

# THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR ISSUE: INDIA'S RESPONSE

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The hottest issue on the international platform that is being discussed these days is the nuclear programme of Iran. While Iran has acceded to the fact that it is pursuing a nuclear programme, it has forcefully argued that it is for peaceful purposes. However, the United States, the greatest protagonist of a non-nuclear Iran, does not accept the official Iranian stance and claims that Iran intends to build nuclear weapons. Since Iran does not recognise Israel, the latter feels an existential threat from Iran's nuclear programme. This has brought the issue of the Iranian nuclear programme to the arena of the West Asian power struggle. Further, the fact that Iran has been a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)<sup>1</sup> and is perceived as a 'rogue state' by the United States, it is apprehended that in future, Iran's nuclear weapons might land into the wrong hands and may ultimately be used, leading to a wide scale disaster. This dimension of the Iranian nuclear issue has raised some doubts over the efficacy of the nuclear deterrence regime.

India has emerged as a great power in the last couple of decades and is widely expected to make its presence felt farther from its immediate neighbourhood. Therefore, it is expected that India should be clear about

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1. Iran signed the NPT in 1968 and ratified it in 1970 as a non-nuclear state under the Reza Shah Pahlavi regime. See Esther Pan, "Iran: Curtailing the Nuclear Program," *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 13, 2004, URL: <http://www.cfr.org/publication/7821/iran.html#p5>, accessed on: September 30, 2010, 3:56:18 pm.

its role in this West Asian power struggle. Further, India's balancing of its relations with Iran, on the one hand and the United States on the other, has put a lot of pressure on it to react to the Iranian nuclear issue in a measured manner. Most importantly, India needs to be clear on its approach towards nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation in order to react to the Iranian nuclear issue in a proper manner. This article deals with these issues and, in essence, attempts to assess India's response to the Iranian nuclear issue.

For assessing the Indian response, it is important to understand the recent trends in Indo-Iranian relations. This, along with an understanding of the real status of the Iranian nuclear programme, its power dimension, and its relation with nuclear proliferation and deterrence, would help us in devising a pragmatic policy to address the issue.

It may be recalled that in recent times, India has developed a strategic partnership with the US with the successful conclusion of civilian nuclear cooperation. However, in some quarters<sup>2</sup>, India is regarded as having come under the pressure of the US due to this partnership. India had been vying for such an opportunity for a long time, and, to achieve this, has to put at risk its gas pipeline as well as its long-standing good ties with Iran by voting against the country in the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) resolutions. Iran's complaints against India are mainly on this account.

So what efforts have been made by India to mend the worsening ties with Iran? Has India convincingly explained to Iran the justification of its actions in the IAEA resolutions? How far has this action really strained the ties between the two nations? What is the future of the Iran-India gas pipeline? How is India attempting to maintain balanced relations with the US and Iran? Can it continue to do so in the future? If not, what would be the implications? Assuming that the current Iranian regime continues to

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2. See, for instance, Ninan Koshy, "India and the Iran Vote in the IAEA," *FPIF (Foreign Policy in Focus)*, October 27, 2005, URL: [http://www.fpif.org/articles/india\\_and\\_the\\_iran\\_vote\\_in\\_the\\_iaea](http://www.fpif.org/articles/india_and_the_iran_vote_in_the_iaea), accessed on: October 2, 2010, 7:45:08 pm. In this article, it is argued that India's vote against Iran in the IAEA resolution on September 24, 2005, was a precondition to the Indo-US nuclear deal which was given final approval by US President George W. Bush in July 2005. Koshy argues that India had "rejected the position" held by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

maintain its current posture on the nuclear issue in the near future, what kind of relations will India share with that country? All these questions are sought to be answered in this paper.

### MAIN APPROACHES TO THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR DEBATE

There are mainly three approaches to the Iranian nuclear discourse. The first approach suggests that although it is prudent to convince, persuade or compel Iran through soft power to abstain from acquiring nuclear weapons capability, the sky would not fall if a nuclear Iran became a reality. The proponents of this approach show a firm belief in the doctrine of nuclear deterrence.

The second approach is adopted by those who suggest that a nuclear Iran simply cannot be accepted. They believe that Iran is a non-dependable rogue state and its further progress in the nuclear field is a potent threat to the peace and security of the world. The basis of this group's argument is that the doctrine of 'nuclear deterrence' is shaky. Nuclear deterrence can only work in an ideal world of rational actors.<sup>3</sup>

The extremist elements of this group include the proponents of a "muscular"<sup>4</sup> US foreign policy; showing total lack of faith in any other method of response to the Iranian nuclear issue, viz., engagement, sanctions or deterrence, they suggest various military options. One such military option proposes an innovative idea of strikes on Iran's non-nuclear sites for the regime's compliance "by causing ever-higher levels of pain."<sup>5</sup>

The third approach is adopted by those who believe that Iran is a rational actor and nuclear deterrence would apply in this case. However, this group

**This group fears that a nuclear Iran would create the situation of a nuclear arms race, resulting in nuclear proliferation and effectively destabilising the region.**

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3. For the detailed arguments of these two approaches, see Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz, "The Debate: – A Nuclear Iran: Promoting Stability or Courting Disaster?" *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 60, no. 2, Spring/Summer 2007, pp. 135-150.

4. A detailed formulation of this concept can be found in Amitai Etzioni, *Security First: For a Muscular Moral Foreign Policy* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2007).

5. Amitai Etzioni, "Can a Nuclear-Armed Iran be Deterred?," *Military Review*, vol. XC, no. 3, May-June 2010, pp. 117-125.

fears that a nuclear Iran would create the situation of a nuclear arms race, resulting in nuclear proliferation and effectively destabilising the region. Therefore, a sincere effort should be made to stop Iran. This approach, however, does not suggest applying force to stop Iran from going nuclear. The Indian approach on the issue appears to reflect this type of thinking.

### **AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR DISPUTE**

Although Iran's first nuclear quest can be traced to the last decades<sup>6</sup> of the Shah's period, it was soon abandoned, with little progress. There is not much documentation available to chronicle Iran's nuclear quest in its early years. However, it is believed that despite signing the NPT, Iran had indulged in secret nuclear activities "at least since 1985."<sup>7</sup> The subsequent Iranian nuclear quest has taken the form of an international issue of gigantic proportions, leading to four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions based on the findings of the IAEA.

#### *The Genesis of the Dispute*

The clandestine nuclear activities of Iran were revealed for the first time by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) on August 14, 2002. NCRI is the political wing of the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran, which was exiled from the country after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. It was brought to the notice of the world for the first time by this organisation that "many secret nuclear programs are at work without any knowledge of the International Atomic Energy Agency,"<sup>8</sup> apart from the declared activities of the Bushehr nuclear plant. The two secret projects revealed by the organisation were the Natanz nuclear facility and Arak atomic facilities. Despite this revelation,

6. The available information on this varies. Some put this period to be the 1960s, "Iran's Nuclear Program: Overview," *The New York Times*, [URL: <http://www.nytimes.com/info/iran-nuclear-program>, August 20, 2010, accessed on: September 4, 2010, 10:32:45 pm], while others {Yonah Alexander and Milton Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership: Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2008), p. 113] establish this period to be the 1970s.
7. Alexander and Hoenig, *Ibid.*, p. 113.
8. Remarks by Alireza Jafarzadeh, US Representative Office, National Council of Resistance of Iran, "New Information on Top Secret Projects of the Iranian Regime's Nuclear Program," August 14, 2002, *Iran Watch*, Website, URL: <http://www.iranwatch.org/privateviews/NCRI/perspex-ncri-topsecretprojects-081402.htm>, accessed on: September 4, 2010, 10:04:03 pm.

“Iran’s policy of concealment continued almost totally until October 2003, when it made an extensive declaration<sup>9</sup>” on its nuclear activities.

On the Iranian nuclear activities, the most exhaustive source consists of the successive IAEA reports that were brought out as a result of the IAEA’s inspections of Iranian nuclear sites and its negotiations with Iran. The IAEA brought out numerous reports on Iranian nuclear activities from June 6, 2003, and has continued to do so. These reports chronicle the Iranian nuclear activities in a very exhaustive manner, and are accessible to the media<sup>10</sup>, so much so that Iran becomes “the only country whose nuclear information can be found in every paper.”<sup>11</sup>

#### **THE ROLE OF IAEA AND UN SECURITY COUNCIL**

For a clear perspective of the Iranian nuclear dispute, it is imperative that the roles of the IAEA and UN Security Council are understood and their relationship with the NPT is established. In the Iranian nuclear dispute, the roles of the IAEA and UN Security Council stem from the NPT, the founding document of multilateral non-proliferation efforts voluntarily signed by Iran. This treaty was concluded in 1968 and entered into force on March 5, 1970. “The NPT in effect contains two trade-offs, both of which are problematic in concept or implementation: nuclear disarmament for non-proliferation; and nuclear energy cooperation in return for non-acquisition of nuclear weapons.”<sup>12</sup> Currently, there are 188 member states of the NPT. The formal status of the DPRK (North Korea) remains ambiguous since it withdrew from the NPT in 2003 after being found to be in violation.<sup>13</sup>

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9. Alexander and Hoenig, n. 6, p. 113.

10. These reports can be found on the official website of the IAEA at [www.iaea.org](http://www.iaea.org).

11. Remarks by Ahmadinejad in an interview. See, “Iran Ready for Cooperation on Nuclear Issue: Ahmadinejad,” *Tehran Times*, Online Edition, Interview of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad by the *Press TV*, URL: [http://www.tehrantimes.com/index\\_View.asp?code=223726](http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=223726), accessed on: July 28, 2010, 12:59:31 pm.

12. The Acronym Institute, “The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the International Atomic Energy Agency,” URL: <http://www.acronym.org.uk/npt/aboutnpt.htm>, accessed on: August 12, 2010, 2:48:57 pm.

13. Ibid.

The IAEA,<sup>14</sup> set up in 1957, “as the world’s ‘Atoms for Peace’ organization,” within the United Nations family, with its Secretariat headquartered in Vienna, Austria, is assigned the role of its nuclear watchdog by the NPT. Headed by the Director General, the IAEA currently has 151 member states. An important policy-making body of the IAEA is the 35-member Board of Governors. There is a provision for IAEA reports to be submitted to the UN Security Council either periodically or depending upon the cases. It is through this provision that the Iranian case has been repeatedly referred to the UN Security Council by the IAEA. The Board of Governors takes its decisions based on two-thirds majority voting. The Indian role in the Iranian nuclear dispute is predicated due to its membership in the Board of Governors. Using its rights, India has voted thrice<sup>15</sup> against Iran in the IAEA resolutions.

The legitimacy of the United Nations Security Council sanctions is derived from Article 41<sup>16</sup> of Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. Chapter VII is titled, “Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression.”<sup>17</sup> Article 41 of this Chapter states: “The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, this Article prescribes economic and diplomatic sanctions.

Based on this Article, the UN Security Council (UNSC) had sanctioned Iran four times by July 2010. Despite these sanctions, Iran has not stopped

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14. For the organisation and purpose of the IAEA, see International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Official Website, URL: <http://www.iaea.org>, accessed on: September 4, 2010, 9:45:43 pm.

15. These votes were cast in the IAEA resolutions on September 24, 2005, February 4, 2006, and November 27, 2009. The details of these votes are discussed in the later part of this article.

16. The United Nations, “Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression,” Charter of the United Nations, URL: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter7.shtml>, accessed on: September 4, 2010, 9:54:09 pm.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

its uranium enrichment programme resulting in “growing pressure for sanctions to be tightened further.”<sup>19</sup>

*The Precursor to the UNSC Sanctions*

Although in 2003, the reformist government of Mohammad Khatami had agreed to suspend Iran’s nuclear enrichment activities fearing international sanctions, the election of the hardline conservative, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in August 2005, changed the status quo<sup>20</sup>.

The IAEA adopted a resolution on September 24, 2005, showing its concern that Iran’s concealment of its nuclear activities has “given rise to questions that are within the competence of the Security Council, as the organ bearing the main responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.”<sup>21</sup> However, the Iranian nuclear issue was not yet referred to the Security Council and Iran was given a chance to comply with the NPT. India had voted against Iran for the first time in this resolution.

Defying the IAEA call, in January 2006, Ahmadinejad announced the resumption of enrichment activity<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, on February 4, 2006, the IAEA adopted its resolution<sup>23</sup> referring the Iranian issue to the UN Security Council. This resolution was adopted through 27 votes in favour, 3 against and 5 abstentions. While Cuba, Syria and Venezuela voted against the resolution, Algeria, Belarus, Indonesia, Libya and South Africa abstained from voting. India voted for second time against Iran in this resolution. Significantly, Pakistan too voted against Iran this time, changing its earlier stance when it had abstained from voting.<sup>24</sup>

**Pakistan too voted against Iran this time, changing its earlier stance when it had abstained from voting.**

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19. *BBC News*, “UN Sanctions Against Iran,” BBC Online, July 26, 2010, URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-10768146>, accessed on: August 23, 2010, 4:09:37 pm.

20. *The New York Times*, n. 6.

21. IAEA Resolution, “Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” GOV/2005/77, adopted on September 24, 2005, URL: [www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2005/gov2005-77.pdf](http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2005/gov2005-77.pdf), accessed on: August 31, 2010, 6:36:06 pm, p. 6, Para 31.

22. *The New York Times*, n. 6.

23. n. 21.

24. “India Votes Against Iran on Nuclear Issue,” *The Financial Express*, Online Edition, February 5, 2006, URL: <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/india-votes-against-iran-on-nuclear-issue/149182>, accessed on: September 2, 2010, 8:45:09 pm.

Iran underplayed the repercussions of the IAEA resolution by saying: "The Security Council is not the end of the world."<sup>25</sup> The Iranian nuclear issue was discussed at the UN Security Council on March 29, 2006, "which called for a report by the IAEA to establish Iran's compliance with the terms of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT)."<sup>26</sup>

On July 31, 2006, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1696<sup>27</sup> noting that despite the efforts of the IAEA for more than three years "to seek clarity about all aspects of Iran's nuclear programme, the existing gaps in knowledge continue to be a matter of concern, and that the IAEA is unable to make progress in its efforts to provide assurances about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran."<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, the Security Council demanded that "Iran shall suspend all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, including research and development, to be verified by the IAEA."<sup>29</sup>

The resolution fixed August 31, 2006, giving one month's time for Iran to suspend its nuclear activities, failing which, "appropriate measures under Article 41 (meaning economic and diplomatic sanctions) of Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations<sup>30</sup> would be adopted." However, Iran "rejected"<sup>31</sup> this demand of the Security Council and the deadline expired, compelling the Security Council to take punitive action against Iran.

### *First Round of UNSC Sanctions*

On December 23, 2006, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1737,<sup>32</sup> sanctioning Iran for non-compliance of its demands. The resolution called

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25. "UNSC Not End of the World," *Tehran Times*, Online Edition, February 6, 2006, URL: [http://www.tehrantimes.com/index\\_View.asp?code=111910](http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=111910), accessed on: September 4, 2010, 11:34:39 pm.

26. n. 19.

27. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1696, S/RES/1696 (2006), Dated: July 31, 2006, URL: <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/3788552.28424072.html>, accessed on: August 30, 2010, 6:50:07 pm.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

31. n. 19.

32. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1737, S/RES/1737 (2006) (\*Reissued), Dated: December 27, 2006, URL: <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/2448771.74496651.html>, accessed on: August 30, 2010, 6:56:43 pm.

upon all states to “prevent the supply, sale or transfer ... of all items, materials, equipment, goods and technology which could contribute to Iran’s enrichment-related, reprocessing or heavy water-related activities, or to the development of nuclear weapon delivery systems.”<sup>33</sup> This resolution also called upon all countries to “freeze the funds, other financial assets and economic resources ... engaged in, directly associated with, or providing support for, Iran’s proliferation sensitive nuclear activities or the development of nuclear weapon delivery systems.”<sup>34</sup>

### *Second Round of UNSC Sanctions*

Observing the non-compliance of Iran, on March 24, 2007, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1747,<sup>35</sup> toughening sanctions on Iran. The resolution banned Iran from exporting “arms” and importing “any battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, large calibre artillery systems, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships, missiles or missile systems.”<sup>36</sup> It also called upon all countries “and international financial institutions not to enter into new commitments for grants, financial assistance, and concessional loans, to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, except for humanitarian and developmental purposes.”<sup>37</sup>

### *Third Round of UNSC Sanctions*

Finding lack of cooperation from Iran on the nuclear stalemate, on March 3, 2008, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1803,<sup>38</sup> imposing further sanctions on Iran. The resolution called upon all countries “to inspect the cargoes to and from Iran, of aircraft and vessels, at their airports and seaports, owned or operated by Iran Air Cargo and Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping

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33. Ibid., p. 2.

34. Ibid., p. 4.

35. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1747, S/RES/1747 (2007), Dated: March 24, 2007, URL: <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/5809192.06142426.html>, accessed on: August 30, 2010, 7:02:08 pm.

36. Ibid., pp. 2-3.

37. Ibid., p. 3.

38. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1803, S/RES/1803 (2008), Dated: March 3, 2008, URL: <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/142237.6.html>, accessed on August 30, 2010, 7:08:09 pm.

**By the end of 2009, international concerns on the Iranian nuclear activities had intensified.**

Line, provided there are reasonable grounds to believe that the aircraft or vessel is transporting goods prohibited under this resolution or Resolution 1737 (2006) or Resolution 1747 (2007)."<sup>39</sup>

The resolution also called upon all countries "to exercise vigilance over the activities of financial institutions in their territories with all banks domiciled in Iran, in particular with Bank Melli and Bank Saderat, and their branches and subsidiaries abroad, in order to avoid such activities contributing to the proliferation of sensitive nuclear activities, or to the development of nuclear weapon delivery systems, as referred to in Resolution 1737 (2006)."<sup>40</sup>

By the end of 2009, international concerns on the Iranian nuclear activities had intensified. In its report dated November 16, 2009, and adopted on November 27, 2009, the IAEA stated that "there remain a number of outstanding issues which give rise to concerns, and which need to be clarified to exclude the existence of possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme."<sup>41</sup> Expressing particular concerns over Iran's concealment of its Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP) in Qom, the IAEA stated that "Iran's failure to inform the Agency, in accordance with the provisions of the revised Code 3.1, of the decision to construct, or to authorize construction of, a new facility as soon as such a decision is taken, and to submit information as the design is developed, is inconsistent with its obligations under the Subsidiary Arrangements to its Safeguards Agreement. Moreover, Iran's delay in submitting such information to the Agency does not contribute to the building of confidence."<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, the IAEA concluded: "Unless Iran implements the Additional Protocol and, through substantive dialogue, clarifies the outstanding issues

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39. Ibid., p. 4.

40. Ibid., p. 4.

41. Report of the Director General, IAEA, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008) and 1835 (2008) in the Islamic Republic of Iran," GOV/2009/74, November, 16, 2009, URL: <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2009/gov2009-74.pdf>, accessed on July 19, 2010, 3:00:09 pm, p. 6, para 31.

42. Ibid., p. 7, para 34.

to the satisfaction of the Agency, the Agency will not be in a position to provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran.”<sup>43</sup>

This resolution was co-sponsored by Russia and China, which had so far championed Iran’s cause<sup>44</sup>. In the 35-member Board of Governors of the IAEA, 25 countries, including India, favoured the resolution. This was India’s third vote in the IAEA against Iran. While Cuba, Venezuela and Malaysia opposed the resolution, countries like Brazil, South Africa, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Egypt and Turkey abstained from voting.

Iran was secretly building the Fordow site as a back-up for other known atomic facilities in case Israel bombed them<sup>45</sup>. This resolution largely served as the precursor to the fourth round of sanctions. Reacting to this resolution, Iran’s Ambassador to the IAEA, Ali Asghar Soltanieh said that the resolution would “cause Iran to discontinue its voluntary cooperation”<sup>46</sup> with the Agency. This resolution even caused some Iranian lawmakers<sup>47</sup> to suggest that the Iranian Parliament could consider withdrawal from the NPT so that its nuclear programme would no longer be subjected to the IAEA scrutiny. Subsequently, a fourth round of UN Security Council sanctions was imposed on Iran for failing in its obligations.

#### *Fourth Round of UNSC Sanctions*

On June 9, 2010, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1929<sup>48</sup>, imposing additional sanctions on Iran. The resolution further prohibited Iran from buying heavy weapons and toughened financial transactions with Iranian

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43. Ibid., p. 7, para 36.

44. Indrani Bagchi, “India Votes Against Iran at IAEA,” *The Times of India*, Online Edition, November 28, 2009, URL: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-votes-against-Iran-at-IAEA/articleshow/5276462.cms>, accessed on: August 12, 2010, 3:02:22 pm.

45. Ibid.

46. “Iran to Halt Voluntary Cooperation with IAEA,” *Tehran Times*, Online Edition, November 29, 2009, URL: [http://www.tehrantimes.com/index\\_View.asp?code=208850](http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=208850), accessed on: September 4, 2010, 11:03:47 pm.

47. “Iran Could Leave Nuclear Treaty, Says Lawmaker,” *Tehran Times*, Online Edition, November 29, 2009, URL: [http://www.tehrantimes.com/index\\_View.asp?code=208855](http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=208855), accessed on: September 4, 2010, 11:09:47 pm.

48. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1929, S/RES/1929 (2010) (Reissued), Dated: June 9, 2010, URL: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N10/396/79/PDF/N1039679.pdf?OpenElement>, accessed on September 4, 2010, 9:39:53 pm.

**Ahmadinejad  
hailed the Tehran  
Declaration for a  
nuclear fuel swap as  
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and fair framework”  
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nuclear issue.**

banks.<sup>49</sup> However, there are still “no crippling economic sanctions and there is no oil embargo”<sup>50</sup> on Iran so far. Iran had been given 90 days for “full and sustained suspension of all activities”<sup>51</sup> related to its nuclear programme. This resolution was adopted through 12 votes in favour, 2 against and 1 abstention. While Lebanon abstained from voting, Brazil and Turkey voted against the resolution.<sup>52</sup>

**FUTURE COURSE OF THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR DISPUTE**

The future of the Iranian nuclear dispute rests on Iran’s ability to satisfy the international concerns and on the assurances from the international community on Iran’s legitimate interests provided under the NPT. Although in an interview<sup>53</sup> with Press TV on July 26, 2010, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad showed his willingness for “effective cooperation” for resolving the dispute arising due to the nuclear programme, he put the philosophical condition that these talks be based on “respect and justice.”

While promising to resume talks by mid-Ramadan (by early September 2010), Ahmadinejad put two conditions to these talks. The first of these conditions is to involve other countries too apart from the P5+1 (five permanent members of the Security Council and Germany). The second condition is that these nations declare their position on the nuclear status of Israel, which has neither confirmed nor denied its access to nuclear weapons. These conditions largely form Ahmadinejad’s framework package and include what he calls “international affairs and global concerns.”

Ahmadinejad hailed the Tehran Declaration for a nuclear fuel swap as a “reasonable, legal and fair framework” for resolving its nuclear issue.

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49. Ibid., pp. 4-5, 7.

50. n. 19.

51. n. 48, p. 9.

52. Security Council, SC/9948, Department of Public Information, News and Media Division, New York, “Security Council Imposes Additional Sanctions on Iran,” June 9, 2010, URL: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/sc9948.doc.htm>, accessed on: August 30, 2010, 7:22:46 pm.

53. n. 11.

The Tehran Declaration<sup>54</sup>, signed in May 2010 by Iran, Brazil and Turkey, is an agreement for fuel swap that provides the fuel for the Tehran research reactor through an exchange in Turkey under the supervision of the IAEA and Iran. According to the deal, Iran would exchange 1,200 kg of low-enriched uranium for 120 kg of 20 percent enriched nuclear fuel. This fuel would power the Tehran research reactor that produces radioisotopes for cancer treatment. The Tehran Declaration was brokered between the Turkish Prime Minister and Brazilian President in Tehran, which was later disapproved by the US.

Iran has been blamed to have agreed to the nuclear deal through the Tehran Declaration since it had anticipated the new round of sanctions<sup>55</sup>. It is significant that Russia and China, the champions of Iran's cause, have supported the fourth round of UN Security Council sanctions. Nevertheless, the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu has said<sup>56</sup> that despite voting against the new US-backed UN Security Council sanctions on Iran, he has maintained a constructive dialogue with Washington for ending the nuclear standoff.

Seeking to downplay the prevalent apprehensions from Iran's nuclear activities, the former IAEA Director General Mohamed El Baradei has emphasised that Iran is not producing nuclear weapons and the threats emanating from Iran are intentionally exaggerated by some elements. These views were expressed by the Egyptian Nobel Peace Prize laureate in an interview<sup>57</sup> that was published in the July 12, 2010, edition of the German magazine *Der Spiegel*. El Baradei's opinions are significant since he has

**Acknowledging that Iran is "working on technologies that make the construction of a bomb possible," he reiterated, "But I do not believe that the Iranians are actually producing nuclear weapons."**

54. "Turkey Says Committed to Diplomatic Deal on Iran's Nuclear Program," *Associated Press, Tehran Times*, Online Edition, July 15, 2010, [URL: [http://www.tehrantimes.com/index\\_View.asp?code=222985](http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=222985)], accessed on: August 12, 2010, 2:56:29 pm.

55. n. 11.

56. n. 54.

57. Erich Follath and Dieter Bednarz, "Don't Believe the Nuclear Hype About Iran: El Baradei," *Tehran Times*, Online Edition, July 15, 2010, URL: [http://www.tehrantimes.com/index\\_View.asp?code=222989](http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=222989), accessed on: August 12, 2010, 2:54:48 pm.

**The unfolding Iranian nuclear saga has apparently triggered a fundamental reevaluation of the broader paradigm of 'nuclear deterrence.'**

served as the chief of the United Nations nuclear weapons inspectors for 12 years.<sup>58</sup>

Acknowledging that Iran is "working on technologies that make the construction of a bomb possible,"<sup>59</sup> he reiterated, "But I do not believe that the Iranians are actually producing nuclear weapons." Commenting on the perceived nuclear arms race in West Asia triggered by Iran, he said that this issue "is overrated by the West."

He termed as "nonsense" the alleged plans of Saudi Arabia and Egypt to develop nuclear weapons due to pressure put by the Iranian nuclear programme and concluded that "the danger of a nuclear-armed Iran is overestimated, some even play it up intentionally."

## **THE DIMENSIONS OF THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR DEBATE**

The intense debate that has been generated by the Iranian nuclear issue is due to the fact that this question has multifaceted dimensions. The most important dimension concerns a potent challenge to the nuclear deterrence regime. The West Asian power struggle and the superpower rivalry are among other important dimensions to this debate.

### *Challenge to Nuclear Deterrence*

The unfolding Iranian nuclear saga has apparently triggered a fundamental reevaluation of the broader paradigm of 'nuclear deterrence.' Does one nation, which is increasingly isolated by the international community, have the capability to change the well-established norms of global peace – nuclear deterrence? Answering this question requires an evaluation of the perceived apprehensions of the potent Iranian threat.

At the outset, it is important to clear the dust from the concerns being shown by the world regarding Iranian intentions. Whatever, the intention of

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58. El Baradei (an Egyptian) served as the Director General of the IAEA for three consecutive terms (December 1997 to November 2009) before Yukiya Amano (a Japanese) took over from him on December 1, 2009.

59. Follath and Bednarz, n. 57.

Iran, the total separation of the nuclear programme into civilian or military is not possible or judicious from the security perspective.<sup>60</sup> History has taught us this lesson at a very high cost "... the vain effort made in the Treaty of Versailles to abolish the German military air force while leaving practically unimpaired its so-called civil aviation, aircraft manufacturing industry, and German control of its own air space proved tragically futile. One use of German air power was temporarily impaired but its potential air power remained."<sup>61</sup> Much like the difficulty in separation of air power into military and civilian domains, nuclear power too cannot be strictly separated into the two respective water-tight compartments. It is precisely due to this reason that the world community is alarmed by the prospects of a nuclear Iran, despite its declared intentions to use it only for civil purposes.

**Another relevant reason for alarm is the possibility of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists.**

Still another relevant reason for alarm is the possibility of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists. This apprehension is based on two assumptions. First, Iran actually builds a nuclear weapon in the future. Second, the Iranian polity becomes so fragile that control over its nuclear arms becomes loose and terrorists are able to lay their hands on them. Such a possibility would give rise to serious issues related to the security of nuclear material and technology.

The apprehensions shown by segments of the international community regarding the portrayal of Iran as a suicidal state, however, are not the full story. A correct insight into the Iranian nuclear issue can be developed only through a proper understanding of the "strategic logic" of Iran's foreign policy while appreciating that it is "formulated not by mad mullahs but

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60. For an analysis of "indivisibility" of air power, see John C. Cooper, "The Fundamentals of Air Power," in Eugene M. Emme, ed., *The Impact of Air Power: National Security and World Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, INC, 1959), pp. 128-135. Much of what is discussed in this classical treatise on 'air power,' holds true to this day. This model of analysis can be effectively applied to understand the indivisibility of nuclear power.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

**The United States has tried to persuade Russia and China to support its cause against the Iranian nuclear programme. This has borne some fruit**

by calculating ayatollahs.”<sup>62</sup> Iran’s foreign policy is as “US-centric” now as it was during the era of the Shah, the only difference being that now it is fuelled by anti- and not pro-US sentiments. It perceives the US as posing an “existential threat” to its Islamic regime as well as to its regional ambitions. To counter this challenge from the US, Iran has devised “a strategy of deterrence,” of which its nuclear programme is an important component.<sup>63</sup>

A careful analysis of Iran’s relationship with the IAEA would reveal how Iran has adopted a delaying technique to proceed with its nuclear programme while, at the same time, avoiding any serious military confrontation with the United States. This is definitely not the symptom of a suicidal state. If this is not true, then how do we explain the portrayal of Iran as such? The answer lies in the prevalent power struggle in the West Asian region.

### *Power Struggle in West Asia*

The mysterious disappearance of the Iranian nuclear scientist Shahram Amiri in June 2009 during a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia and his subsequent reappearance on July 12, 2010, at Pakistan’s Embassy in Washington, DC unfolds a “secret war,”<sup>64</sup> indicating some “cold war echoes.” Amiri’s claims of the US offering a huge bribe for disclosing nuclear secrets and the US’ counter claims that he was a “willing defector” are indicative of the behind the scene manoeuvrings by both sides, few details of which are available to the general public.

The United States has tried to persuade Russia and China to support its cause against the Iranian nuclear programme. This has borne some

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62. See Mohsen M. Milani, “Tehran’s Take: Understanding Iran’s US Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, July / August 2009, pp. 46-62, p. 46. In this paper, Milani illustrates how Iran’s foreign policy is based on its twin objectives of regime protection and regional ambition.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-51.

64. “Out of the Shadows – Iran Accuses America of Kidnap and Torture,” *The Economist Newspaper*, reproduced in *The Indian Express*, New Delhi Edition, July 20, 2010, p. 13.

fruit as evidenced in the voting for the fourth round of UN Security Council sanctions against Iran. Russia and China supported the fourth round of these sanctions against Iran. Russian President Medvedev<sup>65</sup> reportedly commented that Iran had attained the capability of making a nuclear bomb. This stand is very close to that taken by the United States. This was perhaps because the Russians had made proposals similar to those made by Turkey, which were refused by Iran. Although Russia is echoing the US stance, China is being careful not to take such antagonistic steps against Iran. This is in line with China's energy imperatives, which binds it with Iran's cause. When one arranges the mosaic of these scattered incidences revolving around the Iranian nuclear issue, the emerging picture will clearly reflect the power politics being played out in the West Asian region.

**Despite not being a signatory of the NPT, India has shown a sincere commitment to the principles of non-proliferation.**

## INDIA'S RESPONSE

The Indian response to the Iranian nuclear issue can be ascertained at two levels: bilateral and multilateral. As far as the bilateral level is concerned, the statements of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and the verbal exchanges during the bilateral official visits can help us judge the Indian response.

At the multilateral level, the Indian response to the Iranian nuclear issue is largely predicated on the Indian membership of the 35-member Board of Directors of the IAEA. The Board of Directors is an important executive body of the international nuclear watchdog and all the decisions are made and resolutions are passed through the two-thirds majority voting. In this regard, taking a particular stance becomes a mandatory exercise.

Further, the Indian response to the Iranian nuclear issue can be assessed in three broad contexts: commitment to non-proliferation, Indo-Iranian relations and Indo-US relations.

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65. n. 11.

**Iran an important element of a large energy corridor stretching from Central Asia to India.**

*Commitment to Non-Proliferation*

Despite not being a signatory of the NPT, India has shown a sincere commitment to the principles of non-proliferation. India maintains that Iran voluntary joined the NPT, and as a member, it must fulfil all its commitments to the treaty. The three occasions on which India has voted against Iran in the IAEA have been in accordance with its non-proliferation commitments. While India respects the rights of Iran as an NPT signatory, it does not favour Iran's nuclear weapons. Any support to the Iranian weapons programme, tacit or explicit, would go against India's "moral high ground"<sup>66</sup> on nuclear non-proliferation.

*India-Iran Relations*

While a strong and unparalleled historic bond between the two countries is an undisputed fact, as a part of India's "proximate neighbourhood,"<sup>67</sup> Iran's importance is fully realised in the Indian strategic calculations. For India, Iran's position is significant in terms of geo-politics, cultural linkages and energy security.

With the second largest gas reserves and the third largest proven oil reserves, Iran is "extremely important to India from the perspective of energy security."<sup>68</sup> By importing 22 million tonnes of crude oil from Iran, worth US \$10 billion in the year 2008-09, India became the third largest market for the Iranian crude.<sup>69</sup>

This shows how Iran plays a crucial role for India in terms of its energy security. Such realisations have given birth to a number of energy related projects whose fructification could make "Iran an important element of a large energy corridor stretching from Central Asia to India."<sup>70</sup> The importance of

66. Bagchi, n. 44.

67. For an understanding of how India sees Iran in "strategic terms", see Indian Foreign Secretary, "Speech by Foreign Secretary at IDSA-IPIS Strategic Dialogue on India and Iran: an enduring relationship," New Delhi, July 5, 2010, URL: <http://www.mea.gov.in>, accessed on: July 19, 2010, 1:31:32 pm.

68. Ibid.

69. Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, "India-Iran Bilateral Relations," March 2010, URL: <http://www.mea.gov.in>, accessed on: July 19, 2010, 2:20:43 pm.

70. n. 67.

the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project deserves attention in this context. The Chabahar port project is yet another example of the convergence of interests of the two countries. These significant projects, along with the more ambitious ones such as the international North South Corridor project, of which "India is also a member,"<sup>71</sup> are "seen not only as commercial but also strategic in nature, not just for India, but for all the countries in the region."<sup>72</sup>

**The Indian stance on the issue is clear and consistent. Since Iran is a signatory to the NPT, it must adhere to its norms.**

The first traces of changing Indo-Iranian relations can be seen since the 9/11 episode. Although Iran was not directly involved in the issue, its clubbing with North Korea and Iraq as "the axis of evil" by the Bush Administration placed it in a suspicious position. No stones were left unturned subsequently to prove Iran's support to various international terrorist outfits. India too has suffered severely due to international terrorism. So the portrayal of this image of Iran somewhat tarnished its standing in the Indian psyche.

The issue that gave a more serious blow to the Indo-Iranian ties was India's voting against Iran in the IAEA thrice. The Indian stance on the issue is clear and consistent. Since Iran is a signatory to the NPT, it must adhere to its norms. This stance is in accordance with India's consistent position on non-proliferation. True, there is no concrete proof to show that Iran is 'intending' to build a nuclear bomb. Still, Iran should have declared its nuclear programme to the nuclear watchdog since "the IAEA continues to provide the best framework for addressing technical issues related to the Iranian nuclear programme."<sup>73</sup>

On the issue of its first vote against Iran in the IAEA resolution on September 24, 2005, India clarified that it was "opposed to the matter being referred to the UN Security Council at this stage,"<sup>74</sup> and it was happy that

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71. n. 69.

72. n. 67.

73. Ibid.

74. Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, Press Releases, "Explanation of Vote on Draft Resolution on the Iran Nuclear Issue at the IAEA Governing Board Meeting," September 24, 2005, URL: <http://www.mea.gov.in>, accessed on: August 31, 2010, 5:47:08 pm.

the resolution had “agreed to keep the matter within the purview of the Agency itself.”<sup>75</sup> However, despite some reservations, India’s support for the resolution was “based on the premise that the intervening period will be used by all concerned to expand the diplomatic space to satisfactorily address all outstanding issues.”<sup>76</sup>

On the apprehensions that the Indian vote may affect Indo-Iran energy cooperation, India clarified that it sees “no reason why there should be any apprehension in this regard. India has played a constructive role in the IAEA and helped safeguard Iran’s legitimate interests. ... India’s principled stand that the issues raised should remain within the purview of the IAEA and that we should give ourselves time for further consultations, has been appreciated by Iran and supported by several delegations in the Board of Governors. At the same time, we have urged Iran to demonstrate some flexibility so that its friends can help in evolving a satisfactory outcome within the IAEA itself.”<sup>77</sup>

In response to India’s second vote against Iran in the IAEA resolution on February 4, 2006, India clarified that the Indian vote “should not be interpreted as in any way detracting from the traditionally close and friendly relations we enjoy with Iran. It is our conviction that our active role, along with other friendly countries, enabled the tabling of a resolution that recognises the right of Iran to peaceful uses of nuclear energy for its development, is consistent with its international commitments and obligations, while keeping the door open for further dialogue aimed at resolving the outstanding issues within the purview of the IAEA.”<sup>78</sup> India also made a request to “Iran to respond positively to the requests from the IAEA Board to restore the confidence building measures it had voluntarily adopted in the Paris agreement, and continue to cooperate with the IAEA

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75. n. 74.

76. Ibid.

77. Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, Press Releases, “Briefing by Official Spokesperson on Draft Resolution on Iran in IAEA”, September 24, 2005, URL: <http://www.mea.gov.in/>, accessed on: August 31, 2010, 5:59:54 pm.

78. Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, Press Releases, “In response to questions on India’s vote on the Iran nuclear issue at the IAEA Board meeting in Vienna,” February 4, 2006, URL: <http://www.mea.gov.in/>, accessed on: August 31, 2010, 6:06:07 pm.

in resolving any outstanding issues related to its nuclear programme.”<sup>79</sup>

In its third vote against Iran in the IAEA on November 27, 2009, India reiterated that this vote was consistent with its declared position that it opposed Iran’s alleged quest for nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, the vote did “risk some heartburn”<sup>80</sup> with Iran. Like the Chinese sponsorship, the Indian vote was the result of intense US diplomacy, which included a special conversation between the National Security Advisers of India and the US.<sup>81</sup>

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki criticised India for voting against Iran in the IAEA resolution. He said, “It was not expected that despite cordial relations (between Iran and India) and facts about Iran’s nuclear activities, New Delhi would adopt a stance contrary to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and give a yes vote to an anti-Iran resolution by the International Atomic Energy Agency Board of Governors.”<sup>82</sup>

Indian’s explanation on its vote on the resolution was consistent with its earlier stand. According to this explanation, the November 16, 2009 report<sup>83</sup> of the Director General of the IAEA concludes that “while the Agency has continued to verify the non-diversion of declared nuclear material in Iran, there has, however, been no movement on remaining issues of concern which need to be clarified for the Agency to verify the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear programme.”<sup>84</sup> Although India supports Iran’s right to peaceful nuclear energy, Iran is also expected to observe its obligations under the NPT of which it is a signatory. Since the conclusions of the Director

**Although India supports Iran’s right to peaceful nuclear energy, Iran is also expected to observe its obligations under the NPT of which it is a signatory.**

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79. Ibid.

80. n. 44.

81. Ibid.

82. “Iran Deplores India’s Yes Vote on IAEA Resolution,” *Tehran Times*, Online Edition, December 2, 2009, URL: [http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index\\_view.asp?code=209828](http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=209828), accessed on: September 4, 2010, 11:24:56 pm.

83. Reference to the IAEA Report, GOV/2009/74, see n. 41.

84. Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, “India’s Explanation of Vote at IAEA, Vienna,” Press Release, November 27, 2009, Official Website of Ministry of External Affairs, India, URL: <http://www.mea.gov.in/>, accessed on: July 19, 2010, 1:58:13 pm.

General are “difficult to ignore,” India has supported the resolution against Iran “based on the key points” of that report.<sup>85</sup>

India was hopeful about the continuation of the dialogue for the resolution of the issue and added, “This resolution cannot be the basis of a renewed punitive approach or new sanctions.”<sup>86</sup> The UN Security Council, however, went ahead and imposed the fourth round of sanctions on Iran largely based on this resolution.

### *Indo-US Relations*

Numerous accusations had been levelled on India that it came under pressure from the United States while voting against Iran in the IAEA resolutions for the first time. However, India has categorically denied that Indian support for the IAEA resolution of September 24, 2005, had a linkage to the Indo-US nuclear deal. The Indian position on this issue was, “Nothing could be further from the truth. India takes decisions on issues based on its own independent assessment and in consonance with the country’s national interests. The Indo-US nuclear cooperation agreement stands on its own based on India’s energy needs, global impact and on the acknowledgement of India’s impeccable record on non-proliferation.”<sup>87</sup>

Regarding the delay in the completion of the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline project, the official explanation is, “Such multilateral projects involve protracted discussions, as all aspects have to be carefully examined and deliberated upon to the satisfaction of the participating countries to protect each country’s interests and to avoid problems in the future for the successful operation of the pipeline.”<sup>88</sup>

In order to appreciate the real implications of India’s actions in the IAEA, rather than evaluating the validity of the grounds of these refutations, it would be a more worthwhile exercise to analyse the dichotomy of the Indo-

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85. Ibid.

86. Ibid.

87. n. 77.

88. Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question, “Q. 2393 India-Iran gas Pipeline Project,” Asked by Shri Naveen Jindal and answered on July 22, 2009, by the Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs, Smt. Preneet Kaur, URL: <http://www.mea.gov.in/>, Accessed on: July 19, 2010, 1:50:11 pm.

US nuclear deal and the Indian vote in terms of cost-benefit analysis under the broad paradigm of India's 'national interest.' This process first demands an answer to the question: Why did the US seek the nuclear deal with India?

The United States sought the nuclear deal with India mainly for two reasons: to contain China and to tap the huge Indian nuclear market.<sup>89</sup> R. Nicholas Burns, the US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs emphasised that among the main objectives of the Indo-US civil nuclear agreement included creating "new opportunities for US businesses in India"<sup>90</sup> and "ensuring that China's rise is peaceful."<sup>91</sup>

India and the US signed the civilian nuclear cooperation agreement on October 10, 2008. This agreement paves the way for American companies to enter the multi-billion-dollar<sup>92</sup> Indian nuclear market. Since its first atomic test in 1974, India had been facing a ban on nuclear trade with the US. This agreement would allow American companies to sell nuclear fuel, reactors and technology to India.

This agreement, which took almost three years to be completed, has reversed the American position on the Indian nuclear status, ending 34 years of US sanctions. While the deal is important for India as a strategic partnership with the US and for energy supply for its fast-growing economy, it is equally important for the US, since it provides the American nuclear companies a huge market.

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89. Presently, only 3 percent of Indian electricity needs is supplied by nuclear power and the projection for 2050 for the same is 25 percent. India lacks oil and natural gas production and has limited coal and uranium reserves. See *BBC News*, "US and India Sign Nuclear Accord," BBC Online, October 10, 2008, URL: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7663017.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7663017.stm), accessed on: August 8, 2010, 3:09:45 pm.

90. R. Nicholas Burns, "America's Strategic Opportunity With India: The New US-India Partnership," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2007, vol. 86, no. 6, pp. 131-146, p. 137.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

92. "US, India Sign Unprecedented Nuclear Deal," *Associated Press*, *The Msnbc Digital Network*, Website, October 10, 2008, URL: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/27122378/>, accessed on: August 2, 2010, 2:47:18 pm.

Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, the Indian Foreign Minister said just before signing the accord: "We look forward to working with the US companies on the commercial [steps] that will follow to implement this landmark agreement."<sup>93</sup> The same week, before the signing of the accord, the US President George W. Bush had signed the accord into law after its approval from the US Congress. By this time, and due to the US' efforts, the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG) had already lifted the nuclear trade ban on India, enabling it to have access to the international nuclear market. Effectively, India could now expand its nuclear power industry without signing the NPT.

Evidently, the prospects of the Indo-US strategic alliance far outweigh the losses (if any) incurred due to the risk taken by India while voting in the IAEA against Iran. However, this is not to suggest that India has undermined its relationship with Iran in any way. The Indian position on the issue is well founded and the way India has attempted to balance its relationship with the US and Iran in an extremely tough situation is commendable.

## **CHALLENGES BEFORE INDIA**

The unfolding saga of the Iranian nuclear dispute and the Indian position in the IAEA has posed some serious challenges to India. Prominent among them are the loss of strategic autonomy and the increasing weight of China in the West Asian region.

### ***Loss of Strategic Autonomy***

Under its new found relationship with the sole superpower of the globe, maintaining its strategic autonomy of the NAM era would be a difficult task for India. While a loss of strategic autonomy results in a shrinking space for diplomatic manoeuvring, overemphasis on the same limits the growth of Indo-US rapprochement. In such a situation, India finds itself doing a tight-rope walk. One way to achieve the twin objectives of 'global ambition' (as promised by the Indo-US strategic partnership) and increased influence in Central Asia (along with the imperatives of energy security), is for India

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93. n. 89.

to look for a solution in “multifaceted diplomacy”<sup>94</sup> with Iran along with Russia and China.

### *Increasing Weight of China*

One important question, having a great impact on India’s stature in absolute terms, relates Indo-Iranian relations to Sino-Iranian relations. Since 9/11, a very clear trend is seen where Iran’s distancing from the US is bringing it closer to the erstwhile USSR and China. Iran’s closeness to China, at the cost of India’s worsening relations with Iran, is a matter of grave concern. So the most important question to be answered is: to what extent will Iran’s distancing from India have repercussions on India’s regional power status vis-à-vis China? If this intensity is high, then what are the correcting measures that India can opt for?

Perhaps the biggest irony of the Iranian nuclear issue is that while the Indo-US nuclear deal was primarily sought to contain a rising China, its linking with the condition of Iran’s isolation has paved the way for increasing the weight of China. With the Iranian nuclear issue having given birth to a new type of power play<sup>95</sup> in the Gulf, China is happy to see its weight increasing there. In such circumstances, India faces a daunting challenge of how to come out of the sidelines to counter the Chinese weight in the region.

## CONCLUSION

India has responded to the Iranian nuclear issue in a measured manner, maintaining its consistent stand that while Iran has the right to civil nuclear energy, it is also bound by its obligations under the NPT. So Iran should respect its international commitments. Further, India has maintained that another nuclear armed state is not in its national interest, implying that it

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94. Guillem Monsonis, “India’s Strategic Autonomy and Rapprochement with the US,” *Strategic Analysis*, July 2010, vol. 34, no. 4, pp. 611-624, p. 618.

95. C. Raja Mohan, “Nuclear Iran and the Gulf: Can India Make a Difference?,” *The Indian Express*, Online Edition, February 12, 2010, URL: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/nuclear-iran-and-the-gulf-can-india-make-a-difference/579037/1>, accessed on: July 16, 2010, 3:51:23 pm.

does not support any covert or overt nuclear weaponisation of Iran. Under the prevailing pressure, India has shown great deal of diplomatic acumen by successfully forging a strategic relationship with the United States while, at the same time, offsetting its impact on its relationship with Iran. Nevertheless, India faces some grave challenges in terms of maintaining the balance in its relationship with Iran due to the increased isolation of Iran from the international community caused by its stubbornness in continuing its clandestine nuclear programme and constantly defying the NPT.