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**IRANIAN NUCLEAR DEAL AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE
REGION: ANALYSIS OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**

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(Member, RIEAS International Advisory Board based in Pakistan)

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**RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN STUDIES
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Introduction

Iran once had a nuclear ambition which was a concern to the Western powers. It was during the Khomeini period (1979-1989) that the Iran's nuclear program first began and gradually grew on all stages of the nuclear fuel cycle. Then, Iran had started construction of the Bushehr reactors with the assistance of Russia. By 1995, Iran was procuring dual-use technology from Western sources, which indicated to some that it was pursuing nuclear weapons. By 2002, Iran had established a heavy water production plant and a uranium enrichment facility. The present crisis began in 2003 when the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency), in a surprise, move determined that Iran had for almost two decades concealed its nuclear activities, in breach of its

obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Iran is a signatory to NPT and therefore has a right to a civil nuclear program. The IAEA had declared that sensitive technology facilities were being developed in Iran and that it had not been transparent with its nuclear-related facilities and import of nuclear material. Critics of Iran got the smoking gun they had wanted all along. They jumped at the opportunity now presented and began to argue that there was a history of past efforts at concealment in Iran. It was alleged that Iran had indulged in black market shopping and other suspect activities and had established a growing ballistic missile development program. Later, the IAEA reported that Iran had nuclear equipment supplied by the black market sources, chiefly the A.Q. Khan network. Iran promised to suspend the uranium conversion activities for an interim period.

But in August 2005, Iran broke the UN seals at its uranium conversion plant and resumed the conversion of uranium. It had breached its NPT obligations by this action and was in violation of a deal reached with the EU trio of Britain, Germany, and France. The IAEA demanded that Iran halt all nuclear fuel work but it refused. Ever since, the Iranian nuclear program has been a matter of great concern to the West. Later, the IAEA had expressed fears that referring Iran to the UNSC for possible sanctions over concerns that Iran wanted to build nuclear arms would split its members. The IAEA wanted to give more time to Iran by setting a new deadline for it to halt sensitive work. The US and EU were rallying support for a tough resolution calling on the IAEA governing board to report Iran's secretive nuclear program to the UNSC for sanctions against Iran. Then in a major development the IAEA called on Iran to suspend all enrichment activities and declared that Iran was in violation of NPT technical safeguard measures. Finally, on Sep. 24, 2005, the IAEA passed a resolution requiring Iran to be reported to the UNSC over a failure to convince the agency its nuclear program was entirely peaceful. The IAEA approved the resolution despite earlier Iranian threats to begin enriching uranium, if the UNSC passed any sanctions against it. The EU resolution required Iran to be reported to the UNSC, but at an unspecified date, watering down an earlier demand from the Europeans for an immediate referral. This means Iran would most likely not be referred to the UNSC until the IAEA board meets in November 2005. The resolution was widely seen as a victory for Western efforts to increase pressure on Iran. Both China and Russia, which had earlier strongly opposed the EU's proposed resolution, abstained. Surprisingly India, which had earlier opposed the EU resolution, voted for it. Only Venezuela voted for Iran. The foreign minister of Iran immediately called the

resolution an illegal, illogical and a political act. Iran also threatened to halt spot checks by the IAEA on its nuclear sites. The stage was set for a confrontation with the US and EU. Iran's rhetoric was not helping matters.

The Past Iranian Perception

Officially, Iran had consistently denied any ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons. It had reiterated that it would never use atomic technology to make bombs. Iran had claimed that it did not intend to produce nuclear weapons because of its Islamic laws and that it does not even need nuclear weapons. Later, Iran also claimed that it had mastered the fuel cycle, but was committed to the peaceful use of this technology within the framework of the NPT, international laws and in cooperation with the IAEA. Iran had reaffirmed its right to possess the full nuclear fuel cycle. It then outlined four proposals, including an offer to engage in serious partnership with private and public sectors of other countries in the implementation of its uranium-enrichment program. Iran insists such work is only for peaceful purposes and a right it should enjoy as a signatory of the nuclear NPT. Iran claimed that the offer represented the most far-reaching step, outside all requirements of the NPT. Iran asked the UN to create an ad hoc committee to study and report on possible practical measures and strategies for complete disarmament. It questions how Israel came to acquire nuclear arms.

The question was: Why would Iran want a nuclear bomb? There were given a number of reasons why it may want one. May be, it was the Iranian feeling of deep insecurity resulting from its particular historical experiences. Earlier in 1951, the US had ousted the populist government of Mossadegh and installed the Shah on the throne of Iran. The Shah was a brutal, egomaniac, pro-Western king who much destroyed the Islamic identity of Iran. The regime was corrupt and also ruthless. The Iranian people suffered under the Shah's rule. The US had given him considerable support through his long rule and had a very profitable relationship with Iran. The Shah was obsessed with modernization and attaining regional power status by building a formidable military. The US had once sold Iran expensive weapon systems that it never needed, nor even had the capacity to use. The people had enough of the Shah and his American protectors. Finally, the Shah was overthrown in 1979 in a populist revolution led by Imam Khomeini. This Islamic revolution is considered as one of the great revolutions in the history of the Third World. Since the beginning the Islamic revolution has been intensely opposed by the US. The US still does not recognize the Islamic republic. The regime of Saddam Hussein, with considerable American support, committed aggression against the new republic in 1980. The Iran-Iraq war lasted eight

years in which millions died and the Iranian economy was ravaged. The Khomeini regime was devastated as a result of the war. The regime resolved to acquire military strength so that it never feels vulnerable again. Thus, perception of acute perpetual insecurity explained why Iran may have wanted nuclear weapons. Arjomand maintained that:¹

As Iran scanned the strategic horizon, it seemed obvious that the US had invaded Iraq because Saddam did *not* have any weapons of mass destruction. This made Ahmadinejad's insistence on Iran's nuclear "rights" popular with the Iranian masses and the middle class alike. Despite popular disenchantment with the Ahmadinejad era, that sentiment still prevails in Iran

Secondly, Iran continued to be situated in a region that was unstable. Therefore, acquisition of a nuclear capability made some sense, at least to the Iranians. While the US castigated Iran's nuclear efforts yet it maintained a surprising silence on Israel's nuclear weapons. Ever since 9/11, the Bush administration has indulged in rhetoric denouncing Iran as an "outpost of tyranny" and as one of the "axis of evil". The encirclement of Iran with US military power has presented Iranian rulers with a pronounced and imminent threat. For Iran the US is still a state whose antagonistic attitude cannot be neglected and whose power cannot be ignored. Therefore, the Islamic regime looks toward the nuclear bomb as the ultimate guarantee of American good behaviour. Thus, relations between Iran and the US became hostile. Arjomand had argued that:²

Of course, one explanation for the prolonged bilateral freeze is the warped discourse of what George W. Bush foolishly called the "global war on terror," in which Iran, along with Iraq and North Korea, was cast as part of an international "axis of evil." As a result, US officials viewed any move toward diplomatic normalization as unacceptable "appeasement." But the Bush administration's moralistic foreign policy merely reinforced America's stance since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution. And it is in the history and course

¹ SAÏD AMIR ARJOMAND, *The End of Iran's Islamic Revolution*, Project Syndicate, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/end-of-iran-islamic-revolution-by-said-amir-arjomand-2015-08#X0pbgoPVDKfRIRr4.99>, Accessed August 23, 2015

² SAÏD AMIR ARJOMAND, *The End of Iran's Islamic Revolution*, The Project Syndicate, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/end-of-iran-islamic-revolution-by-said-amir-arjomand-2015-08#X0pbgoPVDKfRIRr4.99>, Accessed August 23, 2015

of that revolution that a fuller and more compelling explanation of recent events is to be found.

Thirdly, Iran aspired for leadership of the Muslim world. It was an ancient nation and has a strong nationalism to match. Iran is also very ambitious. The crisis in relationship between Iran and the West was not just about nuclear weapons. The real cause was much deeper. Iran was determined to reshape the Middle East in its own image. Earlier, it seemed to be deliberately provoking a “clash of civilizations” with the US. Iran was brandishing its Islamic credentials, when it opposed Israel with which it had no direct dispute. In 2005 a new leadership emerged in Iran, which was a far stronger enemy of the US. The previous regime was perceived to be corrupt and the old guard of clerics seemed to be on the way out. The general elections had empowered the Revolutionary Guards. Ahmadinejad, then the president of Iran, represented this institution. In the past few years the Revolutionary Guards had in so many ways become the government. Ahmadinejad was the first non-cleric to become president since 1981. Arjomand stated he was a “fanatical devotee of Khomeini, the revolution’s first imam, was a reminder of the revolution’s populist inception. To promote an aggressive nuclear policy was to vindicate Khomeini’s battle against America, “the Great Satan.”³ Thus, the Iranian defiance of the West increased. In August 2005, Khomeini, supreme leader of the republic, announced that in contradiction to the US Greater Middle East plan, Iran had one of its own. President Ahmadinejad’s rhetoric had become intense. He claimed that the US was in its last throes, while Iran was rising and was destined to supersede it. The geopolitical dominance in the Middle East was the incontestable right of Iran. The Iranian president announced that the country was ready to share nuclear technology with Muslim countries. In a UNGA address on September 17, 2005 he accused the US of conducting a “nuclear apartheid” and that it was guilty of nuclear proliferation. President Ahmadinejad has warned that if countries tried to impose their will on Iran through force then it will reconsider its entire approach to the nuclear issue. President Ahmadinejad said that Iran had a right to possess the full nuclear fuel cycle⁴ has warned the UN that taking punitive measures over intentions rather than actions contradicts the principles of the UN. Iran signalled its resolve to never bow to Western demands to dismantle parts of its nuclear program and was ready to face the consequences. Iran was adamant in maintaining a tough stance at the UN.

³ ARJOMAND, The End of Iran’s Islamic Revolution, The Project Syndicate, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/end-of-iran-islamic-revolution-by-said-amir-arjomand-2015-08#X0pbgoPVDKfRIRr4.99> Accessed August 23, 2015

⁴ Dawn, Sep 19, 2005

The Past American Perception

Earlier, in the aftermath of 9/11, the Bush administration had articulated the “Axis of Evil” policy. The US continually talked about the threats posed by Iraq, Iran and North Korea. These three countries were castigated as “rogue states” that were bent on acquiring WMD. The US would take pre-emptive action to protect itself from threats “before such dangers had progressed to a stage at which they would prove difficult, if not impossible to eliminate”.⁵ Thus the perception of threats had changed for the US. Largely, the Doctrine of Pre-emption, as it came to be known, was a response to 9/11. The doctrine and the resulting National Security Strategy of 2002 were seen as a “comprehensive blueprint” to meet America’s security needs. Some of the goals of the strategy were related to security while others pertained to democracy building and economic growth in the Middle East. Specifically, the US pledged to prevent its enemies from threatening it with WMDs. Iran was also included in this list of US enemies.⁶ The doctrine was actually invoked against Iraq, and the country occupied by the US in 2003. Eventually, it was the repeated public identification of states like Iraq, Iran and North Korea as presenting clear threats to American interests at home and abroad through the development of WMD and sponsorship of terrorism that gave the teeth to the new strategy. The strategic goal of the American Global War on Terror was to rid the world of rogue states seeking nuclear weapons and supporting terrorism.⁷ Having gotten rid of Saddam Hussein, the US has turned its attention to Iran. The probability that the US will move against Iran has been reduced because of the US military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. The US and the EU argue that although Iran is acquiring nuclear fuel, it does not possess any power plant to utilize it. This alone set alarm bells ringing in the West.

The US and the EU began to suspect that Iran was acquiring the wherewithal of nuclear weapons. The US and EU are now wary of Iranian intentions and argue that the NPT could break down if the Iranians get their own way. The US and EU demand that Iran abandon its uranium enrichment technology in return for trade and other incentives. This abandonment is seen as the

⁵ Robert J Pauly Jr. and Tom Lansford, *Strategic Pre-emption: US Foreign Policy and the Second Iraq War* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Co., 2005), 34.

⁶ *Ibid*, 47

⁷ *Ibid*, 50

only objective guarantee that Iran will never acquire nuclear weapons. The EU and US have threatened Iran of having the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) clamp down sanctions on Iran, if it did not stop activity at its nuclear plant. The US was focusing on the IAEA board where it had declared to push forward for full disclosure about Iranian intentions in order for the UNSC to determine the right policy to tackle the matter.⁸ President Bush did acknowledge the Iranian right to a civil nuclear program, but questioned why the oil-rich nation needed one. President Bush has vowed action on Iran in the UN and informed that the US will try to rally China and Russia behind possible UNSC action. He said that the world has to ensure that Iran does not get the nuclear weapon and that it was very significant for the world to grasp that Iran with nuclear weapons will be “incredibly destabilizing”. Therefore, we must work together to prevent Iran from acquiring the means to develop a nuclear weapon.⁹ The US President had met China’s President Jintao in New York on Sep 14 2005, and tried to persuade him to join the US in trying to stop nuclear program of Iran. He asked the Chinese leader not to block action of the IAEA’s reference of Iran’s work on uranium enrichment to the UNSC. Condoleezza Rice, US Secretary of State admitted that the US and the EU might lack the votes to haul Iran before the UNSC.¹⁰ Ms. Rice echoed President Bush’s remark and also conceded that Iran had a right to run a civilian nuclear program. She argued that the real issue was not the civilian nuclear program but the attempt by Iran to acquire the technology to produce a nuclear bomb. Iran does not need nuclear energy, argued Rice. She said that the US would continue to back the EU in its attempts to bar Iran from any activity with potential military use. The US was also concerned about Iran’s very recent offer of sharing nuclear technology with Muslim nations. Ms. Rice argued that generally such acts are called proliferation and that Iran “would probably not be within the responsibilities of a state operating within the NPT”. She continued to say that this was “one of the dangers of letting Iran get the fuel cycle”.¹¹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The Nation, Sep 14, 2005

¹⁰ Dawn, Sep 16, 2005

¹¹ Dawn, Sep 17, 2005

Meanwhile, the US claimed that it had a broad agreement from both developed and developing countries that international pressure must be brought on Iran to stop nuclear fuel work that could be weapons-related. The world community was also in agreement that Iran must suspend its sensitive nuclear fuel cycle activities and cooperate fully with the IAEA. It had been over two years since France, Britain and Germany (commonly called the EU3) had tried to persuade Iran that it needed to abandon its enriched uranium fuel program to convince the world that its atomic ambitions were peaceful.

The US was supported by many countries on the Iranian nuclear issue. Previously, in 2005, France threatened Iran with referral to the UNSC over its nuclear activities. In remarks to the UNSC, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin had then stressed the need for a determined response against weapon proliferation. He had said that in the nuclear sphere, they had put their trust in the IAEA and that if a state failed in its obligations under the NPT, it was legitimate, once dialogue has been exhausted, to refer it to the UNSC.¹² The EU also remained sceptical of any Iranian plan of enriching uranium.¹³ Earlier, Iran seemed to have support in the IAEA. Brazil, India, Indonesia, and South Africa believed that there was no evidence that Iran was violating the NPT. Malaysia had said that all countries had a basic and inalienable right to develop atomic energy for peaceful purposes. Countries belonging to the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) had noted that while the West repeatedly question why oil-rich Iran was building nuclear power plants it never asked Russia, also oil-rich, the same question. Despite the fact that it possessed the world's largest natural gas reserves, Russia had built a number of nuclear power plants. Earlier, India, China and Russia were balking at the American push to refer Iran to the UNSC for possible sanctions. They backed Iran's right to a peaceful nuclear technology under the NPT.

Past Regional Political Developments and the Iranian Nuclear Case

The region's political situation had an obvious bearing on the Iranian nuclear case. The situation in the Middle East had become very complex, to say the least. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had unintended consequences, the rise of Islamic state in Iraq and Syria being one

¹² Dawn, Sep 15, 2005

¹³ Dawn, Sep 17, 2005

glaring example. Previously, Iran seemed to have gained as a result of some political developments. Iran seemed to have benefited from the defeat of its enemies in Afghanistan and Iraq. The regime that emerged in Iraq was Shia not Sunni, which happened to be the best possible outcome for Iran. The expulsion of Syria from Lebanon had left Iran as an influence in the country. Also, the past US insistence on democracy was seemingly undermining Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the two traditional allies of the US, and the rivals of Iran.¹⁴

Assuming that Iran had wanted to acquire a nuclear weapon, what were its likely consequences? Most likely there would have been widespread regional destabilization, in which the opponents of Iran would have sought antidotes to Iranian nuclear capability. A nuclear Iran would have terrorized Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey. There could have been a nuclear spiral in the region.

Russia and China have enormous economic stakes in Iran. Russia was building a \$1 billion nuclear reactor at Bushehr in Iran and had much to gain from Iran's plans to develop atomic energy. Earlier, Russia had been an opponent of referring Iran's program to the UNSC. China, which needed Iran's vast energy resources for its own booming economy, also opposed the Western drive against Iran. Earlier, both countries had feared a UN referral would have caused the standoff over Iran's program to escalate into an international crisis. India also needed energy badly for its development and is trying very hard to acquire Iranian gas and oil. Later, because of intense US pressure India got out of the gigantic \$7-8 billion India-Pakistan-Iran pipeline project. However, the project continued between Pakistan and Iran. Russia, China and India wouldn't have supported any Israeli military action against Iran primarily because of their vested interests. Therefore, no strike by Israel ever took place. Iran did have some support on the nuclear issue. For example, Pakistan had not been a part of the P5+1 group's efforts against Iranian nuclear ambitions. Earlier, Pakistan had believed that taking the matter into the UNSC, without first exhausting all available options would be counterproductive. It seeks a peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue. India is also firmly against nuclear proliferation and seemingly wants the issue resolved diplomatically.¹⁵ Earlier, Pakistan had stated that Iran had the right to a peaceful civil nuclear program.

¹⁴ Amir Taheri, 25

¹⁵ Nasim Zehra, "Iran reaches out to a credible friend," The News, Sep 12, 2005

Meanwhile, Hassan Rouhani became president in 2013 because Iranians had “lost patience with Ahmadinejad’s incompetence”.¹⁶ Arjomand argued that it could be now said that the Islamic Revolution was over.¹⁷ Arjomand maintained that:¹⁸

The nuclear accord reached last month is the product of a different political context: President Barack Obama was eager to make a deal with Iran part of his legacy, and this time, Rouhani, as President, was able to negotiate with the full backing of Khamenei, with whom (unlike Khatami) he has worked closely. But there is a deeper reason for the success of the nuclear negotiations: Khomeini’s Islamic revolution of 1979 has finally ended – and Khamenei knows it. He must also know that the export of Islamic revolution from Shia Iran has lost its allure, replaced in the Sunni world first by the global jihad of al-Qaeda and now by the so-called Islamic State and caliphate of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. For Iran, what counts now is no longer ideology but national interest and realpolitik. That is why it finds itself currently backing the *opponents* of revolutionary Islam: Bashar al-Assad against the Islamists in Syria and the Houthis against al-Qaeda in Yemen. And it is why it finds itself not only signing a nuclear accord with the Great Satan but also tacitly cooperating with it against the Islamic State, their common enemy. Now that the revolution is over, cooperation in other areas is likely to become equally appealing.

Thus, after nine years of standoff between Iran and the West, a historic [deal was made](#) last month, between Iran and six world powers on the country’s [nuclear program](#). Ever since, Iran’s

¹⁶ SAÏD AMIR ARJOMAND, The End of Iran’s Islamic Revolution, The Project Syndicate, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/end-of-iran-islamic-revolution-by-said-amir-arjomand-2015-08#X0pbgoPVDKfRIRr4.99>, Accessed August 23, 2015

¹⁷ SAÏD AMIR ARJOMAND, The End of Iran’s Islamic Revolution, The Project Syndicate, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/end-of-iran-islamic-revolution-by-said-amir-arjomand-2015-08#X0pbgoPVDKfRIRr4.99>, Accessed August 23, 2015

¹⁸ SAÏD AMIR ARJOMAND, The End of Iran’s Islamic Revolution, The Project Syndicate, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/end-of-iran-islamic-revolution-by-said-amir-arjomand-2015-08#X0pbgoPVDKfRIRr4.99>, Accessed August 23, 2015

relations with the West have gradually improved. Rouhani's election was “widely seen as having launched a more positive tone in Iran's interactions with the West.”¹⁹

US - Iran Relations

The US and Iran have had a hostile relationship ever since the Islamic revolution of 1979 that had established the current Islamic republic. However, political developments in the region and circumstances have led to a convergence of national interests in defeating the new transnational threat of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), more commonly called just The Islamic State (IS) which emerged in 2013. Akbarzadeh argued:²⁰

The emergence of ISIL was due to a combination of political, ideological and geo-strategic factors. An expanded aerial campaign will hardly change those. A meaningful response to ISIL would require addressing the underlying factors that allowed ISIL to gain so much ground with such ease. This has been most evident in the Sunni-populated parts of Iraq. This was not the first time that the Sunni population rebelled against the central government in Baghdad. Anbar province was the scene of fighting in 2009, until a promise of political representation won over the Sunni tribes. Without doubt, the government of Nouri al-Maliki failed to deliver on the promise of political inclusion. But the problem is systemic and traces back to the post-Saddam Hussein experience of de-Baathification under US occupation that purged the state machinery of members of the former ruling party. This hit the professional class of Sunni Iraqis hard....Repeated calls by the international community for an inclusive government and adequate representation of Iraq's Sunni population fell on deaf ears in Baghdad. Therefore, it is not surprising that Iraq's Sunni population has been in a state of frustration and rebellion. Many see in ISIL a viable response to the Shia-dominated government's sectarian politics. The irony is that this response further entrenches these sectarian politics. ISIL is sailing in a sea of Sunni political disaffection. Only a political response can take the wind out of its sail. Still, the US is not the one to tell Iraqis how to run their state. Obama was right when he acknowledged early in his first term in office that the US had interfered too much in Middle East affairs.

¹⁹ UK reopens its embassy in Iran as relations warm, Laura Smith-Spark, CNN, August 23, 2015

<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/23/world/iran-uk-embassy-reopening/index.html> accessed August 23, 2015

²⁰ Shahram Akbarzadeh, Memo to Middle East: Solve your own problems,

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/08/memo-middle-east-solve-problems-150820112715131.html>, accessed August 23, 2015

Religious fanaticism, which later morphed into terrorism, was a response to the role played by the US in the region. By supporting unrepresentative governments, Washington has done more than any other actor to feed the monster. As a result, any initiative out of Washington on political change will simply feed into an established narrative of US imperialism, discrediting the message. The solution needs to emerge and be advocated by regional powers. Regional powers have an urgent interest in dealing with ISIL. Bombing attacks in Saudi Arabia, attacks in the Sinai, and not to mention the tide of refugees pouring into neighbouring states, means that they are all immediately affected...Rather than depend on the Americans to do the heavy lifting in solving the problem of ISIL, it is time for the region to engage in some introspection. Perhaps it is time to consider the ideological links between ISIL and what is taught in many religious seminaries in the region. How different is the religious curriculum in established places of learning to ISIL's attitude towards Shia Muslims and other sects? ISIL has presented the Middle East a rare opportunity to re-imagine the future, break with the past, and explore alternatives. Washington can help that process, but only in a supporting role.

Iran and the US will cooperate further in containing the ISIL threat for sure. Menon argued that:²¹

The Islamic State (IS), of which Baghdadi is the Amir al-Mu'minin (Commander of the Faithful), has taken some hits lately, but it's in no danger of being knocked out. The array of foes that IS faces is certainly formidable. And they are coalescing to destroy the Caliphate Baghdadi and his acolytes have created in swaths of Syria and Iraq. The United States, Britain, France, Australia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Iran, and Russia have come to agree that the Caliphate must be put out of commission....Though IS embraces a Salafist-inspired doctrine rooted in an idealized conception of Arabia's 7th century Islamic community, it runs a 21st century, Internet-driven, PR machine. Despite its losses, IS's destruction is scarcely imminent. Though damaged, it retains important sources of strength and resilience, even appeal. To begin with, unlike al-Qaeda, it has by any reasonable definition established a state. IS has also created governing institutions, central and provincial, that run the gamut. Shari'a law is interpreted and enforced (aided by blood-chilling forms of punishment). Taxes are collected. Schooling—based on Wahhabi precepts—is provided, as are various social services. Intelligence is gathered, soldiers recruited and trained. An apparatus of horror is tasked with kidnappings, beheadings and forced amputations, mass atrocities, and sexual slavery—all justified by bizarre theological pronouncements. But the Caliphate would never have achieved what it has where it led by a small band of sociopaths that relied solely on brutality to extract obedience. There's more to IS than its horrendous cruelties would suggest. In anarchic, violent Syria and Iraq, it has acquired a social base by

²¹ Rajan Menon, Beware the Islamic State's Staying Power, *The National Interest*, August 23, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/beware-the-islamic-states-staying-power-13666>, accessed August 23, 2015

providing people—more precisely, those who adhere to its draconian theological rules, don't rebel, and refrain from aiding and abetting its enemies—security, functional institutions, and basic economic necessities. Many of those living under IS rule doubtless have no choice, but others are drawn to its mission of building an Islamic polity and restoring the pieties and glories of old. Successful state-creation explains in part why IS attracts followers from numerous countries, many of whom defy the stereotype of jihadist converts as lost souls: anomie-ridden, marginalized, poorly educated, and professionally unsuccessful. The commitment to re-creating a transnational Caliphate also accounts for the oaths of fealty (*bayat*) that IS has garnered from Islamist groups extending from Pakistan to Libya and even southward to Nigeria. IS has other sources of strength. Its operations are funded by multiple sources of income, including taxes, revenue from selling natural resources, ransoms and cash from shadowy Persian Gulf sources. Its fighters, well-armed, battle-hardened true believers, have acquitted themselves well against enemies with larger numbers and better weapons. In short, the Caliphate isn't an itinerant terrorist center with embryonic cells strewn across the world. That's one of the reasons it has eclipsed al-Qaeda....The Caliphate, by virtue of its agenda, does present a serious threat to the countries in and around its neighbourhood. But they must take the lead in addressing it. The United States can assist in various ways short of military intervention, above all helping to forge a political settlement in Syria and pressing Iraq's government to integrate Sunnis into its political institutions. Progress on both these fronts is essential because the bloodletting and sectarian divisions in Iraq and Syria have been a boon for IS. American military power, though formidable, cannot vanquish IS, and even its efficacy against terrorism is debatable. Keep this in mind. Once the presidential campaign cranks up there will be a continual cacophony of claims from candidates that they, unlike their rivals, have the courage to bring the hammer down on the Caliphate.

Iran supports Assad in Syria. Notwithstanding, US calls for Assad to relinquish power, the Obama Administration hasn't done much to attain the goal. Aziz argued that the Obama Administration had even implicitly approved the Assad regime.²²

He further said:²³

²² Omer Aziz, How Barack Obama betrayed the Syrian people, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/08/barack-obama-betrayed-syrian-people-150822084544918.html> accessed August 23, 2015

²³ Omer Aziz, How Barack Obama betrayed the Syrian people, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/08/barack-obama-betrayed-syrian-people-150822084544918.html> accessed August 23, 2015

Between August 2011, when President Obama first called on Assad to step down, and August 2014, when the US intervened to bomb the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Assad had used chemical weapons against thousands of civilians. Obama threatened airstrikes to punish the regime, but implicit in this threat was the understanding that Assad would stay in power. Obama administration officials even admitted not wanting the Syrian opposition to prevail... the US - a staunch proponent of non-proliferation, whose official policy was that Assad had to go - did not want an Assad. Obama was too risk-averse to enforce his own red line...The Obama administration's argument against intervening in Syria was that the situation was just too complicated for the US to help...By 2014, the Syrian vacuum had become filled with black flags.....Obama's refusal to confront Assad and support the opposition allowed the Syrian president to set in place a motion of events that gave rise to ISIL....Obama's foreign policy has been shaped by his predecessor's invasion of Iraq, and so the choice he offered to the public was do nothing in Syria or risk "another Iraq". But his disinterest exacerbated what may come to be known as "another Syria", with over 250,000 dead, four million refugees, and over half the population displaced. War haemorrhages not only bodies, but memories. It turns the remembered past into a collage of grey rubble between vast chasms of emptiness. History will not be kind to those whose actions and inaction led to the Syrian people's ruin. And while this generation may be lost to the squalor of the refugee camp and terror of daily bombardment, a future generation will remember what was done as their fathers and mothers met the most undignified of ends.

Notwithstanding criticisms by Republicans in the US, the Obama Administration is wary of getting involved militarily again in the Middle East and that for good reason. Apparently, relations between the Iran and the US were poised to improve in the future. The US can collaborate with Iran to defeat regional Islamic terrorist networks like the IS.

Islamic terrorism remains a serious concern and threat in the region. It is the very nature of the Islamic terrorism phenomenon which makes it so dangerous. The Islamic network is transnational possessing a range of fighting capability. While Al-Qaeda was seemingly defeated, it does have regional sympathizers of like-minded groups like Jamaah Islamia, Abu Sayyaf group, and the Moro Islamic Liberation front. Entities may interact with each other secretly to achieve the common objectives. Essentially, these are small groups of like-minded radicals who though associate with each other are not necessarily located in established formal structures. The Al Qaeda may have been defeated but it should not be seen as a defeat of Islamic radicalism. The Islamic radicalism phenomenon is very complex. Paradoxically, a mushrooming effect may be taking place as the known Islamic radical organizations like Al-Qaeda were

decapitated. The most important new Islamic fundamentalist threat now comes from the IS. What is the nature of the Islamic radical phenomena? Firstly, an understanding of the nature of the globalization phenomenon is required. This phenomenon affects us all, including the radicals. The world has changed in the last decade or so. Globalization has benefited many countries rise into prosperity, like in the Asia-Pacific region. The globalization phenomenon has also clearly had some unintended consequences. Several activities, including the criminal drug trade, terrorism, and traffic in nuclear materials, have also been globalized. The financial liberalization that seems to have created a borderless world is also helping international terrorists and criminal networks, and thereby creating numerous problems for poorer countries. The terrorists and criminals love the Internet, the global communication and business infrastructure, and the massive integrated transportation system build around the world in so many regions, like Europe and the US. Paradoxically, globalization has empowered Muslim radicals, like many others across the world. The implications for a continued regional Islamic terrorist network are undeniably very serious

The Muslim problem can be summarized as that of a civilization in the throes of a crisis of unimaginable proportions threatening its very survival. The Muslim world is passing through a very difficult phase of its history. The problems faced by it are both internal and external. Internally, we are stricken by lethal ailments like poverty, illiteracy, social and economic inequity, social anarchy and backwardness, worship of the past, social injustice, etc. The Islamic world seems to be in a big mess. A tidal wave rising from the troubled waters of the Islamic world is the aggressive fanatical extremism masquerading as Islam. This phenomenon is disguising itself in its exterior aspects as religious intolerance, extremism and political violence. Generally everyone agrees that extremism, in all its forms, is deadly for national life and that this attitude has the whole Islamic world, to encounter dangers never experienced before. Almost all agree that the devilish activity has hidden the benign, friendly, and enlightened face of Islam from the view of the world. However, there is sharp disagreement about the real causes of extremism, the right strategy for coming to grips with this mind-set, and for its, eventual eradication. Externally, the Muslim Ummah has no status in international affairs. Muslim societies are considered below human. Muslims are branded as terrorists and there is a growing image of Islam as a religion opposed to love tolerance, knowledge, and freedom of speech,

human rights and progress. The aforementioned internal weaknesses have resulted in an appalling religious extremism. Although extremism is found in only a tiny minority of militants, it has affected the whole Muslim society. The resulting developments have affected those societal segments that have nothing to do with terrorism. Rather these Muslims are against it. Religious extremism has gradually emerged as a violent force. It is based on incomprehension or a misplaced notion of Islam. Unfortunately, the greatest part that plays in promoting this notion of Islam is by the personalities and institutions that are supposed to be the true interpreters of Islam and its seats of learning. The status given to them has been largely accepted by society itself.

Islam is being hijacked by an unenlightened minority of militants who ignore the core universal values of Islam and whose activities grossly distort the image of Islam. This minority's activities are greatly harming the cause of the Muslims, culturally, politically, religiously, and economically. These destructive tendencies need to be countered by mustering all available resources. What can we do about the Islamic radicals? We should be fighting the likes of IS on several fronts. The IS has spread into as far as Pakistan. An editorial entitled "[The IS threat](#)" published in *Dawn* on November 10th, 2014 lamented:²⁴

IS may not yet have a substantial presence in Pakistan, the militant landscape here is favourable to its goals in several ways. Many of the key players in the militant groups today have an agenda and set of targets that easily fits within the IS framework. And the IS brand is international, giving a boost to local outfits in their quest for relevance and importance in the crowded world of militancy. In at least one regard, what the Pakistani state should do is fairly clear: be forthright about the IS threat and the extent of the group's activity in Pakistan. Ultimately, the point of militant groups is to be visible, so major ingress by IS, were it to happen, would be known once attacks start occurring and the group began to take responsibility for them. Far better than that would be to have the threat explained beforehand – because tracking the threat would also mean having a strategy to deal with it if and when it explodes in a big way. Yet, the Pakistani state appears to be stuck in an old pattern of confronting the militant threat: do nothing, or very, very little, until the threat grows so big that it is impossible to ignore – and infinitely more difficult to fight back against. Much the same had happened with Al Qaeda when it began to seek local partners and shape the jihad discourse among militants, giving it an international context and flavour that is significantly more dangerous than localised variants. Were IS to gain more than a toehold in Pakistan, the perils are fairly obvious: IS could go far beyond what Al Qaeda, Lashkar-i-Jhangvi or even the TTP have achieved here. Which would mean a terrible and even

²⁴ See editorial entitled "[The IS threat](#)" published in *Dawn* on November 10th, 2014

higher price that the Pakistani state and society would have to pay for IS's existence here. With its overt and ferocious sectarian agenda, an IS in the ascendant could unleash forces within society that are too frightening to even contemplate. Miss the warning signs now or fail to deny it space within Pakistan now and it may not be long before IS becomes the mother of all militant problems.

It should be realized that a workable strategy to defeat Islamic terrorism requires both near and long term efforts. It must be a practical strategy which can only be formulated after careful planning.

In the short-term, combat terrorism by ruthless force through coordinated action. This effort would include implementing several measures, like capturing or killing terrorists, defeating attacks, disrupting the enemy's plans. Military action is not the sole instrument of national power in this fight. Intelligence sharing and law enforcement are important in this effort. To sum it up, react immediately to the terrorist threats and stop the violence.

Strategy of Enlightened Moderation

The strategy of Enlightened Moderation was first pronounced by General Musharraf during in 2000 or so. Islamic radicalism is primarily a Muslim problem. Clearly, Muslim societies and states have failed here. Muslims should accept responsibility for that failure. More importantly, the Muslim countries should get their act together and work to eliminate the threat. They must together promote the idea of Enlightened Moderation. The idea now reverberates in the entire Muslim world beyond the confines of Pakistan.

The strategy was a two-pronged strategy. The first prong is to be delivered by the Muslim Ummah through rejecting extremism and terrorism and in advancing on the path of socio-economic emancipation. President Musharraf believes that the only way we can remedy the Muslim situation is by emphasizing the real humanitarian teachings of Islam and by implementing its core values on all levels of society, individual and collective. We must also present the real face of Islam to the world. This requires courage, a strong will, wisdom and sound judgment. We have to take certain big decisions now. Otherwise our society will not be

established on positive values. In the long-term, we must change the mind-set fuelling radicalism. Many Muslims have an erroneous and misguided understanding of Islam. This cost we have to pay for the neglect of our education system. The illiteracy and lack of quality education in the Muslim world is tragic to say the least. Years of neglect have led to deplorable education standards in the Muslim world. The time to turn the tide of educational neglect in the Muslim world has come. Simply educate Muslim youth and give them hope for a better world.

The second prong is to be delivered by the West and the US in particular. This consists of resolving all Muslim political disputes and also assisting in the socio-economic uplift of the deprived Muslim World. This is also to be understood as the external dimension of the strategy. Essentially this boils down the world meeting Muslim demands. The world must solve the issues that most bother Muslims, like Kashmir and Palestine. Muslims demand justice and a solution to their long-standing grievances. Anything less will not work. Why should the world assist us? We must win over the hearts and minds of likely supporters of terrorism under the Islamic label. Hopelessness and helplessness breeds resentment and anger that in turn leads to desperate acts of terror. Change the environment and the material conditions those radicals thrive in vulnerable populations will breed extremists. After all, many misguided Muslims turn towards violence as acts of sheer desperation. The phenomenon of Islamic radicalism cannot be defeated force alone. Much more needs to be done. The world on its part must try to better understand Islamic viewpoints. Islam must not be continuously ridiculed in the global media because this breeds resentment in Muslims. The genuine requirements of cultural space and Islamic identity must be duly recognized. It is not only the poor and alienated who become radicals but also the educated and prosperous. The Islamic world can and should be redeemed. There is hope yet. We must promote the notion of Enlightened Moderation. This implementation of the policy requires careful planning at various levels, including a regional forum.

The Future?

A new partnership between the US, Iran, Turkey, India and Pakistan can be established to provide regional peace and stability. In the Asia-Pacific region several regional forums are now in place. The most successful regional forum is Asean. The Saarc was now being established also. The Asean had proven to be a useful forum to discuss regional security and cooperation. In the first decades of the 21st century, a new regional forum needs to be established in the greater

Middle East region to be ready to play a greater role in regional security, politics and the economy. Specifically, it is recommended that the new forum do the following:

1. Establish a new Middle Eastern- Asian multilateral security organization that could effectively hold the interests of the countries of the region. A new forum is needed in which members work earnestly to craft such a relationship. The US, Iran Turkey and Pakistan must take the lead in strongly support funding to train and equip counterterrorism units in various countries in the region. Better border control installations need to be established. Nations throughout the Asia and the Middle East region should be cooperating and building capability to counter transnational terrorist threats. Collective successes can only be partly enabled by greater coordination, and collaboration among national organization. This dimension of the strategy can also be understood as the internal aspect. It is not only at the level of the Muslim world that we must act but also at the higher level of the Asian-Middle Eastern region. What can the forum do in the matter? We need to better planned and galvanized efforts to meet the challenge of Islamic radicalism in the region. A long-term strategy would include mechanisms committed to address the economic and political conditions in the Asia-Middle Eastern region. Some progress has been made in this direction. The countries of the region are cooperating and building capability to counter terrorist threats. Some collective successes have been achieved enabled because of greater coordination, and collaboration among national organization. The forum may be employed as a forum for knowledge sharing and discussions on the subject by its experts. We need to galvanized efforts to better meet the challenge of fighting Islamic radicalism in the region. Some progress has been made in this direction.
2. Meet the Islamic terrorist threat at an intellectual level. Coordinating efforts with the Muslim world designate a forum for the examination of the phenomenon of Islamic radicalism. Given the great importance of Islamic radicalism, a regional dialogue is needed to understand the issue better through an open debate on its complexities.
3. Coordinate regional efforts to meet the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

4. Convene a regional conference on education to help formulate better policies. Specifically, bring in regional experts to share knowledge on what works, what does not, and how to rectify the situation through change management. Combat Islamic radicalism through better education opportunities for all.
5. Launch a new initiative for establishing a Free Trade Area. Devise a 20-year plan to reduce or eliminate tariff and non-tariff barriers throughout the region. Strengthen its links with the World Trade Organization (WTO) to pursue the Doha Development Agenda. Most importantly, work to establish a regional trade organization to work with the WTO to expand regional trade.
6. Increase opportunities for economic dialogue within the countries of the region, both bilaterally and multilaterally.
7. Enter into a pact for coordinated regional disaster management mechanism. The region must meet future disasters in a united manner. The need of a combined effort should have been apparent as long ago as the Tsunami disaster in December 2004 in which the region faced massive devastation and deaths of over 150000. The ASEAN members had taken the lead to sign a pact on coordinating relief efforts to meet disasters. In Laos in July 2005 they resolved to boost efforts to strengthen cooperation across the borders. Later, the first joint disaster drill took place just recently where Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei participated. More efforts were surely needed to build regional disaster management capacity.
8. Work out a political solution to the IS crisis. A new Middle East may be carved out of the old colonial era nation-state configuration. An independent Kurdistan and an independent Sunni homeland in Iraq for starters. A historic opportunity to negotiate a new configuration in the Middle East presents itself. Peace talks are better than the use of military force. The IS cannot be defeated by military muscle alone and therefore a peace talks is all the more necessary. Also, the present nation-state dispensation in the Middle East isn't sacrosanct and can be changed through negotiations. Yes, recognition of Sunni rights and aspirations in both Iraq and Syria is

the need of the hour. Thus, a new Sunni republic must be established in which the IS may, or may not, be empowered. It is the wise thing to do.

The future can be drastically different than the past. It is all up to the present leadership of these countries. The US must now come to terms with the Islamic Republic of Iran and recognize it immediately. Iran must also reach out to the US and end the bitterness of the past. Pakistan and Turkey may facilitate such overtures and rapprochement between two erstwhile enemies. A new Middle East can thus be achieved in which there is peace, security and stability for all.

Iran-Israeli Relations

Iran and Israel are arch rivals and have hostile relations. Israel had vehemently opposed Iran's quest for nuclear weapons and had talked of using military force to stop the advancement of its nuclear program. During the past negotiation phase Israel was still thinking of the use of military force against Iran's nuclear assets. It had warned the US that talks with Iran was futile and pointless. If all failed, Israel was willing to use force to try to stop Iran from going nuclear. It was speculated that Israel would conduct a limited air strike on the suspected nuclear facilities. This would be similar to the Israel's attack in 1981 when it destroyed Iraq's Osirik reactor. However, the US did not contemplate use of force against Iran. Israeli leaders planned to attack military targets in Iran in recent years, but they were held back due to the opinions of other governments and military leaders, according to an audio recording leaked to an Israeli television broadcaster, CNN and the New York Times reported. 'One planned strike was canned after scheduling conflicts with a joint military exercise with the United States got in the way... It detailed three strikes Barak had allegedly planned with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in 2010, 2011 and 2012, the reports said'.²⁵ CNN had translated the audio, which was in Hebrew. CNN reported further on August 22, 2015 that:²⁶

Israeli leaders planned to attack military targets in Iran in recent years, but they were held back due to the opinions of other government and military leaders...One planned strike was canned after scheduling conflicts with a joint military exercise with the United States got in the way...In 2010, an Israeli military assessment put an end to the plans, Barak

²⁵ [Israel planned to attack Iran three times in recent years: reports](#), Dawn, August 23, 2015

²⁶ Ben Brumfield and Oren Liebermann, Leaked audio: Israeli leaders drew up plans to attack Iranian military, CNN, August 22, 2015 <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/22/middleeast/israel-plan-iran-military-target-strike/index.html>, accessed August 23, 2015

apparently said in the recording. "At that crucial moment, essentially, the answer from the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) was that the accumulated capability does not meet the threshold of the IDF chief of staff that he can say this is operational...Then in 2011, IDF Chief of Staff Benny Gantz changed the assessment. The capabilities were there, the recording said. Netanyahu, Barak and then-Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman supported the idea of striking targets in Iran. Eight other ministers got on board, though two needed some convincing, the recording said... The two changed their minds. Reportedly, the idea to attack surfaced again in 2012."We planned to do it, but then I spoke with (then U.S. Defense Secretary) Leon Panetta and said that I request, I demand to postpone the drill," the recording attributed to Barak said. Panetta obliged, but the window of opportunity fell a few days before the next election. It got postponed again. ...In 2012, he told CNN's Christiane Amanpour that he would like to hold out hope but that he didn't. "The Iranians have a long tradition of deceiving and defying the whole world," he said. "So we are a little bit sceptical. "He did not trust the assurances of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei that religious convictions forbid Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon...Barak was sceptical that sanctions on Iran were preventing Tehran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, but he would not talk publicly about the possibility of Israel carrying out strikes. "I think that it should remain behind closed doors as a part of a vague understanding that there is a big stick in the bedroom," he said. It should suffice for Iran to know that when Israel, America and others say that all options are on the table they mean it, he said.

It was also reported in Los Angeles Times on August 23, 2015 that:²⁷

Barak, who was defence minister in Netanyahu's second government during 2009 and 2013, described three occasions from 2010 to 2012 when plans to strike Iran fell through for different reasons. Israel's top leaders at the time — Netanyahu, Barak and Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman — reportedly believed that Iran would soon enter a "zone of immunity," beyond which a strike would be more complicated and less effective. In advance of what would have been the next stage of government decision-making, the three met with Israel's top security chiefs, including the chief of staff and the heads of the country's intelligence agencies: Mossad, Shin Bet and military intelligence. "At the decisive moment, the army's answer was that 1/8Israel's3/8 cumulative capabilities did not pass the threshold of an operation... In other words, the military was not ready to strike Iran. When the matter next came up in 2011, the military's new chief of staff, Benny Gantz, said the army did have the necessary capabilities and a wider security cabinet of eight ministers was convened, according to Barak. At that point, he said, two of Netanyahu's more hawkish ministers, Moshe Yaalon and Yuval Steinitz, objected that

²⁷ Batsheva Sobelman, Netanyahu planned Israeli attacks on Iran, former prime minister says, Los Angeles Times
<http://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/netanyahu-planned-israeli-attacks-on-iran-former-prime-minister-says/ar-BBm1sT8?li=AA54ur&ocid=U270DHP> accessed august 24, 2015

the potential losses Israel could face were too great. The following year, plans coincided with a joint military exercise with the United States and Israel did not want to implicate its important ally and get into diplomatic trouble, Barak said. He added that he persuaded U.S. Defence Secretary Leon Panetta to postpone the exercise by several months but that ultimately, the new timing was also inconvenient.

The report was republished in Dawn on August 23, 2015.²⁸ An Israeli limited military action against Iran would have destabilized the region further. It would have radicalized the Muslim activists, especially the Islamic State. Definitely any thoughtless and knee-jerk action would have proven very harmful. The region would have descended into turmoil if Iran had been targeted. The Middle East was already a hotbed of radicalism and further Western military action on another Muslim country was not going to be helpful at all. The US had some troops in neighbouring Afghanistan and Iraq, and Iran had numerous ways to retaliate against a military strike by Israel. Unlike Israel, the US did not dismiss Iran lightly. Iran was an ancient nation and has always played a prominent role in Islamic history. It was one of the two Islamic nations that had never been colonized by the West. Iran was centrally situated in the “Islamic arc” which stretched from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean. Also, Iran had one of the strongest militaries and economies in the region. Iran possesses one-tenth of the world’s proven oil reserves and the second largest natural gas reserves in the world, after Russia. The implications of the Israeli use of force against Iran were therefore very grave. Therefore, it never happened primarily because of US opposition to it. Also, Russia and China wouldn’t have backed any Israeli military strike against Iran.

If the nuclear deal sticks, future relations between Iran and Israel may be normalized.

Iran-UK Relations

Seemingly, Iranian troubled relations with the UK were a thing of the past. Very recently, both UK and Iran also reopened their embassies in the respective capitals. UK Foreign Secretary Hammond said in Tehran:²⁹

²⁸ [Israel planned to attack Iran three times in recent years: reports](#), Dawn, August 23rd, 2015

²⁹ UK reopens its embassy in Iran as relations warm, Laura Smith-Spark, CNN

Updated 1233 GMT (1933 HKT) August 23, 2015

<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/23/world/iran-uk-embassy-reopening/index.html> accessed August 23, 2015

Iran is, and will remain, an important country in a strategically important but volatile region. Maintaining dialogue around the world, even under difficult conditions, is critical ...Over the coming months, we will work to ensure that the nuclear agreement is a success, including by making sure that it is fully implemented by all sides...The two countries must tackle common challenges together, he said, including terrorism, regional stability, the spread of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, the illegal drug trade and migration. The leadership of these countries will not always agree. But as confidence and trust grows there should be no limit to what over time we can achieve together and no limit to our ability to discuss these issues together.

Evidently, relations between the two countries were ready to improve in the future.

Iran-Pakistan Relations

Pakistan's relations with Iran are strained. However, up till the 1970s Iran and Pakistan were close allies but later relations deteriorated. [Ayesha Siddiq](#) argued that: ³⁰

Posts by some militant outfits on social media about Iran indicate the presence of an ideological lobby inside Pakistan, which opposes improvement of bilateral relations between the neighbours. It also gives an impression that the matter is nothing, but an ideological confrontation. But was this always the case? Though the literature by the Pakistan military appears silent on Saudi Arabia and Iran, Tehran was once a significant capital that ensured Pakistan's security. Generals like Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan, Nur Khan and others appreciated Iran's worth for Pakistan. There is enough evidence that speaks volumes about Iran's centrality for Pakistan's security, especially up until the late 1970s. The Shah of Iran had provided material help to Pakistan during the latter's 1965 war with India and was looked upon to admonish New Delhi for any adventurism. In 1969, Pakistan celebrated the Iranian monarchy and Iran celebrated Pakistan Day.... The rise of the jihad culture changed Pakistan's socio-political dynamics. One of the important milestones in our history is the creation of the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan that was encouraged and later established in the 1980s, not just to fight the jihad in Afghanistan, but also to start a sectarian conflict in Pakistan. Zia was uncomfortable with those sects in Pakistan which were resisting his Islamic laws, especially as these affected them. The Iranian Revolution in January 1979 made [Pakistanis belonging to these sects overconfident](#) about pursuing their ideology and challenging Zia's laws.

The state resisted harshly. By the mid to late 1980s, there were enough forces present to punish people based on their sectarian identity, for instance, for demanding a separate curriculum in their schools in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B). That a *lashkar* went to G-B, which was involved in sectarian violence, is a fact of history. Many of the *lashkaris* settled in G-B to change the environment permanently. This was the typical reaction of a security establishment, which is sensitive to internal challenges and deals with these heavy-handedly — be it in East Bengal, Balochistan, G-B or Okara....The two decades of militancy certainly had an impact, but a more critical role was played by how Pakistan's strategic masters envisioned regional geopolitics in which Pakistan had

³⁰ [Ayesha Siddiq](#), "Pakistan-Iran relations", The Express Tribune, November 27th, 2014.

a central role to play. It certainly had no place for other states, such as Iran, challenging Rawalpindi's control in its sphere of interest, like in Afghanistan. Having given favours like transferring nuclear know-how, Iran was expected to conceding to respect Pakistan's strategic ambitions. Tehran's intervention in Afghanistan irritated Rawalpindi.... In the 1970s, Pakistan began to develop two key components to gain military strength — proxies and nuclear deterrence.

The proxies were used aggressively in Afghanistan and then elsewhere. The security establishment was inspired by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's vision of finding a central place in geopolitics of the Muslim world. Pakistan would not make the mistake of not developing military capacity, which the Shah lacked to fill the strategic gap created due to withdrawal of British forces from the region. The Beg-Gul doctrine of the 1990s enunciated Pakistan's role in filling the gap created by perceived withdrawal of the US and other forces from the Middle East. The strategy highlighted both proxies and nuclear weapons as the military's strength. The proxies came with an expensive ideological baggage. The murder of an Iranian diplomat in 1991 was part of the high cost, which the state was willing to pay. This was a rare case in which evidence was available to punish the killer, who was eventually freed in 2011. Nuclear deterrence, on the other hand, boosted Pakistan's confidence regarding its role as defender of the Muslim world. Thus, the GHQ's disappointment over Iran's role in Afghanistan and its building ties with India, all of which went against Pakistan's vision. Today, the poor state of the road from Quetta to the Sistan border underscores Iran's marginal relevance for Pakistan. Iran, which was once Pakistan's major trading partner, has little economic role. The American embargo, the power of internal ideological partners and the regional power games have changed the ties to a degree that they will not improve without a major shift in thinking.

Given, the development an opportunity for Iran exists to improve relations with Pakistan and India. For example, Pak-Iran gas pipeline project which was halted from quite some time. Iran had already built the pipelines up to the Pakistan-Iran border and now it was for Pakistan to complete the pipelines. The USD 8 billion Iran-Pakistan project had been long delayed. It can now be completed. Originally, India was part of it but backed off under US pressure and Pakistan stalled it for the same reasons. With easing of sanctions the project can go ahead with full stream. India would get much needed gas through Pakistan land route. Pakistan would also import gas and oil from Iran through this land pipeline. However, the India-Pakistan phase of bad relations may yet delay the project. Iranian gas and oil supplies to Pakistan will now be forthcoming through the pipeline.

Trade was another sector that could improve. Iran's trade with Pakistan was only over one billion dollars whereas it is over ten billion with India and Turkey each despite the nuclear sanctions. Another area of possible joint cooperation was in the area of peaceful nuclear power generation in which Pakistan can provide Iran with needed assistance. Plus, an increased role of Iran in Afghanistan after the lifting of the sanctions was over the horizon. Pakistan can cooperate with Iran to bring peace, stability and security in Afghanistan. Pakistan welcomed the very recent nuclear deal between the P5+1 and Iran. It is hoped that Iranian relations with Pakistan will improve significantly now. This nuclear deal is definitely a good development for the region as it lessens the tension and opens up Iran to the world.

Pakistan is wary of developing ties between its arch rival – India and neighbour Muslim country- Iran and also Iran’s role in Afghanistan. ³¹The Pakistani military establishment doesn't approve of close military links between India and Iran.

The COAS of the Pakistan Army is slowly getting in the driver’s seat in Pakistan and the Army's concerns matter. The Pakistan Government may indicate its displeasure on Iranian Navy exercising with arch rival India. However, Iran will likely dismiss Pakistan's concerns and go ahead with the exercises. Pakistan will only ignore the issue then. So, any Indian plan of US- Iran-India-Australia-Japan naval exercises and cooperation will face no hurdles, at least from the Pakistani side as the Pakistan Army doesn't want to provoke any one. The Pakistan Army has its hands full facing the innumerable challenges inside Pakistan and the country's borders.

Iran-India Relations

Iran has historic ties with India. Iran will seek improved economic, commercial and military ties with India as it believed that the country had done well and had much to offer it. Lately, India has been the focus of a lot of global attention. It is widely seen as a rising global player. There are many things going in favour of India. India has a population of some 1,027 billion people. It is now the second country in the world, after China, to cross the one billion mark. The UN estimated that by 2050 India will have overtaken China as the most populous country in the world. India is increasingly seen as a success story and it is often viewed as an ancient civilization with legitimate global power aspirations. Undoubtedly, India has done well in the economic area. It has averaged 6% growth rate in last 20 years. It has become the fourth largest economy in the world in terms of purchasing power parity. India hopes to redouble its economy by 2010 by a sustained annual growth of about 8%. Iran seeks markets in India and assistance to develop its infrastructure and military. Iranian relations with India will further improve.

Meanwhile, India is making several qualitative as well as quantitative improvements in its military capabilities. The US is assisting India’s military development in a big way. It has sold India maritime aircraft (P3C) and UAVs to further augment Indian surveillance and offensive

³¹ see

https://video.search.yahoo.com/video/play;_ylt=A2KLqIMyztpVEhIALjc0nIIQ;_ylu=X3oDMTByZWc0dGJtBHNIYwNzcgRzbGsDdmlkBHZ0aWQDBGdwb3MDMQ--?p=Pakistan+Relations+With+Iran&vid=776a9e56de811643ce48ea978f5bb9 accessed August 24, 2015

capabilities. India is acquiring blue water navy. The Indian Navy is fast heading towards nuclear weaponization of its surface and sub-surface platforms through Dhanush SSM, KLUB, ATV projects and acquisition of Akula class nuclear submarines from Russia. The Indian Navy is acquiring the capability to attack deep land targets from the sea. The US has offered to sell F-16 and F-18 aircraft along with long-term manufacturing rights. India is also further developing its ballistic missile capability. Development continues on the Agni III, an ICBM with an expected range of 3,000 kms. India also continues development of sea-based ballistic missile capabilities. It has the technical expertise to pursue an ICBM capability. The Indian Space Research Organization had launched the Polar Space Launch Vehicle and also the Geosynchronous Space Launch Vehicle, which may serve as a technological springboard for an ICBM capability. India desires the perceived status and prestige of possessing an indigenous ICBM capability. The rapid military build-up has the potential of de-stabilizing the entire region. India continues to develop its military capabilities. India already possesses a huge military force some 1.2 million strong. It is equipped with a formidable arsenal of weapons both conventional and nuclear. India is expanding its military capacity in a big way. In 2003 India signed an arms deal with Russia for the supply of \$3 billion worth of military hardware. In 2004, India announced that its shopping list for arms for the next five years included \$15 billion worth of weapon systems for its armed forces. In March 2006 India announced a 7% increase in its defence budget for the next fiscal year. The defence budget has been increased to \$20.11 billion, with \$8.91 billion as capital allocations. Pressure is growing on the Indian government to increase defence spending even more. India now plans to spend \$15 billion on upgrading conventional weapons. It plans to import eight nuclear reactors by 2012, at an estimate cost of \$14.4 billion. India believes that in the final analysis, a country's international standing is founded on the reach of the weapons in its armoury, that it had certainly boosted its image by going nuclear, and that it will truly emerge as an international power only when it tests its first ICBM. India continues to further develop missiles and its nuclear capability. Why India is now spending more and more money on the upgrading of weapons systems? Why is India bent on the acquisition of new sophisticated weapons systems? How can India rationalize its massive military build-up? India has a history of aggression in the subcontinent. All neighbours of India have problems with it. The bullying tactics of India shall spell disaster for South Asia. Meanwhile, an arms race is in the making in the region as neighbours of India feel threatened by the giant in their midst. Instead of taking the

leadership position for the betterment of South Asia, India has chosen the path of self-aggrandizement. This is a tragedy. For the sake of the people of South Asia, India must show some magnanimity and give some concessions to resolve various disputes with its small and weak neighbours. South Asia has a great potential left unrealized. It is hoped that things will now change with India acquiring its due leadership role in South Asia and lead the region towards peace, development and stability. It all depends on India.

Iran's relations with India are poised to improve significantly. India and Iran are developing a new undersea gas pipeline in the Arabian Sea that will connect the two countries, bypassing Pakistan altogether. The gas pipeline project by South Asia Gas Enterprises Pvt Ltd (SAGE), when implemented, could see over 31 million cubic meters of gas per day delivered to India. The pipeline project, also known as Middle East to India Deepwater Pipeline (MEIDP), was formulated a decade ago, but could not take off due to the Western sanctions and US opposition as well as technological issues. With the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline still stuck and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipelines yet to take off, the SAGE project holds promise of seeing gas delivered to energy-starved India in about five years. The 1,200-1,300 km pipeline, set to cost around \$4.5 billion, was a good energy option for India. The SAGE pipeline, called MEIDP project, would start from Chabahar on the southern coast of Iran and Ras Al-Jafan on the Oman coast. The pipeline, after traversing deep in the Arabian Sea, would bring gas to Porbandar in south Gujarat. The maximum depth of the pipeline is set to be 3,450 metres, and construction would take two years to complete, according to the website. The pipeline route can also bring Turkmenistan gas to India through a swap arrangement with Iranian gas from the South Pars gas field in the Arabian Sea. Turkmenistan and Iran are building gas pipelines till Chabahar port. From here the Turkmen gas could be transported, through SAGE pipeline, to India, to the Gujarat Coast. Turkmenistan, in the past, was agreeable to such options, for supply of additional gas too. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, who met in Ufa, in Russia, on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit earlier this month, had discussed increasing Iranian oil imports, the development

of Chabahar port and the fast-pacing of connectivity projects. Iran is central to India's access to Central Asia and the Chabahar port and road connectivity is a priority area for India.³²

Thus, Chah Bahar on the Gulf coast will soon connect with Afghanistan in north through a road link. Thus, infrastructure developments will commence beneficial to the South West Asia region. Iran has historical relations with India and undoubtedly future ties will grow. Iran seeks better relations with neighbouring Pakistan also. Any naval engagement with India will exacerbate past tensions with Pakistan and prove an obstacle on desirable future cordial relations with Pakistan. Therefore Iran may be circumspect on advancing the Indian Navy any such concessions or engagements any time soon. Naval engagements between Iran and India may yet happen later but not any time in the near future. However, Iran may give some docking facilities to the Indian navy in Chah Bahar seaport to balance US presence across the Gulf. As Chinese navy sets up in Gwadar seaport in Pakistan, India would be keener to enter the Gulf through Chah Bahar seaport in Iran. In all likelihood more developments will happen regarding the expansion of the Chah Bahar seaport in near future.

Iran will also seek great cooperation with India to counter Taliban influence in Afghanistan. Iran already supports the Shia Hazaras in south and southwester Afghanistan. However, Iran would be definitely anticipating peaceful and secure Afghanistan and a final ending of the long war there. The US and Iran have a convergence of national interests in Afghanistan now.

Conclusion

The world has changed and globalization has introduced newer challenges like transnational terrorism. The Middle East has been affected by the various internal and also global trends, as never before in history which is changing the entire politics of the region. Circumstances have changed drastically in the region which requires new thinking. Old rivalries can be forgotten and cooperation can yet happen to secure the region. Unless and until, all powers cooperate towards this end the regional will not improve at all and may yet deteriorate further. Further turmoil may result as a result of inaction. Given the strategic and historic significance of the greater Middle Eastern region, volatility and turbulence here will make the world an unsafe place. Time is running out.

³² With Iran nuclear deal, an undersea gas pipeline to India holds promise, Zee news, http://zeenews.india.com/news/world/with-iran-nuclear-deal-an-undersea-gas-pipeline-to-india-holds-promise_1633175.html, accessed August 24, 2015

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