

## **Implications of a nuclear-armed Iran on the Middle East and Pakistan**

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### **Preface**

**T**he Middle East is known as the birthplace of all the ‘Abrahamic religions’; Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Besides the religious divide, which has shaped the conflict-ridden political demography of the Middle East, it is also considered as to be the critical node in global economy, for it produces bulk of the world oil, considered essential to keep the engine of global economy running.

The politics of oil and religion have made the Middle East the most focused and troubled region of the world, especially for the global and economic giants, since the end of Second World War. The long unresolved dispute between Israel and Palestine has become one of the most dominant causes of Muslim rage<sup>1</sup> which continuously fuels anti-America and anti-West sentiments amongst Muslims due to the unjust and partisan support extended to the state of Israel by West in general and America in particular. This growing Muslim rage has been perceived by the West as an immediate threat not only to the pro-West governments of Middle Eastern countries but also to their supreme economic and vital strategic interests in the region.

These perceptions, along with the memories of the oil crisis of 1973, helped shape U.S. aspirations in the region and its quest to establish hegemony and also physical control of oil in the Middle East. The year 1979 was a very eventful year in this regard when not only the USSR invaded Afghanistan but the unfolding of the Iranian revolution was also witnessed.

More recently, the Middle East has become the focal point in global politics for another important issue and that is the Iranian nuclear programme. The concerns on the Iranian nuclear programme are also shared by some of the other regional countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Kuwait besides United States, Israel and some of the European countries. Some analysts in Pakistan also fear that a nuclear Iran would become a dominant power in the Middle East thus significantly

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compromising Pakistani position and interests in the region. Others argue that a nuclear Iran would immediately take nuclear pressure off Pakistan and may also add to the latter's stability.

An attempt would be made in this paper to dispassionately and impartially analyse the Western and Israeli viewpoints on the Iranian nuclear issue, the concerns of other regional countries and, finally, the implications for Pakistan and the region.

## **Introduction**

Pakistan and Iran have enjoyed very good relations since 1947 once Iran became the first country to recognize Pakistan. However, after the Iranian Revolution, these relations could not keep the original warmth due to sectarian issues and Pakistani support for the Taliban. Further deterioration in the bilateral relations came from the proliferation episode of Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan network whereby both felt betrayed by each other.<sup>2</sup> Since then, Pakistan's and Iran's nuclear programmes have come under immense scrutiny by the Western governments and the media.

General Musharraf's decision to crack down on the militant organizations that had been nurtured for more than two decades as state policy, resulted in a severe and violent backlash which was beyond the government's ability to control or contain. The rising level of violence in society and a significant support for these organizations raised apprehensions in some of the Western capitals that Pakistani nuclear weapons faced a risk of either falling into the hands of non-state actors or of unauthorized use. These apprehensions have been followed by a consistent smearing campaign including plans to seize them under extreme circumstances.<sup>3</sup> The situation has compounded since the U.S. May 2, raid in Abbottabad which resulted in death of Osama bin Laden.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the possibility of an Israeli/U.S. strike on Iranian nuclear installations has frequently been discussed within the Western media, governments and institutions.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, these common denominators, along with the energy crisis in Pakistan, can become the basis for a stronger and durable partnership and relationship between Iran and Pakistan.

## **Pakistan-Iran relations – historical overview**

Iran was the first country in 1947 to have recognized Pakistan followed by Reza Shah Pahlavi's visit to Pakistan in March 1950 as the

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first head of State to visit the country. That laid the foundations of a cooperative relationship and formal acceptance of the borders. The establishment of the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) organisation between Iran, Turkey and Pakistan in 1964 further strengthened the ties between these states. Prior to this arrangement, both Pakistan and Iran became part of the Western military alliance, CENTO in 1955.<sup>6</sup>

During the 1965 war, Iran not only morally helped Pakistan but also provided Pakistan with material help in the shape of oil. Iran also declared the Indian attack on Pakistan as an act of 'aggression'. Similarly, after the 1971 war, the Shah indicated that an attempt to further dismember Pakistan would force Iran to intervene against any such attempt.<sup>7</sup>

However, the situation changed dramatically once General Zia-ul-Haq, after coming to power, visited Iran thrice from 1977 to September 1978, just months before the fall of the ailing regime of Shah<sup>8</sup> to show solidarity which didn't go well with the revolutionaries succeeding Shah in 1979. The subsequent irritants between Iran and Pakistan emerged out of Islamabad's lack of support for Iran over the U.S. embassy hostage issue and the Iran-Iraq war, various sectarian issues, Pakistan's support to Taliban<sup>9</sup> in Afghanistan and, finally, Pakistan's tilt towards Saudi Arabia and the U.S. in a manner which was not considered very favourable by the Iranians.

As a result, trade and economic relations between the two States also suffered, thus bringing down their bilateral trade to just 155 million dollars annually. However, since the fall of the Taliban regime, the situation has improved as from 2002 onward, Pakistan started to import electricity from Iran for Balochistan province and annual trade also increased to 376 million dollars.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, there have been renewed calls from Iranian authorities to start a new era of bilateral cooperation.<sup>11</sup> Pakistan, unfortunately, has been reluctant to respond to these calls in a positive manner, fearing the annoyance of the U.S. government.

### **West and its perceptions of a nuclear armed Iran**

Over the past five years or so, the Iranian nuclear programme has dominated the global debate as one of the foremost issue. During whole of

this course, Israel has repeatedly been issuing threats to use force if Iran moves ahead to develop nuclear weapons. From time to time but the Europeans and Americans have also been showing their concerns on the Iranian nuclear issue. The U.S. has also threatened to use force if it becomes inevitable that Iran is on the road to develop nuclear weapons. Europeans on the other hand emphasize that their concerns regarding nuclear proliferation are not Iran-specific but are aimed to discourage all the future proliferation trends.<sup>12</sup>

Europeans and Americans prefer different approaches to handle the Iranian nuclear issue. Europeans stress on a mixed approach of diplomacy and incentives while the U.S. obsessed with the use of power relies more on sanctions, coercion and use of force if other options fail to force Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions.<sup>13</sup> However, the U.S. is mindful of the consequences arising after such an action but is still willing to go ahead if deemed necessary. The Europeans are not engage in a direct confrontation with Iran and therefore have less to worry if Iran acquires a nuclear capability. Their primary concern is in the real sense is the devastating blow to their already dwindling economy if there is a military confrontation between Israel and Iran or U.S. and Iran resulting in cessation of the vital oil supplies for global economy.<sup>14</sup>

Another interesting point in whole of this escalatory scenario is, as to which extent the Europeans and the regional states would be willing to confront or oppose the U.S. and the Israeli action. Most are of the opinion that in case of any such confrontation, the Europeans and other regional states would ultimately have to tow the U.S. and Israeli line. The opposition from the European and other regional states would simply remain restricted to some political statements condemning the action with almost an insignificant effect.

West is also apprehensive that a nuclear capable Iran would embolden the Islamic resistance and militant organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas which could adopt a more confrontational approach towards Israel. Consequently, any conventional conflict between Israel and these militant organizations could eventually drag other regional states including the nuclear capable Iran into the conflict, thus possibly acquiring a nuclear dimension.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, the acquisition of nuclear-weapon status by Iran could result in emergence of new nuclear states in a domino effect thus resulting in a possible nuclear arms race in the region. Such a scenario would not only create new sectarian schisms within the regional states but would also

tilt the strategic equilibrium of the region in favour of Iran, thus making it impossible for the great powers to manage the situation in the Middle East on their terms.

### **The Iran-Israel caldron**

Israel and Iran in past have enjoyed very cordial relations. But the nature of relationship between Iran and Israel has changed diametrically since the Iranian revolution in 1979. However, despite severing the relations, still Israel and Iran were never perceived each other a threat that must be confronted. This situation changed in 2005 once Mr. Ahmadinejad was elected as president of Iran. His rhetorical statements regarding the holocaust and destruction

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of Israel are taken as an existential threat by Israel.<sup>16</sup> Israel lacks the strategic depth and due to its small size it even can't afford a single nuclear strike which puts it in a unique dilemma of a “one-bomb state.”<sup>17</sup> Israel avows to prevent the holocaust conditions in future at all cost, which is also known as to be its policy of “Never Again” thus justifying the policy of pre-emption to any existential threat within or outside the region.<sup>18</sup>

Some analysts in west believe that Iranian nuclear programme can't be tamed through diplomacy, covert sabotage operations, economic sanctions and cyber attacks etc, as these measures in past have failed. The assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists blamed on CIA and Mossad and virus attacks like Stuxnet didn't knocked out Iranian nuclear programme. Rather it provided Iran with more experience to deal with such eventualities and plan for alternatives and at the most it just caused a temporary slowdown.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, for some of the Israeli politicians and defence officials, the only viable way to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapon capability is through pre-emptive strikes. In their opinion such an action must be taken before Iran actually develops such a capability or reaches to a point of no return.<sup>20</sup> For these officials the right time to strike Iran is approaching fast because Iran soon might acquire the capability to strike Israel with nuclear capable missiles.<sup>21</sup>

Tel Aviv has therefore hinted at striking Iran even if the U.S. at some stage abandons Israel to deal with the issue by itself due to political or

economic compulsions. Israeli military commanders are also convinced although it is a difficult task but after deliberate planning and repeated rehearsals, it possibly can be executed.<sup>22</sup> Since 2009, annual civil defence exercise in Israel has now become a regular feature and is meant to handle a situation arising from such an attack in which other states and non-state actors like Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria and Iran becomes part of the conflict.<sup>23</sup>

### **Concerns of Gulf Cooperation Council states**

Regional states in the Middle East like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Egypt, the UAE, Jordan and Oman are equally apprehensive of a nuclear-armed Iran as of the West.<sup>24</sup> They fear that a nuclear armed Iran would deepen the already fragile Shiite-Sunni equation in the region and would also swing the balance of power in favour of Iran resulting in a possible nuclear arms race. More so, Iran would also come in a strong position to start dictating its own terms on various global and regional issues.

Another of these states' concern is that a nuclear Iran may encourage the Shiite population in mostly Sunni dominated states to resort to violent means for regime change amid the sweeping Arab Spring thus destabilizing domestic situation in an already fragile region. However, they are also apprehensive of the consequences as a result of a military strike on Iran.<sup>25</sup> Some of the reports published in western media suggest that Saudis have been taken on board by the Israelis in case they decide to strike Iranian nuclear installations and therefore, Saudis have already given a green signal to Israel for using its airspace to strike Iran.<sup>26</sup>

There appears to be an unspoken unanimity of views amongst the Europeans, the Arabs and the Americans that Iran must be prevented from becoming a nuclear state, and if diplomacy fails, other options like sanctions or even a military strike should be used to prevent the country from achieving nuclear weapon capability.

### **Iranian interests in the region and Pakistan**

Iranian ambitions in the region and the world are rooted in its 5000-year-old historical aspirations. Iranian intentions most of the time remains undefined for the reason that they at times become inseparable from their political and religious aspirations but on other times would completely defy these. Iranian interests in the region and in Pakistan may vary according to Iranian capabilities, situations and intentions as they don't

follow a universal pattern. Their policy objectives can be enumerated under the following headings:

***Revolutionary aspirations or realpolitik***

Iran, although initially poised to export its Shiite ideology through revolution across the region, has reconciled with the reality after Khomeini's death. The post-Khomeini Iran is not much different from any other democratic state, with a policy of "neither East nor West",<sup>27</sup> while serving its national interest and boosting its national image through diplomacy, economics and display of hard power.<sup>28</sup> While the internal political hierarchical system of Iran is dominated by religious theocracy; in essence, the Iranian state political system pivots around the modern democratic values and thus except for unusual circumstances it pursues its national policy under the famous jargon of realpolitik.

***Regional dominance and global prominence***

Iran has two main objectives in the region; first to seek global prominence in order to sustain regional dominance and second, to protect the Shiite population living in other states under the dominance of Sunni oligarchs.<sup>29</sup> Its strategically important location in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz provides it with a unique capability to oversee the world's busiest oil shipping route. However, Iranian capability to block the Strait of Hormuz remains susceptible due to the U.S. presence in the region. However, Iranian capability to disrupt the oil supply from the gulf even for limited period of time is acknowledged and its devastating impact for the global economy also remains beyond any question.

***The Nuclear pursuit***

The debate over Iranian nuclear aspirations revolves around various propositions. There seems to be no consensus in the West as to what are the actual Iranian nuclear ambitions. For some analysts, Iranians are pragmatic and farsighted people who are wary of the depleting Gulf energy resources and therefore are looking for an alternative in shape of nuclear energy. Therefore, they don't find any reason of getting concerned about Iranian nuclear intentions especially once Iran is permitting the IAEA to do its job. Some other analysts argue that the Iranian nuclear programme is mainly peaceful but they have purposefully kept it suspicious in order to use it as a bargaining chip and gaining advantageous position against Americans. So till the time Iran is cooperating with the international community, there is no need to be worried. However, there

are other conservative thinkers who actually believe that Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapon programme and it actually wants to develop a nuclear device which would enable it to dominate the entire region.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Dominating the Palestinian-Israeli conflict***

The nature of Iranian conflict with Israel is religious and not political. The current Iranian form of government is the manifestation of the religious philosophy enshrined in the Shiite doctrine professed by Imam Khomeini within the purview of the Mahdi tradition.<sup>31</sup> According to this religious doctrine the root of all the evils and ills is embedded within the folds of Western modernity whose inspirational source can be traced back in the seeds of Zionism. Thus according to this belief, it is actually the Zionists philosophy which has resulted in the American imperialism.<sup>32</sup>

The contemporary trends indicate that American imperialism might get weakened over a period of time thus losing its significance for Iran, however, the Zionist philosophy in the region is likely to prevail and so would its conflict with the Islamic regime in Iran. Thus, the Iranian support for militants groups like Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad etc., would continue to exist till the time either a peaceful solution to the problem is found or a radical change in the ideology of Iran comes through, both of which have a remote possibility. Therefore, Iran would continue to adopt measures which enable it to secure a dominating position in the ongoing conflict till the time some peaceful solution to the conflict is not found.

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### ***Relations vis-à-vis its neighbouring/regional countries***

Iran has a diverse approach of maintaining relations with its neighbouring countries with a mix of pragmatism and ideological aspirations.<sup>33</sup> The initial thrust of sectarian motivation guiding its foreign policy has been replaced by a more realistic and nationalistic approach.<sup>34</sup> Although Iran does maintain an approach of supporting the Shiite populations in other regional countries, its principle motive to maintain bilateral relationships with other states is to secure its national and economic interest in the region. However, it does give priority to those



states where the domestic public opinion is considered as to be favourable towards Iran. The diverse kind of relationship which it maintains with India and Saudi Arabia is just a case in point.<sup>35</sup>

### **Implications of a nuclear Iran on the region and Pakistan**

Israel and the U.S. have repeatedly reiterated that a nuclear capable Iran will not be accepted at any cost and to prevent Iran from acquiring any such capability, all options including a military strike, remains part of the strategy. The Israeli position of striking Iranian nuclear installations is much older than the current hardliner regime. However, they are not sure if they would be able to handle a situation arising from such an eventuality or it would prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapon capability, as and when it decides to do so, and if there is any other way to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, short of complete annihilation of its conventional military and nuclear capabilities.

A surgical air or missile strike with a huge economic and political cost would be just good enough to retard the Iranian nuclear pursuit towards nuclear weapons production, if it desires so, merely by few years and the strikes will have to be repeated after every few years to keep preventing Iran from reacquiring the nuclear capability.

Some analysts, therefore, believe that coercion is not the best option to prevent Iran from becoming nuclear and rather a different approach of multilateral diplomacy, involving other regional countries like Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, etc should be adopted, preferably including some security assurances to convince Iran that acquiring nuclear weapons and not complying with the NPT obligations would be counterproductive.<sup>36</sup> Such an option however, seems highly unlikely due to the profound influence of the Israel lobby on American policy and decision makers which is not in favour of exercising any diplomatic option on Iranian nuclear issue.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, according to some analysts, Iran would eventually acquire a nuclear weapon capability, and therefore West must brace itself for a scenario in which it will have to deal with a new nuclear power in the Middle East. There could be both negative and positive implications for the region and Pakistan if Iran acquires a nuclear weapon capability, which are as follows:

#### **Negative implications**

##### ***Regional hegemony and eminence***

As already noted, Iran has two main objectives in the region; the first to establish a hegemony or eminence in the region, to oversee the world

busiest oil supply route through the Strait of Hormuz, and second to promote Shiite interests in other states of the region where Shiite population exist in significant numbers. Some states in the region are apprehensive that after Iran becomes nuclear, the hardliner regime would use the psychological and political weight of nuclear weapons to establish its hegemony in the region.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, during the time of Shah, Iran had established very cordial relations with the United States and Israel and with their support Iran had become a dominant player in the region.<sup>39</sup> The Iranian ability to keep a watch over the global oil supply route, along with its nuclear capability would definitely raise its international stature and bargaining position in the world.

### ***Expanding the Shiite influence in the region***

A nuclear Iran might reassert its old intentions of expanding the Shiite influence to other parts of the region, which could destabilize the region besides compounding the sectarian divide. The Iranian spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, had hoped immediately after the revolution in Iran that this revolution would soon be spilling over to other parts of the region and to facilitate that all soft measures like propaganda and propagation etc should be exercised.<sup>40</sup> States like Lebanon, Syria, Bahrain, Qatar, Iraq, Kuwait, Yemen and the UAE etc where significant numbers of Shiites are residing are apprehensive that Iranian revolutionary aspirations would be galvanized if Iran acquires a nuclear weapon capability. These states are fearful that a nuclear Iran could encourage the Shiite to resort to adopt such measures which in their perceptions would pave the way for the revolution with a nuclear armed Iran at their back. In any such case the political, sectarian and economic cost would be immense for whole of the region.

### ***Shiite-Sunni rift***

The Iranian endeavours to reaffirm the Shiite influence within the region after acquiring nuclear capability would put it in a confrontational mode with other countries especially Saudi Arabia. This could seriously compound the existing Shiite-Sunni rift in the region with serious implications for Pakistan as well. Pakistan enjoys good relations with the Sunni states in the Middle Eastern along with the Iran and thus could face a hard choice in terms of its alignments between Shiite Iran and the rest of the Sunni Middle Eastern states. This could disturb the already fragile domestic divisions within Pakistan between Shiite and Sunni sects, thus resulting in internal and external instability.

***Serious blow to NPT***

A nuclear Iran could deliver a very serious and devastating blow to the global non-proliferation regime. Some states within the region, like Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, UAE and Saudi Arabia etc could scarp NPT and may decide to resume their nuclear programmes. This could encourage states in other volatile regions, like South Korea and Japan etc to pursue the course for acquisition of nuclear weapons thus resulting in the collapse of Non-proliferation regime. Such a scenario would not only make the NPT redundant but also result in a global nuclear arms race thus threatening the world with an unprecedented risk of a global nuclear war.

***Strengthening of non-state actors***

If Iran acquires the nuclear weapon capability, that could strengthen the non-state actors and militant groups like Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad etc to confront Israel in a more violent manner. This would increase the prospects of a regional war in Middle East which could have devastating implications especially along with the Arab Spring which has already made the region extremely volatile. Some other militant groups forming part of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan could also increasingly resort to similar strategy. Such a scenario would intensify the conflict in Afghanistan, thus significantly raising the level of violence across the region from Pakistan to Palestine. As a result Pak-Iran relations would also be profoundly affected in this power struggle game.

***Escalation of conflict with Israel***

Iran is currently engaged with Israel and United States in a bitter diplomatic row. While the Iranian conflict with the United States has political dimensions, its nature of conflict with Israel is within a religious paradigm. Iran not only denies Israel's right to exist, like many other Muslim countries, but the ruling Iranian theocracy also believes that the state of Israel would be destroyed at their hands after the arrival of their hidden twelfth Imam, known as Mahdi.

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According to their belief, the world has to reach a certain point of chaos and turbulence before the arrival of Mahdi, and therefore, either a conflict with Israel or any other cataclysmic event of equal proportions

would pave the way for the return of Mahdi,<sup>41</sup> who would then conquer the world from East to West and establish a Shiite rule across the globe. It is quite possible that if Iran acquires a nuclear bomb, it may use it on Israel to create favourable conditions, according to their perceptions, for the return of their awaited messiah.

On the other hand, Israel also considers a nuclear-armed Iran as an existential threat<sup>42</sup> mainly because of its small size and lack of strategic depth which makes it as a one-bomb state.<sup>43</sup> These fears have convinced Israel that pre-emption is the only way to ensure its own survival against a nuclear-capable Iran. Israeli military commanders have worked on various contingencies regarding striking Iran and are of the opinion that although it is a difficult task, but still can be successfully executed after necessary planning and rehearsals.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Looming risk of a major or a nuclear war***

If the situation on Iranian nuclear issue is not successfully handled through diplomacy and soft measures, a confrontation either between Israel and Iran or between the United States and Iran, involving other non-state actors like Hamas and Hezbollah fighting on behalf of Iran seems likely. After the diplomatic failure, the U.S. and Israel would try to deprive Iran of its nuclear capability by using force. Thus Iran would retaliate by attacking Israeli nuclear installations at Dimona and Nehal Soreq, which could immediately acquire a nuclear dimension thus having catastrophic consequences not only for the region but for whole of the world including Pakistan.

### **Positive implications on Pakistan and the region**

The situation in case of Iran becoming nuclear for Pakistan is however not as grim as perceived by some analysts. Pakistan is already sharing a border with two nuclear countries whose ideologies provide a complete antithesis to its own founding ideology. Along with the religious ideology, Buddhist and Hindu cultures are also very different in its nature and configuration from the Pakistani culture and society. So if still Pakistan can have very cordial relations with China besides managing its relationship with India, a nuclear capable Iran sharing similarities in religion, culture and social norms should not be perceived as a threat once going for an all out war or even a military conflict with Iran almost seems to be an inconceivable scenario.

That, however, does not imply that Pakistan should start assisting, cooperating or collaborating with Iran in its nuclear pursuit. Iran is a signatory of NPT and under the treaty obligations it does not enjoy the right of acquiring nuclear weapons. Pakistan must stick to its stance of reiterating that Iran has the right to peaceful use of nuclear technology under Article IV of NPT. However, Pakistan should openly oppose any military action or sanctions against Iran. If Iran decides to become a nuclear weapon state, it will have to abandon the NPT as per procedure in vogue and if in future such a scenario emerges, Pakistan should not take a hostile view of the situation; rather, it should accept the nuclear weapon right of Iran as a non-NPT member state. Here are some of the envisaged positive implications for Pakistan and region:

### ***Easing off pressure on Pakistan***

If Iran acquires a nuclear weapon capability, it could ease the Western pressure on Pakistan regarding its nuclear programme as a fresh debate over legitimacy of Iranian nuclear weapons would create a cushion for Pakistani nuclear programme. Moreover, Pakistan would be in a much better and stronger diplomatic position to defend its case of possessing and maintaining a nuclear arsenal. This thought of easing pressure from Pakistan<sup>45</sup> did motivate some decision makers and nuclear scientists to extend nuclear cooperation with Iran and other states, but time has proven that it was not a wise and admirable idea. It would have been much better for Pakistan had Iran developed the nuclear capability on its own.

### ***Stability in Afghanistan***

Pakistan and Iran already have enjoyed a long era of good relations from 1947 to 1979. But, after the Iranian Revolution, and especially in the late 90's once Pakistan's support for anti-Shiite Taliban frustrated the Iranian government, these relations turned lukewarm. Thus, Iran turned to India, ignoring Pakistan, but over the past few years, India-Iran relations have also suffered due to India's tilt toward the U.S. and Israel.<sup>46</sup>

Of late, Pakistan and Iran have learnt some hard lessons and are confident that they will not repeat the mistakes of the 90s in shaping their policies towards Afghanistan.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, Iran's driving force behind its foreign policy has been pragmatism and not only the religious ideology.

A display of this pragmatic spirit can be seen in Palestine where hardliner Sunni militant organizations like Hamas and Islamic Jihad are

politically and financially supported by Iran against a common enemy.<sup>48</sup> Thus, if Iran becomes a nuclear weapon state, Pakistan will have to take Iran more seriously while responding to the repeated calls from Iran to strengthen the existing relations.

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This co-operative engagement could provide a conducive environment for reaching a middle ground in Afghanistan for regional stability. Resultantly, Pakistan and Iran jointly could come in a strong bargaining position against the U.S. Moreover, cooperation between Iran and Pakistan would provide investment opportunities in economic and defence-related fields as well. The stability factor in Afghanistan would, therefore, certainly open opportunities and avenues for Pakistan, Iran and Turkey towards Central Asia which has immense energy resources.

### ***Defence and economic cooperation***

There are immense defence, industrial, agricultural and economic cooperation prospects between Iran and Pakistan. Unfortunately, Pakistan has a history of maintaining relations with other countries, especially the U.S., on emotions and an outdated notion of friendship which has repeatedly resulted in embarrassment and a sense of betrayal for Pakistan. In international politics, relations between states are based on interests and not sentimental friendships.

While the U.S. and Pakistani perception on various issues in the region like China and India are diametrically opposite due to obvious reasons, Pakistan and Iran, to a great extent, share these perceptions due to the close proximity which provides a strong basis for maintaining a durable relationship. The U.S. would not be able to maintain its physical presence in the region endlessly; therefore, Iran and Pakistan in future would have no other option but to work on a strategy of cooperation.

This cooperative relationship in defence, economic, energy, trade and industrial fields is imperative for prosperity, interdependence and cooperation in the region. Thus, if Iran becomes nuclear, such an opportunity would arrive early as not only Pakistan's dependence on the U.S. would recede, but the CIA- and Mossad-sponsored operations<sup>49</sup>

directed against Iranian government from Balochistan would also come to an end.

This cooperative relationship in defence, economy, energy, trade and the industrial field is imperative for prosperity, interdependence and cooperation in the region. However, this cooperation should not be aimed at forming an alliance directed against some regional or global power but rather to strengthen the bilateral relationship. Thus, if Iran becomes nuclear, this opportunity would arrive early as not only Pakistan's dependence on the U.S. would decrease but the CIA-sponsored operations directed against Iran from Balochistan would also come to an end.

### ***Revival of ECO***

There is a strong possibility that after Iran becomes nuclear, the regional countries, especially Turkey and Pakistan, start to rejuvenate the old ties through the almost defunct ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization). This cooperative relationship can then be further extended to other countries like China, Afghanistan and Central Asia incorporating it in the SCO (Shanghai Co-operation Organization), especially in the fields of technology and natural resources.<sup>50</sup> The Chinese are interested in economic progress and their approach towards other regional organizations like SAARC and ASEAN is based on cooperation, thus the ECO can become another such forum to enhance regional economic cooperation. That would also help Pakistan overcome its energy crisis as well.

### ***Strategic depth to Pakistan***

Unfortunately the concept of strategic depth through a stable Afghanistan often remains misperceived and misconceived in Pakistan. The phenomenon of strategic depth through a stable Afghanistan should not be translated as a synonym of territorial depth for Pakistan. Rather, it is a much deeper and a comprehensive concept which implies that a stable Afghanistan with strong economic, diplomatic and cultural ties with Pakistan would relieve Pakistan of any security concerns on its western borders. Moreover, in a war-like situation between India and Pakistan, Afghan economic and political interests would also be at stake much like those of Pakistan; it would thus also put its diplomatic weight behind the efforts to rein in the war.

An identical phenomenon of strategic depth in case of a nuclear-capable Iran becomes plausible if Iranian economic and strategic interests get embedded with Pakistani interests, thereby equally affecting Iran in an escalatory scenario. In addition to that, India would also have to consider the factor of a nuclear-capable Iran in case of a war with Pakistan which risks escalating up to the nuclear threshold. On the other hand, a war-like situation between Iran and Pakistan involving nuclear weapons is highly improbable.

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### ***Securing the nuclear programme and installations***

Pakistan and Iran are at the centre of the international diplomatic and propaganda campaigns targeting their nuclear programmes. Echoes of a military action against these installations consistently resonate in the international media and governments. This unique and common threat can become the basis of a common strategy to negotiate a treaty whereby both states should adopt a joint mechanism to counter threats directed against their nuclear installations and an attack on one would be consider an attack on the other.<sup>51</sup>

That is, a mechanism similar to that of NATO where an attack on one member state is regarded as an attack on all member states. This alliance must not be directed against some specific country but rather should be projected against a general threat directed against the nuclear installation of both the states from anywhere including states and non-state actors.

### ***Bridging the gap***

By maintaining good relations at both ends, Pakistan would have a unique opportunity of bridging the gap between Sunni and Shiite states, especially Iran and Saudi Arabia. That could further enhance Pakistani stature within the OIC (Organization of Islamic Conference).

Pakistan not only has close and very cordial relations with Saudi Arabia but also enjoys good relations with Iran. Saudi-Iranian relations, on the other hand, are not very amiable. The two countries also have a



strategic rivalry in the region. This strategic competition is further compounded with the sectarian divide between the two countries. Pakistan and Turkey can bridge the gap between the two countries as they both have good relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia at the same time. This bridging of gap can come as a result of enhanced cooperation in economic, defence and social sectors. Turkey is already playing a significant role in reducing the trust deficit between Iran and the Western countries over the nuclear issue. Therefore, such a mediatory effort has more success chances in the region. In case of any such successful mediation, Pakistan's role in the region and in the global Muslim community would be elevated.

### ***Resolution of Palestinian dispute***

Fearing the risk of a nuclear war, the U.S. and Israel may reconsider their existing policy of keeping the Palestinian issue on the back burner. In case of resolution of the Palestinian issue, the inflammatory cause fuelling the militancy and terrorism in Muslim world would cease to exist. If that happens, it could dramatically reduce the level of violence and number of terrorist acts around the world.

In such a case, a major source of anti-West sentiments would diminish and the terrorists will not be able to sell their agenda for new recruitments. Consequently, the rage of Muslims against the West may turn against the totalitarian regimes, thus resulting in a sweeping change across the Muslim world, which has just been witnessed in the form of the Arab Spring.

### ***Nuclear stability in the Middle East***

If Iran acquires the nuclear-weapon capability, that would end the Israeli nuclear hegemony in the region and would result in nuclear stability in the region.<sup>52</sup> This nuclear hegemony of Israel has enabled it to pursue a belligerent policy towards Palestinians thereby even depriving them of some basic rights and privileges. Israel pursues this policy mainly due to two reasons. First, it enjoys a conventional compatibility with its hostile Arab neighbours, and second, it deters them with its possession of the nuclear-weapons.

Thus, Israeli treatment of Palestinians comes as a result of its unequivocal power which cannot be challenged by any of the states in the region. After Iran acquires nuclear capability, the Israeli hegemony in the region would be compromised and Israel will have to adopt an even-handed approach towards Palestinians due to the fear of any confrontation

which could acquire nuclear dimension thus threatening even the existence of Israel.

## **Conclusion**

It is difficult to precisely predict what the real outcome of a nuclear-armed Iran for the world would be. Some analysts believe that more states with nuclear weapons would bring more stability in the world, and that the fear of their behaving irrationally is unfounded and overblown.<sup>53</sup> However, there are others who argue that a nuclear-armed Iran would increase its influence in the Middle East manifold, thus further intensifying the already existing rift between the Shiite and Sunni states. Therefore, that would become a source of further instability. A third group of analysts argues that a nuclear-armed Iran, at some point in future, would lead the region into a major war, possibly nuclear, involving the U.S., Israel and Iran.

**The situation for Pakistan if Iran acquires the nuclear-weapon capability will not be grim as considered by some analysts. The critical analysis of the risks and benefits indicates that Pakistan, rather than losing, would gain more if Iran acquires a nuclear-weapon capability**

None of the scenarios discussed above can be either accepted or refuted completely as all of them hold a possibility to be proven right or wrong on empirical basis. The pessimistic viewpoint, however, seems to be exaggerated by the Western media for their vested interests. The situation for Pakistan if Iran acquires the nuclear-weapon capability will not be grim as considered by some analysts. The critical analysis of the risks and benefits indicates that Pakistan, rather than losing, would gain more if Iran acquires a nuclear-weapon capability.

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