cleverly made use of the vacuum created by the Western firms post U.S. sanctions and has been able to emerge as Iran's largest trading partner and major investor. Moreover, India would also want Iran as a partner in Afghanistan as a strategy to balance Pakistani influence in Afghanistan. Since 1947 to 1990, India’s stand towards the region of West Asia has been ideological and that is reflected in the kind of subdued relations with the region. Since the nineties of the earlier century there has been a paradigmatic shift in India’s relations with West Asia as is evidenced from the importance given to the three nations---Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel in its agenda. The present paper is segmented into four segments, the first segment would be dedicated to the Indo-Iran ties since 1947-
India-Iran Relations: 1947-1990

India and Iran have had ancient relations and have had much of civilizational affinities, marked by continuous economic and diplomatic links with Persia (modern Iran) for centuries. The relationship marked a change with the fall of the Mughal Empire and India becoming a colony. Post Partition Indo-Iran relationship underwent a major change due to the new political developments. Although there was a distance in their relationship, due to ideological reasons, but India did not completely sever all her ties with Iran. The two countries signed a Treaty of Friendship on March 15, 1950, to strengthen their relations for mutual benefit and development. The Shah visited India in February/March 1956 and Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru visited Iran in September 1959. However, Jawaharlal Nehru, was dead against Iran and Pakistan joining the Baghdad Pact and described it as a “wrong approach, a dangerous approach and a harmful approach.” Moreover, India was also close to the Iranian leader’s arch rival, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s. Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi visited Iran in April 1974 and Prime Minister Shri Morarji Desai visited in June 1977. The Shah, in turn, visited India in February 1978.

The mark of friendship was evident when Iran helped India during the 1962 Indo-China War and India shared solidarity with Iran during the 444 days (November 4, 1979 to January 20, 1981) American hostage crisis and during the shooting down of an Iranian civilian jet airliner [Iran Air Flight 655 (IR655)] by the US Navy over the Strait of Hormuz (July 1988). On the other hand, Iran lent support to Pakistan against India in the 1965 and 1971 India-Pakistan wars. Moreover, Iran also supported Pakistan's position in the Kashmir issue on religious grounds. Although India did not support the revolution of 1979 in Iran, however maintained friendly ties with Iran. The end of Cold war and the subsequent retreat of Soviet Union from the soils of Afghanistan brought in a hope of new changes in the relationship. However, Kashmir issue time and again cropped up as the irritant in the Indo-Iran relationship. Though India came out in support of Iran during
the Iranian civilian jet airliner crisis, the Iranian leaders ignored Pakistan’s nefarious actions to destabilise India and condemned the Indian government for inappropriate handling of the crisis in Kashmir. On January 24, 1990, the official spokesman of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, addressing a press conference in Tehran, expressed “profound regret” over the handling of riots in Kashmir and called deployment of the Indian armed forces in the riot stricken areas (Kashmir) “unjustified” while IRNA (Iranian News Agency), in an outrageous manner, wrote that “Kashmir is being reduced to fire and blood.” Iran not only condemned India on the mishandling of the Kashmir issue but also expressed its displeasure by withdrawing the invitation to the Foreign Minister of India, I.K. Gujral who was to visit Iran in April 1990 to co-chair the meeting of the Indo-Iranian Joint Commission in Tehran.  

The visit of Narasimha Rao, the then Prime Minister of India in 1993 to Teheran marked a new era in the Indo-Iran relations. It was a landmark visit as it was the first visit made by an Indian Premier since 1979 and this visit helped to remove many of the misconceptions between the two nations and helped India counter Pakistan's growing influence over Iran. The success of the move could be gauged by the fact that it was Iran which prevented Pakistan from humiliating India in the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) by pressuring Pakistan to refrain from presenting the resolution alleging violation of human rights by India in Kashmir in March 1994. (Asopa 1998) Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani returned Prime Minister Rao’s visit to India in April 1995, which was followed by the visit of India’s Vice President K. R. Narayanan to Iran in October 1996.

Meanwhile new developments were taking place in the Indian subcontinent, that was going to change the face of politics in the region forever. Taliban, a new radical Islamic students’ militant group, which was unknown to the outside world, took advantage of the volatile and unstable political condition in Afghanistan and came to power in the mid-1990s. The establishment of the Taliban government in Afghanistan not only changed the political conditions in Afghanistan but also affected the relations of the countries of the region. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, in collaboration with the US, supported the Taliban, while India, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Russia backed the anti-Taliban Northern
Alliance. The consolidation of power by the Taliban in Afghanistan emerged as a major source of anxiety for both the countries. India and Iran with large Shia Muslim populations were weary of Sunni-Wahhabi extremists in their proximate neighbourhood. Iran later did a somersault in its policy and supported Pakistan and backed the Taliban for obvious reasons, Pakistan was an old friend.

**Post 2000: Blossoming Partnership Riding on Realist Agenda**

As the world was entering the new millennium certain developments especially in the form of new players and determinants within the region forced India to take a relook at her strategic security interest. India responded to this changed situation by manouevring her foreign policy strategy. This strategic “security environment,” according to the *Annual Report 2000-2001*, of India’s Ministry of Defence “extends from the Persian Gulf in the east and from the Central Asian Republic in the north to the equator in the south.” Consequently, in April 2001, India’s Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee led a high level delegation team to Iran, the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister since 1993 (Prime Minister Vajpayee’s delegation included Jaswant Singh, Minister of External Affairs and Defence, Omar Abdullah, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, Brajesh Mishra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister and National Security Adviser, and other senior officials.). The Tehran Declaration (2001) signed by former Prime Minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Iran’s the then President Muhammad Khatami laid the bedrock for cooperation on a wide range of issues. It stressed on energy and commercial concerns, reaffirmed a commitment to develop the North–South transport corridor (for the movement of goods via Iran into Central Asia, Russia and Northern Europe), and incorporated agreements to promote scientific and technical cooperation. This meeting resulted in the establishment of India-Iran Strategic Dialogue to address regional and international security issues. India-Iran relations were not confined to economic and political cooperation but extended to defence as well. In April 2001, the Defence Minister of India followed India’s Prime Minister Vajpayee’s visit to Tehran and discussed “issues of mutual concern” and signed a Memorandum of Understanding on defence cooperation with Iran. Three months later, in July 2001, a high level Iranian defence delegation led by
Brig Gen Dr. Hussein Dehghan, Deputy Minister of Defence of Iran, visited India and the first meeting of the India-Iran Joint Working Group on Defence Cooperation took place. September 2001, an incident changed the face of global politics forever. The mighty U.S was attacked by by Osama bin Laden’s Al Qaeda terrorist group on September 11, 2001. The US policy-makers demanded that the Taliban surrender Osama bin Laden to the US, who according to the U.S. Policy makers, was the mastermind behind the attack and was in hiding in the Taliban controlled areas and was under the protection of the Taliban. As the Taliban refused to surrender Osama bin Laden, the US launched a military campaign, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) “against Al Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan” on October 7, 2001.

Taliban withdrew from Kabul in mid-November 2001 as it was unable to withstand the US and its coalition partners’ superior military forces. As the US intensified its actions in its ‘the war against terrorism’ as the U.S policy makers continuously reiterated in their addresses, the then President of the US, George W. Bush, in his State of the Union Address on January 29, 2002, branded Iran, Iraq and North Korea as members of the “axis of evil” alleging that these countries were “seeking weapons of mass destruction”, and that these regimes posed "a grave and growing danger” to the peace of the world.

However, India did not agree to the US position that Iran was “arming to threaten the peace of the world.” Although the US campaigned with the world community to isolate Iran, India continued its relations with Iran. Rather India believed that Iran was important for India for----

i) ensuring peace and stability in “Afghanistan is critical to India’s [economy and] security and Iran can provide a major stabilising influence [in Afghanistan].”

ii) Geographically, Iran was important for India as well. The geographical position of Iran made possible for India to have overland transport facilities connecting Afghanistan and the energy rich Central Asian countries, something which Pakistan was not willing to comply with.

iii) The other most important factor was that, India “views Iran as an influential Islamic state that can effectively counter Pakistan’s anti-India propaganda in the Islamic world.”
iv) Moreover, India's growing home energy crisis offers a more pragmatic necessity for India to ensure diplomatic relations with Iran. Off late India's energy crisis at home has made her look for options and Iran seems to be one of the best options for India.

The keeness of Iran to have good diplomatic relations with India can be estimated by the visit of Dr. Hasan Roophani, Secretary to the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, to India on June 2002. Dr. Roophani met various high level Indian leaders, including India’s Prime Minister, Defence Minister and External Affairs Minister. Dr. Roophani discussed a range of bilateral issues that included economic cooperation, investments and trade, political issues and security matters, including energy security.

The two countries “stressed the need for accelerating the rehabilitation and reconstruction process” in the war-wrecked country Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{10} Dr. Roophani’s visit was followed by the visit of Mohammad Shariatmadari, Iranian Trade Minister, to India on January 5, 2003. There was also a report which indicated that in January 2003, Adm Madhavendra Singh, Chief of the Indian Navy and Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, visited Tehran and signed an agreement on defence cooperation with the Iranian Minister of Defence.\textsuperscript{11}

India, invited Iranian President Mohammad Khatami as the chief guest at the Independence Day celebration on January 26, 2003. During President Khatami’s visit, a “New Delhi Declaration” was signed along with seven other substantive agreements setting start to the “vision of a strategic partnership” between the two countries. The New Delhi Declaration comprised of various aspects of bilateral cooperation ranging from economic exchanges to defence cooperation, cooperation in the energy sector, science and technology, information technology, education and training, reconstruction of Afghanistan, and other global issues. Relating to the issue of terrorism, India and Iran “reiterate their resolve to strengthen the international consensus and legal regimes against terrorism, including early finalisation of a Comprehensive Convention against International Terrorism… Iran and India agree to continue joint cooperation to address the issues of international terrorism and trafficking in narcotic and psychotropic substances.”\textsuperscript{12}
One of the key instruments of the New Delhi Declaration is the ‘Road Map for Strategic Cooperation’, which envisages a robust defence cooperation between the two countries, including training and exchange of visits. Though defence ties between India and Iran have been clouded in secrecy, a number of reports from secondary sources seem to suggest that India would cooperate with Iran on upgrading the latter’s Russian-supplied weapon’s system, supply conventional military equipment and spare parts, provide expertise in development of military hardware and train Iran’s armed forces. It was also agreed that the Indian aeronautical engineers will help Iran maintain and provide mid-life upgrade for its MiG fighter aircraft. Iran has also sought India’s help to refit and maintain tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and artillery guns. India is also planning to sell Konkurs anti-tank guided weapons and spare parts. In the past, India has helped Iran adapt four Russian-built Kilo-class submarines for warm water conditions in the Persian Gulf. Iran is also seeking combat training for missile boat crews and hopes to purchase simulators for ships and submarines from India. Several reports indicate that Iran has ‘allowed India to have access to its military bases in the event of war with Pakistan’. If true, this could fundamentally alter regional relations in India’s favour.

The growing keeness on both the countries to continue with cordial diplomatic relations between them can be established by the fact that on March 2003, two Iranian warships, Bandar Abbas, a fleet replenishment tanker, and Lavan, a logistics support vessel landed in Mumbai on a five-day goodwill visit and participated in the first-ever India-Iran joint naval exercises off the Mumbai coast (Arabian Sea). This was followed by the visit of the Iranian Vice President, Isfandiar Rahim Mashaee, and the Chief of Iranian Air Force to India, in March and May 2003 respectively.

The second Indo-Iranian naval exercise took place on 3–8 March 2006, coinciding with President Bush’s visit to India and weeks before Congressional hearing of the proposed US–India civilian nuclear deal. Inferring from the presence of an unusually large number of Indian consulates at strategic locations in Iran, several analysts speak of close security ties between New Delhi and Tehran. The Indian consulate in Zahedan indicates a possible intelligence presence. India’s consulate in Iranian port city of Bandar Abbas, that was established in 2002 ignoring protests from Pakistan, helps it to monitor movement of
ships in the Persian Gulf and the straits of Hormuz. Observers in Pakistan note that the Indian engineers are working to upgrade and develop the Iranian port of Chahbahar that would help India to easily monitor Pakistan's activities at the Gwadar port, currently being developed as a naval base with Chinese assistance.\(^{16}\)

The disintegration of Soviet Union led to the emergence of numerous Central Asian republics that were rich in natural oil deposits but were at the same time marred by internal strifes and disorder. India's interest lay in retrieving the region’s market that was cut off for Indian goods with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Central Asian states, with their oil and natural gas deposits, also emerged as an important factor in India’s efforts to locate the widest possible set of alternatives to meet its growing energy requirements.\(^{17}\)

A major commercial venture between India and Iran is the North-South Transportation Corridor agreement that was signed in September 2000, that also takes Russia and Turkmenistan on board. The corridor, when fully operational, would permit transport of goods from ports in India across the Arabian Sea to the southern Iranian port of Bandar Abbas and Chahbahar. Goods would then be transitted to Iran, via rail to Iranian Caspian Sea ports of Bandar Anzali and Bandar Amirabad. They would then be transferred to ports in the Russian sector of the Caspian Sea. From there the route extends along the Volga River via Moscow and to Northern Europe.

In order to make it commercially viable, and reduce the length of the cargo transport distance from the Indian Ocean region to Northern and Eastern Europe by two-thirds, as compared to the route through the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean, this ambitious trade route requires building road and rail links and developing intermediate ports along the way with streamlined customs and other procedures.\(^{18}\)

Trial runs on this route began in 2001 and its official operation was announced in early 2003. However, the optimal potential of the North-South corridor is yet to be realised as a project of this magnitude requires large investments and years of sustained effort to make it efficient in the long run.\(^{18}\)

As part of the agreement, India has agreed to help expand the Iranian port of Chahbahar and lay railway tracks that would connect Chahbahar to Afghan city of Zaranj on the Iranian border. At present, India has to depend on ports in Pakistan, mostly Karachi, to move cargo to Afghanistan. Besides allowing India to
bypass Pakistan, Chabahar is particularly well-suited for India to aid Afghanistan because the Iranian government has built a series of roads connecting Chabahar port to the Iran-Afghanistan border. From there goods can be transported by road to the southwestern Afghan city of Zaranj. Chabahar could act as gateway port for trade with Iran and Afghanistan. Since India has made large-scale investments in Afghanistan, especially by constructing the Delaram-Zaranj highway, the 215-km-long Delaram-Zaranj highway (Route 606) that India built for Afghanistan at a cost of around $110 million, India also envisages future development of the war-torn region, having a port in Iran would help both logistically and commercially. Ideally, it would have been profitable to move those shipments using ports in Pakistan. However, looking at Pakistan’s anti-India policy, Chabahar port of Iran is the next best commercially viable location for India. This would enable Indian good to move into Afghanistan via Delaram and beyond and in the process, open up an alternate route into Afghanistan, which now relies mostly on goods transported overland from ports in Pakistan and provides a supplementary access of Afghanistan to the sea. With Chabahar open to Indian goods, India would be able to sidestep Pakistan’s dominance of mainland trade routes to the Afghan territory. New Delhi’s expansion of trade into Afghanistan is part of a trilateral agreement signed by India, Iran and Afghanistan in January 2003. This agreement and the North-South Corridor initiative have become key milestones in the promoting India’s trade with Iran, Central Asian countries and Afghanistan.

Indian officials are currently vying for long term, around 60-90 years, operation and development rights for the Chahbahar port. India wants to develop Chabahar port to improve connectivity with Afghanistan and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Iran would not develop a port to suit India’s requirement. Chabahar port does not have immediate commercial viability, though it does have long-term potential to emerge as the gateway to Afghanistan and CIS countries. So, to make a potential case out of the project, India is likely to ask the Iranian Government to assign it long-term rights of 60 to 90 years to develop and operate the port. Two Indian ports — JN Port and Kandla Port — may get the rights to develop the Iranian port of Chabahar, in a first-of-its-kind initiative of the Indian Government to improve connectivity with Afghanistan and Iran. On 2nd
July, 2013, an Iranian delegation met JN Port and Kandla Port officials in Mumbai. “The second round of negotiations are on. A final decision will be taken with inputs from the Ministries of External Affairs, Defence and Finance,” N. N. Kumar, Chairman, JN Port, told Business Line. Cooperation in this area appears to indicate a reinforcement of ‘strong Indo-Iranian political relations rather than a broader defence alliance’. India and Iran are actively exploring options for expanding the amount of goods India is sending to Afghanistan via Iran. The two governments have begun drawing up a transit agreement to allow India to ship more goods to Afghanistan through Iranian territory. Amidst growing energy demands at home in India, India’s policy makers are faced with the need to diversify sources of energy supply.

The Delhi Declaration emphasised energy as a strategic area in the bilateral relationship, whereas the Teheran Declaration focused on the mutual benefits that would accrue from enhanced cooperation. With high rates of economic growth and over 17 per cent of the world’s population, India has become a significant consumer of energy resources. The government hopes to maintain an annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of about 8–10 per cent over the next quarter century to meet its goals for poverty eradication. This level of growth will require India to at least triple its primary energy supply. In 2006, India was the sixth largest oil consumer in the world and some observers believe that by 2025, India may become the fourth largest consumer of crude oil following the US, China and Japan. Already India imports more than two-thirds of its hydrocarbon requirements and any further escalation would adversely affect its energy security. Placing current import dependency at 72 per cent, a Planning Commission report warns that the country faces ‘formidable challenges’ in meeting its energy needs and that our ‘import dependence is growing rapidly’. The Persian Gulf nation accounts for roughly 10 per cent of the world’s total proven petroleum reserves. Iran in 2007 accounted for 17 per cent of India’s crude oil imports making it the second-largest supplier of oil after Saudi Arabia at 23 per cent. This makes Iran a key ally for India. In addition to seeking new suppliers for energy, India is also looking into energy resource diversification. This accounts for the increasing use of natural gas, largely driven by demand in the power sector. The power and fertilizer sectors account for nearly three-
quarters of natural gas consumption in India. Although India’s natural gas production has consistently increased, demand has already exceeded supply and the country has been a net importer of natural gas since 2004. Iran has an enormous reserve of natural gas, which according to a 2008 estimate stands second only to Russia. Talks have been underway between Iran and India to build a pipeline via Pakistan to transport Iran’s abundant natural gas to India. The plan, also known as the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline project, envisages the transportation of Iranian natural gas through a 2,600-kilometre pipeline from the South Pars fields in Iran via Pakistan to Gujarat in India. Even though the project appears beneficial for all the concerned parties, several commercial and political issues have delayed an agreement. Indian security officials have questioned the wisdom of importing a commodity as critical as natural gas through the Pakistani corridor. They insist that the gas pipeline passing through Pakistan should be accompanied by clear security guarantees from Islamabad. In mid-2009, Pakistan signed an agreement with Iran to secure 750 million cubic feet of natural gas per day through the pipeline, without India’s participation in the negotiations. The message from this development seems to be that India could join the deal as intended but it would not wait infinitely for New Delhi to make up its mind. India’s hesitation in reaching an agreement on the proposed deal is no less influenced by US opposition to it. Moreover, there is still no agreement, for example, between India and Iran on the price of the gas or between India and Pakistan on the tariff to be paid for transportation across latter’s territory. Due to the uncertainties involving this pipeline, the Indian government’s 11th Five Year plan does not project any gas supply from this route. At the same time, the Indian government does not want to disavow interest in the project lest it be accused by domestic critics of bowing to US pressure on Iran. In addition to diversifying its sources of supply, India’s international energy strategy has also been to acquire stakes in energy production facilities in Iran, in order to ship back liquefied natural gas (LNG). India’s investment in Iran’s energy sector stands around $100 million. In November 2009, the overseas arm of state-run Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC), ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) and Ashok Leyland Projects Services, a private company, signed agreements to take 40 per cent stake in South Pars field-phase 12 (SP-12), offered by the...
state-run National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC). OVL has also submitted a $5.5 billion plan to bring to production the Farzad-B gas find in Farsi gas fields in the Persian Gulf. Besides, in December 2009, OVL agreed to take 20 per cent stake in the LNG gas export facility that Iran LNG (a subsidiary of NIOC) is building at the southern Iranian coast. Though this plant is to turn gas produced from phase-12 into LNG for exports, India is eying it for turning gas from the Farzad-B gas field into LNG. The Indian company is expected to receive up to 6 million tonnes per annum of LNG for its efforts in both the gas fields (Business Standard Report 2009). Natural gas is set to become the major component of India’s import from Iran, especially as domestic demand rises and India begins to face higher prices in the international market.

India, the world's fourth-largest petroleum consumer, is Iran's second largest oil customer after China and purchases around $12bln worth of Iranian crude every year, about 12 percent of its consumption. India and Iran have been holding discussions at regular intervals on issues related to economic cooperation under the joint commission mechanism, which was established in July 1983. India imported 262,800 barrels per day (bpd) from Iran in 2012/13, a reduction of 27.4 per cent from the previous year, according to preliminary government data. India has been paying for 45 per cent of its Iranian oil imports in rupees, which has limited international acceptability, and was settling the remainder in euros through Turkey's Halkbank, but this was halted in February under pressure from tighter western sanctions. The US and European Union slapped sanctions on Iran to block oil revenues over its disputed nuclear programme, which they suspect aims to build weapons. Iran denies this claim. Since April 1, Indian refiners have held on to 55 per cent of payments as Iran has been exploring avenues, including settling in roubles through Russia, the sources said. The non-payment was seen as a hidden incentive or a temporary relief on top of attractive credit terms offered by Iran to Indian clients.

On December 27 2010, regarding the payment mechanism for trade with Iran, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced that: “In view of the difficulties being
experienced by importers and exporters in payments to and receipts from Iran, the extant provisions have been reviewed and it has been decided that all eligible current account transactions including trade transactions with Iran should be settled in any permitted currency outside the Asian Clearing Union (ACU) mechanism until further notice.” ACU is the simplest form of payment arrangements whereby participants settle payments for intra-regional transactions with central banks as their representatives. Iran had refused to sell crude oil to Indian companies if the payment was done outside the ACU route. Nevertheless, Iran later agreed to ensure shipments at least for January 2011. In fact, to make matters worse, on 7 January 2011, the State Bank of India (SBI) refused to issue fresh Letters of Credit (LCs) to public and private sector refiners. This move has the potential to ‘halt’ oil import from Iran altogether. This stance by the RBI has led Reliance Industries to abandon its plans to invest in an oil refinery in Iran. Though there is no direct evidence that American pressure is operating on Indian companies, however, there are indications that it is quite likely that firms like Reliance were coerced to withdraw from Iran if they wanted to keep their prospects alive in the Shale Gas sector in USA.  

Given Iran’s unique geo-strategic location, the Islamic nation became the only viable gateway through which India could reach this region. While welcoming a parliamentary delegation from Iran, led by its Speaker Dr Ali Larijani President Pranab Mukherjee spoke about the importance of the New Delhi-Tehran ties, in the context of both geo-politics and economics,. The President spoke about civilisational linkages, saying: “Throughout history, both countries have seen an intermingling of people and cultures.” He also spoke about the economic potential of both countries, stating: ”India and Iran have a strong bilateral economic relation-ship and it needs to be further deepened for the benefit of peoples of both countries.”

The two-way trade between India and Iran has shown good growth in recent years. In fact, it has grown more than 25 percent during the last five years from US$ 12887.52 million in 2007-08 to US$ 15968.03 million in 2011-12. India’s export to Iran has grown more than 25% from about US$ 1943.92 million in 2007-08 to US$ 2411.33 million in 2011-12. Iran's exports to India during these years have registered an increase of almost 30% from US$ 10943.61 million in 2007-08 reaching US$ 13556.71 million in 2011-12.
The trade balance continues to be in Iran’s favour, although India’s imports are also increasing as well. During the current financial year i.e. April-Dec, 2012-13, exports are to the tune of US$ 2068.08 million whereas the imports from Iran are to the tune of US$ 8471.64 million. The total trade is US $ 10539.72 million.  

Iran on the other hand having being transformed into a "rogue" nation, hand in gloves with those who threaten world peace and security, by the US, was now keen to develop close diplomatic relations with India. According to Iran's policy makers, this move would enable Iran to come out of the “rogue” status imposed on it by the US and strengthen its position in the global politics. Besides, India, unlike Iran, did not have strained relations with the West, therefore, “India is seen by Iran as an important partner and a possible conduit to the West.” The other reason for Iran's engagement with India is to facilitate economic cooperation between the two countries and maintenance of internal stability.

Sharing its northern border with at least three troubled states of Central Asia, breakaway units of the erstwhile U.S.S.R, Iranian leadership was mindful of the dangers of becoming entangled in their disputes. The possibility of ethnic conflicts in those states spilling over into its territory and fuelling civil disorder among its diverse ethnic minorities also exercised Tehran. Moreover both India and Iran shared a threat from Sunni radicalism emerging from Pakistan and Afghanistan. This threat emerged as one of the most significant area of cooperation between India and Iran. The issue of Pakistan-based terrorism came up during Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki’s visit to India in November 2009, where both the countries called for mutual cooperation and international attention to the the role of Pakistan's military and intelligence establishments in fostering a large number of terror outfits including al Qaeda on its soil and providing support and safe haven to Taliban on its western and southern borders with Afghanistan. India has been feeling the problem for long especially through the bomb blasts taking place in Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad and other places in the country, carried out by Pakistan military and Intelligence supported terrorist groups. Iran has also felt the problems emanating from an increasing Sunni militancy within its territory. A spate of suicide bombings has rocked Zahedan in recent years, a predominantly Sunni city along
Iran’s frontier with Pakistan. The October 2009 attack on Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in this restive city was attributed to Pakistan-based Jundallah (with possible links to Taliban or al Qaeda or elements within the Pakistani government). When the Taliban was routed by the Northern Alliance in November 2001, both New Delhi and Tehran welcomed its demise and made Afghanistan’s reconstruction and development a common critical goal.

The US has opened the door to a reconciliation process in which the American military would reach out to moderate elements of the Taliban, much as it did with Sunni militias in Iraq. This policy also reflects Afghan President Hamid Karzai’s own inclination to integrate Taliban fighters who renounce violence into the Afghan armed forces. Islamabad has already offered to help the Americans and Karzai government negotiate with the Taliban and other insurgents.

Meanwhile, Taliban and other associated terrorist groups, under the order of their controllers in Pakistan, have been carrying out attacks and issuing threats to compel India to close down its developmental activities and leave Afghanistan. Therefore, India felt that any step to reintegrate the Taliban into the government would redouble Islamabad’s leverage in Kabul to New Delhi’s detriment. Iran and India has jointly opposed the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Taliban, dismissing the adoption of a $ 500 million ‘Peace and Reintegration Trust Fund’ at the London Summit in January 2010, to bring Taliban fighters into the civilian fold, as absurd and destabilising. Iran is an important ally here and its help is crucial in ensuring that elements hostile to India do not have a free run in Afghanistan (allowing Pakistan the ‘strategic depth’, which it so dearly seeks over India, by being in a position to control the regime in Kabul) after the NATO forces leave the region.

Both India and Iran have been isolated in the American search for an Afghan settlement, even as they face an uneasy scenario of a Taliban dispensation in Kabul. It is, therefore, in the interests of the two countries to intensify coordination with each other and with other regional players such as Russia and Central Asian republics, to stabilise Afghanistan. Indo-Iranian Joint Working Group on Terrorism is a ready instrument to
begin renewed cooperation on combating the Taliban insurgency and the narcotics trade that sustains it.

Strategically and economically, as it stands, it is in the best interest of Iran to develop and strengthen the bilateral relationship with India. As the new President of Iran, Hassan Rouhani pointed out that India would be one of the priority areas in his government's foreign policy agenda. The entry of Iraq as the new player in the energy supplier category for India (Iraq has replaced Iran as the second largest crude oil supplier after Saudi Arabia) has cut a deep gash into Iranian economic prospects. The visit of Salman Khurshid, external affairs minister of India, to Iraq on June 2013, followed by M. Veerappa Moily, the petroleum and natural gas minister to attend the joint commission meeting is a significant step to a renewed Indo-Iraq cooperation. Iraq offered three newly offered oil blocks in the Middle Furat oil fields to India and has agreed to consider investing in Indian Oil Cooperation's 15 million tonne refinery in Paradip. Iraq has also agreed to restart negotiations with India's ONGC Videsh Limited to finalize the long pending contract for oil block 8, an on land exploration block in Western desert in Iraq. Iran responded by offering India's state owned oil companies production sharing contracts in a departure from its usual practice of offering Indian companies 15 percent fixed returns under a buy-back contract with the national oil company of Iran. Teheran, it is said has also offered to ship the gas to Oman in liquefied form from where it can be processed into LNG, which can then be shipped to India.\(^{37}\) India's growing economic cooperation is another major area of bilateral ties. Indian Ambassador to Iran Shri D.P. Srivastava said that India will keep its trade ties with Iran despite the international economic sanctions imposed on Iran, India.\(^{38}\) In March 2013, Consul General of Iran in Hyderabad, Hassan Nourian, said bilateral trade between India and Iran is poised to cross $25 billion within four years. “The Indo-Iran trade cooperation amounts to $15 billion. Both the governments of Iran and India have come to a conclusion that in the next four years they want to take it to $25 billion,” Nourian said. About 45 percent of exports from Iran are paid in Indian rupees, and the Indian Ministry of Commerce has expressed desire to encourage trade to use the rupee surplus accumulated through oil exports from Iran to India.\(^{39}\)
Challenges to India–Iran Relations

The challenges to Indo-Iran strategic and economic partnership arise from Iran and India’s close proximity and strategic relations, growing from mutual interest convergences and Iran’s nuclear policy that is under US suspicion. The second Indo-Iranian naval exercise took place on 3–8 March 2006, coinciding with President Bush’s visit to India and weeks before Congressional hearing of the proposed US–India civilian nuclear deal. The conduct of the exercise signalled to both Washington and Tehran that New Delhi’s bilateral relations would be independent of pulls and pressures of a third party. This was a significant incident from the perspective of Indo-Iran relationship. Although the Indian officials downplayed the Iranian leaders’ visits to New Delhi and the port call of Iranian warships, arguing that they were “insignificant and should not trouble the US.”

According to Christine Fair, a leading American strategic security analyst, the US’ “increased scrutiny of the Indo-Iranian relationship arose due to the temporal convergence of two unrelated developments: the ever deepening Iranian nuclear crisis and the efforts of President George Bush to persuade the US Congress to adopt legislation enabling a civilian nuclear deal for India.” At the same time, the US policymakers viewed the growing relations between India and Iran unfavourably, as “when the US was positioning itself to attack Iraq, resulting in turmoil in West Asia, [as ] India’s attempt to distance itself from the US foreign policy vis-à-vis West Asia.”

In June 2005, India, prioritising its national interest, ignored the US pressure to isolate Iran and sent an Indian delegation to Pakistan and Iran, to review the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline proposal with both the countries. During this visit, India and Iran had “signed a 25-year agreement in Tehran for the annual supply of 5 million tons of liquefied natural gas to commence in 2009, a deal worth [about] $ 22 billion.” The US displeased with this development, expressed strong reservations about India’s Iran policy, and sanctioned some individual Indians and Indian chemical companies, alleging that they had made “transfers of technology to Iran that could be useful for Iran’s purported weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program.”
The *CRS Report for Congress* pointed out that “in 2003, an Indian chemical industry consultancy, Protech Consultants Private Ltd., was sanctioned under the Iran-Iraq Arms Nonproliferation Act (P.L. 102-484)” and in December 2005, another two “Indian chemical companies (Sabero Organic Chemical Gujarat Ltd. and Sandhya Organic Chemicals Pvt. Ltd.) were sanctioned under the INA [Iran Non-Proliferation Act] for transfers [of technology] to Iran.” Besides, two Indian nuclear scientists, Dr. Surendar Chaudhary and Dr. Y.S.R. Prasad, were sanctioned under the INA in September 2004 on the allegation that they had passed on heavy water nuclear technology to Iran.\(^{46}\)

In 2004, amidst all these developments, the US signed an agreement with India “to expand cooperation in three specific areas: civilian nuclear activities, civilian space programme and high-technology trade.” US and India also agreed to expand “dialogue in missile defense.”\(^{47}\) On July 18, 2005, India’s Prime Minister Manmohan Singh issued a Joint Statement with the US President George W. Bush in Washington DC to enable full civil nuclear energy cooperation between the two countries.\(^{48}\) The changed US policy towards India came as a result of the need to entice India and decrease India’s dependence on Iranian oil. The India-US civil nuclear deal proposal generated considerable domestic opposition especially from the Left parties which was a partner of the coalition that was in government in India. However, India’s policy-makers, under the pressure of the unavoidable circumstances (that is, the desire to proceed with the civil nuclear deal initiative with the US and the need of US support for India’s permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council) as well as its desire not to disturb the friendly relation with U.S voted alongside the US against Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in September 2005. The WikiLeaks publication has thrown up new evidence that suggests that India voted against Iran at the IAEA due to its dislike for “another state in the region to become a nuclear power.”\(^{49}\)

Yet, in February 2006, India once again voted against Iran at the IAEA, an indication that it had voted under US pressure. The voting which took place on February 4, 2006, recommending that Iran’s nuclear programme be referred to the UN Security Council, was approved, with 27 countries, including India, voting in favour of the resolution, three
countries (Cuba, Syria and Venezuela) voting against, and five abstaining. Speaking in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Indian Parliament) on February 17, 2006, Indian Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh rejected any attempts to link the India-US nuclear energy cooperation with Iran’s nuclear programme, and said, “As a signatory to the NPT, Iran has the legal right to develop peaceful uses of nuclear energy, consistent with its international commitments and obligations. It is incumbent upon Iran to exercise these rights in the context of safeguards that it has voluntarily accepted upon its nuclear programme under the IAEA.” He further added that India took the unusual step of voting against Iran at the IAEA because of the “security concerns arising from proliferation activities in [India’s] extended neighbourhood.”

The US-India bilateral Nuclear Cooperation Agreement (also known as the 123 Agreement) was finally signed on October 10, 2008, by India’s External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee and the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Washington DC. The Indian government was criticised and even accused by many strategic and security analysts and some political parties of surrendering to the US for “operationalising the nuclear deal” with it, and not following its independent foreign policy. The critics of the Indian government perceived that the Hyde Act which is binding on the Indo-US civil nuclear cooperation, contained a concealed condition. Brahma Chellaney, an eminent strategic thinker and analyst, expressing one such view, wrote, “Unlike the existing Section 123 agreements with other countries, the Indo-US civil nuclear cooperation will be uniquely governed by a special, India-specific US domestic law, the Hyde Act.” Exposing what Indian government critics feared, the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said during her statement at the House of Foreign Affairs Panel, “We will support nothing with India in the NSG that is in contradiction to the Hyde Act. It will have to be completely consistent with the obligations of the Hyde Act.”

The disturbing fact about the Henry J. Hyde United States-India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Act of 2006 is that it contains a prescriptive Article in SEC. 103. Statements of Policy (b) With respect to South Asia, clause (4) stating that the US will “secure India’s full and active participation in United States’ efforts to dissuade, isolate, and, if necessary, sanction and contain Iran for its efforts to acquire weapons of mass...
destruction, including a nuclear weapons capability and the capability to enrich uranium or reprocess nuclear fuel, and the means to deliver weapons of mass destruction.” Surprisingly, the 123 Agreement signed between the US and India specifies in detail, various issues like the purposes of the agreement; the scope of cooperation; the transfer and protection of nuclear materials, non-nuclear material, equipment and related technology; and the IAEA safeguards, etc., but, there is no mention of Iran in the agreement. India’s Prime Minister Manmohan Singh defended his government’s policy of initiating civil nuclear cooperation with the US, arguing, “If India has to grow at the rate of 8 per cent to 10 per cent and, may be, more, India needs rising amounts of energy.” He further stated that by 2012, India’s total production of nuclear power will not be more than 3,000 MW, and though India has large reserves of coal, it is low-grade coal, with a high ash content. Therefore, the increased use of coal is likely to “run into environment hazards, like CO2 and other gas emissions.” The political crisis between Iran and the US not only affected their relations but also impinged on the socio-economic development and cooperation of the countries of the region. A good example of it is the delay in the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline project. The IPI gas pipeline project is aimed at constructing a 1,620-mile (2,700-km) pipeline from Iran’s South Pars fields in the Persian Gulf to Pakistan’s major cities of Karachi and Multan and then further to Delhi, India. Of the total length of the 2,700-km project, 1,100 km would run in Iran, 1,000 km in Pakistan and 600 km in Indian territory. The IPI gas pipeline project raises great hope and expectation in the region. It was even referred to as the “peace pipeline” by some political and economic analysts because they believed that through economic cooperation, the tension between India and Pakistan, especially the Kashmir issue, could be subdued. Iran took great interest in the development of this gas pipeline (IPI) project and earnestly sought to achieve it because it would give: a major boost for job creation and economic prosperity of the provinces on the pipeline route; the enhancement of Iran’s strategic positioning and standing, both regionally and on a global level; and regional economic integration.
The Iranian as well as some Indian politicians and political analysts, especially former Indian Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas and Panchayati Raj, Mani Shankar Aiyar, strongly supported the project of bringing Iranian natural gas to India through the pipeline passing through Pakistan. However, Aiyar’s stand did not go down well with the policy-makers of the US. A WikiLeaks publication indicated that Mani Shankar Aiyar was replaced with “one of India’s most right-wing, pro-US, and pro-big business politicians” Murli Deora, during the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government’s Cabinet reshuffle in 2006 under the influence of the US. 62 This development let many strategic and political analysts to believe that the proposed IPI pipeline has become a dream pipeline, not so much for the prices, transit fees and security issues as argued by the Indian government, but mainly because of the pressure from the US against any trade relations with Iran. The US strongly opposed countries carrying out business activities in Iran and imposed various restrictions like the Iran Non-Proliferation Act and Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) which comprises sanctions on annual investment in excess of $20 million in Iran’s energy sector, making it difficult for India and other countries to invest in Iran. The US has adopted such tough policies because it does not want Iran’s “economic lifeline” to be sustained “at a time when the US and its European allies are trying to weaken [Iran] economically.” That is why “any attempt by Iran’s neighbours and clients to give its energy industry a shot in the arm is viewed by Washington as a quasi-hostile move.” 63

It is to be noted that India is Iran’s second largest buyer of oil, second only to China, importing about 12 per cent of its oil needs. Iranian officials declared that as of July 2011, India’s oil debt to Iran was between $4 and 5 billion. The Iranian government and businessmen, upset with the Indian government for delaying the payment for oil imported from Iran, even threatened to cease further oil supplies to India “unless [India] finds a way to pay for its oil imports.” 64 The Indian government, left with little option, worked relentlessly to prevent the cut-off in fuel shipments from Iran and finally succeeded in solving the problem of payment for Iranian crude oil with the help of Turkey, thereby, averting a major political crisis between the two countries. 65
Iran felt let down by the voting against it at the IAEA, and, Iranian leaders expressed their displeasure towards India’s policy by moving away from the past practice of supporting India on the Kashmir issue and began to openly voice their support to the Kashmiris. On September 18, 2010, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmansparast condemned India for “the killing of 15 Muslim protesters in Kashmir who were protesting the alleged desecration of the Koran in the US.” He said, “[I]t was perfectly acceptable for Muslims to react to the desecration of the Koran and countering such reactions could be reinterpreted as supporting an act of sacrilege.”

Two months later, on November 15, 2010, Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Khomenei, in his Haj message to the pilgrims, described “Kashmir as one of the world’s besieged regions.” The Indian government considered the statements of the Iranian supreme leader as interference in India’s “territorial sovereignty” and abstained from voting against a UN resolution criticising Iran’s human rights violations. This marked a major shift in India’s stand on Iran, because it was for the first time since 2003 that India has abstained from voting against a UN resolution critical of Iran. The strained India-Iran diplomatic relations do not comprise a new development:

In September 2005, India voted for the IAEA resolution finding Iran to be in ‘non-compliance’ of the safeguard obligation under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and then it voted to refer Iran to the UNSC in February 2006. The votes stirred fierce controversy in India but went a long way in placating those policy makers, who questioned India’s engagement with Iran in the backdrop of the Congressional debates on the US–India civilian nuclear deal. Even though at the time the government defended its vote as an ‘independent decision’ by saying it worked actively to help Iran during stand-offs in the negotiation process and ensured that the issue remained with the IAEA instead of immediate referral to the UNSC, New Delhi understood that the failure to take a clear stand on the Iranian imbroglio would thwart the much sought-after nuclear deal with the US.

The government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was accused—especially by the Left parties who were partners in the coalition—of bowing to US pressure and compromising the ‘autonomy’ of India’s foreign policy decision making. Critics also
argued that Iran had the right to develop civilian nuclear technology and that India’s vote brazenly dovetailed with the US policy of isolating Iran.\textsuperscript{72}

India’s position has been to hold Iran accountable to its obligations under the NPT, IAEA and UNSC guidelines and insist that Iran address questions related to its nuclear programme to the satisfaction of the international community. On 27 November 2009, India once again joined the US in voting against Iran in a resolution at the IAEA, which demanded that the Islamic Republic immediately suspend construction of its newly-revealed uranium enrichment plant at Qom—a site kept secret until recently. This stand clearly demonstrated that New Delhi does not view any further proliferation in its neighbourhood as conducive to its security environment. Manmohan Singh said as much in a question and answer session during his visit to Washington, a week before the vote.\textsuperscript{73}

**Converging Interests and Pragmatic Strategy**

Dr. Manmohan Singh’s government had come under severe criticism and opposition for voting against Iran at the IAEA, and the US feared that the Indian government would bow down to pressure, and sacrificing the autonomy of India's foreign policy, and changing its stand on Iran. In January 2006, media reports, both the national and international, published a report citing comments of David Mulford, former US Ambassador to Delhi, who publicly warned India that “if [Indian government] opposes Iran having nuclear weapons, [Americans] think [India] should record it in the vote” at the IAEA. He further added that in case India did not vote against Iran at the IAEA, the India-US civil nuclear cooperation initiative was unlikely to materialise.\textsuperscript{74} These statements of Ambassador Mulford led to sharp reactions from various political parties in India, particularly from the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Surprisingly, even the US State Department disowned Ambassador Mulford’s statement and said it was his “personal opinion” and not that of the US government. In view of the continued rise in criticism from its citizens and political parties, Ambassador Mulford was summoned by India’s Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran, and told that his comments were “inappropriate and not conducive to building a strong partnership between the two democracies.” Ambassador Mulford, caught in a diplomatic row, tried to play down the crisis, arguing
that his remarks had been “taken out of context” and expressed “sincere regrets” to the Indian government.\textsuperscript{75}

Notwithstanding the IAEA votes, India is conscious of its equities with Iran and has signalled little inclination towards relinquishing them. Several constraints, however, limit the extent to which India can extend a hand to Iran: the first and foremost being India’s relationship with the US. As Iran’s nuclear stand-off continues and as the Islamic Republic suffers the fourth round of the UNSC-imposed sanctions, India is clearly in a quandary. The measures taken by the US under the CISADA, restricts investment by third countries in Iran’s energy sector. Such a position puts India at odds with the US and lays bare the dilemma posed by continuous pulls and pressures of a strategic partnership with Washington.\textsuperscript{76}

Further, while on the one hand, India cannot wish away the unfavourable impact that economic sanctions can have on its energy security and trade relations, on the other hand, policy makers in India are well aware of the importance of a strategic alliance with world’s superpower. In the last two years India has made substantial gains in areas such as military-to-military ties and counterterrorism: defence trade between India and the US has expanded to 3 billion worth and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has been coordinating with the Indian intelligence on Mumbai terrorist attacks.\textsuperscript{77} With the nuclear deal, India is also poised to have access to high technology in areas of energy, space and communication. Ideally, India would like to maintain a parallel relationship with both the US and Iran, but this is evidently not happening. The IAEA votes and the shaky prospect of the IPI gas pipeline are illustrative of how strong the ‘US factor’ can be in the future of India–Iran relationship.

While Iran is important, India would also like to maintain its relations with Israel. India–Israel cooperation has broadened over the years to include supply of defence equipment, intelligence sharing, counterterrorism and joint defence-related research. The possibility of Israeli technology reaching Iran via New Delhi, has exercised Israeli political establishment from time to time. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon sought explicit guarantees from India on this issue during his visit here in September 2003.\textsuperscript{78} Israel raised this question once again at a meeting of an Indo– Israeli joint working
group on counterterrorism in November 2004. Notwithstanding, India’s impressive track record in containing illegal transfer of technology received from a third country, Israel’s concerns as the largest arms supplier, will remain salient in India’s defence ties with Iran. Another factor that could act as a determining factor in India–Iran relations is India’s ties with the Arab Gulf states, especially with Saudi Arabia. Apart from the 4.8 million-strong Indian diaspora, who form a significant chunk of the Gulf workforce, the region is important for energy security and bilateral investment and trade. Saudi Arabia and Qatar are the largest suppliers of petroleum and gas respectively to the subcontinent.

India figures as a major export–import partner for all the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. On the other hand, Iran has far from friendly relations with United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. UAE has territorial dispute with Iran over Tunb islands in the Gulf. Although controlled by Iran, they are claimed by the UAE with broad Arab backing. Bahrain–Iran relations have been strained since the 1981 discovery of a planned Iran-sponsored coup to establish a Shia theocracy in Bahrain. With 70 per cent of the Shia Muslim being ruled by a Sunni ruling family, much of Bahrain’s sectarian troubles are suspected to be fomented by Iran. Saudi Arabia and Iran have a history of mutual distrust and suspicion, which has only sharpened with Iranian aggressive behaviour in the region in the aftermath of the Iraq war. Iran’s effective control of southern Iraq, ‘incursions’ into Lebanon through the Hezbollah, interference in the Palestinian issue through Hamas, meddling in the internal affairs of Yemen and intransigent stand on the nuclear issue have created a sense of disquiet among its Arab neighbours.

In mid-2009, Pakistan signed an agreement with Iran to secure 750 million cubic feet of natural gas per day through the pipeline, without India’s participation in the negotiations. The message from this development seems to be that India could join the deal as intended but it would not wait infinitely for New Delhi to make up its mind. India’s hesitation in reaching an agreement on the proposed deal is no less influenced by US opposition to it. The Bush administration opposed the project because of the crucial revenue it would give to Iran, which is facing punitive economic sanctions for its controversial nuclear programme. Even though Washington is no longer actively
opposing the pipeline project, India’s negotiations with Iran over the pipeline could now trigger sanctions under the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (CISADA). CISADA was passed by Congress on 24 June 2010 and signed into law by President Obama on 1 July 2010. The Act expands upon the restrictions of the Iran Sanctions Act of 1996 (the ISA) and the Iranian Transaction covers a significantly broader range of areas than the ISA that makes it of particular interest to companies with, or considering business, activities related to Iran. This Act provides for the imposition of penalties against foreign companies that invest more than $20 million in a single year in Iran’s energy sector. 

While India and Iran would have liked to cooperate on areas such as nuclear energy and space, political compulsions dictate that no such engagement is in the offing very soon. When Iran was known to be reviving its civilian nuclear programme during the 1990s, New Delhi cooperated with Tehran by agreeing to sell two nuclear reactors that were to be placed under IAEA safeguards. The sale was abandoned under pressure from the US. Two Indian scientists have also been under US censure for providing technical assistance to Iran’s nuclear programme. Indo-Iran space cooperation also appears to be dead letter in the face of Indo-US cooperation in this field.

Iran on the other hand now has to face a new challenge in the form of Iraq which is trying to make use of the situation and emerge as the biggest supplier of oil and natural gas to India and it has ably replaced Iran as the second largest supplier of energy next to Saudi Arabia. Iraq offered three newly offered oil blocks in the Middle Furat oil fields to India and has agreed to consider investing in Indian Oil Cooperation’s 15 million tonne refinery in Paradip. Iraq has also agreed to restart negotiations with India’s ONGC Videsh Limited to finalize the long pending contract for oil block 8, an on land exploration block in Western desert in Iraq. Iran responded by offering India’s state owned oil companies production sharing contracts in a departure from its usual practice of offering Indian companies 15 percent fixed returns under a buy-back contract with the national oil company of Iran. Teheran, it is said has also offered to ship the gas to Oman in liquefied form from where it can be processed into LNG, which can then be shipped to India.
Guided by pragmatic considerations and complemented by both the countries own converging security and national interests, the relationship is here to stay. India’s success in securing its ties with the US did not deter it from vociferously defending its relationship with Iran. The February 2007 visit of India’s the then Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee to Iran and Iranian President s MahmoudAhmedinejad’s visit to India in April 2008—both amid heightened US–Iranian tension on the nuclear issue and clandestine Iranian involvement in Iraq—are pointers that India will continue to pursue its relations with Iran irrespective of the views of the US. More recently, Mottaki’s trip to India before Manmohan Singh’s departure to the US was a clear indication that India will not completely sacrifice its energy and strategic interests with Tehran for its relationship with Washington or any other country. The election of Hasan Rouhani as the President of Iran in June 14, 2013 Presidential election, and his return message to the P.M of India that India would be one of the top priority area of his foreign policy agenda. Inspite of its close proximity with both Washington and Tel Aviv, and irrespective of the growing tensions caused by the US sanctions and India's desire to emerge as a responsible nuclear state, India seems to be in no mood to let go the the space for Pakistan and China to emerge as challengers to India's emergent status as a major player in international politics. The liberalizing reforms of China and then India unleashed the prospect of their demographic and economic destiny unfolding in uncomfortable proximity. A Ministry of External Affairs paper titled ‘International Sanctions on Iran and Way Forward for India-Iran Relations’ argues that ‘Political engagement with Iran, while of great importance, may not be sufficient to ensure that our interests are protected. Economic engagement with Iran is also necessary and would help us in promoting our energy security, connectivity and opening of new markets, and to underpin our political objectives.’ Interestingly, the same paper observes that China was ‘taking a conscious decision to step into the vacuum created by the exit of western and other companies,’ which would give it additional leverage in Iran. “To India and other rising powers, the material might and political influence that define great powers are not simply teleological ends—they are means by which governments pursue their interests and foreign policy
objectives. India has sought to build capabilities and influence not simply for the sake of being strong, but also to advance more specific national aims. Infact that is probably the reason that India seems to cosy up to Iraq as well and focus on it as one of its supplier of energy and Iraq's emergence as the second largest supplier of energy resource to India is a pointer to India's desire to explore other options in fulfilling its domestic energy demands( this is also probably the reason behind the U.S waiver for India and other seven emerging economies from banking and other sanctions after they had cut back on oil imports from Iran).India can use this to its advantage and expand its economic partners in West Asia and also make use of the emerging competetion between the regional powers in West Asia to serve the needs of India.

India's West Asia policy is one of the most complex. Neither can it ignore the other Arabian states nor can it ignore Israel, which stands out as one of its allies in the region, while charting out its policy for Iran. India therefore needs to balance its strategic interest and its energy security concerns while framing the foreign policy on Iran. Moreover, its equation as a responsible nuclear state with a history of nonalignment during the Cold war period and its fight against terrorism has cast huge pressure on India. However, back home India's closeness with Iran symbolises India's independence and as also analysts like Kumaraswamy who point out the 13% Muslim minority as the determining factor in India's policy towards Iran.

India, therefore, has been performing the balancing act pretty well by resorting to multilateralism, striking up friendship with other regional actors within West Asia but at the same time not forgetting its traditional partners but India needs to play its role as a strong regional leader and resolve the nuclear sanction crisis which unfortunately it has not been able to play. India's relationship with Iran, therefore as it stands today is a case of tight rope walking,for India just cannot gloat in the glory of new found frienship with US, rather should keep in mind the challenges and the game plan of the two other powers within the subcontinent, namely Pakistan and China that are also desirous to cut a big role in the regional as well as international politics.
End Notes


17. With Central Asian energy reserves being estimated at 2.7 per cent of total world oil reserves and 7 per cent of total natural gas reserves, the region has a huge potential as a future energy source for India; Kundu, Nivedita Das. 24 April 2008. Hamid Ansari’s visit to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. From http://www.idsa.in/idsastrategiccomments/HamidAnsarisVisitToTurkmenistanAndKazakhstan_n_NDKundu_240408. Accessed on May 14, 2013.

   c. On the importance of Central Asian region to India, see, Blank, Stephen. 2003. India’s rising profile in Central Asia, Comparative Strategy, 22(2), 139–57.;


In fact, it was Pakistan that first floated the notion that the Taliban could be categorised as ‘good’ and ‘bad’. The ‘good’ Taliban were those who could cut ties with al Qaeda and other terrorist groups and pursue their political goals peacefully. However, the irony is that there can be no such neat distinction as both al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan are surviving and flourishing with the connivance of the Pakistani establishment. It is no surprise that the Talibanisation of Pakistan is taking place rapidly and US-led NATO forces are increasingly losing ground in Afghanistan. See Perlez, Jane. 9 February 2010. Pakistan is said to


39. n.38. op. cit.
42. n.9. op. cit
43. Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Government of India, Natural Gas, at http://petroleum.nic.in/ng.htm
46. n.45. op. cit.


70. India conducted its second naval exercise with Iran in 2006 at a time when the US Congress was considering a civilian nuclear deal with the U.S. This invited strong comments from the Chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee, Tom Lantos, who observed that relationship with ‘the current terrorist regime in Tehran is unacceptable behaviour by any country seeking to be our strategic ally’ Haniffa, Aziz. 6 April 2006. India not a threat to NPT: Lantos, Rediff.com, Retrieved from http://www.rediff.com/news/2006/apr/06ndeal1.htm. Accessed on 15 May 2013.


75. n74.op.cit.
79. (Al-Shayeji February 2010; Fandy January 2010; Ehteshami 2002).
83. See C. Fair 2007, pp51-52
85. FARS NEWS, Foreign Policy, Iran’s President-Elect Vows to Deepen Ties with India Tue Jul 09, 2013 12:19

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India and Iran Relations:

The Need for Constructive Re-engagement

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Abstract:
The ties between the India and Iran are not new but an ancient Phenomenon. Independent India and Iran established diplomatic links on 15th March 1950. Today both are considered as significant regional power and are recognized as ‘crucial factor’ in fostering peace, stability and development in the greater parts of West Asia, Central Asia and South Asia. Globalization and Recent development in the context of 9/11 has affected their relations to a large extent, either due to the changing nature of their national interests or due to the pressure created by U.S. particularly on India. This article examines the key areas which will strengthen the Indo-Iranian relationship.

Keywords: Energy, Central Asia and Cooperation on Afghanistan.

Introduction:
India and Iran has a rich civilizational history going back several millennia but there have been many ups and downs in the trajectory of India-Iran relations. The rapidly shifting international environment and the concomitant strategic imperatives have been a major factor in forcing the two nations to reorient their foreign policies towards each other. In contemporary times, India has not only deepened this relationship but also expanded it to cover wide ranging political, economic and security as well as science and technological aspects. The importance of Iran for India lies in its geostrategic position, energy resources as well as in providing access to the Central Asian region and Importantly, Iran can play a pivotal role in a number of regional configurations in the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and in the Caspian areas for India and ultimately will help India not only in countering expanding Chinese and Pakistan’s influence in these areas but also in securing energy sources required for developing economy and in becoming, as well as in playing the role of a regional power.

Energy:
The Government of India plans to achieve a GDP (gross domestic product) growth rate of 10% in the Eleventh Five Year Plan and maintain an average growth rate of about 8% in the next 15 years (Planning Commission 2002). Given the plans for rapid economic growth, it is evident that the country’s requirements for energy and supporting infrastructure would increase rapidly as
well. In order to enable policy makers to undertake timely decisions, it is extremely important to estimate the magnitude of total energy requirements as well as examine the economic, environmental, and geopolitical implications of India’s alternative energy pathways in the next few decades. While factors such as demographic profile, change in lifestyle, and consumer preferences dictate the level of useful energy demands, the availability and prices of resources and technologies influence the levels and patterns of final energy requirements in the future.

Realizing the importance of examining the role of various energy technology options for India’s energy sector under alternative policy scenarios, the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India entrusted the study entitled ‘National Energy Map: Technology Vision 2030’ to TERI (The Energy and Resources Institute). The report mentioned that on the basis of BAU (business-as-usual, represents energy development as per current government plans and policies, representing a GDP growth rate of 8%) scenario, the total commercial energy consumption is estimated to increase by 7.5 times over the 30-year modelling period from a level of 285 Mtoe (million tonnes of oil equivalent) in 2001 to 2123 Mtoe in 2031. A comparison of energy requirements across the alternative economic growth scenarios indicates that if the economy grows at a slower pace of 6.7%, as characterized by the LG (low-growth) scenario, commercial energy requirement would increase to only about 1579 Mtoe by 2031 (5.9% GDP growth), while the energy requirements could be as high as 3351 Mtoe (8.6% GDP growth) by 2031 with a growth rate of 10% as represented by the HG (high-growth) scenario.

Although, Indian government has plans for enhancing the exploitation of its hydro power, nuclear energy, and renewable energy resources, the analysis indicates that the impact of these supply-side alternatives is minor when compared with the total requirements of commercial energy by 2031. Although the contribution of hydro, nuclear, and renewable energy forms together increases by about six times during 2001–31, these sources can at most contribute to a mere 4.5% of the total commercial energy requirements over the modeling time frame. It is, therefore, evident that the pressure on the three conventional energy forms, that is coal, oil, and gas will continue to remain high at least in the next few decades. However, the study clearly indicates that natural gas is a preferred option for power generation as well as for the production of nitrogenous fertilizer. The availability of natural gas, therefore, needs to be facilitated by removing infrastructural constraints. Besides its high end-use efficiency, it is a cleaner fuel and relatively much easier to handle than coal. It is, therefore, important to enhance natural gas exploration and production from deep sea. Additionally, efforts should be made to source gas from within the Asian region (including Turkmenistan, Bangladesh, Iran, and Myanmar).

On the other hand there are emerging China-Iran Nexus, Chinese firms are key suppliers of ballistic and cruise missile-related technologies to Iran. China is also helping Iran pursue the development of a nuclear fuel cycle for civil and nuclear weapon purposes, despite Beijing’s 1997 bilateral commitment to the United States to forgo any new nuclear cooperation with Iran. China is expanding its geopolitical profile in the Middle East and courting Iran in particular, in light of its soaring energy requirements. With Iran emerging as the largest oil supplier to China, China’s economic growth is now inextricably linked to Iran. While Iran’s development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles may not be of any direct strategic consequence for India, China’s
growing leverage over Iran can shape Iran’s attitudes toward India in the coming years. China has so far been very successful in hemming India in from all sides, and if Iran decides to follow China’s lead, it might make India geopolitically handicapped. While as India–Iran ties in the energy sector are based on the solid logic of supply and demand, Iran is anxious to sell its abundant hydrocarbon resources India’s large and growing energy demand and Iran’s pool of energy resources make the two nations natural economic partners. India’s search for energy security in a rather volatile energy market makes Iran, with its fourth largest reservoir of oil and second-largest reserves of natural gas highly attractive. Despite this, India continues to lack an overarching energy strategy because of a lack of consensus on crucial choices that the nation needs to make in the domestic political as well as global context. It is, therefore, extremely important for India to make sure that Iranian stakes in good relations with India increase dramatically over the next few years.

Central Asia:

India also shares with Iran an interest in a stable political and economic order in Central Asia. After the disintegration of the Soviet empire, Central Asia has emerged as an important region where many countries, including the U.S. and China, have evinced a keen interest, especially since it has become a major oil-producing region. Also, India and Iran are equally threatened by the menaces of drug trafficking, smuggling in of small arms, and organized crime, all emanating largely from Central Asia. There is a clear strategic convergence between India and Iran on promoting stability in Central Asia and managing great-power relationships in the region.

Central Asian states, with their oil and natural gas deposits, also emerged as an important factor in India’s efforts to locate the widest possible set of alternatives to meet its growing energy requirements. Given Iran’s unique geo-strategic location the Islamic nation became the only viable gateway through which India could reach this region. A major commercial venture between India and Iran is the North-South Transportation Corridor agreement signed in September 2000, which also takes Russia and Turkmenistan on board. The corridor, when fully operational, would permit facile transport of goods from ports in India across the Arabian Sea to the southern Iranian port of Bandar Abbas and Chahbahar. Goods then transit Iran via rail to Iranian Caspian Sea ports of Bandar Anzali and Bandar Amirabad. They are then transferred to ports in the Russian sector of the Caspian Sea. From there the route extends along the Volga River via Moscow and to Northern Europe. It will reduce the length of the cargo transport distance from the Indian Ocean region to Northern and Eastern Europe by two-thirds, as compared to the route through the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean. The North-South Corridor initiative have become key milestones in the promoting India’s trade with Iran, Central Asian countries and Afghanistan.

Cooperation on Afghanistan:

India and Iran have been supporting the Northern Alliance and are currently extending all possible help to Hamid Karzai’s government. After the ouster of the Taliban regime, both countries wish to establish friendly relations with Afghanistan. For India, this means strategically outflanking Pakistan, while for Iran, it means securing its eastern border. In forging close political
and economic ties, India has the advantage of exploiting its new links with the incumbent Tajik-dominated regime in Afghanistan that is strongly opposed to the ousted Taliban. Both Iran and India consider the early reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan highly desirable, and both have a stake in the durability and stability of the present government. Thus, India has established two consulates—at Kandhar and Jalalabad as has Iran.

While The WikiLeaks “revelation” has not uncovered anything radically new, it has highlighted the prevailing intricacies and complexities of the conflict. Pakistan’s “offer” of negotiating a deal with the Taliban and the Haqqani network has regained prominence. Former Canadian diplomat Chris Alexander’s disclosure of Gen Kayani’s plans of demolishing Indian consulates in Kabul has re-emphasized the importance of the Afghan theatre in the Indo-Pak equation. India’s perennial attempt to carve out a niche in Afghanistan has suffered many set-backs. With such limited options, India should look at its potential partners to ensure that its national interests are safeguarded across the Durand Line. Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Ali Fathollahi’s recent visit to India illustrates this change in the diplomatic mood in New Delhi. This visit followed the 9 July joint commission meeting between India and Iran where Afghanistan was a key point agenda was under discussion. New Delhi and Tehran have enjoyed a fairly comfortable relation with few contentious issues. The two countries had supported the Northern Alliance after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. India has been a victim of the Talibanisation of Afghanistan, when it was used as a haven for training camps for spurring militancy in Kashmir. The case of Kandahar IC-814 hijacking further accentuated Delhi’s acrimony towards the fundamentalist elements in Afghanistan. While Shia majority Iran has the benefit of influence on the Hazara tribes in Afghanistan, it has no conviviality with the Sunni-Pashtun Taliban’s control on its borders. Additionally, Iran’s animosity towards the Taliban was further fuelled by the killing of 11 Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e-Sharif in 1998, which sparked a military conflict. As such, the strategic interests of India and Iran have conjoined in terms of Afghanistan. In the present context, both countries have not fully embraced the idea of reconciliation process with the Taliban, as proposed by the Karzai government. They continue to stand unconvinced about the advantages of the process owing to the horror of a renewed wave of Islamic fundamentalism on their periphery. This feeling is also shared by Russia, which holds similar fears about heightened Islamic fundamentalism near its borders and those of the Central Asian Republics.

Iran has qualms with regard to almost the three million Afghan refugees it hosts, who may have connections with Taliban and may use Iran as a substitute to Pakistan as it ensures a net of safety due to strained Iran-US relations. On the other hand, India is wary of Pakistan’s military-ISI nexus that is inflaming the insurgency in Afghanistan and using the Afghan Taliban, the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Haqqani network as proxies to target the Indians in Afghanistan. While India has set conditions to facilitate the Taliban’s reintegration, it continues to remain leery about the result. The suspicion is also due to the fear that the Pakistan-friendly Afghan Taliban would obstruct India’s access to Central Asia. Similarly, Iran has voiced out its opposition stating that there can be no differentiation between “good and bad Taliban.” Recent developments testify that Pakistan holds the main key to Afghanistan’s future, which visibly remains an unpalatable fact for the New Delhi administration. With few options to exercise, India approach towards working with Iran to counteract Pakistan’s influence is inevitably important. Interestingly, Islamabad is working
Towards a better relation with Iran as well and has even highlighted its “good” deed of helping Iran in the arrest of Abdolmalek Rigi, the leader of the Baluch Sunni rebel group Jundollah.

Iran is a strategically essential player for India and Pakistan’s thawing relationship with Iran would worsen the already almost lost situation. Iran’s geographical location is a plus point for continuous engagement in Afghanistan. Its long border with Afghanistan and its long-standing cultural ties are imperative to exercise geo-political and geo-strategic influence in the region. India’s trump card in the situation is Iran’s Chabahar port, which will provide direct New Delhi direct access to Afghanistan and Central Asia. The port would minimize New Delhi’s need to negotiate with Islamabad for any access to Afghanistan. The last Indo-Iran talks have highlighted the need to expedite the operationalization of the India-aided Chabahar port. As noted by Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury in India Today, the port is strategically important because it is placed barely 73 km from Pakistan’s Gwadar port, which has been built with Chinese assistance. The already constructed Zarang-Delaram road in Afghanistan, when joined with the Chahar-Milak road (being upgraded with Indian assistance and will connect a bridge on route to Zaranj) would bestow upon India and Iran a higher degree of access to Afghanistan, ensuring greater influence in the region and also bypassing Pakistan. While India is emphasizing on “structured, systematic and regular consultations” with Iran, one should understand that it is not a win-win situation. In the recent past, India-Iran relations have been affected by turbulence, mainly because of India’s support for the US-driven IAEA resolution that condemned Iran over its nuclear programme and led to sanctions. Therefore, it is important for India to have a realistic assessment and cooperate with Iran to find a middle ground, which favors both New Delhi and Tehran. With potential odds at play, the perennial US pressure on India to support sanctions against Iran would continue to overshadow India-Iran relations. At this juncture, India needs to define its national interests and choose options to safeguard them, rather than distance its potential partners in order to coddle the Obama administration. Pakistan is US’s present preference in the region and is likely to remain so in the coming future. India’s diplomatic proximity with Iran may also force the US to have a relook at its priorities in Afghanistan and may stimulate the Obama administration to think about India. However, expecting Washington to take a U-turn and undermine Islamabad’s role in the Af-Pak region would be highly idealistic. Therefore, New Delhi needs to shun its long-practiced apprehension and take a firm stand militarily and strategically. India should move with a sense of reality and bring into shape its own Af-Pak policy, one that safeguards its own interests.  

Conclusion:

In the phase of globalization, Iran is going to be increasingly significant from the point of India’s Economic, commercial and political interests. In view of emerging markets as well as growing significance of the Central Asian states, India will need to re-work its policies generally towards the entire region and particularly towards Iran. In addition to transit facilities to conduct trade and commerce with Central Asian states via Iranian territory, cordial ties with Iran will continue to bolster India’s energy security. The Indo-Iranian initiatives of April 1995 concerning joint ventures Production, Agriculture, Machine tools, Auto-parts, Tourism, telecommunication, Environment and control of drug traffic need to be concretely worked out and put into action. There is indeed a perception in both India and Iran that the two countries have not realized the
full potential of their relations, so both the countries particularly India must revise its foreign policy towards Iran for establishing constructive engagement, otherwise India will not be able to compete and control neither the Pakistan’s influence on Afghanistan and Iran nor the Chinese growing economy and relations with Iran. All this ultimately lead to restrictions on India’s interests and policies to play dominant role in Afghanistan, Iran and in other Central Asian countries.

Notes:

1. ‘‘India National Energy Map for India: Technology Vision 2030 Summary for policy-makers” Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser, Government of India 318, Vigyan Bhavan Annex, Maulana Azad Road, New Delhi – 110 011 India Tel. 2302 2112 Fax 2302 2113 India +91 • Delhi (0)11 Web www.psa.gov.in
TERI Press The Energy and Resources Institute Darbari Seth Block IHC Complex, Lodhi Road New Delhi – 110 003


Iran’s Domestic and Foreign Policies

Iran’s Newly Elected President and His First Term’s Significant Domestic and Foreign Policies

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Dr. Majid Rafizadeh, an Iranian-American scholar, is author, leading and award-winning scholar, Middle East expert, and US foreign policy specialist. Rafizadeh is the president of the International American Council on the Middle East and he is a senior fellow at Nonviolence International. He serves on the board of Harvard International Review at Harvard University and Harvard International Relations Council. He is also a member of the Gulf 2000 Project at Columbia University, School of International and Public Affairs. Previously he served as ambassador to the National Iranian-American Council based in Washington DC.

Rafizadeh is a frequent guest and political analyst on international and U.S. news shows including CNN, BBC, Foxnews, ABC, Aljazeera, France 24 English International, NBC, Russian TV, CTV, CCTV, Skynews, to name a few. His work regularly appears on national and international outlets, in prints or online, including The New York Times, New York Times International, Los Angeles Times, CNN, Fareed Zakaria GPS, Foreign Policy Magazine, Aljazeera, The Nation, and The Huffington Post, to name a few. He is regularly being consulted by governmental institutions, NGOs, non-profit organizations, national and international media outlets as well as being quoted on outlets including CNN, Aljazeera English, France 24 English International, BBC, Russia Today, and Voice of America.

Previously, Rafizadeh conducted research at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. As a public and note speakers, he speaks at diplomatic centers, panel discussions, universities, institutions, interfaith seminars in the United States, Europe, Middle East, and other regions on U.S. foreign policy, democratization, human rights, religions, and Middle East politics. Rafizadeh has previously lectured and taught at several universities including Oxford University, Cornell University, Damascus University, University of California, Santa Barbara, and Islamic Azad University, and Sheikh Bahaee University. He has been recipient of several major scholarships including Fulbright Teaching Scholarship through which he taught at University of California Santa Barbara, Religious Studies Department. He attended Harvard and has also received fellowships from several universities including Oxford University, Orfelea Center, and Annenberg University.

After the votes of Iran’s 2013 presidential election were tallied and Hassan Rowhani announced the winner, the new president of the Islamic Republic – who will soon
replace the controversial and provocative figure Mahmoud Ahmadinejad – will be preparing to face several major domestic, regional and international issues. This term of presidency is an especially critical one for Iran, as the country has recently been facing an unprecedented level of economic decline as well as regional and international pressure and isolation. The most significant issues that Iran’s new president must face can be categorized by two fronts.

One on hand is domestic policy. This includes addressing the country’s economy, high level of inflation and unemployment rate (particularly in urban areas), the youth that are disaffected with the Islamic character of the regime, as well as repression of political parties, journalists, minorities and activists. On the other hand is Iran’s foreign policy, specifically: Iran’s nuclear program, defiance of the international community, relations with Assad’s turbulent regime, hegemonic ambition in the Middle East, political, strategic, economic, diplomatic and geopolitical relationships with proxies throughout the region (including Hezbollah and Al-Mehdi’s Army), four rounds of paralyzing economic sanctions, as well as regional and international isolation.

Iran’s deteriorating economy that Hassan Rouhani will have to inherit is in some part attributed to the policy mismanagement of the current lame duck president, Ahmadinejad, who insisted that rates for borrowers and depositors could not exceed the inflation rate. In addition, according to recent statistics by the International Monetary Fund, under Ahmadinejad’s presidency in 2013, inflation in Iran reached 25.2 percent, unemployment 13 percent (although the unofficial number is above 23 percent), and economic growth a staggering 0.8 percent. Moreover, the value of the rial has eroded for the past few years, to a point where it now costs about 39,800 rials to buy $1 in Tehran. When Ahmadinejad first assumed the presidency, the rate had been 1,300 rials.

From a domestic and economic perspective, it is very unlikely that Hassan Rouhani would be capable of significantly enhancing Iran’s declining economy, reducing the unemployment rate (particularly among the youth), or generating more job opportunities for the population. This is partly due to the fact that Iran’s deeply wounded economy is not only linked to the inefficiency and mismanagement of ex-president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, but also – and most fundamentally – the accumulated impact of sanctions.

In addition, most of the revenues in the country are allocated to Iran’s nuclear program, facilities and technologies. Moreover, the country’s revenues and oil profits are held by some state institutions, such as Iran’s Revolutionary Guards Corps, army, and the Basij – the paramilitary militia loyal to the Supreme Leader. Iran’s economy, rather than being based on a free market which would allow Iranians the opportunity to prosper and invest in any sect of the financial market, is centralized in the state and ruling clerics.
Meanwhile, when it comes to Iran’s foreign policy agenda, two objectives in particular are in the most vital need of being tackled. Firstly, there are the four rounds of crippling sanctions and unprecedented regional and international isolation, attributed to the Islamic Republic of Iran’s nuclear enrichment program and defiance towards the international community. Secondly, another foreign policy objective topping the agenda is the Syrian conflict between the pro-Assad groups and pro-rebels parties, now entering its third year without any political resolutions in sight.

Based on the ideological, career, personal, and political characteristics of Hassan Rowhani, his position towards Tehran’s nuclear enrichment does not differ from the position of Iran’s Supreme Leader, Revolutionary Guards’ high generals, Basij. Across Iran’s political spectrum – principlists, moderates, reformists, and centrist – Iran’s nuclear program has been a matter of consensus. Obtaining nuclear capabilities is viewed as a matter of survival for a regime hit by robust sanctions, disaffected populations and regional and international isolation. As a result, the international community’s pressure and sanctions towards the Islamic Republic of Iran will likely only progress while Tehran will continue to defy the international community and the IAE’s proliferation standards.

Finally, when it comes to Syria, Hassan Rouhani is unlikely to push for any policies which would alter Tehran’s status quo towards Assad’s sect-based and police state. For the Iranian leaders, Syria has been Tehran’s only consistent ally since the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979. Syria is considered a bulwark against Israel and the United States, as well as a conduit for delivering arms to Hezbollah. Hassan Rowhani is well-aware that if Assad’s regime falls, the balance of power will significantly shift in the region in favor of the Gulf Arab states (particularly Saudi Arabia) and against the Shiite-led collation of Iran and Hezbollah. From this perspective, Tehran will lose much of its geopolitical influence and hegemonic ambitions in the region.

**Will the Election of Hassan Rowhani Alter Iran’s Foreign Policy towards Syria?**

At the outset of his term, the new president of Iran, Hassan Rowhani – the centrist candidate who was just confirmed into office after the election outcome was announced – will confront a thicket of national and international challenges. Rowhani’s presidential term will commence in a particularly challenging time; when the Islamic Republic of Iran is facing an unprecedented level of regional and international isolation. One of the most crucial foreign policy objectives which will take precedence in Rowhani’s agenda is the Syrian conflict which has now entered its third year.

The election result raises vital questions regarding whether Iran’s foreign policy towards Assad’s sect-based and police regime will be altered or whether Iranian-Syrian alliance will evolve into a new phase. Will the presidency of the centrist Hassan
Rowhani influence Iran's diplomatic ties with Damascus and its unconditional support for Assad? Will Tehran change its political, military, intelligence and advisory assistance to Syria's state apparatuses, army, security forces, and Mukhabart?

While there is a significant amount of high expectations and enthusiasm among some Western political leaders and scholars that the election of the centrist Rowhani might influence Iran's support of Assad, it is crucial to be realistic about Iran's centrist and moderate camp's ideology, the power of the presidential office, Iran's political structure, and Tehran's foreign policy objectives. First of all, it is necessary to note that the Iranian centrists and moderates' political spectrum analyze Syria from the realms of balance of power as well as from a religious and geopolitical paradigm rather than from a human rights one. Although Rowhani argues for constructive interactions with other countries and although he supports applying a softer political tone – as opposed to the combative, controversial and provocative language that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad or other hardliners utilize – when dealing with the international community and regional state actors in regards to Syria, Rowhani has not called for an overall sweeping shift in Iran's foreign policy. For instance, Rowhani has neither asked Assad to step down from power nor pressed to halt the Islamic Republic of Iran's military, intelligence, financial, and advisory support to Damascus.

From the perspective of the centrists, including Rowhani, withdrawing support to Damascus equates to undermining Tehran's geopolitical leverage and balance of power in the region, which ultimately endangers their own power. This becomes particularly more significant to the Iranian leaders who argue that they are surrounded by what they perceive as existential and strategic enemies; the United States' military bases, for instance, are located throughout Iran's borders and in the Gulf Arab states (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, etc).

More fundamentally, because of the role the Supreme Leader plays in Iran's foreign policy objectives, it would be unrealistic to argue that Rowhani would alter Iran's current political status quo towards Assad's regime. Rowhani does not completely control the country's foreign relations with Syria; Iran's policy towards Damascus is closely guided by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the high generals of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, and Etela'at - Iran's intelligence. However, Rowhani does have the ability to set the tone in regional and international circles for the Supreme Leader. In addition, the Supreme Leader has been very clear about his political stance on Syria, stating that Assad's regime is targeted by Israeli and US-backed groups, foreign conspirators and terrorists.

Lastly, religiously and ideologically speaking, one of the major pillars of Iran's foreign policy has been that it has proclaimed itself as the safe-guarder of Islamic – particularly Shiite – values. The Alawite sect-based state of Syria serves as a crucial instrument for advancing, empowering, and achieving this ideological foreign policy objective. Iran under Rowhani's presidency is unlikely to change the current status quo, push for regime change in Syria, ask Assad to step aside as many Western and Arab Gulf states did, or halt any political, military, intelligence and advisory assistance to Assad's ruling Alawite and socialist Bath party, due to the belief that they will be ideologically and
religiously weakening their own regional influence and foreign policy leverage. If the Alawites lose power, the next government would likely be constituted from the current oppositional groups and the Sunni majority in Syria, who comprise roughly 74 percent of the population. As in Egypt and Tunisia, where the Islamic Sunni parties were the ones who won the elections, in Damascus, the Sunni oppositional groups are more likely to win most of the parliament seats in the situation of a new government forming after Assad. This will be regarded as a considerable shift in regional and international balance of power against Iran and in favor of the Arab Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia.

Considering the aforementioned factors: the president’s limited control over directing foreign policy compared to the Supreme Leader’s more powerful role, the centrist and moderate ideologies, as well as the geopolitical, and ideological elements surrounding the issue, it is more likely that Iran will continue implementing its current strategies towards Syria to preserve Iran’s regional and international balance of power, its political and economic national interests, and the survival of the ruling clerics.

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The mental map of the contemporary world is usually formed from images and stereotypes perpetuated in the media. This is the case with Iran. Western society and growing world powers perceives Iran through the prism of random information full of stereotypes, prejudices, aversions and anxieties: Iran equals terrorism, hence bad people; Iran equals Islamic fundamentalism, hence backwardness; Iran requires women to wear a head covering, thus it subjugates women. The reality, however, is much more complex. Iran is a modern Islamic society in the process of transformation.

In the Western textbooks, the history of Iran is the history of ancient Persia, of Cyrus the Great, Darius and Xerxes, and of an empire famous for its conquests. Europeans look at it through the eyes of Greeks in the age of Herodotus and Pericles, of people who were defending themselves against the Persians. Two centuries later, Alexander the Great arrives in this land; to this day he is hated by the Iranians for destroying the power of their mighty state. When Iran was conquered by the Arabs in the 7th century, it disappeared from the mental map of Europeans.
for several centuries. The Iranians then found themselves within the embrace of Islam, which became their religious point of reference. On a cultural level, however, it was an entirely different phenomenon. For the sake of the new belief, the Iranians renounced their own religion of Zoroastrianism.

In adopting the Shi’a denomination of Islam, Persians tried to dissociate themselves from their greatest enemies, the Sunni Arabs, and to resist the spread of the Sunni world under the caliphs. Europeans rediscovered Persia only in the 13th century, thanks to Marco Polo’s expedition along the silk route. After Persia’s decline as a result of the Mongol invasions in the 13th and 14th centuries, it was possible to rebuild the country. The Safavid dynasty ruled the Persian empire again and tried to maintain the country’s independence, which was threatened by the Ottomans. Then Shi’a Islam, the state religion of Persia since the 16th century, became the mark of national identity and a measure in the struggle for independence against the threat of the Ottoman Turks (similarly to Catholicism in Poland). In the 19th century, the desire to ‘take apart’ the Ottoman Empire brought Europeans and Persians closer together.

In the 20th century, the chief common aim was petroleum. It was the UK (and then the USA), Tsarist Russia (and then the USSR), Germany and France that acquired the largest influence in Iran, leading to the domination of these countries in Iran’s economy. The result was the division of Iranian society into a small, very wealthy elite and an increasingly impoverished minority. The imposition of western cultural patterns by both shahs of the Pahlavi dynasty increased the level of social dissatisfaction. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 brought end to the situation. The Iraq-Iran war, declared by Saddam Hussein in 1980, lasted eight years and consolidated Iran’s multi-ethnic society around the new government. Today, the Iranian Islamic Republic is 34 years old, and a new generation is growing up in the era of globalization and the Internet, which are having their influence on the nation’s ways of thinking. The new is maybe “on the wave”, after the recent elections.

**Today is yesterday but tomorrow**
The Iranian nation is like a tree with deep, strong roots. Its civilization is one of the oldest in the world, and the Persian state was a power in the ancient world. For Iranians, those times do not seem like distant history, but a part of the present which they keep referring to. During celebrations of the empire’s 2500th anniversary, organised in 1971 in Persepolis, the Shah proudly received the leaders of 56 foreign countries. Anniversaries such as the Day of Ashur (commemorating the death of the Prophet’s grandsons at the hands of the Caliph at Karbala in 680) or the martyrdom of certain imams (the first Shi’a leaders) are occasions for prayer, but also for heated discussions of contemporary affairs.

An aversion to submitting to foreigners has been developing in Iran for over two thousand years. Ancient Persia was a power, but it also had many enemies, including Alexander of Macedonia, the Arab caliphs, Genghis Khan, Timur (Tamerlane), and, since the 19th century, Europeans and then Americans. Iran’s traditional politeness and hospitality (taroof) are a delight to foreigners. But there are limits: the Iranians, descendants of the Aryan people (from whom comes the name Iran, used since 1934), want to govern themselves.

Iranian pride in the past takes various forms. Every Iranian knows that his country is the most beautiful place in the world and abounds in everything - from oil to other natural resources to a
refined culture whose essence is expressed in poetry. Many people think that it is the Persians who first declared (on the famous Cyrus Cylinder) the existence of human rights; the Persians who invented pizza (which the Persian soldiers baked on their shields); and even the Persians who discovered alcohol (the consumption of which is forbidden, although it was first created by Razi, an Iranian scholar and chemist). The lower level of Iranian society sometimes displays a conviction of its own civilisational superiority towards Afghans and Arabs, and admiration for the achievements of Europeans and Americans is mixed with pain at the lack of reciprocal appreciation for Iran’s greatness and importance in the world. Iranians like to complain that no one understands them. And basically they are right.

Modernisation without westernisation
Iranian identity is today a mixture of the ancient Persian Empire, Shi’a Islam and modernity burdened with western influences. In contrast to many countries in the Middle East, Iran has been consistently modernising for over a hundred years. The results are visible in the infrastructure (in roads, airports, and urban planning), in the economy (a free market, foreign investment, trade), the political system (the tripartite division of power), law (based on the Sharia), education (schooling is obligatory for 90 per cent of children), mass culture (cinema, Iranian pop), and social mores (a higher number of women than men at universities). The challenge for Iranians is to find the golden mean between preservation of their own hundreds-year-old identity and fascination with, and overly rapid absorption of, the achievements of the West.

“What have we given the world? We have given it poetry, miniatures, and carpets...all useless things from the productive viewpoint” - in this way a certain Iranian summarised the matter for the Polish writer Ryszard Kapuściński (book: Shah of Shahs). In Iran, the spiritual force is more important than materiality, literature more important than technology. Iran’s spiritual leaders have often written verses: even Ayatollah Khomeini has a collection to his name. The mosque is not only a place for prayer, but also for creativity, scholarship, meetings and discussion. There, on Astronomy Day, fake rockets may be fired or the sun and moon viewed through telescopes. There too, shop owners seek for clients: Iranians are a religious nation, but they also have a talent for trade. The ‘bazaar’, or merchant class, is a middle stratum which plays a key social role, similar to that of the intelligentsia in Europe. And in poetically sophisticated Persia, their carpets can sometimes fly...

Life in 2D
75% of Iranians live in cities - it is the largest percentage of urban population among Middle Eastern countries. In Iran, unemployment is lower than in the countries of North Africa, where the Arab Spring erupted, but, as in other Muslim countries, finding employment is more important than in Europe. A young man without work doesn’t count, for instance, in the marriage market. In the same time, 66% of the Iranian students are women. Taking into consideration both the factors mentioned above, no surprise that the average age for getting married has raised and is now 30. This upsets the social norms and places young men in a difficult situation; it is hard on young women too, who must wait a long time to get married and whose possibilities of fully enjoying womanhood are limited (the social norms require virginity). This is a Gordian knot that at some point will have to be cut.
Iranian society attaches enormous importance to beauty. Iranians surround themselves with beautiful objects and pay careful attention to their appearance (many young men carry toilet bags). General cleanliness, frequent visits to the hairdresser and manicurist, make-up, and fashionable clothing are all important to the modern Iranian man or woman. Today, in the land of Darius the Great, one can observe not only the immaculately trimmed beards of the imams, but also the great popularity of plastic surgery, particularly nose jobs. Iranian women wearing high heels, large amounts of make-up and carelessly arranged head scarves indicate the tolerance of Iranian society.

Iranians have a centuries-long tradition of intellectual reflection, of undermining the existing rules and being in opposition. And they have natural leaders in this enterprise, as Shi’a Islam fostered the clergy’s independence from the state authorities and inclined them to be active outside the sphere of religion. Thus the forces of independence and revolution came to be concentrated around the mosques. Iranians, like Poles, are able to live in two dimensions simultaneously: they do one thing publicly and another privately. They function in a sort of ‘2D reality’. Satellite television, private moneychangers offering twice the exchange rate given in the local banks, the liberated behaviour of the youth - it’s all illegal but tolerated by the authorities.

In search of a balance
If the foreigners look at Iran from ‘the other side of the mirror’ they see, in addition to the persistent stereotypes (recently refreshed by the prizewinning American film “Argo”), a fairly modern and well-organised state. In spite of a difficult geographic location between the Arab world, which is seen as a rival, and the unstable countries to the east, Iran has been able to defend its own cultural separateness and political independence. Despite painful economic sanctions during the last years, the state is still economically strong and prosperous (thanks primarily to petroleum).

The most important challenge facing contemporary Iran is to find a balance between its roots in Islam, its traditional Persian identity, and modernising influences from the West. After having swung like a pendulum between the Pahlavi shahs and the Islamic Republic, Iran, three decades after the revolution, is tending towards a balance. The future of Iranians - 70 per cent of whom are under 35 - depends on the success of this process.
Iran’s Nuclear Program

The Rationality of Iran’s Position on Its Nuclear Program

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Dr. Rousseau’s interests over the years have included theories on origins of life, archaeology, palaeontology, history, competitive tennis, hockey, baseball and playing music. As a teenager, he showed exceptional talent in hockey in the province of Quebec, Canada. On average, he scored 40 goals and 100 points in only 25 games per season between the ages of 12-17. In one game he scored 8 goals and got 4 assists, leading his team to the championship victory in a provincial tournament. In baseball, as a pitcher, he threw three no-hitters (perfect game) during one regular season. Dr. Rousseau won many trophies and medals during his teenage years.

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Since December 2002, the issue of the Iranian uranium enrichment program is in the focus of news media. The United States and many of its allies suspect Iran has serious intentions of wanting to build an atomic bomb, while trying to cover it up by flimsy assertions that it is developing advanced nuclear technologies for peaceful civilian purposes. States (five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, plus Germany’ the so-called P5+1) involved in the rounds of talks make a point of not prejudging Iran’s true intentions. But it is rather curious that a country which abounds with oil and gas needs to invest massive sums of money in nuclear energy, civilian or otherwise.

The last six International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reports released on in 2012 (four reports) and 2013 (two so far) on the Iranian issue have highlighted that Iran has made significant progress towards its declared objective of developing civilian nuclear power. On the other hand, the reports expressed serious suspicions about the purported civilian uses of the program. In particular, they alleged that purported research and studies directly applicable to the development of detonators for nuclear weapons, such as warheads and other components, and the production of long-range missiles are being conducted. The February 2012 IAEA report says that the agency is “increasingly concerned” about “the possible military dimension” of the
Iranian nuclear program. Israel and the United States have been the most active nations in opposing the possibility of a nuclear armed Iran, as this country is located in one of the most unstable areas on earth. These two allied countries have for years - but more intensively in recent months - been preparing contingency plans for a possible preemptive air attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities.

Although initially partisan of a negotiated solution with Teheran, the European ‘troika’ (Germany, France and Great Britain, also known as EU3), the framework for negotiations that existed between 2004 and 2006, finally grew tired of never-ending talks that led nowhere. Tides changed and the troika threatened Iran with possible economic sanctions after Iran’s nuclear dossier was referred to the U.N. Security Council. Since that time, Germany, France and Great Britain, with the EU’s backing, have moved much closer to the U.S. viewpoint and strategy, imposing new sanctions on Iran in October 2012 targeting Iran’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs, and government revenues allocated to them.

There are inherent risks in taking such a position, as Russia and China, Iran’s important partners, could close ranks with Iran and this would put the EU in an ambiguous position.

From a Western point of view, the battle against nuclear proliferation is of the utmost importance; the more so in Iran’s case since the EU and the United States are trying to prevent an unreliable state from reaching the status of a nuclear power. Islamic fundamentalists, who use gloomy and threatening rhetoric in their foreign policy statements, rule Iran. One must not forget that this is also a country suspected of supporting and financing local and world terrorist networks. Moreover, the mullahs’ regime is a declared enemy of Israel and has called for its destruction. Knowing all this, it appeared legitimate to refer the Iran nuclear issue to the UN Security Council in order to force this country to live up to its international obligations and listen to reason. However, the strategy has little chance of success.

More often than not Western governments and the media paint a general picture of Iran’s nuclear intentions. However, several major elements that give Iran a much stronger position are omitted in this sensitive issue. It is necessary to look at the Iranian point of view and to show some rationality in it. In no way should one think that the purpose here is to defend or justify Teheran’s actions.

So far, nobody has been able to find clear-cut evidence of a hidden military agenda in Iran’s nuclear program. The Iranian state is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which serves as the main vehicle for fighting nuclear proliferation worldwide. Consequently, Iran is not allowed to carry out research for building any type of atomic weapons. However, according to the NPT, states are not forbidden to obtain the technical capabilities to produce an atomic bomb as long as they do not actually proceed to build it. The NPT says only that the production sites must be accessible to the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) inspectors.
The NPT further stipulates that, “Each Party shall in exercising its national sovereignty have the right to withdraw from the Treaty if it decides that extraordinary events, related to the subject matter of this Treaty, have jeopardized the supreme interests of its country” (Article X, point 1). This provision is rather vague to say the least.

It would seem that Iran has solid footing within the conditions of the NPT. It only needs to consider the invasion of Afghanistan, and especially the occupation of Iraq by the United States and its allies from 2003 to 2011 – and which ended when U.S. troops left the country – as direct threats to its national security. Iran could invoke this situation to justify its withdrawal from the NPT. In fact, in the last decade or so, most neighboring states of Iran have passed either under the control of the influence of the United States, a country that did not hesitate to resort to military intervention against Iraq under the pretext of the presence of still non-existent or ‘untraceable’ weapons of mass destruction. Also, George W. Bush, the 43rd U.S President between 2000 and 2008, used much rhetoric in labeling Iran as being part of an ‘axis of evil.’ In these circumstances Iran’s withdrawal from the NPT would only be perceived as a normal reaction and a legal step. In considering Iran’s geographic location the UN Security Council would hardly have room to criticize such a decision.

This leaves the EU and the United States on the horns of a dilemma. How to sanction Iran without shooting itself in the foot?

On June 9, 2010, the UN Security Council decided to sanction Teheran by passing Resolution 1929 which bans Iran from participating in any activities related to ballistic missiles, tightened the arms embargo, bans individuals involved with the nuclear program from traveling abroad, froze the funds and assets of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, among other things. Reaching a consensus on these sanctions took a lot of time and was possible because the resolution did not affect Russia’s and China’s interests directly as, for example, it did not forbid the export of military hardware to Iran, and particularly the Russian S-300 anti-aircraft systems. In that context and in contrast to previous practice, Moscow did not use dilatory tactics such as invoking a variety of reasons for postponing sanctions against Iran. Nevertheless, Washington will always have a difficult time bringing convincing evidence against Iran. Less powerful countries of the Security Council may be easily swayed but the task to convince all five permanent members of the UN Security Council will constantly be a daunting one. Even if sanctions are agreed to there is usually conditionality attached to them which dilutes their impacts. That’s why the EU and countries such as Australia, Canada, India, Israel, Japan, South Korea and Switzerland have imposed a series of non-UN-mandated sanctions against Iran.

In the end, it appears that the NPT is not very dissuasive, so long as a state is ready to endanger its political and economic reputation and assume the costs of a military nuclear program. And Iran is indeed not showing any signs of backing down and seems prepared to defy the EU and the United States. Apparently, it has calculated the opportunity costs and understands that it
does not have much to lose militarily, politically and economically. Teheran is also well aware
that the United States is bogged down in Afghanistan and other parts of the world and that the
‘hawks’ in the Pentagon have reconsidered their earlier contingency plans for an all-out invasion
of Iran or even strategic bombing. The plan has been shelved and few are willing to take the
political risk of dusting it off. We got our lesson in Iraq, the ‘hawks’ probably think. Washington’s
foreign policy, under Obama’s administration, seems clear: no pre-emptive strike against Iran
and its nuclear sites, but heavy sanctions against, and continued diplomatic pressure on, the
Iranian regime. This policy is partly determined by Obama’s declared intention of partially
withdrawing U.S. troops from the Middle East in the short to medium term. The financial crisis
and the debate on the U.S. public debt ceiling have actually forced President Obama to
progressively disengage the U.S. from the region, as evidenced by the departure of the last U.S.
battalion from Iraq in December 2011 and the objective to end the engagement in Afghanistan
by 2014.

Fluctuations in international oil prices are important variables in decision-makers’ calculation. It
is clear that the world oil market would be severely hit by a reduction of OPEC oil production, of
which Iran is a key member. For instance, in April 2005, Iran expressed its firm intention to use
the oil threat when it asked the OPEC to reduce its oil production by one million tons. The price
and continuity of supply of oil definitely plays a key role in deciding whether to attack Iran or
not.

The situation in Iran in 2013 does not have much in common with the first Iraq war in 1991 or
with the ousting of Saddam Hussein in 2003. The Iranians are neither coming out of an
exhausting conflict nor suffering from a 10 year economic embargo. Teheran is also far from
being diplomatically isolated, as was Baghdad in 1991 and before the “Shock and Awe” military
campaign. Although they finally agreed to refer Iran to the Security Council, China, Russia, and
many other UN members do not seem inclined at the moment to give up their trade relations
with the Ayatollahs. Moreover, Iran does not suffer from the ethnic divisions that existed in Iraq
and the government has the popular support of the people on the nuclear issue.

In short, the Iranian government is in a rather favorable situation where it can choose between
two options: 1) To negotiate for a high price the end of its nuclear program; or 2) to carry on its
nuclear program without having much fear of a destabilized internal situation, even with a
tightening of the international sanctions.

Let’s venture to make an assumption at this stage of the conflict: Iran wants to obtain the
absolute assurance that no one will try to destabilize its domestic politics with the aim of taking
control of its oil resources. This might explain the P5+1’s inability to negotiate a solution with
Teheran since this group, whatever it puts on the table, cannot put something concrete in their
offer to the satisfaction of the Iranian statesmen.
One could then infer that the P5+1’s negotiations are in reality an attempt to both preserve the credibility of the IAEA, calm down the ‘hawkish’ faction in Washington and Jerusalem and buy some more time. If it were so, option number 2, that is to continue the nuclear program, would be clearly the best option for the Iranians. The best way to protect itself against an invasion or air attacks remains to possess the atomic bomb. That is doubtless what Teheran has learned from the U.S. offensive against Iraq.

If the Islamic Republic of Iran has actually drawn such a conclusion, then the Obama administration’s strategy to fight nuclear proliferation is deeply flawed. The decision to destroy Saddam Hussein’s regime has done much to persuade other countries to develop Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) for self-defense. Countries such as Russia, China and India have lowered the barriers against resorting to force to achieve their objectives. Now we can add Iran to this group. The U.S. invasion of Iraq has also struck another blow at the structure of international law and treaties, as Iran’s attitude in the nuclear issue demonstrates.

The Iraq war is certainly not the sole factor explaining Iran’s attraction to nuclear weapons. Iranian leaders have no doubt observed that Washington has a much more careful and peaceful approach to powerful nuclear states. One needs to keep in mind a country like North Korea, which is totally independent in its domestic policy. Pakistan, India, and even China and Russia are also perceived with different eyes by Washington since they are nuclear states.

Teheran has also taken notice that the United States had persistently denounced the Anti-Ballistic missile (ABM) Treaty in order to proceed with construction of an anti-missile shield that could lead to the militarization of space as well as its nuclearization. It is easy to understand that the prospect to have permanently swords of Damocles over your head for not being in the good graces of Washington is not a pleasant one in a time of preemptive military strikes against independent ‘outlawed’ counties.

Perhaps the Iranian leaders have paid attention to the recent the announcement by Vladimir Putin that Russia will have soon a new type of atomic bomb. In 2006, then-President Jacques Chirac announced France’s new nuclear deterrence doctrine. Iran also certainly took notice of that too. The French nuclear strategy has always been massive and total. Now, it could be targeted at some countries supporting terrorist groups and networks. In short, the select club of nuclear powers has no lack of imagination when it needs to intimidate and disquiet other countries. This kind of attitude blackens their collective reputation and that is why the nuclear powers’ fight against nuclear proliferation is not being taken seriously. President Obama’s objective, made public in 2009, of ridding the world of nuclear weapons is an example of those double standards.

Iran’s nuclear ambition and the objectives of its foreign policy put this Persian Gulf country in the realist tradition in international relations: Distrust of cooperation and of international
forums; confidence in its economic capabilities and conviction in the failure of the U.S. military operations anywhere in the world; calls for the respect of its sovereignty.

Even equipped with the nuclear bomb – which is far from being achieved – Iran in the mid-term will not become a serious menace to the select club of ‘old’ nuclear powers. The technological gap between Iran and these countries is too wide and Iran needs decades to reduce it.

The Mullahs’ objectives are more modest. First, they search for respect from world powers and at the same time they protect Iran’s territorial integrity and sovereignty. Second, they want to give their country the status of a superpower in the boisterous Middle East region. Will the P5+1 and the United States let Iran achieve these objectives?

Map of U.S. Military Bases Surrounding the Iranian Territory


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The foundation for the recent nuclear confrontation between the United States and Iran traces back to the Iranian hostage crisis and the botched rescue attempt in 1979. This incident had occurred soon after the revolution in Iran, in the same year, which led to the ouster of the pro-American shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Before the Revolution, the United States was Iran's foremost economic and military partner and facilitated the modernization of its infrastructure and industry. After the 1979 seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran, the United States froze Iranian assets, including bank deposits, gold and other properties. American intelligence and logistical support played a crucial role in arming Iraq in its war against Iran in the 1980s. Although President Carter declared strict neutrality in the conflict, the US government was helping Iraq diplomatically and economically. During the second half of the Iran-Iraq war, the Reagan Administration pursued several sanction bills against Iran. On the other hand, it established full diplomatic relations with Saddam Hussein’s government by removing it from the U.S. list of State Sponsors of Terrorism in 1984. According to the American Senate Banking Committee, the administrations of Presidents Reagan and George H. W. Bush authorized the sale to Iraq of numerous dual use items, including poisonous chemicals and deadly biological viruses, such as anthrax and bubonic plague. In the 1980s and 1990s, there were a series of incidents that led to worsening of bilateral relations. The United States also accused Iran of assisting the creation of the Hezbollah, which it accused of being involved in several anti-American terrorist attacks, including the American Embassy bombing in April 1983, the Beirut barracks bombing in October 1983, and the Khobar Towers bombing in June 1996.

The United States also launched Operation Praying Mantis, the largest American naval combat operation since World War II, against Iran, in retaliation for the Iranian encroachment of areas of the Persian Gulf as part of the Iran-Iraq war. The International Court of Justice, while dismissing Iran’s claims that the United States breached the 1955 Treaty of Amity, noted that the actions of the United States of America could not be justified as measures necessary to protect its essential security interests. There was also a confrontation over the shooting down of the Iran Air Flight 655 by a US Navy carrier in
1988, after the end of the Iran-Iraq War. The end of the cold war also did not improve bilateral relations as the Clinton administration imposed a total embargo for American companies on dealings with Iran in 1995. Subsequently, the Congress passed the Iran-Libya Sanctions act in 1996, to prevent other countries from making large investments in Iranian energy.

**American Concerns over Nuclear Program & Terrorism: The Emphasis on Belligerence**

It was around the same time that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) raised concerns over Iran’s covert nuclear program by stating that it was clearly intended to develop a nuclear weapons capability. Since 2003, the United States has alleged that Iran has a program to develop nuclear weapons and that a nuclear-armed Iran was unacceptable. Iran has maintained that its nuclear program is aimed only at generating electricity. Tensions mounted between the United States and Iran while IAEA inspections of sensitive nuclear industry sites in Iran continued from 2003 to early 2006. The United States believed that the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei tightly controlled most of the state apparatus and Iran's nuclear weapons program had intensified during this period.

President Bush in a State of the Union address in January 2002, described Iran, North Korea and Iraq, as an axis of evil and warned that the proliferation of long-range missiles developed by these countries constituted terrorism and threatened the United States. The speech caused outrage and was condemned by reformists and conservatives in Iran. The United States also accused Iran, which denied this claim vigorously, of providing logistical and financial support to Shia militias in Iraq in order to wage a proxy war against it.

In an effort to obtain intelligence on Iran's nuclear program, the United States began flying unmanned aerial vehicles, launched from Iraq, over Iran the same year. Iran responded aggressively by describing the surveillance as illegal. Several claims have been made that the United States has violated Iranian territorial sovereignty using drones, soldiers and other provocations since 2003. Seymour Hersh¹, in an article in The New Yorker in January 2005, stated that the United States was penetrating eastern Iran from Afghanistan in a hunt for underground installations developing nuclear weapons. In March 2006, American and European representatives noted that it was time for the UN Security Council to act as Iran has enough unenriched uranium hexafluoride gas to make ten atomic bombs. Seymour Hersh also stated in the same article that the US Central Command had been asked to revise the military's war plan, providing for a maximum ground and air invasion of Iran. Scott Ritter² revealed in June 2005 that the Pentagon was told to be ready to launch an aerial attack to destroy the Iranian nuclear program. In 2006, the United States passed the Iran Freedom and Support Act, which appropriated millions
of dollars for human rights Non-governmental organization (NGOs) working in Iran. The United States pushed for international sanctions against Iran because of its nuclear program.

The United States also escalated its covert operations against Iran since 2007, according to current and former military, intelligence, and congressional sources. The covert activities involve support of the minority Ahwazi Arab and Baluchi groups and other dissident organizations. Robert Baer\(^3\) stated - "The Baluchis are Sunni fundamentalists who hate the regime in Tehran, but you can also describe them as Al Qaeda". United States Special Operations Forces have been conducting cross-border operations from southern Iraq, with Presidential authorization. The scale and the scope of the operations in Iran, which involve the CIA and the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), have been significantly expanded in recent years.

Scott Ritter has stated that CIA-backed bombings had been undertaken in Iran by the MEK, an opposition group included in the U.S. State Department list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations. Dennis Kucinich\(^4\) and Seymour Hersh claimed on separate occasions in April and November 2006 that the US and Israel were giving the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PEJAK) equipment, training, and targeting information in order to create internal pressures in Iran. The PEJAK, an opposition group closely linked to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and listed by the U.S. State Department as a Foreign Terrorist Organization had killed 24 members of the Iranian security forces in March 2006. Robert Baer also stated that the United States was supporting Jundallah, a Sunni and Salafi group; the People's Mujahedin of Iran; and the PEJAK. Seymour Hersh detailed American covert action plans against Iran involving the CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and Special Forces in 2008.

**Efforts at Rapprochement**

President Khatami’s reign in the late 1990s and early 2000’s was marked by some moderation in Iran's public stance towards the West. The Clinton administration had responded positively, in 1998, to his call for a dialogue of civilisations. Subsequently, both countries eased travel restrictions and ended the American embargo of Iranian carpets and pistachios. There were continuous informal inter-parliamentary talks between the members of the Congress and the Majlis until 2000. However relations continued to stall due to opposition from Iranian conservatives and American preconditions for discussions, including changes in Iranian policy on Israel, nuclear energy, and support for terrorism.

In 2003, prior to the Iraq War, the Bush administration reportedly received overtures from the Iranian government. With assistance from the American Iranian Council, Iran
proposed to resolve all outstanding issues including concerns over its nuclear program and support for Hamas and Hezbollah. However, the Bush administration, which at the time held that it could achieve more of its goals through outright regime change than through further attempts at diplomacy, did not respond to Iran’s attempt at rapprochement.

In May 2006, Ahmadinejad sent a personal letter to President Bush to propose "new ways" to end Iran's nuclear dispute. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley dismissed it as a negotiating ploy and publicity stunt that did not address American concerns about Iran's nuclear program. President Bush insisted in August 2006 that Iran must face the consequences for its continued enrichment of uranium which had created a global threat. Ahmadinejad responded by inviting President Bush to a debate on Iran's right to enrich uranium at the UN General Assembly, which was to take place in September 2006. The invitation was promptly rejected by White House spokesman Tony Snow. In November 2006, Ahmadinejad wrote an open letter to the American people stating that dialogue was urgently needed because of American activities in the Middle East and that the United States government was concealing the truth about bilateral relations with Iran. In September 2007, Ahmadinejad addressed the UN General Assembly. Prior to this, he gave a speech at Columbia University in an effort to reach out to the American public. Interestingly when the United States pressed for direct talks at the Iraq conference in Sharm El-Sheikh in May 2007 in an effort to get closer and exchange gestures in a public forum, Iran passed up the opportunity.

Two days after Barack Obama was elected president in November 2008, Ahmadinejad issued the first congratulatory message to a newly elected American president since 1979: "Iran welcomes basic and fair changes in U.S. policies and conducts. I hope you will prefer real public interests and justice to the never-ending demands of a selfish minority and seize the opportunity to serve people so that you will be remembered with high esteem". Ahmadinejad issued a list of grievances, including the 1953 coup, support for Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war, and the Iran Air Flight 655 incident.

In his inaugural speech in January 2009, President Barack Obama said - “To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West — know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.” In the beginning of the festival of Nowruz in March 2009, Obama spoke directly to the Iranian people in a video saying, "The United
States wants the Islamic Republic of Iran to take its rightful place in the community of nations. You have that right—but it comes with real responsibilities”.

However, soon after, in April 2009, Iran convicted Roxana Saberi⁵ to eight years in prison for spying for the United States. After spending four months in prison, she was released in May, and the charge was dropped. Coincidentally, in July 2009, the US released five Iranian diplomats leading some to believe that this was part of a hostage deal. However, the arrest and detention had a negative impact on relations with both countries accusing each other of spying.

When Ahmadinejad got re-elected amidst fraud allegations and widespread protests in the Iranian Presidential elections of 2009, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs stated, "Like the rest of the world, we were impressed by the vigorous debate and enthusiasm that this election generated, particularly among young Iranians. We continue to monitor the entire situation closely, including reports of irregularities”. Vice President Joe Biden reiterated that, "It sure looks like the way they're suppressing speech, the way they're suppressing crowds, the way in which people are being treated, that there's some real doubt". The State Department spokesman Ian Kelly declared soon after that the US was "deeply troubled by the reports of violent arrests and possible voting irregularities".

Conclusion

Nuclear program in Iran is still one of the main issues in bilateral relations currently. The Obama administration does not recognize Iran's right to nuclear power. It has been persistently trying to stop the program’s advancement using sanctions to isolate the Iranian economy by stopping monetary flow. All attempts to defuse tensions have been unsuccessful in the wake of the unconditional demand of the United States to stop uranium enrichment, which is, in turn, unacceptable to Iran. Interestingly, Paul Pillar⁶ observed that all National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) on Iran have addressed the Iranian fears of US attack explicitly and related its desire for nuclear weapons to those fears. Ellen Laipson⁷ also observed that "the Iranian fear of an attack by the United States has long been a standard element in NIEs on Iran”.

In 2009, Western intelligence agencies discovered, and Iran admitted to, another secret facility that was designed for approximately 3,000 centrifuges to enrich uranium. In 2010, the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced that Iran was now a nuclear state, producing uranium enriched to up to 20%. In November 2011 the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) released a report confirming that there was “credible” evidence that "Iran has carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear device." The report was based on intelligence received from more than 10 different countries; interviews with foreign scientists who helped Iran develop their
program, and the IAEA’s own investigations and analyses. Each report since then has underscored Iran’s continuing refusal to address the IAEA’s evidence and its refusal to allow IAEA inspectors into the Parchin complex, where evidence shows “strong indicators of possible nuclear weapon development.” The IAEA’s May 2013 report noted that Iran has a 182 kg stockpile of 20% enriched uranium and 6,357 kg of 5% enriched uranium, enough to produce weapons-grade uranium for seven nuclear bombs using the same enrichment technology. Iran continues to install centrifuges at the deep underground, heavily defended Fordow installation, increasing its capability to quickly enrich to weapons-grade.

The US has had sanctions in place for many years against companies that invest in Iran's energy sector. Recently, more stringent US sanctions have been included in the National Defense Authorization Acts of 2012 and 2013, which placed sanctions on the Central Bank of Iran and foreign institutions doing business with the Central Bank of Iran. Those sanctions targeted major buyers of Iranian oil, forcing them to significantly reduce the amounts of oil they buy from Iran and to start paying for oil with goods instead of cash. The Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act (CISADA) of 2010, which sanctions companies that provide refined petroleum or energy-sector technology to Iran. The US Treasury has also "blacklisted" Iranian companies involved in proliferation or terrorism to make banking transactions more difficult for them globally.

With the election of Hassan Rouhani, the moderate leader, as Iran’s President, the Obama administration has yet again offered to have a willing partnership. Mr Rouhani used his inauguration speech to promise a government of moderation for all Iranians, but also called for international sanctions to be lifted. However the US Congress is considering imposing tougher sanctions since it believes that years of sanctions have brought about a change of leadership in Iran. This could lead to an executive-congressional confrontation over the Iran policy in the coming days. Additionally, the strong hold of the Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei can also limit the options for the new Iranian President.

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2. Former UN weapons of mass destruction inspector in Iraq
3. Former C.I.A. clandestine officer who worked for nearly two decades in South Asia and the Middle East
4. Former US House of Representative and Democratic nomination for President in the 2004 and 2008 elections
5. Iranian-American journalist
6. Former CIA official who led the preparation of all National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) on Iran from 2000 to 2005
7. Former CIA official