

PERCEPTIONS ON IRANIAN NUCLEAR ISSUE AND IMPLICATIONS OF INDO-US NUCLEAR DEAL

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Abstract

Iranian nuclear programme had become a political issue when an anti-West government came to power in Iran. Importantly, the U.S was the chief sponsor of Iran to access the nuclear technology and its purpose was to promote the 'Atom for Peace'. Initially, Iranian nuclear issue was only the concern of the U.S and Israel since the mid of 1990, it had support when Arab regional countries and later, European Union countries found nuclear Iran might be a danger. In 2002, IAEA interfered on Iranian nuclear issue as an investigator and then, it became the security matter of all concerned countries. After that, West began to impose multi-pronged economic sanctions on Iran. India and U.S concluded the civil nuclear agreement in 2008 since their implicit interest was on Iranian nuclear issue. The present article tries to analyse the link of Iranian nuclear issue and Indo-U.S civil nuclear deal and testify whether the nuclear deal is quid pro quo. It also discusses the divergent perception of U.S, Israel, India and Arab regional countries on Iranian nuclear issue. However, they had a similar interest that was to suspend the uranium process of Iran.

KEYWORDS: Economic Sanctions, IAEA, Indo-U.S Civil Nuclear Agreement, Iranian Nuclear Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Nuclear Proliferation Safeguards, Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

INTRODUCTION

Iranian nuclear programme and the ensued issue linked with U.S and the latter encouraged Tehran to be the part of the peaceful use of nuclear energy

to promote President Eisenhower's 'Atom for Peace Programme' in 1953. Germany, France, and Sweden made the consortium with Iran exchange the nuclear technology. U.S. was a principal sponsor of nuclear-enabled equipment to Iran among them and it stopped support when an anti-Western government came to power in Tehran in 1979. The rest of the nations continued their collaboration when revolutionary government of Iran decided to resume the nuclear enrichment programme in 1981. Since then Iranian nuclear programme became the conflicting subject between Iran, U.S. and Israel. However, after the demise of Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran found reconciliation with U.S. initiated by the non-conservative leaders in Iranian politics. Admittedly, they tried to convince the obstructing people the necessity to recommence the bilateral relation with America.

Infact, since the Islamic revolution, the regime change in Iran was underlying with U.S. policy thereby it had been looking for possible ways to accomplish its target. Obviously, Iran had bid to become a nuclear power in the region since the imperial regime but later the Reformist and Pragmatist governments had an instinct to rapprochement with U.S. therefore, Tehran retracted from the nuclear enrichment programme. It was reflected in the words of Mohammed Khatami, former president of Iran while speaking at CNN Television in New York in 1998, said, "we are not a nuclear power and do not intend to become one. We have accepted IAEA safeguards and our facilities are routinely inspected by that agency"ⁱ.

However, the tension of U.S. particularly Israel on Iranian nuclear programme did not disappear despite Khatami government assured no plan to make an atomic bomb. Their argument was that Iran had secret nuclear plants and later, it found in the Satellite images and also Mujahadeen-e- Khalq (MEK), an Iranian political-militant organisation, revealed the hidden nuclear power stations in Natanz and Arak. However, European countries were not agreed to pursue the Sanctions Act of 1996 in the complete sense because they had considerable investments in Iranian oil fields. Therefore, EU-3 (Germany, France and U.K) promoted 'critical dialogue' to resolve the issues between U.S. and Iran and the latter was ready to cooperate with the international community.

The reconciliation process between Iran and U.S. found productive moreover other factors such as Afghan-Taliban, the 9/11 attacks and Iranian participation in Bonn Conference also reinvigorated their relation and it seemed a paradigm shift in their bilateral tie-up. However, a short grace period ended between Iran and U.S. in 2002, when U.S. President George W. Bush labelled Iran as part of 'axis of evil' along with North Korea in his state of the Union address. In return, Iranian leaders chanted the derogatory phrase of Khomeini, U.S. as the 'Great Satan' and Israel as 'Little Satan'. U.S. was insistent that the Iranian nuclear programme must be halted otherwise, it would lead the production of weapons-grade uranium. Iran reacted the purpose of uranium process was only for the civilian needs and it also substantiated partnership with European countries in the nuclear field would pose the question of non-transparency.

PERCEPTIONS ON IRANIAN NUCLEAR ISSUE

In 2005, Ahmadinejad, President of Iran, opened the secrecy of uranium enrichment programme. He declared would continue the development

of uranium certainly, Iran had its justifications. Then, Iranian nuclear issue was not only the primary concern of US and Israel but the regional Arab countries and also the international community. Since 2002 International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the watchdog of UNO, involved to bring out the fact of Iranian nuclear issue and focused whether the processed uranium was sufficient to build the weapons of mass destruction. U.S compelled UN direct IAEA to investigate the purpose of uranium procurement because it required the legitimate evidence to pursue punitive action against Iran and also vital for the diplomatic support of countries across the world.

After the inspections in various nuclear centrifuges, IAEA reported that “Iran has not provided the necessary cooperation to permit the agency to confirm that all nuclear material is in peaceful activities”ⁱⁱ. It added that Iran elevated the nuclear enrichment activities and no obligation to the ‘Nuclear Proliferation Safeguards Agreement’. On the other hand, Iran raised questions about the reliability of IAEA reports and its argument was IAEA could not find out the processed uranium for nuclear warheads in plants. U.S and Israel had not been conscious about the contradictory in the IAEA reports and its board governors highlighted the “uncertainties related to the scope and nature of Iran’s nuclear programme”ⁱⁱⁱ. However, U.S and Israel considered it was a legal provision to move against Iran and their target was to make Iran as a free nuclear and non-sophisticated weapon state in the region.

Instead of the military option, U.S decided to impose the multi-pronged economic sanctions on Iran with the support of UNO, EU and allied countries and they seemed that it was the right option to bring Iran into their line-up. For the support of others, U.S sporadically declared “a nuclear-armed Iran would pose a threat to the region, to the world and the future of the global nuclear proliferation regime”^{iv}. President Bush had also changed his posture to choose a military strike on Iran to terminate the nuclear activity and he exhausted diplomacy to get the support of others. U.S was conscious about the consequence of military intervention than Israeli because it had a failed history in Afghanistan and Iraq therefore, it propagated the isolation policy against Iran. Moreover, U.S perceived that military strike would not be an easy solution to destroy all nuclear facilities installed under the earth (rock-shell nuclear plant).

President Barack Obama also came to power with the intention to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue through the negotiations. In the second term of the presidential debate, Obama alerted Iran “all the options are on the table and we will do anything to make sure Iran does not get a nuclear weapon”^v. In fact, he also wanted to avoid yet another war in the Middle East and White House also promoted diplomacy was the finest approach to prevent Iran acquire the bomb-grade uranium. Josh Earnest, Secretary of White House Press, told, “it is not just that the President wants to try to avoid another war in the Middle East, he does, it is that diplomacy is the best way for us to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapon”^{vi}. On the other hand, Israel attitude was different, Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel, told “Iranian regime believes that the international community does not have the will to stop its nuclear programme” and “must change quickly because the time to resolve this issue peacefully is running out”^{vii}. Israeli department was as the part of gunboat diplomacy and it perturbed about the retaliation from Iran and also

the consequence of war. Reports say that Iranian authority already assigned Hamas and Hezbollah to counter attack when Israel launch a military strike. Israel had concerned about the multi-level attack from enemies definitely, it would bring great loss to properties and lives.

U.S and western media propagated the danger of a nuclear Iran encouraged Arab countries to prevent Tehran being a nuclear arms capable power in the region. The linking factor between regional Arab countries and West was the convergent interest on Iranian nuclear issue. Those countries had justifications as a signatory to NPT in 1968 and recognised member to IAEA's Safeguards Agreement in 1974, Iran should have followed the guidelines. Beyond it, their undercurrent apprehension was a Shia country that would become a regional power with nuclear bomb admittedly it would make the security threat as well as the balance of power in the region. Arab regional countries supported West and they avowed that nuclear programme of Iran must be frozen and asserted impose effective severe sanctions on Tehran even without UN approval.

The anti-Iranian perceptions of prominent Arab countries revealed by the WikiLeaks cables. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, King of Saudi Arabia, repetitively pressured U.S to "cut off the head of the snake" by launching military strikes to destroy Iran's nuclear programme^{viii}. Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, King of Bahrain, asserted that to take a forceful action against the nuclear programme of Iran and he said, "that programme must be stopped"^{ix} UAE alerted U.S if Iran has the nuclear weapon it would be more dangerous than the Al-Qaeda in the region. The perception of Arab countries reveals that U.S had considerable pressure from them along with Israel to take a retributive action against Iran. Admittedly, overt and covert approach from the Arab world encouraged the West put forward the isolation policy against Iran. When West determine other option on Iran no doubt it would get the backup from those countries because they were looking for to give a blow Iran.

Iran and Israel reacted in different ways when WikiLeaks's reports came out; Ahmadinejad responded as "we do not give any value for these documents" and he added that "Iran and regional states are friends and it is an "organised effort by the U.S" to bring conflict between Iran and regional Arab countries. On the other hand, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu reacted as "the world with his country's assessment that Iran is chief danger", and he added that "Israel is not alone"^x.

U.S, Israel and anti-Iranian Arab states projected Iran as a dangerous nation to the world and they succeeded to convince others to follow the isolation policy. By the harsh isolation policy, U.S has targeted either standstill of uranium process or topple the Iranian regime without a military expense. For this purpose, UNO and EU stood as frontline partners with U.S and UN Security Council put forwarded various Resolutions 696 (2006), 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008), 1835 (2008), and 1929 (2010) against Iran to tough the sanctions.

On the other side, Russia and China not completely cooperated with the West on Iranian isolation policy. Iran inclined to Russia and China, two veto powers in UNSC, when its relation deteriorated with U.S and EU. Russia and China had defiance against the production of uranium for nuclear

warheads, but those nations were not against the right of Iran to produce nuclear energy for the civilian purpose. They were against the imposing of draconian unilateral sanctions on Iran and also ineffective UNSC Resolutions. Even though, Russia and China could not effectively counter the combined belt of international sanctions on Iran. By the pressure from U.S, Russia and China suspended weapon accords with Iran. Russia had lost a total of \$13 billion in arms sales and it suspended delivery of S-300. In return, Iran demanded \$4 billion as compensation from Moscow^{xi}.

In the case of UNSC Resolution 1929, Russia and China firstly balked to protect the interest of Iran and then, they supported the new resolution against Tehran in 2010. Vitaly Churkin, the Russian Ambassador to the UN, stated that "the resolution did not authorise the use of force, but the sanctions sent a strong message to Iran about the need to comply with the IAEA"^{xii}. Russia and China continued bilateral relations with Iran, however, U.S was concerned about their clandestine tie-ups with Tehran chiefly in the strategic and nuclear assistance. North Korea and Syria had a different position openly supported Iran's right to acquire nuclear armaments, and they questioned the uneven approach of West on Iranian nuclear issue. Some other nations' gestures appeared to be supportive to the nuclear-powered Iran however, they secretly conjoined with West to stop the nuclear acquisition of Iran.

Since 2010, Obama administrations focused on launch the joint US-Israeli cyberattack on the computer system of Iranian nuclear centrifuges. Iran admitted the "Stuxnet virus" attacks on its nuclear-controlled computer system. In addition, Obama demanded to stop all countries who had comprehensive bilateral relations with Iran, notably India and he seemed that complete freeze of economic transactions would bring financial criticality to Iran. Pre-Ahmadinejad governments succeeded to pose difficulty of economic sanctions but he failed even though, Iran had sufficient fiscal policy. In fact, it happened not only the lack of economic plan but the countries even Russia and China were also, in the last phase, followed the multilateral sanctions on Iran.

Anti-Iranian countries cooperated with West and UNO for the effective implementation of economic sanctions on Iran in the best and possible speed. By the sanctions, they targeted "to destroy the domestic economy of Iran, cut down imports and exports, less the par value of Iranian Riyal and to lessen the supply of life-saving drugs and medicines in domestic markets"^{xiii}. West thought that the strict isolation policy was a better choice than a military strike and they perceived that it would cut the economic lifeline of Iran. Subsequently, it would "punish the common people, who then turn their anger outward" definitely, it would raise the question of regime change or suspension of uranium process.

JUNCTURE OF INDO-U.S INTEREST ON IRANIAN NUCLEAR ISSUE

Besides the support of Arab regional countries, U.S looked for the backup of India, Russia and China for the expansion of Iranian isolation policy. Iran had no significant relation with most of the Arab countries and on the other hand, it had strategic tie-ups with Asian countries especially India admittedly it made much concern to US and Israel. They thought that substantial relation between Iran and those countries was enough Tehran to survive over the West imposed sanctions. Therefore, U.S exhorted India,

Russia and China for the expansion and efficacy of Iranian isolation policy. India and Iran signed 'Tehran and New Delhi Declarations' in 2001 and 2003, promoted a broad range of strategic collaboration between them which alarmed U.S. Its perceptions: Iran could update its defence system, access Indian military and naval bases through the Joint exercise ventures. In addition, India's relation with Iran would encourage other countries to recognise Iran as diplomatically well-deserved and respected nation in the region. U.S thought that Indo-Iranian ties would give Iran potentiality to resist the economic threat. It was urgent for the West, particularly U.S. to prevent the significant partnership between India and Iran therefore, Washington pressed on New Delhi to cut the substantial relation with Tehran majorly in the military and defence fields.

U.S problem was it had no influential relation with India and both failed to establish a significant tie-up during the Cold War years. Failure of India and US to establish timely strategic partnership might be a diplomatic loss in their bilateral relation. In post-Cold War, instead of making strategic partnership U.S considered India as a pro-erstwhile Soviet country, champion of the non-aligned movement and Washington imposed sanctions on New Delhi due to the latter's nuclear experiment in 1998. India, in the meantime, became a regional power in South Asia and it concluded significant agreements with Iran. Later period, U.S policymakers realised that India would be a right partner in the Asian continent to protect its national interest importantly, expand the isolation policy on Iran and counter the dominance of China. The 9/11 attacks and the new geopolitical changes forced U.S and India to strengthen their diplomatic relation.

In fact, India and U.S had no considerable strategic tie-up when they concluded the civilian nuclear deal. U.S seemed that it might be a valuable offer and pursuit for the atomic energy of India, as not a Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) member New Delhi had limitation to get desired access on nuclear energy. India and U.S signed the Civil Nuclear Agreement in 2008, and immediate Iranian response was the pact questioned the "credibility of NPT". When faced criticism, India and U.S counteracted the nuclear deal happened as part of the expansion of their strategic cooperation certainly it was a breakthrough in the bilateral relation between them. Indo-U.S nuclear deal had other objectives, along with meet India's need for energy, in which to reduce or curtail the beneficial relation of India with Iran was important. Nuclear deal embedded the intention of secure "New Delhi's full and active participation in Washington effort to prevent Tehran from acquiring weapons of mass destruction"^{xiv}. It indicates that Indo-US nuclear deal as the part of U.S political and economic encirclement of Iran with the support of India.

As part of seeking diplomatic support, Condoleezza Rice, American state Secretary arrived in India with the message of President Bush in 2005. She expressed U.S concerns on the proposed oil pipeline cooperation between Iran, Pakistan and India (IPI). She persuaded New Delhi to refrain from the IPI Oil Project and in return, U.S offered India substantial concessions to get nuclear energy assistance^{xv}. U.S target was to ensure the comprehensive support of India to the effective operation of economic sanctions on Iran. U.S thought that minimal bilateral relation of India with Iran would boost Tehran's

confidence to continue the nuclear enrichment activities and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries also had this such perception.

U.S approached India win Iran over the nuclear issue with multiple perspectives: U.S thought that many favourable factors with India such as traditional and geopolitical relation with Iran, softpower engagements in the international politics and in addition, India's defiance to a military strike on Iran definitely would help to persuade Iran from making a nuclear bomb. Moreover, India could cooperate with Iran to resolve the nuclear issue while they engage in regional economic platforms like Non-aligned Movement (NAM) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). When West backtracked from regime change in Iran through a military option, it focused put more diplomatic pressure on Tehran to halt the nuclear activities and for this task U.S depended on India well.

U.S succeeded to reduce the substantial quantity of oil import of India from Iran. India had the second position on the oil export list of Iran after China and since 2010, its place was replaced into sixth due to the difficulty of economic transactions and also the lack of probity of New Delhi. American state secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton's visit to India in 2012, underlined the idea to "diversify India's oil imports and reduce its dependency on Iranian oil", however, New Delhi continued crude oil business with Iran even though the amount of import has immensely decreased.

India and China continued their bilateral transaction with Iran through the barter system by which Tehran considerably survived its domestic market crisis. U.S had frozen the Asian Clearing Union¹ and it made difficult to "Reserve Bank of India operationalize payments with Iran since 2010"^{xvi}. The economic sanctions on Iran have made a critical triangular relation between India, Iran and U.S. Nature of this particular relation was such that when India and Iran get closer, U.S drags New Delhi from the side of Tehran. U.S reminded India threateningly that New Delhi's support to Iran through the public and diplomatic channels would affect the Indo-US bilateral integrity. U.S also expressed concerns to India about its support to Iran's advancements in military and defence fields.

India voted three times at IAEA in 2005, 2006 and 2009 against Iranian nuclear resolutions by which it was not focused revenge on Tehran "Iran was not supportive when New Delhi conducted nuclear tests in 1998. In addition, it backed the UNSC Resolutions asked India and Pakistan to cap their nuclear capabilities"^{xvii}. Iran had resentment against India's vote at IAEA and it found when interviewed in the officials of Iranian Embassy and Consulate who raised the concerns about India's tie-ups with the U.S to deactivate Iran in defence and military fields. By the vote, India got an opportunity to act as a responsible nuclear weapon nation without obligation to NPT. India's perspective on Iranian nuclear issue: it recognised the civilian nuclear necessity of Tehran, sceptical about the regional security context,

¹"The Asian Clearing Union (ACU) was established with its headquarters at Tehran, Iran, on December 9, 1974 at the initiative of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP), for promoting regional co-operation. The main objective of the clearing union is to facilitate payments among member countries for eligible transactions on a multilateral basis, thereby economizing on the use of foreign exchange reserves and transfer costs, as well as promoting trade among the participating countries".

bring Iran as a nuclear threat-free nation in the region and In addition, to pursue a balanced relation between GCC countries and Iran, curb weapons of mass destruction, and reduce competition between Arab regional countries to possess the nuclear weapons.

CONCLUSION

The question was raised whether Indo-US nuclear deal made setback on India and Iran relations. India's argument was that it never reduced its relation with Iran by the pressure from U.S. In fact, it made an impact on political and economic ties between them and it questioned the diplomatic credibility of India because failed to defend the nuclear deal was not happened at the expense of relation of New Delhi and Tehran. The Hyde Act-123² explicitly mentioned as "a description and assessment of the specific measures that India has taken to participate fully and actively in the U.S and international efforts to dissuade, isolate, and contain Iran"^{xviii}. The attitude of U.S leaders and the content of nuclear treaty categorically revealed that India must cease the strategic and economic relations with Iran putting into practice of economic sanctions.

On the other hand, if there is no pressure from the U.S or no Indo-US nuclear deal indeed India would have cooperated with the U.S or the international community to suspend the weapons-grade uranium production of Iran. Such insistency had been shown by India when it voted against Iran at IAEA although it was an exclusive privilege of New Delhi. It also proved by the speech of Manmohan Singh, former Prime Minister of India, at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in the US "as far as Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions are concerned we do not support nuclear ambitions of Tehran"^{xix}. Obviously, it meant that India had the plan to prevent Iran from going ahead with the bid to become a nuclear weapon country. India did not want to be Iran as a nuclear-capable nation and it would threat the security interest of the region moreover, lead the competition between the Gulf countries to acquire the nuclear weapon. India has the diplomatic responsibility to ensure the regional security.

Admittedly, India had a different perception of West's ways to halt the nuclear programme of Iran. Unlike the U.S, India had no plan to stringent the economic life of Iran to attain the desired goal. However, when the U.S demanded India to reduce the beneficial tie-ups with Iran especially in oil definitely, it never accepted with a complete sense. However, later, India itself directed the private companies like Reliance to cut down the oil percent 15 to 10 imports from Iran and it might protect the interest of West. However, Indo-US nuclear deal is significant in the context of Iranian nuclear issue. Among the many factors, the deal could help to bring Iran on the side of Nuclear Deal Negotiators (U.S, UK, China, Russia, France and plus Germany) and Tehran accepted the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)³. The fundamental part of the Nuclear Deal is that Iran should reduce the quantity of processed

² "The Hyde Act, or, the Henry J. Hyde United States-India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Act of 2006, to give the act its full title, is a piece of legislation, introduced by Congressman Henry Hyde, passed by the US Congress, which creates the legal basis for co-operation between the United States and India"

³ The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or Iran deal, is an international agreement on the nuclear program of Iran reached in Vienna on 14 July 2015 between Iran, the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security)

uranium less than 3.5 percent, scientifically this quantity is not sufficient to produce nuclear bomb. In short, the prime objective of Indo-US nuclear deal is not now to get on track due to the Liability Act. The critical people failed to understand in the correct sense the conferred interest of India and U.S in the Indo-US nuclear deal that is to halt the uranium enrichment procurement programme of Iran.

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