

PROSPECTS OF A NUCLEAR ARMED IRAN AND POLICY OPTIONS FOR PAKISTAN

Shams uz Zaman *

Abstract

Iran is on the centre stage of international nuclear politics as its nuclear programme is suspected to be weapons oriented. Its nuclear facilities face the threat of a strike from Israel or the United States. Economic sanctions have already been imposed on Iran to restrict the progress of its programme. Pakistan, already beset with problems as a front line state in the “war on terror” is naturally wary of any new conflict in its immediate neighbourhood. Pakistan supports the world community on its stand that Iran, as it has repeatedly asserted and assured, keeps its nuclear programme committed to peaceful purposes. However it is doubtful if a strike against its facilities can deter Iran from making a weapon if it is so determined. A nuclear armed Iran is a plausible prospect therefore. Pakistan and Iran have a history of cordial relationship since 1947. However, this relationship has not been as smooth since the Iranian revolution. With the world opposed to the Iranian weapon and the possibility of a nuclear Iran one day materialising Pakistan would need to tread very carefully as there would be risks as well as opportunities. This paper discusses the policy options for Pakistan if Iran acquires a nuclear weapon capability.

Key Words: Nuclear Weapons, Iran, Pakistan.

Introduction

After the independence of Pakistan in 1947 Iran became the first country to recognise it in the United Nations, thus opening a new chapter in bilateral relations which both countries enjoyed for almost three decades. The establishment of the Regional Co-operation for Development (RCD) among Iran, Turkey and Pakistan in 1964 further cemented these ties. Later on, in 1955, Iran and Pakistan joined the US sponsored Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) which provided another

* Shams uz Zaman is a Research Fellow at National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad, who is also pursuing his M.Phil degree in Strategic and Nuclear Studies.

dimension to their relationship.¹ However, after the Iranian revolution, these relations turned lukewarm due to sectarian issues that cropped up as a result of Saudi and Arab opposition to the revolutionary regime with its ramifications on the sectarian situation in Pakistan; and worsening later when Pakistan supported the Taliban in Afghanistan whom the Iranians opposed. The relations suffered another steep dip when on the nuclear proliferation issue both felt betrayed by each other.² This proliferation affair has not only affected Pak-Iran relations but caused concerns in the West about the nuclear programmes of the two countries. Moreover the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear assets is raising undue concerns in the west due to the violent activities of terrorist groups in the country.³ These apprehensions have resulted in a consistent pattern of reports in the western media claiming that the US has contingency plans to seize them under extreme circumstances.⁴ Pakistan rejects these reports as a pathetic campaign against its nuclear programme.⁵ The propaganda has become more insistent since the reported killing in Abbotabad of Osama bin Laden in a US raid.⁶ On the other side, the threat of an Israeli/US strike on Iranian nuclear installations has become more

¹ Dr. Syed Minhaj ul Hassan, ed., *Pakistan-Iran Relations in Historical Perspective* (Peshawar: Culture Centre of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2004), 159-161.

² Therese Delpech, *Iran and the Bomb: The Abdication of International Responsibility* (United Kingdom: C. Hurst & Co Ltd, 2007), 53-54.

³ Seymour Hersh, "Defending the Arsenals," *The New Yorker*, November 16, 2009, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/11/16/091116fa_fact_hersh?currentPage=all (accessed December 16, 2011). See also, Goldberg, Jeffrey and Marc Ambinder, "The Ally from Hell," *Atlantic*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/12/the-ally-from-hell/8730/>, (accessed December 16, 2011).

⁴ "The Nomination of Dr. Condoleezza Rice to be Secretary of State," *Hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, January 18 and 19, 2005, 128. See also, Paul K. Kerr and Mary Beth Nikitin, "Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons: Proliferation and Security Issues," *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress*, December 7, 2010, 1-2, 11-13, also, Seymour M. Hersh, "Watching the Warheads," *New Yorker*, November 5, 2001, http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2001/11/05/011105fa_FACT (accessed December 16, 2011). Also, Seymour M., "Defending the Arsenal." Also, Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark, "Bush Handed Blueprint to Seize Pakistan Nuclear Arsenal," *Guardian*, December 1, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/dec/01/pakistan.iraq> (accessed December 16, 2011). Also, "US Prepared to 'Snatch' Pakistani Nukes, Report Claims," *Nuclear Threat Initiative: Global Security Newswire*, August 4, 2011, http://gsn.nti.org/gsn/nw_20110804_7784.php (accessed December 16, 2011).

⁵ "2008: US-Pakistan Fight Over Media Manipulation," *Dawn Wiki Leaks*, June 3, 2011, <http://www.dawn.com/2011/06/03/2008-us-pakistan-fight-over-media-manipulation.html>.

⁶ "US to Deploy Troops if Pak Nukes Come under Threat," *News*, May 16, 2011.

overt and looms on the horizon.⁷ However, the success of any such operation and its ramifications thereafter, remain debateable. Interestingly, these common denominators along with the worsening energy crisis in Pakistan provide a prologue for a durable relationship between Iran and Pakistan.

More recently, the Middle East has become the focal point in global politics for another important development, which is the so-called Arab Spring. The change sweeping across the Middle East has raised fears within the US and Israel that the situation in the Middle East may explode resulting in a regional war.⁸ Thus a nuclear capable Iran could change the strategic equilibrium of the region and also pose a serious risk to Israel's survival and security.⁹ Concerns about the Iranian nuclear programme are not merely restricted to the United States, Israel and the West, but are also shared by some of the other regional countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt and Kuwait. These countries of the region fear that a nuclear Iran would become a dominant power in the Middle East and significantly reduce their stature and undermine their interests in the region. In the opinion of certain analysts, a nuclear capable Iran might provide a cushion against western propaganda maligning Pakistani nuclear programme.¹⁰ However, even if that were so Pakistan was in no position to stray from its international commitments. Also, in case Iran decides to acquire a nuclear weapon capability, there is hardly anything Pakistan could do about it as the policy of non interference in the internal affairs of other countries has to be observed by all nations. Still, Pakistan needs to re-evaluate its policy options before such an event comes to pass. 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, regional implications and finally the policy options for Pakistan.

⁷ This World, BBC documentary, "Will Israel Bomb Iran?," Broadcasted on October 10, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/this_world/540989816.stm, transcript available at

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/programmes/this_world/transcripts/willisraelbombiran_101006.txt (accessed May 5, 2011).

⁸ Peter Goodspeed, "Middle East on the Brink of War," *Pakistan Today*, December 16, 2011, 15.

⁹ MJ Rosenberg, "US: Edging Closer towards War with Iran?," *Aljazeera*, December 4, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/12/201112411011569936.html> (accessed December 18, 2011).

¹⁰ Omer Waraich, "Iran Sanctions: Why Pakistan Won't Help," *Time*, September 14, 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1922166,00.html> (accessed December 16, 2011), also, Harsh V. Pant, "Pakistan and Iran's Dysfunctional Relationship," *Middle East Quarterly* vol. XVI, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 43-50, and also, Shah Alam, "Iran-Pakistan Relations: Political and Strategic Dimensions," *Strategic Analysis, The Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses* vol. 28, no. 4 (2004): 540-541.

Aim

To carryout a comprehensive analysis of the implications of a nuclear armed Iran and policy options for Pakistan.

An Historical Overview of Iran’s Nuclear Programme

The ambitious Iranian nuclear programme can be traced back to the times of Reza Shah Pahlavi who planned to build 23 nuclear reactors over a span of 30 years back in 1959. Therefore, Iran purchased a Nuclear Research Reactor from the US to be installed in Tehran as a first measure and interestingly these ambitious aspirations of the Shah were never presumed by the West either as a threat or an attempt to develop nuclear weapons primarily because Iran didn’t possess the expertise or the desire in the requisite field at that time¹¹ and also because it was considered as a close and loyal ally of the West. The stated purpose of these reactors was to develop an alternative source of energy.¹² To assure the world community of its peaceful pursuit, Iran signed the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968 and ratified it in 1970¹³ which encouraged not only the US but other European countries like Germany, France and Sweden etc. to assist Iran in developing its uranium enrichment and nuclear fuel production capabilities.¹⁴ However, in 1979, due to the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, the political and security situation dramatically changed bringing the Iranian nuclear programme to a halt.¹⁵ In 1982, the Iranian government decided to re-institutionalize its nuclear programme and also its dual usage nuclear material production capabilities.¹⁶ However, due to various technical and geopolitical difficulties, Iran could not formally resume its nuclear programme before 1991 and that too after getting assistance from China and Russia.¹⁷ By the mid 90’s, the US and other Europeans countries started alleging that Iran was not meeting its obligations under the NPT. But Iran always dismissed these allegations as propaganda and rhetoric for vested interests.¹⁸

¹¹ Sharon Squassoni, “Iran’s Nuclear Program: Recent Developments,” *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress*, September 6, 2006, 1-2.

¹² “Iran Profile – Nuclear Chronology 1957–1985,” *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, August 2005, www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/1825_1826.html (accessed May 5, 2011).

¹³ Paul K. Kerr, “Iran’s Nuclear Program: Status,” *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress*, December 29, 2009, 1-2.

¹⁴ Greg Bruno, “Iran’s Nuclear Program,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 10, 2010, http://www.cfr.org/publication/16811/irans_nuclear_program.html (accessed May 7, 2011).

¹⁵ Paul K., “Iran’s Nuclear Program.”

¹⁶ “Middle East-South Asia: Nuclear Handbook,” *Central Intelligence Agency*, May 1988.

¹⁷ “An Overview of Nuclear Facilities in Iran, Israel and Turkey,” *Greenpeace International*, February 2007, 4-5.

¹⁸ “Iran’s Nuclear Program,” *New York Times*, December 5, 2011,

From thereon Iran started expanding its nuclear programme, keeping secrecy about some of its nuclear installations. In August 2002, a dissident Iranian group, National Council of Resistance on Iran (NCRI), revealed information about Iran's hidden nuclear facilities at Natanz and Arak, which were not known to IAEA.¹⁹ After these revelations, under the international pressure, Iran had to sign an additional protocol in September 2003 which obliged Iran to grant IAEA access to its nuclear sites besides suspending the work on uranium enrichment and plutonium separation experiments. After these steps the issue seemed to have been cooled down, but in 2005 when Mr. Ahmadinejad was elected Iran's President, the situation changed dramatically. Not only Iran announced resumption of its enrichment activities as permitted under the NPT in February 2006²⁰ but its rhetoric over its nuclear programme also gained a high pitch, raising suspicions and paving the way for international criticism. Since then the Iranian nuclear programme has been on the horizon of world politics amidst controversies and rumours. Despite the assessment of the US National Intelligence Estimates of 2007 and 2010 that the Iranian weapons related programme has been halted since 2003 and the earliest possible date by which Iran could have technical capability to produce enough Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) for a nuclear device, is by 2015, the situation has not stabilized.²¹ Iran is believed to have constructed over 22 known nuclear facilities all across the country. However, the facilities which are considered critical nodes in Iran's nuclear infrastructure include the Nuclear Research Centre and Uranium Conversion Facility at Esfahan, Uranium Enrichment Facilities at Natanz and Qom and Heavy Water and Future Plutonium production Centre at Arak.²² Some other nuclear facilities include Nuclear Research Centre at Tehran (apparently dismantled in 2003), Light Water Reactor at Bushehr, uranium milling plant at Yazd and uranium extracting mines at Saghand, Narigan and Zarigan.²³

In June 2010 United Nations Security Council (UNSC) imposed sanctions against Iran for the fourth time since 2003 after Iran's announcement that it has started development works for enriching uranium

http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iran/nuclear_program/index.html
(accessed December 18, 2011).

¹⁹ Paul K., "Iran's Nuclear Program," 4-6.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "National Intelligence Estimates: Iran Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities," *National Intelligence Council*, November 2007. See also, "Annual Threat Assessment of US Intelligence Community for Senate Select Committee," *Director of National Intelligence*, February 2, 2010.

²² Abdullah Toukan and Anthony H. Cordesman, "Study on a Possible Israeli Strike on Iran's Nuclear Development Facilities," *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, March 14, 2009.

²³ "An Overview of Nuclear Facilities in Iran, Israel and Turkey," 6-7.

up to 20 percent, the maximum limit permitted under the NPT.²⁴ Although the previous IAEA reports were comparatively soft on Iran's nuclear ambitions, the report released on 18 November 2011 alleged Iran of violating and in breach of the NPT additional protocol besides suspecting Iran of hiding clandestine nuclear activities possibly in pursuit for a nuclear device.²⁵ After the release of this report, the US and other major western countries imposed major sanctions against its financial institutions and banks.²⁶ This report does not conclusively reveal that Iran is on its way to manufacturing a nuclear device but indicates that it is almost reaching the stage where it would be able to produce a device, if it so desires.

Western Perceptions of a Nuclear Armed Iran

The West and its Allies

The Iranian nuclear programme is at the centre of world politics stirring a diplomatic storm since last six years or so. From time to time since then, Israel has been issuing threats of using military option to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear weapon state. Although the Americans have also talked about using military option but they still don't consider that it would be the best option due to an unpredictable situation arising in the Middle East after such a strike. Europeans have also shown their concern on the issue while maintaining a position that their apprehensions regarding nuclear weapons technology are not restricted to Iran but rather are directed against any future acquisition efforts, no matter which country attempts it.²⁷ There is also a fundamental difference in the European and the American approach to tackle the Iranian issue. The Europeans are inclined towards diplomacy as they don't perceive a direct threat from a nuclear armed Iran and therefore are more concerned about the prospects of an Israeli-Iran or US-Iran confrontation which may destabilize the region and disrupt the oil supplies if Iran blocks the narrow strait of Hormuz as a consequence.²⁸ The US, on the other hand has repeatedly stressed on coercive measures and sanctions even including a military option in case diplomacy and sanctions fail to deter Iran.²⁹ The

²⁴ "Iran's Nuclear Program," *New York Times*.

²⁵ "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *IAEA*, GOV/2011/65, November 8, 2011.

²⁶ "Iran's Nuclear Program," *New York Times*.

²⁷ Judith S. Yaphe and Charles D. Lutes, "Reassessing the Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran," *Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, Washington D.C.*, 2005, xv.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

²⁹ Joe Klein, "An Attack on Iran Back on the Table," *Time*, July 15, 2010,

concern however is the resultant situation in the Middle East after such an action. Some officials in the US also suspect that if Iran becomes nuclear, militant organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas would become more aggressive, influential and strong, thus posing greater risks for Israel's security and, thereby, raising the prospects of a conventional conflict between Israel and either of the groups which could gradually escalate to a scenario where Israel might consider using the Samson option.³⁰ Furthermore, in their opinion acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran may motivate other regional states like Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria etc. to pursue a nuclear deterrent of their own to counter Iranian influence in the region. Such a domino effect could result in a nuclear arms race in the region which could seriously destabilize the strategic equilibrium in the Middle East.³¹

The Israeli Factor

Israel perceives itself to be in direct conflict with Iran and vice versa. Since Ahmadinejad was elected as President, he has adopted a very aggressive posture towards Israel while issuing rhetorical statements like "Israel will be wiped off the world map" and calling the Holocaust a "myth" and an exaggerated story built on repeated lies. These aggressive statements have been taken at their face value by Israel considering these to be an existential threat.³² Some analysts believe that President Ahmadinejad is on a messianic mission to facilitate or bring about an apocalypse upon the world through which his dream of destroying Israel could be accomplished. This threat has even been acknowledged by the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu while talking to some news reporters.³³ These analysts argue that President Ahmadinejad's calls for nuclear rights and wiping Israel off the map could ultimately create a turmoil and disorder in the region, deemed necessary by him to facilitate the return of the long awaited and promised Mahdi, which is the central part of his religious beliefs.³⁴

Israel is a "one bomb state," due to its size and demography implying that even if one nuclear bomb is dropped on Israel, it would cease to exist as a viable state.³⁵ Israel has affirmed the policy of pre-empting any nuclear threat emanating from within the region on the basis that a holocaust would "never

<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2003921,00.html> (accessed May 5, 2011).

³⁰ Judith Yaphe, "Reassessing the Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran," 17-18.

³¹ Rosenberg, "US: Edging Closer towards War with Iran?"

³² Judith Yaphe, "Reassessing the Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran," xii.

³³ Michael D. Evans and Jerome R. Corsi, *Showdown with Nuclear Iran* (Tennessee: Nelson Current, 2006), 47, 196.

³⁴ Ali Reza Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 31.

³⁵ Michael D. Evans, *Showdown with Nuclear Iran*, 82.

again” be permitted to happen.³⁶ Most western analysts believe that Iranian nuclear ambitions cannot be tamed through diplomatic pressures, covert intelligence operations, sanctions and even cyber attacks like Stuxnet, which could only cause a temporary slowdown rather than a complete shutdown of Iranian nuclear infrastructure.³⁷ Therefore, for most Israeli politicians and strategists, the question is not that should Israel launch a pre-emptive strike, but rather when and how it should be done? These strategists fear that if Iran acquires a nuclear weapon capability, then the US at some stage might abandon the idea of striking Iran due to political or economic compulsions, leaving Israel to deal with the issue alone. Some senior Israeli military commanders are confident that despite this being a difficult task, can still be executed with deliberate planning and rehearsals. For these proponents of striking Iran, the right time to act would approach once there is credible information that Iran is on the verge of becoming nuclear, as they can’t permit Iran to have long range missiles capable of hitting Israel.³⁸ As a part of the plan, since 2009 onwards, Israel annually conducts civil defence exercises aimed at a worst case scenario of simultaneous attacks by Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria and Iran.³⁹ Since the release of IAEA report on Iran in November 2011, Israel has increased its rhetoric against Iran and there are reports suggesting that Israel is preparing its citizens for a major war.⁴⁰ However, some analysts

³⁶ Judith Yaphe, “Reassessing the Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran,” 16-17.

³⁷ David Albright, Paul Brannan and Christina Walrond, “Stuxnet Malware and Natanz: Update of ISIS December 22, 2010 Report,” *Institute for Science and International Security*, February 15, 2011, 10. See also, Joby Warrick, “Iran’s Natanz Facility Recovered Quickly from Stuxnet Cyber Attack,” *Washington Post*, February 16, 2011. See also, Dieter Bednarz and Ronen Bergman, “Mossad Zeros in on Tehran’s Nuclear Program,” *Spiegel Online International*, January 17, 2011, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,739883-3,00.html> (accessed April 21, 2011).

³⁸ “Will Israel Bomb Iran?,” *BBC Documentary*, Broadcasted on October 10, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/this_world/540989816.stm, transcript available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/programmes/this_world/transcripts/willisraelbombiran_101006.txt (accessed April 21, 2011). See also, Jerome R. Corsi, *Atomic Iran: How the Terrorist Regime Bought the Bomb and American Politicians* (Tennessee: Cumberland House Publishing, WND Books, 2006), 11.

³⁹ Jerome R. Corsi, *Why Israel can’t wait* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 9, 95-97, see also, “Report: Israel’s Civil Defense Systems Not Adequate to Cope with Missile War,” *World Tribune*, August 4, 2011, http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2011/me_israel0982_08_04.html (accessed December 8, 2011).

⁴⁰ Neve Gordon, “Is Israel Preparing to Attack Iran?,” *Daily Times*, November 20, 2011, A8, see also, Ryan Jones, “Iran, Israel Prepare for War,” *Israel Today Magazine*, December 8, 2011,

believe that Israeli and US rhetoric of “all options on the table” are merely diplomatic and coercive manoeuvres aiming at compelling Iran to comply with its obligations under nuclear non-proliferation treaty. However, this is not the narrative coming out from Israel whose leaders have repeatedly called for the world to stop Iran from becoming nuclear or else Israel will have to take pre-emptive action even if it has to do it alone.⁴¹ Despite some US officials expressing concerns over implications of an Israeli strike on Iran,⁴² they still fear that the Israeli government has not sufficient evidence on Iranian nuclear ambitions but whenever they are convinced that Iran is about to cross the nuclear threshold, Israel would not hesitate to launch the pre-emptive strike. For Israel the right opportunity to attack has not yet arrived mainly due to two reasons, first, Iran is still believed to be several years away from acquiring the bomb and second, the Obama’s administration is not willing to open up another war front in the Middle East.

Concerns of Regional Countries and Gulf Cooperation Council States

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states, especially the Sunni majority states like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, UAE, Jordan and Oman are also apprehensive of a nuclear armed Iran, not only due to Shia-Sunni differences but also in the larger context of existing strategic equilibrium and nuclear balance in the region which such a development might disturb, leading to a nuclear arms race.⁴³ These states perceive that a nuclear Iran would not only dominate the region but would also dictate its own terms to other states of the region on various global and regional issues. They are also concerned that the Shia population in these Sunni dominated states might feel emboldened due to a nuclear armed Iran creating domestic trouble and law and order situation which could have a very destabilizing impact on the region, that already has reached a boiling point due to the ongoing Arab Spring. However, these states are also fearful of the consequences of a military strike

<http://www.israeltoday.co.il/tabid/178/nid/23038/language/en-US/Default.aspx> (accessed December 18, 2011).

⁴¹ “US Concerned Israel will Act Alone in Iran,” *Yedioth Internet, Ynetnews*, November 5, 2011, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4144046,00.html> (accessed December 18, 2011).

⁴² “Panetta Sounds Warning on Iran Attack,” *Aljazeera*, November 11, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2011/11/2011111101431765845.html> (accessed December 18, 2011), see also, “Attacking or Threatening Iran Makes No Sense (Key Points),” *American Foreign Policy Project*, 2009, <http://americanforeignpolicy.org/military-option-iran/attacking-iran>.

⁴³ Hugh Tomlinson, “Saudi Arabia Gives Israel Clear Skies to Attack Iranian Nuclear Sites,” *Times*, June 12, 2010, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article7148555.ece (accessed April 21, 2011). See also, Jerome R. Corsi, *Why Israel Can't Wait*, 99-102.

on Iran.⁴⁴ Some unconfirmed reports suggested that Saudis have already given a silent approval to Israel for using its airspace to attack Iranian nuclear installations.⁴⁵ This evidence indicates that there exists a tacit understanding amongst some of the European and Arab states on preventing Iran from becoming nuclear and are just hoping that someone might do it someday even if it entails a military strike. However if it actually happens, they might take a different diplomatic stance for public consumption only,⁴⁶ feeling relieved inwardly but publicly condemning it.

Iranian Interests in the Region

Iran has 5000 years' old historical aspirations which galvanize its regional and global ambitions. Iranian intentions not articulated are at times reflected in its capabilities and actions which can be enumerated as:

Realpolitik Rather than Revolutionary

Immediately after the revolution and during the reign of Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran was poised to export its Shiite ideology through revolution across the region. However, after his death Iran has now reconciled with the idea and the post-Khomeini Iran is not very different from any other democratic state, with a policy of "neither east nor west"⁴⁷ while serving its national interest and boasting about its national image through diplomacy, economics and display of hard power. According to Western perceptions the Iranian internal political and hierarchical system is dominated by a theocracy, however in essence the Iranian state political system is based on modern democracy and its national policy on Realpolitik.⁴⁸ Although the supreme position is held by a religious cleric but he does not enjoy sweeping powers across the board and uses his authority mainly with regard to specific religious and legislative matters.

⁴⁴ Judith Yaphe, "Reassessing the Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran," 18-21. See also, Frederic Wehrey et al., *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent – Exploring Reach and Limitations of Iranian Power in Middle East* (California: RAND Corporation, 2009), 145-151.

⁴⁵ Hugh Tomlinson, "Saudi Arabia Gives Israel Clear Skies to Attack Iranian Nuclear Sites."

⁴⁶ Yossi Melman "G-8 'Fully Believes' Israel will Attack Iran, says Italy PM," *Haaretz*, June 27, 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/g-8-fully-believes-israel-will-attack-iran-says-italy-pm-1.298597> (accessed April 21, 2011).

⁴⁷ Parvizi M. Aminch, ed., *The Greater Middle East in Global Politics* (Netherlands: IDC Publishers, 2007), 154-158.

⁴⁸ Frederic Wehrey, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, 8-11.

Regional Dominance and Global Eminence

Iran aims at seeking global eminence through regional dominance.⁴⁹ Its strategic location at the mouth of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz enables it to keep a close watch over one of the world's busiest oil supply corridor. However, to establish control over the Persian Gulf, it needs to have enough military muscle which enables it to block the strait if constrained under exceptional circumstances. Iran also sees itself as a protector of the Shia population living in the region and especially under the dominance of Sunni oligarchs. Iran currently faces extreme challenges in achieving these objectives amid increasing isolation since the last several years.

Pursuit of a Nuclear Programme

There seems to be no consensus even in the West on why Iran actually wants to pursue a nuclear programme. A wide range of theories is offered to explain the Iranian nuclear ambitions. Some European analysts are of the view that Iranians are pragmatic and farsighted who actually believe that the Gulf energy resources would deplete with the passage of time and before it actually happens, they must have an alternative source of energy. Therefore, according to them, there is no need to be worried about the Iranian nuclear programme. This viewpoint is also shared by some other European states, which do not perceive any direct threat from Iran in the near or distant future. Some other analysts consider the Iranian nuclear programme as mainly prestige driven, thus falling in the category of what is called a "bureaucratic model" that is deemed to provide the present Iranian government a justification to stay in power using rhetoric and technological pride. Most dissident Iranians also share this perspective as in their opinion Iran doesn't have the requisite capability or technological advancement to produce nuclear weapons.⁵⁰

While there is yet another group of analysts in the West, and especially in Europe, who 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 the Americans.⁵¹ Among these scholars, a few believe that the Iranian nuclear programme is mainly defensive and deterrence based. In their opinion due to close proximity to three nuclear states, Pakistan, Israel and US troops, Iran feels compelled to have a nuclear deterrent of its own, especially after witnessing the fate of a non-nuclear Iraq

⁴⁹ Ibid., 11-13.

⁵⁰ Frederic Wehrey, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, 30-32. See also, Shahrām Chubin and Robert S. Litwak, "Debating Iran's Nuclear Aspirations," *Washington Quarterly* (Autumn 2003): 105-108.

⁵¹ Therese Delpech, *Iran and the Bomb*, 9-21.

and Libya.⁵² However, most Americans and Israelis have different thoughts on the Iranian nuclear issue and they believe that Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapon programme and actually wants to build a bomb and, therefore, all means, including military, must be utilized to stop Iran from reaching a point of no return. Yet they are in no haste to strike Iran and face an unprecedented situation in the Middle East; and, in their opinion, Iran is still several years away from that point where a military strike would become the only option to decapitate its nuclear capability.

Supporting the Palestinian Cause

Iran and Israel have been allies during the era of the Shah but since the Iranian revolution the situation has diametrically changed. The current nature of Iranian conflict with Israel is more of a religious nature rather than political. The Iranian revolution is a manifestation of the religious philosophy of Ayatollah Khomeini who affirmed the Shi'ite tradition relating to the return of Imam Mahdi. President Ahmadinejad⁵³ is a votary of this tradition. This religious doctrine perceives that evil is rooted in modern western culture which is a product of Zionism and American neo-imperialism.⁵⁴ While over a period of time, American imperialism might get weakened and may lose its significance for Iran, the Zionist expansionist philosophy pursued by Israel is likely to continue in future also fuelling the Palestinian struggle for a separate homeland which is at the root of the present Iran-Israel conflict. The Iranian overt support for the Palestinian cause through various armed militant groups is no secret. The prospects therefore of Iran and Israel living in peace are bleak till such time a peaceful solution to the Palestinian issue is found or the Iranian government brings about a radical change in its ideology/policy, both of which are implausible scenarios in the near future.

Relations with other Neighbouring Countries

Iran has adopted a diverse approach towards its neighbours which is a mix of pragmatism and ideology.⁵⁵ Immediately after the revolution, Iranian foreign policy was driven through its sectarian motivation which has progressively been replaced by a more realistic and nationalistic approach.⁵⁶ Although Iran has not disassociated itself from its ideological moorings, it has adopted a bilateral approach to safeguard its national and economic interests as a priority.

⁵² Shahram Chubin, "Debating Iran's Nuclear Aspirations," 102.

⁵³ Parvizi M. Amineh, *The Greater Middle East in Global Politics*, 121-131.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 138-141.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 154-158.

⁵⁶ Khasayar Hooshiyar, "Iran, Globalization, and the US Imperialist Agenda in the Middle East," *Relay – A Socialist Project Review Toronto* no. 9 (January/February 2006): 32-33.

It, therefore, gives priority to states where the domestic public opinion is favourable towards Iran. This diversity of approach is seen in its relationship with India and Saudi Arabia.⁵⁷ It also supports the Shiite populations in Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon, Syria and even Saudi Arabia where mostly Sunni leaders rule the state. It has also formed an alliance with Syria to extend its sphere of influence up to Israel.

Implications of a Nuclear Iran on the Region

The US and Israel have openly proclaimed that Iran with nuclear weapon capability is unacceptable and towards this end, all options, including military strikes, are on the table.⁵⁸ The US is reluctant to strike at Iran mainly because of two reasons: first, it doesn't want to risk another war in the region and second, it believes that Iran is several years away from acquiring the nuclear technology.⁵⁹ The Israeli position on the issue is however different and its plan of striking Iranian nuclear installations is much older than the current hardliner regime. However for Israelis, the time for striking Iran has still not come as Iran is believed to be several years away from acquiring a nuclear device. Moreover, Israel is not confident of handling the fallout of such an action. Israel also believes that sanctions or other soft measures (like cyber warfare etc) would not prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons capability, if it so decides. Therefore, in Israeli perception short of complete annihilation of Iran's conventional military and nuclear capabilities there is no other way to stop Iran on its nuclear path. Various studies on the subject indicate that a surgical air or missile strike would just be good enough to reverse the clock of Iranian nuclear programme by a few years and will have to be repeated periodically at huge economic and political cost to keep preventing Iran from reaching nuclear capability.

Some analysts therefore, suggest that the US should adopt a multilateral and direct diplomatic approach to deal with Iran, possibly including some security assurances and reducing its threat perceptions by involving other influential regional countries like Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iraq to convince Iran that acquiring nuclear weapons and violating NPT obligations would be an unwise and costlier affair.⁶⁰ This however, does not seem possible due to

⁵⁷ Therese Delpech, *Iran and the Bomb*, 59-63, 79-81.

⁵⁸ Yitzhak Benhorin, "Obama: Nuclear Iran Unacceptable," *Yedioth Internet*, May 9, 2008, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3592480,00.html>. See also, "Nuclear Iran Unacceptable: Israel," *Msn News Canada*, November 19, 2011, <http://news.ca.msn.com/canada/nuclear-iran-unacceptable-israel>.

⁵⁹ "National Intelligence Estimates: Iran Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities," *National Intelligence Council*, November 2007. See also, "Annual Threat Assessment of US Intelligence Community for Senate Select Committee," *Director of National Intelligence*, February 2, 2010.

⁶⁰ Frederic Wehrey, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, 145-151.

the influence of the Israeli lobby on American policy makers.⁶¹ A nuclear Iran, intent upon arming itself, is not an entirely implausible possibility in the future. Consequently, some western analysts have argued that the West must prepare itself for a new nuclear power in the Middle East, focusing on a policy of 'how to handle a nuclear capable Iran' rather than planning "how to prevent Iran from becoming nuclear?"⁶² There could be numerous implications of a nuclear capable Iran including:

Regional Dominance and Pre-eminence

Iran's main objectives in the region are, first to establish a regional hegemony or pre-eminence especially in the Persian Gulf and the strait of Hormuz in order to have control over the world's busiest oil route, and second, to protect the Shia population living in other parts of the region. After Iran becomes nuclear, it is feared by some analysts that the hardliner government in Tehran would use the nuclear weapons not only as a tool of psychological dominance to impose its hegemony in the region but also to settle issues on its terms.⁶³ In their opinion these aspirations of Iran can be traced back to the times of the Shah, who had established very close relations with the United States and Israel in order to become a policeman of the region.⁶⁴ However, this hypothesis is inherently flawed as Iran in itself is not powerful enough to undermine the interests of the major powers in the region. In the past too it used the crutches of US and Israeli support to project its superior position and stand tall in the region, and yet, without being offensive in posture. There is no doubt that the Iranian ability to watch over the Persian Gulf would definitely raise its stature and bargaining position in the world but anything beyond that is debatable.

Exporting the Shiite Revolution

Some analysts believe that if Iran becomes nuclear, it would re-invoke its old aspirations of exporting the Shiite revolution to other parts of the region which could have very destabilizing effect on the region. Immediately after the revolution in Iran, the Iranian spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini hinted that

⁶¹ Stephen Walt and John J. Mearsheimer, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (United Kingdom: Penguin Books, 2008), 282-294.

⁶² James Dobbins et al., *Coping with a Nuclearizing Iran* (California: RAND Corporation, 2011), 93-108.

⁶³ Maj. Gen. Farkash (ret'd), "Iranian Strategic Vulnerabilities: Implications for Policy Options to Halt the Iranian Nuclear Program," *Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs*, special issue on "Iran's Race for Regional Supremacy: Strategic Implications for the Middle East," 2008, 38.

⁶⁴ Dr. Zahid Ali Khan, "US Post 9/11 Persian Gulf Policy: Iran's Concerns and Options," *IPRI Journal* vol. XI, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 42-42.

the revolutionary ideology could spread in the region with its persuasive strength though not through force.⁶⁵ There is a significant number of Shia Muslims living in the Gulf and Middle East countries. If Iran acquires a nuclear weapon capability, these populations would feel emboldened to engage in efforts for bringing about a Shiite revolution. Such a development could have dangerous political, sectarian and economic implications for the whole region. Such speculations have proved wrong even in the days of the Arab spring which has shaken many autocratic states, with the Shias agitating only in the tiny Sheikdom of Bahrain.

Deepening Sectarian Divide

Even if Iran made no such effort to export its Shiite ideology to other countries, some states like Saudi Arabia would still see a nuclear capable Iran as a threat to be matched by a nuclear deterrent of their own.⁶⁶ This trend of mistrust and hostility could seriously compound the existing Shia-Sunni rift in the region with serious consequences for Pakistan as well. Pakistan, which is maintaining very good relations with the largely Sunni Middle Eastern states as well as Iran in its neighbourhood, may be confronted with an extremely difficult choice, of choosing between a Shiite Iran and a Sunni Middle East. The fragile sectarian divisions within Pakistan could also come under immense strain ultimately leading to internal and external instability.

Undermining of the Non-Proliferation Treaty/Regime

If Iran acquires a nuclear weapon capability, it could have a corrosive effect on the nuclear non-proliferation regime as other states in the Middle East and elsewhere could scrap the NPT in pursuit of nuclear weapons. As many as thirteen states including Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, UAE and Saudi Arabia etc. have already hinted at starting nuclear programmes of their own in any such eventuality.⁶⁷ States in other regions like Japan, South Korea and Venezuela etc. could also get motivated by the growing nuclear proliferation

⁶⁵ Lt. Col. Cohen (ret'd), "Iranian Export of Revolution Doctrine and Implementation," *Institute of Policy and Strategy*, Hudson Institute, May 1, 2007, 11-15.

⁶⁶ "Saudi Arabia May Need Nuclear Weapons to Fend Off Threat from Iran and Israel, says Former Intelligence Chief," *Daily Mail*, December 6, 2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2070704/Saudi-Arabia-need-nuclear-weapons-fend-threat-Iran-Israel-says-prince.html#ixzz1hMk7gmy9> (accessed December 18, 2011).

⁶⁷ "Report: Iran could Spark New Nuclear Arms Race," *MSN News*, May 20, 2008, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/24722068/ns/world_news-mideast_n_africa/t/report-iran-could-spark-new-nuclear-arms-race/#.TvbCKjX9NDQ (accessed December 20, 2011).

trends around the globe. Such a scenario would make the NPT redundant, triggering a world wide nuclear arms race.

Emboldening the Militant Groups

Some analysts fear that if Iran acquires a nuclear weapon capability, it could embolden militant groups like Hezbollah, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad etc., against Israel⁶⁸ besides some factions within the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. This development may refuel their extremist ardour to renew their activities in Israel and Afghanistan with the support of a nuclear armed Iran at their back. This could raise the level of violence across the region but also create the scare of a nuclear confrontation. Pakistan could also be affected by this resurgence of extremist violence.

Escalatory Scenario with Israel

Iran's conflict with the US and Israel is escalating. As already discussed, the Iranian conflict with United States has political dimensions but its nature of conflict with Israel is mainly within a religious paradigm. The current Iranian regime considers Israel as an occupier state which must not be recognized, besides believing that the state of Israel would be destroyed at their hands after the emergence of their Twelfth Imam, known as Mahdi, from hiding. The Mahdi would not emerge till the world is in total chaos which can result from a final confrontation of the Muslim world with Israel or a strike on Iran.⁶⁹ Some analysts believe that if Iran acquires a nuclear bomb, it may use it on Israel to create the required conditions for the return of their awaited Messiah. However, this assertion has very weak foundations because in any such case not only the Israelis but a great many Palestinians would also become the victim of the Iranian strike, making Iran an aggressor. The Mahdi, according to Shiite tradition, cannot be on the side of the aggressors. However, for Israel, regardless of the Shiite beliefs, a nuclear armed Iran is an existential threat⁷⁰ mainly because of its small size that a single nuclear strike can annihilate.⁷¹ These threat perceptions could convince Israel that pre-emption is the only way to ensure its own survival against a nuclear capable Iran. To be able to counter a possibility such as this, Israel has prepared different contingent plans and rehearsed nuclear attack scenarios besides demonstrating its ability to hit far off targets with long range nuclear capable missiles and developing hi-tech

⁶⁸ James M. Lindsay and Ray Takeyh, "After Iran Gets the Bomb," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2010), <http://www.cfr.org/united-states/after-iran-gets-bomb/p22182> (accessed December 20, 2011).

⁶⁹ Michael D. Evans, *Showdown with Nuclear Iran*, 47, 196. Also see, Ali Reza Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 31.

⁷⁰ Judith Yaphe, "Reassessing the Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran," 25-26.

⁷¹ Michael D. Evans, *Showdown with Nuclear Iran*, 82.

electronic weapons.⁷² If the Palestinian conflict lingers on so would Iran's conflict with Israel and the threat of escalation of tensions in the entire region jeopardising its security.

Heightened Risks of a Major or a Nuclear War

All these plausible scenarios present the risk of an outbreak of a major war⁷³ in the region either between Israel and Iran or between United States and Iran involving other non-state actors like Hamas and Hezbollah etc. fighting on the side of Iran. If the US or Israel strikes Iran, there would be a severe backlash from Iran in the shape of blocking the strait of Hormuz, attacking the US bases in the Middle East and Israeli cities with missiles or air force attacks. On the other side, most of the governments in the Middle East including the newly-elected pro-Islamic governments in Egypt and Turkey will have to take a stand against Israel. Syria, due to its domestic situation, and the militant groups like Hamas and Hezbollah may also launch attacks in Israel creating an unprecedented scenario in the Middle East which could have catastrophic consequences for the region and the whole world.

Policy Options for Pakistan

Pakistan supports Iran's inherent right to pursue a peaceful nuclear energy programme. There is no stated official position on what would be Pakistan's response in case Iran acquires a nuclear weapon capability. Pakistan is already sharing a border with two nuclear countries, one hostile, and another friendly. What would be the impact of a nuclear Iran on Pakistan particularly in the sectarian context? Except for any repercussions in that particular area, state to state relations have every likelihood of not suffering any decline. It would be unthinkable for Pakistan, as well as for Iran, to have a military confrontation with each other. This however, does not imply that Pakistan could in any way play any part in Iran's nuclear pursuit. Iran is a signatory of the NPT and under the treaty obligations it cannot develop a nuclear weapon. Pakistan would stick to its stance of reiterating that Iran has the right to peaceful uses of nuclear technology under article IV of NPT. However, Pakistan would oppose any military adventurism against Iran that would jeopardise the security and stability of the entire region.

⁷² "Israel's Secret Iran Attack Plan: Electronic Warfare," *Newsweek and The Daily Beast*, November 16, 2011, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/11/16/israel-s-secret-iran-attack-plan-electronic-warfare.html> (accessed December 20, 2011), also "Israeli Army Tests-fires Missile Capable of Reaching Iran," *Guardian*, November 3, 2011.

⁷³ Goodspeed, "Middle East on the Brink of War."

Nuclear Policy of Pakistan

If Iran acquires a nuclear weapon, could this ease the Western pressure on Pakistan or not is a matter of intense debate. The storm of criticism that would welcome the Iranian weapon may for a while shift the West's attention from the Pakistani arsenal that they in any case have no liking for. While that may not be such a big cause for celebration there is every likelihood that the two states may be grouped together as nuclear twins and ultimately taken to the UN Security Council for aggressive scrutiny and tougher action. But Pakistan would have no reason to change its nuclear stance and policy as it is only poised to serve as a deterrent against India rather than any other country.⁷⁴

Pakistan's Afghan Policy

Pakistan and Iran had enjoyed close friendly relations even till after the revolution of 1979. It was in the late nineties when Pakistan's support for the anti-Shiite Taliban regime in Kabul displeased the Iranian government that relations between the two turned lukewarm and Iran got closer to India. However, in the last few years, India-Iran relations have cooled down a lot in the wake of India's tilt towards the US and Israel.⁷⁵ Of late, an understanding between Pakistan and Iran has grown to not base their relations, as in the 90's, on their policies towards Afghanistan.⁷⁶ Since 1989, Iran's foreign policy has been based more on pragmatism than just ideology. It is seen in its Palestine policy which lends political and financial support without discrimination to hardliner Sunni organizations like Hamas and Islamic Jihad against a common enemy.⁷⁷ Therefore it would be advisable if Pakistan took Iran on board to formulate a joint strategy towards Afghanistan to strengthen the existing relations between the three states. This co-operative engagement would go a long way in promoting regional stability by attracting countries like Turkey, China and the Central Asian states to the cooperative circle.

⁷⁴ Naeem Salik, *The Genesis of South Asian Nuclear Deterrence* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 68-69.

⁷⁵ Sudha Ramachandran, "India-Iran Relations at Nadir," *Asia Times Online*, December 4, 2010, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/LL04Df01.html. See also, Kamran Bokhari, "Dispatch: Increasing Complications in India-Iran Relations," *Stratfor*, June 14, 2011, <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20110614-dispatch-increasing-complications-india-iran-relations> (accessed November 22, 2011).

⁷⁶ Qudssia Akhalque, "Khatami Visit a Turning Point," *Dawn*, December 23, 2002, www.dawn.com/2002/12/23/top4.htm, see also, Dr. Noor ul Haq, eds., "Pakistan-Iran Relations," *IPRI Factfile*, July, 2007, 61-63.

⁷⁷ Greg Bruno, "State Sponsors: Iran," *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 7, 2010, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/state-sponsors-iran/p9362#p5> (accessed May 22, 2011).

Defence and Economic Policy of Pakistan

Relations with Iran

Iran's relationship with India has also become lukewarm in the last few years. As a result it is looking for allies in the region and elsewhere to counterbalance the West.⁷⁸ There are immense defence, industrial, agricultural and economic cooperation prospects for Iran and Pakistan within the UN sanctioned framework.⁷⁹ While the US and Pakistani perceptions on various issues in the region relating for instance to China and India are at variance for obvious reasons, Pakistan and Iran, to a great extent, share these perceptions due to close proximity that provide a basis for a durable relationship. This cooperative relationship in economic, trade, energy, industrial and defence fields would be imperative for the prosperity of the region. However, this cooperation should not be viewed in military terms as some kind of an alliance to offset some regional or global power but rather as an arrangement between neighbours to expand and strengthen their bilateral relationship.

Reviving the ECO

Pakistan currently faces severe shortages in the energy sector. To overcome the problem Pakistan needs to work on multiple projects like the IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India) gas pipeline and TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) gas pipelines. Such projects would enable Pakistan, Iran and other regional countries, especially Turkey, to rejuvenate the old ties through the now almost defunct ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization). This cooperative relationship can then be expanded into a regional economic cooperation organization involving other Central Asian states and China to enhance cooperation in the fields of technology and natural resources.⁸⁰ This cooperative arrangement can further be linked to the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) etc.

Strategic Depth Phenomenon

The notion of strategic depth has become a misperceived and misconceived idea in Pakistan as the most myopic of academics translate it in terms of territory which is not correct. The concept of strategic depth is used by almost

⁷⁸ Frederic Wehrey, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, 12-13.

⁷⁹ "Shakeri Calls for Enhancing Iran-Pak Cooperation," *IRNA*, May 21, 2011. See also, "Ahmadinejad Calls for Enhanced Co-operation with Pakistan," *FARS News Agency*, March 21, 2011.

⁸⁰ Dr. Noor ul Haq, "Pakistan-Iran Relations," 62-63.

all the state militaries around the globe and is not restricted to Pakistan alone.⁸¹ Strategic depth is a far deeper and comprehensive concept which implies for Pakistan that a stable neighbourhood in the West, with strong economic, diplomatic and cultural ties with Pakistan would relieve Pakistan of any security concerns on that side of its borders. Moreover, in a war like situation between India and Pakistan, the economic and political interests of its other neighbouring countries would also be at stake thus compelling them to put their diplomatic weight behind efforts to prevent the conflict from escalating. Likewise, once the economic and strategic interests of Iran get interlinked with Pakistani interests it may equally affect Iran if an Indo-Pak conflict escalates. In such a situation India would also have to consider the factor of a nuclear capable Iran.

Bridging the Gap

Pakistan currently is maintaining cordial relations with both Sunni Arab states and Iran. However, Iranian relations with some of the other Sunni dominated states are not very satisfactory. Pakistan has a good opportunity to play the role of a mediator between these states and Iran. By maintaining good relations with both the parties, and initiating joint economic and defence projects, Pakistan can help bring them closer and reduce the trust deficit, especially between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Enhancing the scope of regional organizations and enlisting these states as members of these enlarged bodies could facilitate such a modus vivendi among them. This would also enhance Pakistan's stature in the OIC and the region.

Moving towards Resolution of Palestinian Dispute

Fearing the risk of a major or a nuclear war erupting in the region the US and Israel may continue their existing policy of keeping the Palestinian issue on the back burner. This has recently been reiterated by the US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta as well that Israel must return to the negotiating table with the Palestinians and should mend its ties with Egypt and Turkey.⁸² In case of the resolution of the Palestinian issue the inflammatory cause fuelling militancy and terrorism in the Muslim world would cease to exist. Pakistan has long supported the cause of Palestine and it must therefore use its relations with the Europeans, Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern states to lobby with US

⁸¹ Ejaz Haider, "Pakistan Needs Strategic Depth," *Express Tribune*, October 7, 2011, also, Asad Durrani "Strategic Depth – Revisited," *Express Tribune*, October 19, 2011, and also, Britta Petersen, "On Strategic Depth – A European Point of View," *Express Tribune*, October 27, 2011.

⁸² "US Urges Israel to End Isolation in Middle East," *BBC News*, December 3, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16014194> (accessed December 21, 2011).

policy makers towards the resolution of the Palestinian issue. The task is not easy but if some steps are taken in the right direction, it would help in reducing the existing level of violence and terrorist acts around the world. Palestine is the major source of anti-western sentiments. Its pacification would totally defang the Militant rhetoric and diminish its appeal to new recruits. This is apparently not understood by the US which is fighting the so-called “war on terror.”

Kashmir Policy

Even though India persistently rejects mediation on Kashmir, an expanded SAARC with Iran in it can also help in the resolution of this old dispute. Perhaps Iranian efforts at mediation would be more acceptable to India seen in the regional framework to mediation by the US to which India is allergic. The concern of the regional countries in the context of economic benefits indeed carries more weight.

Conclusion

While these debates rage and the West increases its pressure on Iran to desist from its nuclear intentions that the latter has so far emphatically denied, Pakistan’s support for Iran’s peaceful programme should continue under the NPT. It would be difficult to predict how a nuclear Iran would impact the world. Some analysts believe that more states with nuclear weapons would bring more stability in the world and the fear of their behaving irrationally is unfounded and overblown.⁸³ However, there are others who argue that a nuclear armed Iran would increase its influence in the Middle East manifold, thus further intensifying the rift that exists between the Shiite-Sunni states and could thus become a source of further instability. A third group of analysts argues that a nuclear armed Iran, at some point of time in future, would lead the region into a major war, possibly nuclear, involving the US, Israel and Iran. 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. Pakistan already shares its borders with two nuclear armed countries, China and India and it should formulate its policy options before hand if Iran acquires a nuclear weapon. Though Pakistan would tread with care in such an eventuality, it would be a tight rope to walk on with serious risks as well as opportunities. ■

⁸³ Kenneth Waltz, “The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More Maybe Better,” *International Institute for Strategic Studies* (London), Adelphi Papers, no. 171 (1981): 36.