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## Re-Defining Iran's 'Nuclear And Energy Security'

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### Introduction

In the fast emerging new Global Order and with new actors tending to defy the *Pax Americana*, the world is poised to be taken head on with the new template in the offing. The president-elect of Iran has received the much needed endorsement of widely venerated spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Khomeini in addressing the new challenges.<sup>1</sup> In the post winning phenomena, it is hard to see Tehran not appreciating the gravity of the world promises and its obligations under NPT and a host of relevant UN resolutions. Top West Asian analysts underline the assumption, in what could be called — the mere blurred difference or no difference at all regarding nuclear issue between reformers and conservatives. Any candidate could

have won the election but the intrinsic fundamental doctrines could have been the same barring exceptions on trivial issues. But the new dispensation signals a positive herald to the comity of the nations about the seriousness of Tehran's engagement with the world.

Iranian experts believes that the regime would never have allowed a radical reformist to have run for office in the first place. What matters is whether Khamenei underscores the decisive and constructive role to play in the international political discourse. International political observers perceive<sup>2</sup> that Iran is on the threshold of steering the wheel on the proactive path —by taking head on any regime headed on its way to turn out to be a de-facto nuclear state if not the declared one. For years, it could go for keeping weapons in the basement just like

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South Asian nuclear states before stunning the world. Iran has crept on the surface as a regional gulf power having dominant presence stretching from Iraq to the other fringes of the vicinity — thanks to American invasion of Iraq in the name of WMD and tearing a sovereign country into thousand cuts with complete anarchy and punishing Saddam Hussain for reasons best known to *Pax-Americana*.

Today, as Iran's leaders gaze across the Middle East, they see a crestfallen American imperial<sup>3</sup> eager to exit its Arab predicament, an Iraq preoccupied with its simmering sectarian conflicts and a Gulf princely class eager to appease Iranian power. As with China, Iran sees itself as a leading regional power that is key to the Middle East's conflicts. There can be a solution to neither Iraq's civil war nor the chaos in Lebanon without active Iranian participation. As such, the guardians of the theocracy no longer feel compelled to offer concessions for the sake of US participation or European munificence. However, given the outreach what Obama administration has shown speaks volumes about his genuine intent and motives to go for reconciliatory process rather than confrontationist attitude.

It sounds plausibly clear;

Washington desires a well thought out diplomacy for Iran to help her in resolving and defusing the crisis in Iraq and Afghanistan. This new persuasive and non-confrontationist diplomacy, put forward by the US, is a remarkable opportunity for Tehran. Tehran must seize this opportunity to convert the much isolationist policy on the world stage to create a profile where it can emerge as unchallenged West Asian power without resorting to confrontationist course. For the protracted engagement with the comity of nations of the contemporary world, it is imperative that the president-elect perceives cognitive value and disdains provocative remarks resulting into peaceful nuclear generation rather than nuclearisation.

### **Iran's Foreign Policy**

Tracking Iran's foreign policy<sup>4</sup> is the central point in crafting sensible and effective policies toward itself and merits an in depth analysis as to how the policy of the country has evolved over a period of time. Understanding Iran's foreign policy is the key to formulate sensible and effective policies toward Iran and requires, above all, a close analysis of the profound cultural and psychological contexts of Iranian foreign policy behavior<sup>5</sup>. It is a widely held notion that Iranians

perceive past and never disdain it in the future course of its policy behavior. A paradoxical combination of pride in Iranian culture and a sense of victimization have created a fierce sense of independence and a culture of resistance to dictation and domination by any foreign power among the Iranian people. Iranian foreign policy is rooted in these widely held sentiments. More than anything else it makes no difference in Iran who is elected president in terms of foreign policy. The three candidates who contested the last election against Mr. Ahmadinejad were all running on a platform that questioned Mr. Ahmadinejad's bombastic foreign policy style. They questioned his emphasis on issues surrounding the Holocaust and his approach to Iran's nuclear negotiations<sup>6</sup> even though they may not have questioned Iran's stance in the negotiations. They were more issue-specific which were related to international affairs, than the new President, Hassan Rouhani could do away with so easily. He is known more as protectionist and pursuing an ideology tinged with nationalism.

The issue is whether the President-elect would bring any tangible changes in the international political discourse? In the political realm, he might show some perceived and calculated change in the foreign

policy instance that can be described as 'flexibility.' The disillusionment relating to the past two decades of aggression and conflict like situation in the region gave impetus to a realistic school of politics. The Tehran strategic think tank is contemplating for sometime now as to how to tame American aggressive foreign policy. The new administration in White House, it may be recognized, is willing to give *detente* a chance. In Iran, the aspirants for the president's position, have all taken a more moderate stance in terms of how Iran's foreign policy should be conducted. All the three candidates used the language of *détente* with the outside world. One of the election contestants, Mr. Karroubi made a statement that he would re-establish relations with all countries of the world<sup>7</sup> with the exception of Israel. Foreign policy unexpectedly has become a very important issue in Iran and obviously centers on the argument that Mr. Ahmadinejad had been unduly provocative. Of course, Ahmadinejad himself takes the opposite view, saying that he was in fact the one who had inserted foreign policy in the Iranian campaign by suggesting what the past administration had done, particularly Mr. Mohammad Khatami's administration in its negotiations with U.S, was totally against the Iranian national interest.

### **New President of Iran**

It is widely perceived that the new president of Iran would be the new hope for the international community, after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Many view his stature as an international friendly president, being Western educated which has imbibed in him a larger vision of the present day world. Given the hot-pursuit followed by the earlier president Mohammad Rafsanjani, it appeared that anytime a war would break out with Iran vs. West over the issue of nuclear making process. Even Mohammad Khatami, the first reformist president elected in 1997 - a man of perpetual smile and great potential, could not bridge the gap between the East and the West during the tenure of eight years in office. But the new elected President of Iran like one of his predecessor, Khatami Rouhani<sup>8</sup> wears a constant smile on his face and speaks in measured tones. The new president started his religious studies in 1960 at a seminary. He did his B.A. in Judicial law in 1972 from Tehran University, and at the age of 30, moved to London to study English. In due course of time, social unrest was sweeping his country and a year later, the Shah was overthrown. According to his memoir, Rouhani intended to study at Harvard University, however, due to turbulent

phase of the history at home, he had to come back to Iran. But in due course of time, he returned again to finish his postgraduate studies at Glasgow Caledonian University. His Ph.D. thesis was on "the Flexibility of Sharia (Islamic Law) with reference to the Iranian experience."

### **New President's Policy Analysis**

The new President's policy analysis appears to be based on the scientific discourse and democratic order devoid of religious overtones. Massoud Safiri, who knew the new President very closely underlined significance of his capability as a president to run the country and take it out of the crisis. He further says that president happens to be unfailingly polite, and unlike many other clerics, refrains from using profanities or sexual slurs during the meetings. From the contemporary political perspective, he is considered right, which means that he believes in liberal economic policies and if, for example, he has to have an option between China and U.S,<sup>9</sup> he would choose the U.S., asserts Hooshang Amirahmadi, a professor at Rutgers University and President of the American Iranian Council.<sup>10</sup> He suggests that change could be afoot. "I believe that the Islamic Revolution is getting tired of itself and the old

revolutionary games are no longer popular in Iran." However, it would be early to say and the ultimate goal could be unclear, and as such Mr. Rouhani has always moved in the shadows."

### **Economic Challenges**

Much of international relations based on economic realities of meltdown and downturn are facing unprecedented challenges, and Iran is no exception to it. For the new regime, it would really be daunting task to steer the wheel of economic cart and bring the fragile economy on the robust footing. Unless Iran resorts to the course correction, the various ambitious plans including the nuclear one may well turn out to be a fiasco. Therefore, one of the first priorities of the government would be putting energy-rich Iran's derailed economy back on the track amid low oil earnings and high domestic inflation, a key battle in the Islamic Republic. The previous tenure of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was marred not just by his anti-West tirades, but chronic economic woes which critics say was a result of the hardliner's expansionist policies. Ahmadinejad's "slogans of economic justice" were good, but "hardly yielded practical results," Iranian economist Saeed Leylaz asserts. Mr. Ahmadinejad centered his 2005

presidential campaign on a promise to "bring the country's oil money to every family's dinner table." After the election his position was boosted by a dramatic rise in oil prices, providing him with more than \$100 million a day in state revenues. And, yet, all official statistics show that, with inflation running around 18% and unemployment jumping to more than 30%, the average Iranian was worse off than three years ago. Under the previous administration of President Mohammad Khatami, the Islamic Republic scored average annual economic growth rate of around 4%. Given the exploding nature of demography, which warrants generating a million jobs to cope with chronic unemployment, only high sounding statement from any quarter would not serve the real purpose in near future. But it was enough to prevent the economy from sinking. Under President Ahmadinejad, however, the growth rate had dropped to around 3% and that too despite rising oil revenues. The social atmosphere and political situation leave much to be desired, but the greatest threat to Iran's stability lies in its exhausted economy. In an overall view, Iran's economy is in a very bad shape. While this is officially denied by Iranian government, recent reports of Iran's Central Bank indicate a sharp decrease in new investment endeavors, increase of imports and

decline of the stock market, all signifying growing stagnation of the economy.

The independent Asian economist analysts believe that Iran is facing chronic economic crisis that is quite evident in its internal markets, namely the housing sector. In the past, real-estate was considered a safe investment with low costs and high interest. Since 2006 prices of real-state and housing went sky-high while the capability to buy went to an all-time low creating a dull market. In addition, ordinary Iranian had to deal with other negative financial issues. According to official estimates, Iran has the highest inflation rate in the whole region at 25.6 percent. Many experts are skeptical of this figure and estimate that the real inflation to be somewhere between 35 to 40 percent. There is no doubt, however, that in the last two years food stuffs have experienced more than 40 percent increase. Based on aforesaid analysis, it helps us to explain as to why the adventurous posture would be difficult to handle unless the derailed economy is back on the track during the new regime of the President-elect.

### **The Energy Politics**

The much talked about Iran

Presidential election generated widespread snooping<sup>11</sup> and zest in the world at large. But protests on the street tell a different story altogether that everything is not fine as it appears to be on the surface. A world wary of Iran's nuclear program reacted cautiously to grand leader Hasan Rouhani<sup>12</sup> the new elected President of Iran as it happened in case of the new Nuclear deal between Iran and the U.S. Some expressed hope that the Islamic republic's president will soften his defiance and warm up to recent U.S. overtures. For the volatile Middle East and the West alike, the stakes were high. Iran is a key economic player in the region, a perceived threat to Israel's national security, and a major worry for the U.S. and allies who fear Tehran is trying to build an atomic weapon.

New U.S administration has offered dialogue with Iran after a nearly 30-year diplomatic freeze between the two nations. Iran insists that its nuclear program is peaceful and geared solely toward generating electricity. However, the U.S. officials contend it's trying to enrich uranium to build weapons of mass destruction. Privately, many diplomats at the International Atomic Energy Agency — the Vienna-based U.N. nuclear watchdog — said they expected little change regardless of who leads the

Iran's government. That is because Iran's main policies and any major decisions, such as possible talks with Washington or nuclear policies, rest with the ruling clerics headed by Iran's unelected supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Hassan Rouhani, Iran's new President may allow Israel to briefly deflect U.S. pressure to endorse the creation of a Palestinian state and freeze the construction of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, said Yossi Alpher, a former intelligence official and government adviser. In the past, Ahmadinejad had outraged Israelis and many others around the world by publicly challenging the Jewish state's right to exist. "The re-election of Ahmadinejad demonstrated in the past the increasing Iranian threat," said Danny Ayalon, Israel's deputy foreign minister.

However, West Asia has a different take. Mr. Amir Moussa said that he hoped the new President would boost cooperation to achieve peace and rid the region of weapons of mass destruction. "I believe the situation could move in the direction of quieter talks and understanding. Dialogue is the name of the game," he said. Iraq's government said it hoped the Iranian leader will seek reconciliation with other countries to promote peace in the region.

## **India-Iran**

India has had historical links with Iran. Moreover, India requires energy for its economic growth. Thus, the foreign policy of India should be crafted in such a manner where we are in a position to derive the optimum mileage from Iran at the same time maintaining warm relations with the U.S. Iran and Central Asia are major energy suppliers, and given the fluctuating nature of the world market prices, India needs to play its card right at the earnest. The last visit of the Iranian President paved the way for greater cooperation between India and Iran.

## **Wider perspective**

The macro politics, conflict-driven, unilateralists or asymmetrical approach might not be the right temptation for top-down peace building strategy to address the Persian peninsula under the new regime of Hassan Rouhani - the new President of Iran, 2013. As it has become common place, in a scholarly discourse dominated by the accounts of West Asia as the battle ground of elemental forces and a focal point for *new great game*, South strategic analysts perceive since the US invasion of Iraq, the Middle East has undergone a steady transformation.

Among the unintended consequences of the war is Iran's emerging empowerment. The traditional alliances and rivalries that have balanced and contained Iran's influence simply no longer exist. Iraq is a broken country while the Gulf monarchies are eager to accommodate—as opposed to confront—Iran's power. In the meantime, Washington's missionary zeal to promote democratic change in the Middle East is only empowering the Islamist parties.

In spite of the baffling claim by the George W. Bush, former US president, that the conflict in the Middle East is between forces of freedom and agents of tyranny, elections in places as varied as the Palestinian Authority and Iraq are bringing to power Islamists with long-standing ties to Tehran. Lebanon's recent turbulations have furthered Iran's claims to regional leadership. When the incumbent Sunni Muslim regimes of Saudi Arabia and Egypt initially criticized Hizbollah's daring raids, Iran stood by its protégé. The crisis only unfolded to Iran's advantage, as its client managed to reverse decades of Arab military humiliation, surviving the Israeli onslaught.

### **The Way Forward**

Asian political observers stress

that the U.S should speak the language of contemporary Iran's cumulative civil society rather than imposing its *Pax-Americanian* think tank. The new remarkable phenomena, which Iran is making is its presence felt and Iran's projection of power in West Asia, especially in the Persian Gulf, where Iran desires to play a constructive but dominating role as a major player. More significantly, the policy of ostracizing the Iranian society on the part of some countries should be abandoned. This move has drastically harmed the civilians for more than three decades of containment and sanctions. Affirmative view is widely held both by scholars and the public regarding American policy of putting the Iranian regime in complete international diplomatic isolation. The talks should not proceed with riders. In regard to nuclear issue, the U.S. should take Iran on its explicit commitment to uranium enrichment solely for peaceful purposes, and the Ahmadnejad's statement that "Iran has always been willing to resolve the nuclear dispute through negotiations." Besides, the Obama administration's conciliatory approach to reach Iran is a step in the right direction of the diplomatic persuasion. Finally, the new regime is required to demonstrate some flexible behavior in conformity with

international standards.

### **Conclusion**

The new Iranian President, whether described as a strident unilateralist or a moderate who is crafting a strategy to engage Western powers to arrive at the latest *Nuclear Deal 2014* may not be taken as the template for change notwithstanding the fact that the present election has been described as the most accommodative in the recent history of post Iranian Revolution. Not surprisingly, many post-modernists explain that the President incumbent and the policy he is likely to pursue in all probability is not going to tread the path of stress-free years ahead. The new power assumption is an incredible dramatic moment to precede two steps forwarded- even the world stakeholders appreciate his vision to avert the crisis. Caught on the horns of dilemma, at the very outset of the election counting, he turned out to be puzzled though, but apparently, it sounds, he has sailed the stormy sea and with the spiritual intervention the uproar has been regulated to the extent which suits the Iran's politico-economic realm. So, the attempt is being made to democratize the street unrest into meaningful manifestation of the populist grievances into the fruitful navigation to the mass pacification

rather than confrontation.

In view of its geopolitical significance and its strategic location, and due to the turbulence in the Middle East, having adequate and truly national (that is, independent of the foreign powers) military capability is one of the most important asset of Iran. Although the U.S. would like to pretend otherwise, the fact is that Iran is facing severe security problems. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the three wars of the past 20 years (the Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf war of 1990-1991 and the consecutive wars in Afghanistan) and their legacies colour the politics of the region. In addition, a vast region around Iran, from Israel to the Indian subcontinent, has created many severe security problems for Iran. The entire region is engulfed in conflicts and also overlapping ethnic disputes, including the Israeli-Palestinian war, the struggle between the Shi'ites and Kurds with Saddam Hussein's regime, the instability in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the civil war in Tajikistan, the war in Afghanistan, and the standoff between Pakistan and India. Whatever the case may be as delineated above, the new Iranian President seems poised to take the country ahead and sail through the

stormy sea on a positive horizon in the changing global matrix.

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