

# FICKLE PEACE AND DEVASTATING MIDDLE EAST NUCLEAR TANGLE

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## **Abstract:**

This article captures an exhaustive view of entire dynamics of Iran's nuclear programme, its costs, benefits and cascading effects on the region in particular and globe at large. Undeniably, Iran claims such a programme for civilian purpose, but that does not suggest that she would not, at any given time, transform enriched uranium into deadly nuclear arsenal notwithstanding her official handouts to the contrary. In fact, she has several underlying compulsions, and one, we believe, is her ethno-national and ideological incompatibility with and her scare from Israel's swelling military power in her immediate neighbourhood. Therefore, US has to recognize Iran's compulsions and neutralize the "assumed" threat perception through the medium of mutual dialogue and consultation, the key to Middle East peace and development, than the use of force or UN economic sanctions: the latter seems to loose ground due to recently inaugurated *Iran-Pakistan-India* (IPI) gas pipeline project by two Presidents of Iran and Pakistan.

## **Keywords:**

Iran, US, Israel, Nukes, Middle East, Natanz, Non-Proliferation, IAEA, Enrichment.

## **Introduction:**

Iranian nuclear programme suspected for developing deadly nuclear arsenal beeps incessantly to flash warning to the peace-loving world. Conversely, Iran denies nurturing of any such pursuit of acquiring nuclear weapons capability. US and Israel, because of their strategic stakes in the arena, are committed to prevent Iran from such a misdirected shenanigan, particularly when the vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons in the two leading nuclear powers, US and Russia, is showing symptoms of decline as a consequence of mutual disarmament dialogues. The conflict scenario in the Middle East is not only complex but has the potential to suck in global peace. It therefore calls for adoption of balanced and dispassionate approaches, hypotheses and methodologies for diffusing and resolving the conflict before it grips the region ominously. It remains a critical question to answer, yet whether Middle East can sustain another conflagration on the heels of two conflicts still blazing on Iranian borders. With such overwhelming controversies, the essay attempts to explore a possibility that would keep the conflict leashed.

Quest for nuclear capability and the desire to contain the potential threat of devastation have survived decades since the advent of nuclear

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age. The nuking of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was the biggest tragic episode. The world community virtually witnessed for the first time the destructive dimensions of nuclear weapons that have now gained pulverizing lethality manifold. Chernobyl and Fukushima were small recent reminders to nuclear players who possess the capability and the sneaky forayer of nuclear technology to tread this path cautiously if the planet is to remain free from horrible looming threat of nuclear holocaust. In other words, greater abstinence has to become a norm. Sir Winston Churchill precisely measured, "The price of greatness is responsibility."<sup>1</sup>

Some people with vision encumbered themselves with the responsibility to make the world safe. Dwight D. Eisenhower's 'Chance for Peace' resolve, among many other aspects, aimed at harnessing massive nuclear power in service to the humanity through, "International control of atomic energy to promote its use for peaceful purposes only and to insure the prohibition of atomic weapons..."<sup>2</sup>

Dawn of third millennium, however, confronts a situation in Middle East that perhaps is exceptionally tangled. Iran's suspected nuclear programme has met colossal angst and faces threat of military strike by US and/or Israel. Fredrik Dahl comments, "...It also sparked renewed speculation that Israel, which sees Iran's nuclear programme as an existential threat, might launch pre-emptive strikes against its atomic sites."<sup>3</sup> The stated positions from both sides lead us to conflicting paradigms that are marred by diverse logic. The approaching threat, in the meantime, appears running out of leash. Thus, Middle East is at critical juncture and adrift to a catastrophic precipice. The emerging nuclear dilemma in the region has complex stratification of historic issues that are entwined together to justify the word 'tangle'. It is not only the question of human security but also the play of potent ideological undercurrents that appear inclined to wreck the peace. Nuclear dimension is one of the symptoms that demarcate the imminent

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<sup>1</sup> W. S. Churchill, "*The Price of Greatness*," (Speech at Harvard University, 1943), 'Finest Hour 80', 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1993.

Mr. Churchill was complimenting the US role and responsibility that she embraced to rescue her allies at the onset of Second World War rather than remaining ensconced in a remote continent. The essence of the quote fits well now on all nuclear powers as well as the new entrants with their nuclear trophies to flaunt or endeavouring to develop one.

<sup>2</sup> D. D. Eisenhower, *Chance for Peace*, (Speech)' Miller Center, University of Virginia, 16 April 1953. In some texts, it also appears as 'Atom for Peace' or 'Cross of Iron' speech that he gave just after the death of Joseph Stalin.

<sup>3</sup> F. Dahl, *Analysis-For Iran the Sanctions Price May be Worth Paying*, Reuters Africa, 29 November 2011, <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews>.

conflict severity if the main parties, Iran, US and Israel fail to see the latent immensity of the menace.

The article envisages the scenario in evolutionary perspective, bringing all available evidence to infer conclusions from the prevailing ambiguity. It also explores the strong pivots available to actors in the arena to advance their side of perception-variants. Iran stands much to lose if it is developing nuclear capability. Contextually, US and Israel would suffer even greater credibility loss if at a certain stage Iran manages to show a clean slate.

### **NPT and Obtaining Environments:**

The evolutionary path of Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) had been turbulent because, for its judicious as well as efficacious realisation, other treaties of Cold War and post-Cold War era had to move in tandem. Recently, a larger degree of advocacy to afford added enforcement potency to NPT is visible but there has been regrettable lack of powers' interest too during certain phases of recent history when, wittingly or unwittingly, they were focused on issues, away from NPT.<sup>4</sup> Out of the inventory of 189 signatory states, Iran included, four nuclear powers, Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea have thought it prudent to stay out of it or desert it. A very pertinent question has been raised, "...how, if at all, these states can be brought into the treaty."<sup>5</sup> The failure to do so certainly presents a factor that erodes the 'legitimacy' space of NPT because of them and affords crutches to the faltering arguments of others, who may be busy in developing the nuclear capability. Iran being a signatory of NPT, owes much to listen to the international community but it has its own side of narrative too. The complexity of the issues has hereditary nature and thus the global politics remains jumbled. Einstein to a question, why we have been unable to devise the political means to keep the atom from destroying us, replied, "The answer is simple my friend; it is because politics is more difficult than physics."<sup>6</sup>

The tirade that makes Iranian nuclear tangle as the basis of nuclear discourse conveys mixed messages. Majority in the West advocates vociferously mincing Iranian nuclear installations to dust instantly but there are patient voices as well who advise restraint and recourse to dialogues than resorting to military means. Iran on the other hand stands

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<sup>4</sup> One such example has been quoted in the sequel under 'Iranian Dilemma is Israel-centric'.

<sup>5</sup> D. Howlett, "Nuclear Proliferation," *The Globalization of World Politics* 3<sup>rd</sup>, John Baylis & Steve Smith (Eds.), Oxford University Press, 2006, 514.

<sup>6</sup> C. W. Kegley and S. L. Blanton, *World Politics: Trend and Transformation*, Boston, Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011-2012, 6.

firm to convince the world, though half-heartedly and ambiguously. Commenting on International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) report in September 2010, Iran's Ambassador to the UN, said, "After seven years of constant inspections, the report once again confirms the non-diversion of Iran's nuclear activities towards military and banned objectives." He added, "... it clearly shows that all of Iran's nuclear activities, especially the enrichment efforts, have been conducted under the supervision of the agency."<sup>7</sup> In a recent outburst in response to the Western demand for responding to IAEA's 'November 2011 Report' that shows implicitly that Iran is headed for nuclear weapon development, Iranian delegate to IAEA, on 17 November 2011, "...withdrew an invitation to UN atomic agency experts to visit Tehran and discuss nuclear concerns. He also announced Tehran was boycotting a meeting next week to explore the possibilities of a Mideast (Middle East) nuclear-free zone that will be attended by Israel and all Arab nations, accusing IAEA Chief Yukiya Amano of bias for not focusing on Israel's undeclared nuclear arsenal."<sup>8</sup> However, before commencing the latest round of three-day inspections on 29 January 2012, IAEA chief inspector, Herman Nackaerts commented, "In particular we hope that Iran will engage with us on possible military dimension of Iran's nuclear programme."<sup>9</sup> Iran's parliamentary speaker, Ali Larijani, in the mean time sounded a pre-emptive warning, saying, "... if they (IAEA) deviate and become a tool, then Islamic republic will be forced to reflect and consider a new framework."<sup>10</sup> Thus, the war of wits is on but the nuclear geo-politics that needed an element of dispassionate review is fast falling victim of macabre hoaxes. Burden of responsibility clearly lies on Iran to assure the world convincingly about her non-weapon pursuits. Where the West is failing to recognise is the fact that communication channels are fast collapsing, putting diplomacy to the back burner.

When the world politics is more difficult than physics and there is large perception-gulf among the direct parties' stance, the issue needs to be broached in a manner that rhymes with international law and the regional sensibilities. Iran's geo-strategic vulnerability makes the situation worse from the angle of the proponents of stern military strikes. Conversely, it soon connects from regional to global significance as

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<sup>7</sup> Press TV (Iran), *IAEA Report Confirms Iran's Clean Slate*, 8 September 2010, <http://dissidentvoice.org/2010/09/iaea-report-confirms-irans-clean-slate/>.

<sup>8</sup> G. Jahn, *West say Iran Deceives World on Nukes*, Associated Press, 18 November 2011, <http://news.yahoo.com/west-says-iran-deceives-world-nukes>.

<sup>9</sup> *Khaleej Times*, "Iran hosts IAEA, Lashes out Over Oil Sanctions," 29 January 2012, [www.khaleejtimes.com](http://www.khaleejtimes.com).

<sup>10</sup> *Khaleej Times*, "Iran hosts IAEA, Lashes out Over Oil Sanctions," 29 January 2012.

other powerful actors have their stakes in stable Iran/Middle East. A scholar commented, “By 2005, Russia...in a resurgent bid to re-establish its strategic foothold in the region made strategic forays in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Qatar and most significantly in Saudi Arabia.” Looking northeast, he adds, “China...at about the same time too established substantive strategic relationships with Saudi Arabia and Iran.”<sup>11</sup> Hence, it portrays a jinxed scenario, potent enough to catapult the global peace unless the ‘parties’ consciously eschew violence. Resultantly, the cross-invectives paint a colossal media burst. Yet, one recognises that such conflicting matrix would continue affording the scholars on both sides of the divide the leitmotif for their intellectual dissent.

### **Iran’s Geo-Strategic Significance:**

Iran occupies a unique space in Asia. It is essentially a Middle Eastern country, has contiguous borders with Central Asia, South Asia, South Caucasus, and Europe. From Iranian perspective, when Caspian Sea Legal Regime still hangs out as unresolved, Iran is in comfortable position to claim its contiguity with Russia across Caspian to the north. Its seaports on the strategic waterways, the Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea render it tremendous influence over commercial traffic of huge fossil fuels, exiting from Middle East or occurring among Caspian littorals. Iran sits over fourth world largest oil proven reserves and second world largest gas proven reserves.

After Iranian revolution, when Shah of Iran fled the country, Iran pursued anti-America stance. It was, “Hostage taking of US embassy in Tehran on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1979 by Iranian revolutionaries further precipitated the US-Iran hostility...when Iran had turned down a unanimous Security Council Resolution, requiring her to release the hostages.”<sup>12</sup> Thereafter, US-Iran relations hit rock-bottom. As for Israel, the description is simple. Iran is not inclined to reconcile with the existence of state of Israel as a reality and instead wishes, “Israel must be ‘wiped off’ the map.”<sup>13</sup> Russia and China stand by Iran at crucial times when it needs breathing space in world politics to supplement its diplomacy or technological deficits. Quoting Vladimir Putin in 2010, Janie Fly and Gary Schmitt observed, “...Russia would bring the nuclear

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<sup>11</sup> S. Kapila, *Middle East Changing Dynamics: Strategic Perspective on Power Play of United States, Russia & China*, South Asian Analysis Group, 15 February 2011, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers44%5Cpaper4336.html>.

<sup>12</sup> M. A. K. Niazi, *The New Great Game: Oil and Gas Politics in Central Eurasia*, Raider Publishing International, New York, London, Swansea, 2008, 39.

<sup>13</sup> N. Fathi, “Wipe Israel ‘Off the Map’ Iranian Says,” *The New York Times*, 27 October 2005.

reactor it is constructing in Iran online later this year. This comes just as Washington is hoping to tighten the screws on Tehran over its illicit nuclear program.”<sup>14</sup> It puts the issue clearly in Iranian perspective. Turkey, despite having soft corner to help Iran plant itself in wider international community, is haunted by Iran’s Achaemenid Empire-euphoria and the crunch of historic past. Unfortunately, the same virus of past nostalgia also afflicts Israel. Both seen juxtaposed, happen to be indulging in a lavish deprecation of abstraction in 21<sup>st</sup> Century that is dangerous enough to crystallise a severe conflict, occasional breezy statements notwithstanding. Akbar Hashmi Rafsanjani had declared in 2005, “I absolutely offer the world the assurance that Tehran is not after nuclear arms but will not forsake its absolute right.”<sup>15</sup> Iranian Prime Minister, Kamal Kharrazi went even far, “The IAEA can inspect whenever they wish, any time they want to make certain that Tehran’s use of Uranium enrichment is not used to make nuclear weapons.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Measuring Iranian Nuclear Threat:**

Iranian nuclear threat can support many hypotheses. Within the global nuclear threat assessment, the nuclear ghost has certain forms and guises. Evan B. Montgomery contends, “Moreover, press reports indicate that the forthcoming nuclear posture review will make the goal of countering nuclear terrorism “equal to the traditional mission of deterring a strike by major powers or emerging nuclear adversaries.”<sup>17</sup> The hyped theme of nuclear terrorism is at the top of the index. An ugly dimension of this threat is that non-state actors, if successful, would not only wreak havoc but would go scot-free for the lack of applicability of any retribution against them. Emergence of new nuclear weapon states, also termed in certain discourses as ‘rogue states,’ regional conflicts and nuclear states collapse have also been portrayed as dangerous scenarios. Iran has been tagged as a possible ‘rogue state’ that is perceived to be defying NPT, despite having signed it, by developing nuclear capability in a clandestine manner. Ali Mostashari is of the view, “The image of Iran as a rogue state dates back to the days of the hostage-taking crisis and the

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<sup>14</sup> J. M. Fly, G. Schmitt, “Obama is Making Big Bush’s Mistake on Russia,” *Foreign Policy*, 22 March 2010, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/03/22/obama>.

<sup>15</sup> J. S. Yaphe and C. D. Lutes, *Reassessing the Implications of Nuclear-Armed Iran-McNair Paper 69*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, Washington DC, 2005, 1.

<sup>16</sup> J. S. Yaphe and C. D. Lutes, *Reassessing the Implications of Nuclear-Armed Iran-McNair Paper 69*.

<sup>17</sup> E. B. Montgomery, *Understanding the Threat of Nuclear Terrorism*, CSBA: Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, 12 April 2010, 1.

Iran-Iraq war...”<sup>18</sup> Comments coming from another Qum-trained scholar are also interesting, “If Ahmadinezhad’s influence over the nuclear programme was unchallenged in Iran, there would be little doubt in the international community about the goals of the programme and its function for the war mongering apocalyptists (apocalyptic).”<sup>19</sup>

How close is Iran to manufacture a deadly weapon? The question is consuming emotions, patience as well as ethics at least when the debate boils down to the mode and the degree of retribution that be heaped on Iran. The recommended recipes to flush Iranian nuclear sites have never been applied, except against Iraq and Syria, that too by Israel. Some even prompt US to strike with tactical nuclear weapons to shred them to dust. When asked about the possibility of a nuclear strike upon Iran, President George W. Bush responded, “All options are on the table...”<sup>20</sup> If only someone could claim that such treatment would enforce NPT forever and the proliferation, often sponsored initially by major powers covertly or overtly would cease to exist, perhaps more consensus against Iran would have developed. IAEA, in its ‘November 2011 Report’ could not commit itself to the final verdict that Iran was developing a nuclear weapon and the position, with some additional lines of explicit as well as implicit apprehensions, remains unchanged. The latest plethora of accusations flung on Iran are about intentions though nuclear experts do bring wide array of intelligence reports which suggest that outlay of Iranian nuclear installations is rather lavish than its essential mark to acquire civil nuclear technology. On the contrary, Iranian President’s statement is a matter of solace, “In a September 21 interview with *The New York Times*’ Nicholas Kristof, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad again reiterated Iran’s willingness to halt domestic 20% low enriched uranium (LEU) production in return for foreign supply of the material. He said, ‘If they give us the 20 % enriched uranium this very week, we will cease the domestic enrichment of uranium up to 20% this very week.’”<sup>21</sup>

The major indicator that chills the spines of the analysts, and rightly too, is Iranian ability to operate the facilities of fuel enrichment

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<sup>18</sup> A. Mostashari, *Iran: Rogue State*, MIT Center for International Studies (The Audit of Conventional Wisdom), 5 September 2011, [http://web.mit.edu/cis/pdf/Audit\\_9\\_05\\_Mostashari.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/cis/pdf/Audit_9_05_Mostashari.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> M. Khalaji, “Apocalyptic Politics, On the Rationality of Iranian Politics,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy: Policy Focus # 79*, January 2008, viii.

<sup>20</sup> B. L. Bengs, “Legal Constraints upon the Use of a Tactical Nuclear Weapon Against the Natanz Nuclear Facility in Iran,” *Journal of International Law Review*, George Washington University, 40, 2008, 324.

<sup>21</sup> ISIS: Institute of Science and International Security (Report), “*Ahmadinejad Reiterates Willingness to Halt 20 Percent Enrichment*,” 22 September 2011.

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, UF<sub>6</sub>, on that date contained a total of 5860 centrifuges, some of which were possibly not being fed with UF<sub>6</sub>.”<sup>22</sup> 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 UF<sub>6</sub> 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,<sup>23</sup> 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 UF<sub>6</sub> 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

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<sup>22</sup> IAEA, *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Report: Gov/2011/29, 24 May 2011, 2 (footnote 8), <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2011/gov2011-29.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> IAEA, *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Report: Gov/2011/65, 8 November 2011, 2.



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...”<sup>24</sup>

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...”<sup>25</sup>

Gregory Jones makes startling revelations, saying, “...Iran can now produce the 20 kg of HEU needed for a nuclear weapon in about two months time, should it decides to do so.”<sup>26</sup> A dispassionate critique of Jones statement would lead us to see the flaw in making assumptions, that IAEA has made nowhere. Jones speculation has also been contradicted by some alert experts while commenting on, “...his study on breakout timelines at the Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant (FEP) in Iran. Jones maintains that Iran could fabricate 20 kg of weapon-grade uranium (WGU)—enough for one nuclear weapon—in two months in a breakout scenario at Natanz, while ISIS estimates that such a scenario would take at least six months.”<sup>27</sup> When independent sources, IAEA is one, are brought forward and they do not support the evidence, both possibilities

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<sup>24</sup> *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 10.

<sup>26</sup> G. S. Jones, *An In-Depth Examination of Iran’s Centrifuge Enrichment Program and its Efforts to Acquire Nuclear Weapons*, NPEC-Non-proliferation Policy Education Centre, 9 August 2011.

<sup>27</sup> D. Albright and C. Walrond, *Debunking Gregory Jones Again*, ISIS Report, 27 October 2011.

have to be accommodated in the same berth, hypothesising, Iran would soon possess a nuclear weapon or it may not have it at all. Obtaining discrepancy between the two hypotheses thus hardly permits bridging the credibility gap for carving out a legitimate pretext to attack its installations through military might of US and/or Israel. However, it is clear that Iran has found it extremely complex to have answers for two queries. First, why its massive outlay of nuclear installations and plans to construct many more, lack the show of bench mark or destination to the international community, to which it is engaged in her pursuits. If it was other than military rendezvous, nothing could stop Iran to divulge the details. Second, even if one disregards the preceding query, Iran has no answer to soothe the stakeholders' ire if questioned, why she is stockpiling LEU.

In all probability, these limitations are in Iranian notice and hence she is likely to shift the debate gear conveniently from intentions about military dimension of her nuclear capability to the transparency deficit. Remaining ambiguous and non-committal about developing nuclear weapon, Iran has some effective pivots to contest the dispute through symmetrical and asymmetrical application criteria of NPT safeguards in the past to expose the blatant discrimination of the actors against her and stand tall, as a last resort, on morals. However, some support coming to Iran from the West may not necessarily be because of Iranian lustrous tirades but the neutral world's sympathy for the global peace in particular that may not approve of a rather risky option. Daniel Larison concludes his article, saying, "We can hope that the (US) administration will opt for containment rather than war...because it does not pose the threat that Iran hawks claim that it does."<sup>28</sup>

### **What Inspires Iran to Go Nuclear and Intransigent?**

The question, what are the drivers that force Iran to clinch nuclear status could be summarized which would remain open to informed debates.

- Iran feels constrained to develop nuclear technology as an alternative energy source and that some powers are out to brand it 'rogue state' though NPT safe guards apply to all and sundry. As regards maintainability of NPT, "To sustain—much less strengthen, this 'advantaged' minority must ensure that the majority sees it as beneficial and fair. The only way to achieve this is to enforce compliance universally, not selectively; including the obligations the

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<sup>28</sup> D. Larison, *Reasons Not to Attack Iran*, The American Conservatives, 9 November 2011, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/larison/2011/11/09/reasons-not-to-attack-iran>.

nuclear states have taken on themselves.”<sup>29</sup> Such statements do augment Iranian logic.

- For quite some time, during Saddam Hussein era, Iran had been haunted by the spectre of looming Iraqi nuclear weapons. The assessment then was, “Iraq poses the most obvious and direct security threat justifying an Iranian effort to acquire a balancing nuclear capability.”<sup>30</sup>
- Iran is either threatened or inspired by Israel, Pakistan, India and North Korean precedence of achieving nuclear capability in that gradation though Iran has not spoken specifically against these countries except Israel.
- Iran would slip to low rated state if the privilege of acquiring nuclear weapon or technology is denied to it.
- Iran needs the nuclear capability to defend its regime, more so when it has to counter US/Israeli threat of assault. “Against the back ground of war in Afghanistan and US and Israeli rhetoric about eradicating terrorists and the states that sponsor them, Rafsanjani invoked a hypothetical Muslim nuclear capability. Importantly he seemed to posit such a capability as a second strike deterrent against pre-emptive attacks by Israel or US against Iran.”<sup>31</sup>
- About three decades of US ‘sanctions’ spree against Iran has left the Iranian leadership with little choice but to match the public ire through such tools of defiance. At the same time, Iran stokes hatred for US and Israel among its masses that acts as a bonding factor for its people while enduring the hardships accruing due to economic noose, US and allies are tightening persistently around Iran.
- Iran is resolutely portraying itself as the champion of Muslims’ cause and insinuates about Middle Eastern actors as lackeys of the West for their lack of will to share her pursuits of defeating the Zionist state.

### **Elements Acting Against Military Options to Denuclearise Iran:**

The moment IAEA releases the inspection reports, Iran perceives, its nuclear programme is branded as universal menace and the Western world gets busy in rattling incessant threats, how to punish Iran. Wider worries lurk for them when the impact of nuclear Iran is seen critically. Nuclear Iran would threaten Israel, US and European security interests,

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<sup>29</sup> G. Perkovich, J. Mathews, J. Cirincione, R. Gottemoeller, J. Wolfsthal, *UNIVERSAL COMPLIANCE: A Strategy for Nuclear Security*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace-Study, March 2005, 35.

<sup>30</sup> G. Perkovich, *Dealing With Iran’s Nuclear Challenge*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Study, 28 April 2003, 8.

<sup>31</sup> *Dealing With Iran’s Nuclear Challenge*, 6.

harden some Arabs' position in future peace negotiations, increase militancy and embolden hard liners. Meir Dagan, Director Mossad, labelled Iran as an 'existential threat' to Israel in 2003.<sup>32</sup> The voices that plead restraint on both sides remain feeble. The point is not to absolve Iran of its weak, if not wrong, logic for staying reticent about nuclear stance but to advance an academic discussion for better comprehension of the conundrum.

### **IAEA Asymmetrical Focus**

Iran sees huge discrepancy in dealing with IAEA, that Iran thinks, is cajoled by US and Israel to focus negatively on Iran, despite Iranian endeavour to satiate IAEA teams' curiosity. Iran clearly bears on memory index how some countries went in dive for nuclear weapons acquisition but 'powers' looked the other way to collude with them in achieving the military dimension of their programmes. Iran's sense of being discriminated against exaggerates when it sees its voluntary signing of NPT emerging as an obstacle for its 'peaceful' pursuits while others, not having signed NPT have become standard-bearers of peace despite acquiring huge stocks of nuclear arsenal clandestinely. "A nuclear Iran would also erode Israel strategic edge... Israel is also widely understood to have an arsenal of nuclear and other weapons."<sup>33</sup> Such precedence renders near-legitimacy stamp to stockpiling any number of weapons clandestine way, raising question, is Iran simply emulating others.

### **Dichotomy in Realizing the End**

If the entire exercise by IAEA is to ensure non-proliferation through preventing, eliminating or reducing the lethal weapons and delivery means, the justice demands that all powers be subjected to IAEA safeguards, including those who devise and dictate the morals of global nuclear spectrum. Turning back from all, except Iran, makes IAEA role prone to serious dichotomy that can be challenged by any sovereign state as well as the law wizards who jealously guard the legal boundaries of the impending conflicts.

### **Retribution beyond Measure**

Threat of US and Israeli military strikes hangs on Iran for about a decade now. US posture towards Iran offers, both, carrot and stick but Iran, after

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<sup>32</sup> N. Gaouette, "Israel: Iran is Now Danger No. 1," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 28 November 2011.

<sup>33</sup> "Israel: Iran is Now Danger No. 1," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 28 November 2011.

decades of mistrust, sees only the stick, “Iran’s compliance with the NPT would remove US nuclear threat and thus provide a potential incentive for Iran to forego developing nuclear weapons.”<sup>34</sup> Israel has graded Iranian nuclear venture as an ‘existential threat’ to her security parameters. It has been recommended, “Project Daniel boldly advises that Israel take certain prompt initiatives in removing existential threats.”<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, looking northeast, North Korea not only ditched NPT in 2003 but also continued its nuclear weapon development. Conversely, Iran perceives, the two nuclear powers, US and Israel, are hurling threats of military aggression on Iran against all norms of international law, relevant to the sovereign states.

### **NPT Interpretation**

Iran interprets NPT provisions to its advantage, anchoring its argument on Article IV of the treaty that permits the member states to develop research, produce and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. In other words, when Iran has stood firm on its claims that have not been proved wrong by material evidence, her nuclear venture is afforded the requisite legitimacy of accessing, acquiring and developing nuclear technology. Until IAEA places concrete proofs before the UN, Iran emphasises, no power has the prerogative to launch military strikes against her nuclear facilities. Should this option have been employed as moral equivalent since early sixties, though NPT does not speak of employing ‘force’ against the defaulting countries, the precedence-merit as well as the desire to seek global peace through forced compliance would have been in order. As regards US, Joseph Cirincione comments, “Now US policy is based on different assumption. It seeks to knock of evil regimes seeking these deadly arsenals while tolerating—even encouraging—the possession by states deemed responsible.”<sup>36</sup> The spectre of military strikes presents a strange paradox. When the objectives of IAEA aim at seeking non-proliferation for a safer world, the launching of military operation against Iran to knock out its suspected nuclear arsenal that has

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<sup>34</sup> L. Davis, J. Martini, A. Nader, D. D. Kaye, J. Quinlivan, P. Steinberg, *Iran’s Nuclear Future, Critical US Policy Choices*, RAND-Project Air Force (RAND Corporation, 2011), 21.

<sup>35</sup> L. R. Beres, “Israel’s Uncertain Strategic Future,” *Parameters*, US Army War College Journal, Spring 2007, 38. At page 40 of the same paper, the research group suggests even lavish retribution against sovereign states, maintaining, ‘Under certain circumstances similar forms of Israeli nuclear deterrence should be directed against enemy states that threaten “existential harms” through the use of biological weapons’. Does it justify the legal regime of International Relations, is a moot point.

<sup>36</sup> J. Cirincione, “Iran and Israel Nuclear Weapons,” *The Globalist*, 11 March 2005.

the potential to spin out of control as wider conflict, means that the world is more vulnerable to IAEA newfound compliance devices.

### **Iranian Dilemma is Israel-centric**

By now, there is enough evidence available to suggest how Israel acquired nuclear weapons over decades and Iran knows it. “It goes back to President Kennedy...He pressed the Israelis to agree to US inspections of Dimona to make sure it was not run for weapons. In practice, though, the inspections, which continued after Lyndon Johnson took over, became ‘visits’ that the Israelis made sure did not come up with any incriminating information.”<sup>37</sup> Is Iran emulating the past behaviour of a state that is formidable nuclear power now? A plausible justification can be deduced for the lack of US interest at that time in meticulous implementation of her policy. US was in thick of Cold War when larger nuclear threats were inclined to ensnare the world peace and Israel was a small speck in the big scheme of global nuclear regime. What follows from above however is that, in Iran’s reckoning, despite the knowledge of such lamentable oversights, if Israel is absolved of the burden of responsibility and the nuclear default, Iran finds a cause to persist in her effort? Yet if Iran were struck militarily, the neutral world would stand clear that symmetry of application of IAEA safeguards never warranted such a dangerous reprisal against Iran, not because Iran deserved any concession but because addition of some states during the past four decades as a wielder of nuclear weapons has not threatened world peace in spite of them.

### **Threat of Regime Change**

Iran has remained under constant threat of regime change that George W. Bush applied against Afghanistan, Iraq and later in Libya by NATO. In case of Iraq, the pretexts to launch military offensives have eventually turned out to be baseless at an exorbitant cost of human losses and lingering misery that would drub their future generations for decades. To a question General Anthony Zinni said, “Yes, in my view, it was a blunder....It wasn’t going to be a pie-in-the-sky welcome in the streets with flowers.”<sup>38</sup> George W. Bush admission should shudder the world when he was heard saying, “...Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction

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<sup>37</sup> V. Gilinsky, *Sometimes We Don’t Want to Know: Kissinger and Nixon Finesse Israel’s Bomb*, NPEC Stanford Seminar, 4 August 2011. <http://www.npolicy.org/article.php?>

<sup>38</sup> A. Zinni (Gen), *Former Bush Envoy Centcom Chief Calls Iraq war a Blunder*, MSNBC TV (Interview to Mathew), 25 May 2011, [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5060782/ns/msnbc\\_tv-hardball\\_with\\_chris\\_matthews](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5060782/ns/msnbc_tv-hardball_with_chris_matthews).

and had ‘nothing’ to do with 9/11.”<sup>39</sup> About Donald Rumsfeld, a reviewer of his book comments, “I mention his book to illustrate that authors can and do mix artful apology into their apologia as a deliberate rhetorical technique. By admitting to venial mistakes, they hope to gain credibility later in defending their whoppers.”<sup>40</sup> In Iran case, indirectly there have been clear efforts by the external actors to destabilize Iran internally and substitute clerics-dominated government with a secular one. Having known their intentions, Iran has dug in more heels in defiance to secure political mileage at home despite colossal loss to its economy and image in the West. With extreme tension, prevailing between US/Israel and Iran, particularly in the backdrop of recent Iranian threat to block the Strait of Hormuz, there has remained no room for the conduct of diplomacy that is so crucial in the conflict resolution processes. Iran goes even far to accuse US foreign policy, taken as hostage by the Zionists.

#### **Plea of Resolving the Conflicts**

While seeking non-proliferation scenario, resolve regional conflicts at priority. It would deny a cause to Iran for its threatening rhetoric if peace in Middle East were restored through resolution of a multi-dimensional conflict that hinges on Palestinians and other Arabs’ territories captured by Israel. The latest round of talks carry a streak of hope and wisdom appears to have been recognised. David Makovsky observes, “The potential collapse of the latest negotiations should not stop the United States and its partners from pressing for further concessions from both sides.”<sup>41</sup> In addition, some studies recommend leading nuclear powers to embrace a role that could reach for the core issue i.e. nuclear proliferation, “The unrealistic demand that India, Israel and Pakistan...give up their weapons and join the NPT as non-nuclear states should be put aside.”<sup>42</sup> The irony is that geo-political designs and ‘grand strategy’ considerations of some actors have become weightier than impending threat of nuclear war that ‘powers’ are inclined to accept. Analysing US flawed foreign policy in Middle East, Michael Moran maintains, “US President Barack Obama finds himself with the results of

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<sup>39</sup> A. Goodman, “President Bush Admits Iraq Had No WMDs and ‘Nothing’ to Do With 9/11,” *Democracy Now*, Interview, 22 August 2006.

<sup>40</sup> L. J. Matthews, Colonel, “Known and Unknown: A Memoir,” Review in *Parameters*, US Army War College Quarterly, Spring 2011, p. 150.

<sup>41</sup> D. Makovsky, *Israeli-Palestinian Talks Falter, But Modest Steps Still Possible*, Policy Alert’ Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 27 January 2012.

<sup>42</sup> *Dealing With Iran’s Nuclear Challenge*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Study, 28 April 2003, 42.

a mess decades in making and taking fire from some of the very Washington insiders who engineered this disaster.”<sup>43</sup> Conversely, Iran would not miss to register adversaries’ designs and thus her race to find refuge under nuclear shelter shall go on incessantly to compensate for its imbalance of power vis-à-vis Israel. Leon E. Panetta, US Secretary Defense addressed the issue squarely when he spoke with dispassionate clarity from the US podium (excerpts), “In addition, Iran’s continued drive to develop nuclear capabilities, including troubling enrichment activities ... and its continued support to groups like Hezbollah, Hamas, and other terrorist organisations make clear that the regime in Tehran remains a very grave threat to all of us...Yet we recognize that Israel’s security cannot be achieved by its military arsenal alone. It also depends on the security and stability of the region...”<sup>44</sup> Any observer could pick up his speech quintessence that affords a great manoeuvre space to the parties for conduct of forward looking diplomacy, which is woefully absent. If there are lessons for Iran to draw, some are there for Israel as well. It remains to be seen, whose heart ‘the Secretary’ has struck.

### **Conclusion:**

For Iran, it is imperative to view the regional as well as global nuclear environments more pragmatically by not giving chance to the powers that are inclined to isolate her. Iran has to scramble for proving its non-nuclear weapon status-legitimacy, otherwise, its Muslim neighbours, holding their breath until now, might become keener than US and Israel to see Iran denuclearised. Kayhan Barzegar notes, “Fear of Iraq’s fading Arab identity has, for instance, prompted Saudi Arabia to be more involved...”<sup>45</sup> A credible report suggested, “Future Iranian demonstrations of its nuclear capabilities that reinforce perceptions of its intent and ability to develop nuclear weapons potentially would prompt additional states in the region to pursue their own nuclear weapons programs.”<sup>46</sup> If Middle East has slept by Israeli nukes for about half a

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<sup>43</sup> M. Moran, “US Foreign Policy is Hamstrung in Persian Gulf,” *Global Post*, 22 March 2011, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/opinion/columnists/110321/bahrain-saudi-arabia-us-foreign-policy>.

<sup>44</sup> L. E. Panetta, *New Strategic Challenges in the Middle East*, address to Brookings Saban Forum 2011, 5 December 2011. The author would like to thank Brookings Saban Forum for having alerted him well on time to listen to the Secretary’s speech live.

<sup>45</sup> K. Barzegar, “Iran Foreign Policy Strategy after Saddam,” *The Washington Quarterly*, 33:1, January 2010, 175.

<sup>46</sup> NIC: National Intelligence Council (US) report, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*, US Government Printing Office, Washington DC, 2008, 62.



century, would it be prepared to do so in case of Iran, is a matter that needs Iranian brainstorming earnestly?

Iran must grant Israel an iota of worry when Iran is heaping threats on Israel. Israeli capability to absorb human losses is a known vulnerability that she can ill-afford. The demographic vulnerability is perhaps the major driver behind Israeli military strike proposition, more so when she is emboldened by knocking out earlier Iraqi and Syrian nuclear facilities.

Israel is demonstrating no less obduracy about regional issues that would keep her away from a large segment of global population (Muslims) if her urge, under the shadow of its military might, for acquiring and absorbing extended territories dominates her desire to build peace in the Middle East. Emphasis must shift honestly and wholeheartedly to conflicts resolution to pre-empt them and not the military strike-like ventures that would rather nourish the conflict.

Instead of criticising, Iran must co-operate and recognise IAEA's role as commendable that seems to have shown tremendous professionalism as well as patience. IAEA has also to ensure symmetry in application of set of rules with absolute impartiality. Speculating about Iranian intentions while not finding credible evidence of military dimension of Iranian nuclear programme during inspections would mean IAEA is vulnerable to losing its lustre of neutrality.

Display of responsibility should be the hallmark of exterior manoeuvres by the parties to the dispute. As it is, Iran appears in frantic race to win the label of 'kleptomaniac' but if it manages to absolve itself of the blemishes, it would turn the table on Israel as well as US. Any side that shows munificence to give peace a chance wins.

*Fickle Peace and Devastating Middle East Nuclear Tangle*