

Prestige and Nuclear Security of Iran: A Pakistani Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The nuclear program of Iran has been fraught with controversies and it has faced several economic sanctions over the years. These controversies emerged and grew stronger with Iran refusing to provide the international experts access to controversial sites like Natanz where it is assumed that illegal activities relating to uranium enrichment are taking place. Iran assumes an important position in the region. However, it shares ideological and political differences with its neighboring Sunni majority Arab states. Iran considers United States and Israel as its main adversaries and, historically, there have been several exchanges of threats of war to each other. With these threats it is implied that Iran wants to develop nuclear weapons for; firstly, to have hegemonic position in the region; secondly, to make the threat to US and Israel more credible; and lastly, to have a greater say in the world affairs. Iran's nuclear program has been a source of concern for its regional countries and Pakistan also, being a neighboring country. The relations between them may get complicated; however, the differences between Iran and Pakistan are not huge enough to result in the hot conflict.

Keywords: *Iran Nuclear Deal, IAEA and Iran, Iran and United States, Arab*

Introduction

International system of states is based on the mutual relationships among states. These relations are either friendly or acrimonious. The state relations are driven by power politics. Whichever state is more powerful, it gets recognition among other states as powerful state. The realist paradigm focuses on the power as the primary driving force behind the conduct of relations among the states. Each state is constantly in pursuit of power maximization through military and economic competition. The international political system compels the states to establish their influence by acquiring the more parameters of power in the shape of economic and military strength in their policies. Strong economic condition and military superiority provide them advantageous position in international system. States want to increase their influence in world's politics on the basis of their power. As Thucydides puts it, "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (Strassler, 1996). Politics is all about power; it's a game of power acquisition.

Nuclear technology has brought new dimension in the world politics. Strong economic condition also incentivizes states to acquire advanced nuclear technology for the enhancement of power. The world's five powers; United States, France, United Kingdom, China, and Russia, also referred to as P-5, have a significant influence in the international politics and their nuclear capability helps them to sustain and maintain their role. It was the power of nuclear weapons that motivated states to amass large nuclear arsenals (Introduction, 2007) Nuclear power capability enables the states to counter its strategic as well as security challenges most determinately.

Iran has been aspirant for being an important state in the Middle East. Being an ideologically motivated country and due to its uncomfortable relations with the other Arab states, Iran has been seen with suspicion regarding development of its nuclear technology. Iran has been refusing the inspections of international observers for its peaceful nuclear power program which has added to the suspicion. Iran's nuclear ambitions became matter of concern for the international community. Sanctions have also been imposed over Iran to check its nuclear program. However, Tehran has been resisting conjunctive diplomatic pressure to stop it from its suspicious uranium enrichment activities (Takeyh, 2010).

Iran shares ideological differences with the regional states. Since the Iranian revolution of 1979, it has been orientated around the Shia dominant ideology which has been the major source of concern for the neighboring Sunni ideology countries. Presently, the supreme leader is Ali Khamenei who is the most powerful figure in domestic as well as foreign policy decision-making. Iran believes that United States and Israel as the axis of evil and its main adversaries. It is assumed that Iran has become more influential after the demise of Saddam Hussain regime in Iraq because Iraq was the most powerful competitor of Iran in the region with which it has fought wars for several years (World: Middle East, 2017). In the regional perspective, Iran considers that Saudi Arabia is trying to destabilize the Shia majority states like Lebanon where Hezbollah, a Shia oriented party is part of the government. A nuclear Iran will definitely become a worrisome factor in the region. All the neighboring countries would be affected in many ways.

The questions here arise, despite international pressure and nuclear implications what are the motives and reasons of Iranian quest of nuclear acquisition? Is Iran capable of building its nuclear weapon program? And what would be its likely implications for Pakistan, if Iran goes nuclear? The paper is aimed to examine Iran's nuclear ambitions by highlighting various Pro-nuclear and Anti-nuclear factors in this regard. It will also examine the implications of nuclear Iran for Pakistan deeply. The whole debate has been concluded at the end of the paper.

Theoretical Framework

The Iranian quest for nuclear acquisition can be theorized on the basis of the reasons that incited Iran for nuclearization. Joseph Cirincione gave the concept about "why states want nuclear weapons and why they don't". He has discussed following five models which a state follows to develop nuclear weapons.

National Security Model

The "national security" model argues that "the states seek nuclear weapons in order to enhance their own security" (Introduction, 2007). The security oriented

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nature of this model is central theme of realist paradigm. The two major assumptions of realism entail that; firstly, the International system is defined by anarchy, and secondly, states seek everything possible to attain security (Cirincione, 2007).

This concept further relates to the theory of neoclassical realism in which distribution of power among the states compels them to act in international system according to the perceived threats and factors. Only nuclear weapons have the capability to guarantee security against any kind of threat. Cirincione identifies a domino effect in the patterns of nuclear development where “one state goes nuclear another state is forced to do so, and then another and another (Cirincione, 2007).” Iran’s need for nuclear weapons stems from the security threat from Sunni majority neighboring states. Iran considers itself to be in a “dangerous neighborhood” (Baheli, 2004). Ultimately, Iran thinks that nuclear weapons would ensure its security. Iran considers U.S. and Israel as the main threats while their allies are scattered around the neighborhood (Baheli, 2004).

Prestige Model

The second model “prestige” also drives states to get nuclear weapons because it argues that with the nuclear weapons, “states feel more powerful, relevant, and respected (Cirincione, *Why States Want Nuclear Weapons and Why they Don't*, 2008).” This feeling of being in a prestigious position is what countries want in the power oriented international system. The possession of nuclear weapons is considered as symbol of power, modernity, technological advancement, and legitimate in world politics by having a say in world affairs. The stature of nuclear weapons states impresses the countries to be in that league of nuclear possessor states. Nuclear weapons are the only source of protecting the national interests (Cirincione, *Why States Want Nuclear Weapons and Why they Don't*, 2008). The nuclear weapons “may serve important symbolic functions – both shaping and reflecting a state’s identity (Sagan, 1996).”

With Iran’s position in the region, it has always aspired that it could be a dominant regional power. This nationalistic thought is there since the pre-Shah era before 1979. To recall the prestigious and dominant history of Iran, its government is eager to develop nuclear weapons (Reporter, 2009). The geopolitical location, natural resources and demography is in compatibility with the goal of becoming regional leader for Iran. This consensus is so strong among the policymakers of Iran that whoever is in the helm of affairs, the nuclear policy has remained the same over the years (Dokos, 2008).

Abu Mohammed Asgar Khani says that:

. . . Iran should invoke Article 10 of the NPT and consider those tests as “an extraordinary event” against the “supreme interest” of Iran and therefore should render notice to step out of the NPT before the NPT and the CTBT monitoring systems and inspections regimes are in place. Iran failed to do so. That opportunity was lost and Iran has to pay the price . . . If you ask me if Iran needs to nuclearize itself, I would say this is a must for Iran’s strategy of survival. A nuclear Iran must not be seen as a threat to its neighboring countries or to Israel. The weapons would serve as a minimum deterrence for self-defense in a world of uncertainty (Khani, 2003).

Domestic Political Model

The “states acquire nuclear weapons when a set of well-placed bureaucratic actors stimulate the political leaders to acquire them (Cirincione, *Why States Want Nuclear Weapons and Why they Don't*, 2008).” This aspect is very important because the domestic pressure groups in the politics have their role in the nuclear policy decision making. Domestic politics are manipulated through the pro-nuclear agenda. There is most acceptance and public support for the domestic politics model of nuclear development (Dokos, 2008). It not only brings national security, it also brings benefits for the political regime.

Iran’s political structure consists of a Supreme Leader, who is the non-elected member of the government whereas; it has presidential structure of governance which is elected through elections. It consists of a president, cabinet, and the parliament of experts who formulate the government institutions. The other non-elected members are the armed forces, judiciary, and the two councils i.e. the guardian council and the expediency council (Takeyh R. , 2003). The chair of the Supreme Leader is the most powerful entity in Iran. The decisions of Supreme Leader are taken as the final policy. However, there is a system of checks and balances among institutions as well (Bhagat, 2006).

Iranian political thought is revolving around three groups; firstly the hardliner conservatives, secondly, pragmatic conservatives, and lastly, the reformists (Mahmood, 2006). There is no consensus among the three groups on any other issue except the issue of nuclear weapons development. The perceptions of pragmatic conservatives about Iran are reflective of realistic approach while the hardliner conservatives overrate Iranian capability and over exaggerate the Western hostility for Iran. They reject the costs of nuclear weapons in the form of sanctions whereas the pragmatic conservatives try to avoid isolation of Iran in the world politics (Chubin, 2006). In such a scenario, “Ahmadinejad’s bold statements have demonstrated indifference and disrespect of hardliners for the international community. The hardliners view the nuclear program as the ultimate guarantor of Iran’s influence and security; and access to the nuclear technology would offer a matchless opportunity to prevent any intervention into Iran’s domestic affairs particularly by the Western powers (Litwak, 2003).” On the other hand, the pragmatics fears isolation and deterioration of economic situation. They advocate the nuclear weapons as long as there is no negative impact on domestic economy and international trade (Pollack, 2006).

Technological Model

Joseph Cirincione fourth “technological model” argues that “if a state has the technological ability to develop nuclear weapons, then it will do so; the awesome power of nuclear technology and arms is too much for most leaders to resist (Cirincione, *Why States Want Nuclear Weapons and Why they Don't*, 2008).” Technologically, there are three pre-requisites for a state to develop nuclear weapons. First, it has to have the “weapon grade nuclear fuel”. Second, it has the capability to miniaturize it to fit it on a warhead. Third, it should have the technology to manufacture missiles to take it over large distances to hit the target (Coris, 2005). According to the report of “Weapons, Intelligence, Nonproliferation

and Arms Control Center (WINPAC)”, CIA report on Proliferation, Iran has progressed ahead to achieve these capabilities.

Economic Model

Nuclear weapons are regarded as the “big ticket items” as they provide necessary deterrence from enemy without having to maintain large conventional forces. On the flip side, the development of nuclear weapons technology is costly affair and the states with insufficient economic resources cannot go for it. However, the argument is that once the threat is higher, then economic barriers are no more a hurdle for going nuclear. Economic considerations are not the only indicators of a state to have interest in developing nuclear weapons and it cannot be explained that a state has the economic capability so it will go nuclear (Cirincione, *Why States Want Nuclear Weapons and Why they Don't*, 2008). Iran has faced strict international economic sanctions in lieu of its alleged nuclear weapons program. However, the country is strict on its stance that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes and it is Iran’s right to develop peaceful nuclear energy for it. Despite that international concerns are still there on the basis of its nuclear enrichment activities.

These five models define Iran’s interests and determination for development of nuclear weapons. However, Iran is conditioned by technological and economic barriers which have not yet forced Iran to compromise on its stance.

Historical Background

Iran’s nuclear program was launched with the help of the U.S. as part of the Atoms for Peace program in Shah’s time. President Eisenhower called for the establishment of an international atomic energy agency and for the use of nuclear materials in serving “the peaceful pursuits of mankind.” The support, fillip and participation of the U.S. and Western European governments in Iran’s nuclear program continued throughout the duration of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s (the Shah’s) reign (Joseph Cirincione, 2005).

Until 1979 revolution that toppled the Shah, Iran’s nuclear program was seen as one of the most up-to-date program in the region. The turning-point in foreign assistance on nuclear technology was the 1979 revolution. All the foreign contractors and suppliers withdrew from Iran and gave up their nuclear power contracts. For its own interests and part, the new government cut back or cancelled much of the Shah's ambitious nuclear program including plans for power reactors.

In 1979, hostage crisis in Iran at the U.S. embassy persuaded U.S. to cut off all nuclear support and agreements. In 1980-1988, eight year long war between Iran and Iraq further aggravated the situation and as a result of direct threats from Iraq’s chemical and nuclear weapons program, Ayatollah Khomeini’s government resumed its own nuclear program. Iran turned to the Soviet Union in late 1980s to restart its civil nuclear power program.

Iran accessed Russia to conclude agreement regarding the completion of its Bushehr Nuclear Power Complex. In 1995, an agreement was reached in which Russia agreed to build the power plant under the umbrella of IAEA Safeguards. However, the U.S. expressed concerns over a centrifuge enrichment facility to be built under the agreement. As a result of which the agreement was halted.

During the 1999 and 2002, Iran was reported to have conducted enrichment tests in the centrifuges which were installed at “Kalaye Electric Company. It was reported that the source of UF₆, which is the fuel for reactor, was of Chinese origin (Joseph Cirincione, 2005). In 2003, Iran for the first time provided evidence that it violated NPT during its meetings with IAEA officials. Iran revealed that it is building an “enrichment facility at Natanz” and a “heavy-water production plant at Arak”, a “fuel fabrication plant”, and that it “undertook research into conversion and enrichment activities including centrifuges” (Joseph Cirincione, 2005).

In 2003 the EU-3 (Britain, Germany and France), started a diplomatic effort to negotiate with Iran to forgo its reprocessing and enrichment activities and also to stop the construction of its heavy water reactor at ARAK. As a result of these diplomatic efforts, the Paris Agreement was signed on November 15, 2004. According to this agreement, Iran suspended its nuclear activities until the negotiations for any long term arrangements are not finalized (Report, 2015). Iran continued its work on centrifuges and related research. The IAEA reported in August 2005 that Iran has again resumed its activities at Isfahan conversion site (Report, 2015). It further enhanced the ambiguity regarding its nuclear activities and made the Western World suspicious of Iran’s intention.

Current Status

In January 2006, Iran again started its enrichment program after a gap of few years. The IAEA claimed that since 2006, Iran has installed three complete units at Natanz with each consisting of 3000 centrifuges (Report I. , 2010). Iran reported to the IAEA about the construction of “Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP), near Qom city.” Additionally, Iran also continued work on construction of its “Heavy Water Production Plant (HWPP) at Arak”. The IAEA and the UN Security Council had been continuously calling for abandonment of these projects. However, Iran did not halt its activities (IAEA, 2010).

Suddeutsche Zeitung published a report stating that Iran had received a computer program from North Korea with which it could have been simulated that how the explosion of a nuclear bomb would take place (IAEA, 2010). This program titled MCNPX (Monte Carlo N-Particle Extended) 2.6.0, “works out self-sustaining chain reactions that are necessary to create nuclear explosions” and “figures out with a high level of precision if a nuclear bomb would explode, assuming that all the mechanical components were functioning properly (IAEA, 2010).”

Iran, however, insists that its enrichment program is covered under peaceful program and United States along with the West and Europe is suspicious about its nuclear program out of place. Iran has asserted that there is no proof of Iran’s undeclared activities relationship to a nuclear program and IAEA has failed to provide this evidence, therefore, United Nations Security Council sanctions have no legal basis. Contrary to this, UN Security Council has demanded cessation of all the activities relating to nuclear enrichment and reprocessing. Due to suspicion of Iran developing its nuclear program, the United States, precisely, objected to allow Iran develop its indigenous nuclear fuel.

After all this international debacle, an agreement between Iran and P5+1 (i.e. United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China + Germany) was reached in 2013., in Geneva, Switzerland (Rozen, 2013). “It represents the first

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formal agreement between the U.S. and Iran in 34 years". According to the deal, Iran will freeze its enrichment facilities for a definite period of time as an exchange for relaxation in the economic sanctions, as both sides work together for a long-term arrangement. In addition to that, Iran also agreed to halt its work on Arak nuclear power plant (Neog, 2014) and to allow greater access to IAEA inspectors for inspections. In response, Iran will be relieved from approximately US\$7 billion worth of UN sanctions and a commitment that no further sanctions would be imposed on it (Khanyari, 2013). The deal will be helpful in bringing Iran out of isolation after the sanctions.

The main motive of Iran for going to such a deal was to get out of economic sanctions and to avoid further ones to get out of economic problems.

As far as the international response to the deal is concerned, different countries have different approach towards the deal. The former US President Obama was very enthusiastic about the deal and termed it as an "important first step". On the other hand, Israel has been skeptic about the deal and showed concern about the sincerity of Iran in fulfilling its promises. According to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, the accord is a "historic mistake," and termed it as a failed agreement. Keeping aside Israel, Saudi Arabia along with other Arab states have been sharing the similar concerns about the deal (Chandran, 2013). Turkey, India and Pakistan have welcomed the framework agreement.

It is yet to be seen that whether the deal represents an Iran-US rapprochement process and whether a paradigm shift has occurred or not. However, the relations between the two are going to be better (News, 2013). The pragmatic approach towards the agreement is not to rest too much high hopes on the deal. Whether it is a temporary marriage of convenience for both or they are able to convert it into friendship in the long run.

Pakistan's Response to Iran Nuclear Deal

Iran shared a historical, religious, cultural links with its neighboring state Pakistan. However, over the past few years, this relationship has been facing some ups and downs due to some Iran's inclination towards India. Despite all the minor differences, Pakistan has supported peaceful resolution of Iran's nuclear issue. Pakistan accepts that it is Iran's legal right to benefit from nuclear energy under the NPT, however, it also encourages that Iran must clear concerns of international community regarding its enrichment and reprocessing activities. Such activities should be under the framework of the IAEA safeguards and Iran should share all the information about its activities being carried out at civilian nuclear facilities. Pakistan has always opposed nuclear proliferation but has advocated Iran's right of utilizing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes as long as they are under NPT and other binding commitments on Iran's part (Khan, 2006).

Implications for Pakistan

Iran considers nuclear technology as a matter of prestige and a source of greater influence at regional and international level. This is the reason it has been pursuing nuclear technology despite severe sanctions. The Iranian desire for nuclear energy development has created concerns and suspicions among the neighboring countries especially and internationally, in general. It will definitely have repercussions for South Asian region as well including Pakistan and India. It may have security

implications for both the countries and especially for Pakistan because the strategic cooperation between India and Iran has been improving over the last few years. Pakistan already perceives threat from Indian defense forces in Afghanistan and their presence in Iran would further complicate the security challenge for Pakistan.

The nuclear Iran would add to the security concern of Pakistan and it would complicate the mutual relationship between both the countries. It will not only disturb the deterrence stability of the region but also it will create a complicated web of arms and missile development in the region which would foster instability in the region.

The Iran-Pakistan relations are mostly good and brotherly but there are some contentious points where both the countries have different views. But these views are not that starkly different to start a nuclear war. Pakistan does not like Iran supporting the opposite factions in Afghanistan. Pakistan's support for Taliban government in Afghanistan was the major point of divergence between Iran Pakistan relations. There are differences between both the countries over the relative approach in Afghanistan making them "natural rivals" (Ahmad, 2015).

Similarly, Iran's growing relations with India are another point of divergence between Iran and Pakistan. Iran and India has far-reaching and multi-dimensional relations with each other. A general understanding exists between both the states that they should enhance cooperation in key areas relating to trade and security (Dormandy, 2008). However, it creates complications for Pakistan because if Iran allows India to access its military bases even for training personnel, it would allow India to gather intelligence against bordering Pakistani forces.

Another point of possible contention is the Gwadar Port of Pakistan. The competition for trade route for Afghanistan and Central Asian states would cause bitter relationship between Pakistan and Iran. The suspicion exists in Iran that "Pakistan will compete for trade and energy related trade with Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, although it enjoys warm relations with the Central Asian Republics and Afghanistan, the latter of which gets a substantial discount on port fees."

There are some irritants between Iran and Pakistan which have developed over time. Although these irritants are not expected to escalate into hot conflicts, yet a smooth and healthy relationship may not continue to last long. The internal irritants in the form of Shia community of Pakistan and Iran may get a boost with sectarian tension being created in the bordering areas near Iran; while external irritants in the form of Iran and India relations flourishing would definitely hurt Pakistan if Iran finds any kind of partnership with India. A nuclear Iran could become India's strategic partner against Pakistan.

Conclusion

Iran's aspiration of acquisition of nuclear weapons has a long history as it started in the time of the Shah and progressed in one way or the other since then. All the three political groups in the domestic politics of Iran and the Iranian public are united on the stance of acquiring nuclear technology and energy. This rigid stance of the Iranian public is a positive sign for the Iranian government, and gives satisfaction and strength to the government leaders.

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During the Shah regime, Iran was heavily dependent on U.S. and U.K. for its arms, but, after 1979 Islamic revolution, Tehran was isolated internationally and faced Iran-Iraq war alone. The American-led arms embargo during the war greatly complicated Iran's efforts to replace its losses and sustain its war efforts. That is why; it now strongly emphasizes military self-reliance. Prestige, geopolitical situation, technological and military dimension, Iranian security concerns, and domestic politics all favor Iran's nuclear option. From the Iranian political stance it is clear that it is will probably acquire nuclear status later.

Iran is surrounded by U.S. military forces in its neighboring countries of Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and therefore most of the religious and political elites in Iran feel the need to develop nuclear technology to cope with the regional threats especially for Israel and to deter U.S. military intervention and for preserving its sovereignty and integrity of state. By developing nuclear weapons, Iran will be able to strengthen its existing military capability, enhance power and will ensure its survival and security. Nuclear weapons would transform Iran into a regional military power, and would provide it with the means to deter its neighbors. It will also strengthen the status of the regime in the eyes of the Iranian people and also throughout the Arab and Muslim world.

In addition, any military move by the U.S. or any of its allies especially Israel against Iran to stop its nuclear program might result in Iran destabilizing Iraq by instigating Shia community against the U.S. forces and Iran can also complicate the situation in Afghanistan.

A nuclear Iran would be a security challenge for Pakistan because it would over stretch Pakistan security on the Western border as well while, presently, it has to cater for Eastern border only against India. A new nuclear weapons state in the region may instigate vertical proliferation in the region with India and Pakistan going for quantitative and qualitative development of nuclear weapons to maintain their respective deterrence. This would cause deterrence instability which may eventually result in undermining the strategic stability of South Asian region. However, the scenario indicates that all this is not going to happen in the near future due to the fact that the Interim Agreement is in place. But no one knows when the situation changes dramatically.

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