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IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME: IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL AND GLOBAL SECURITY

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Abstract

In recent time, Iran's nuclear programme has been of concern among the regional and international actors. The United Nations Security Council has imposed a number of sanctions to halt Iran's nuclear programme to maintain global and regional peace and security. The recent fourth round of sanction by the United Nations Security Council is an attempt to compel Iran to stop its much debated uranium enrichment programme, which the United States as well as the international community suspects, is aimed to make nuclear weapons. However, Iran has consistently denied the allegation, and repeatedly defended that its nuclear programme is aimed towards peaceful purposes like alternative fuel (electricity) generation and medical research. This has led to rising tension in the Middle East with various actors who have distinct perceptions and are not willing to change their stances. In this circumstance, the paper attempts to analyze the aims of Iran's nuclear programme and the positions of regional and international actors. To look at this issue critically, the paper also tries to find out the probable impacts of Iran's nuclear programme in the regional as well as global context. The paper concludes by looking into the issues and challenges for Iran and the external powers.

1. Introduction

Since the Second World War, the Middle East (ME) has been the hotspot at conflicts.[1] After the long lasting Arab-Israel conflicts, Iran-Iraq war, and the first and second Gulf wars, Iran's nuclear crisis has become a burning issue in the ME. Iran's recent nuclear crisis is one of the most talked about issues in

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[1] It is worth mentioning that the ME has been the cradle of many ancient civilizations and origin of major religions except Hinduism and Buddhism. Throughout the history, this area has experienced innumerable conflicts and wars.

contemporary international affairs as it has raised questions in and outside the region about Iran's nuclear ambitions. Side by side, the latest fourth round of sanction imposed on Iran by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in June 2010 coupled with the investigations by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has made the Iranian nuclear crisis worse than ever. Although, the IAEA report did not find any secret nuclear weapon building programme in Iran[2], the United States (US) and its allies (the West European countries along with Israel) continue to accuse Iran of a clandestine nuclear weapon plant in the name of a civilian nuclear programme.[3] On the contrary, Iran has constantly been denying the claims made by the US and its allies. Iran has repeatedly stated that its nuclear programme is aimed at peaceful purposes, including electricity generation and medical research.[4] Such accusation and counteraccusation have led to the current nuclear crisis in Iran, affecting the political as well as security environment in the ME with tension mounting on both sides.

Against the backdrop, a modest attempt of this paper is to make an assessment of the present state of Iran's nuclear crisis. The paper argues that any failure to arrive at a peaceful solution to the Iranian crisis could turn into a devastating war, thereby destabilizing regional as well as global peace and security. Furthermore, if both parties show their reluctance for a peaceful solution of this crisis, tension will continue to prevail and any hope for peace will be remote. In this context, the paper endeavoured to address the following queries: What is Iran's rational for its nuclear programme? What are the major points of contention between Iran and the opposing parties on the issue? How is the crisis affecting regional peace and stability in the ME? What will be the future options and challenges for both Iran and others?

The paper is organized into six sections, including the introduction in the first section. The second section of the paper traces the evolution of Iran's nuclear programme against its geo-strategic realities. The core of Iran's present nuclear crisis and the diplomatic initiatives taken by the international community are examined in the third section, while the fourth section analyzes regional and

[2] IAEA, 2004, *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran,* Report by the Director General, available at http://www.iaea.org/Publications /Documents/Board/2004/gov2004-83.pdf accessed on 19 October 2010. In many articles, it has been repeatedly mentioned that IAEA reports did not find any secret nuclear programme in Iran. For details, see also Mark Fitzpatrick, "The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: Avoiding Worst-case Outcomes", *Adelphi Paper 398,* The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), London: Routledge, 2008.

[3] Mark Fitzpatrick, 2008, *ibid.*

[4] For details, see, Hua Limin, "The Iran's Nuclear Issue and Its Impact on Big Power's Relations", *Peace,* Beijing, Chinese People's Association for Peace and Disarmament , June 2007; *The Guardian*, 9 June 2010, "UN Imposes New Sanctions on Iran", available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jun/09/un- sanctions-iran-nuclear-ahmadinejad, accessed on 20 October 2010; also in Mark Fitzpatrick, 2008, *ibid*.

global implications of Iran's nuclear programme. In the fifth section, the paper sheds light into the challenges and future options for Iran and for the world. Finally, the sixth section draws the conclusion.

2. Iran's Nuclear Programme and Geo-strategic Realities

Iran's nuclear programme was primarily initiated in 1957 under the US government sponsored 'Atoms for Peace Programme'.[5] During that period, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah (king) of Iran, had very deep and interactive relationship with the US. It was during this period in 1960, that the Tehran Research Reactor was built at Tehran University with supplied equipments from the US farms. It was a small establishment with a 5 Mega Watt (MW) capacity.[6] As a part of nuclear enrichment attempt, Iran also extended its cooperation and established links with former West Germany, France, Belgium, Denmark and South Africa. In 1971, Iran signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) requiring it to share information with the IAEA regarding its nuclear programme. In return, the IAEA would provide adequate technological support and knowledge for developing its peaceful nuclear activities.[7] During the oil crisis in 1973, with the increase of petroleum price in the international market, the Shah envisioned a plan to build nuclear plants with a total capacity of 23,000 MW by 1994.[8]

The cooperation progressively extended beyond the Iranian border, when Iran joined Eurodif, a consortium that built a uranium enrichment plant in France in 1974. Iran disbursed an estimated US$1 billion loan to the Eurodif. In return, Iran became the owner of its 10 percent share.[9] In 1975, the construction of Bushehr nuclear power station was started with the help of former West Germany.[10] After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Iran's nuclear programme

[5] "Atoms for Peace" was a US government sponsored programme aimed at supplying nuclear knowledge and technology for peaceful research and medical treatment purposes to the developing countries. Under this programme, nuclear reactors were made in Iran and Pakistan. For further details, see, 'Atoms for Peace', address by Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States of America, to the 470th Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, available at: http://www.iaea.org/About/history_ speech. html, accessed on 25 October 2010.

[6] "Iran Profile – Nuclear Chronology 1957 -1985", available at: http://www.nti.org/e_ research/profiles/ 1825_1826.html, accessed on 25 October 2010.

[7] IAEA Website, available at:www.iaea.org, accessed on 2 November 2010. Also see, Hua Limin 2007, *op cit*, p. 18.

[8] "Iran Profile –Nuclear Chronology 1957 -1985", *op cit.*

[9] Hua Limin, 2007, *op cit.*

[10] Although the Bushehr nuclear power plant was started to build with the assistance of West Germany, after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the country stopped its cooperation. However, in 1995, Russia started again to assist Iran for building this plant. In October 2010, Iran started pouring fuel in the power plants. For details, see, BBC Online, "Will

suffered setback due to regime change led by Shi'a clerics. The USA was disturbed with the revolution as it overthrew the Shah, the long and trusted ally of the USA and the West. Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of the Islamic regime in Iran, declared nuclear weapons to be inhuman. Subsequently, Iran voluntarily stopped its nuclear programme.[11] Besides, just after the revolution in 1979, a faction of Iranian students and common people kept 44 US diplomats hostage in the US embassy in Tehran for 444 days.[12] This incident further strained the US-Iran relation when the former conducted "Operation Eagle Claw" to rescue the Americans from Iranian territory in April, 1980. The event apparently made the Iranian furious as they considered it as an attack on their sovereignty.

Figure1. Sites of Research Reactors and Uranium Mines in Iran

Source: BBC Online, "Iran's Key Nuclear Site", available at:www.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4617398. htm, accessed on 2 November 2010.

Ever since, Iran has considered the US as its perpetual enemy. As a matter of fact, relationship with the other Western countries also deteriorated, resulting in a negative impact on Iran's nuclear programme. Under the US influence, France, Germany and other countries stopped cooperating with Iran on nuclear issue. France, for instance, refused to provide any enriched uranium to Iran, and freezed Iran's investment to France. German companies that were engaged in Iran in constructing the reactor in Bushehr stopped working under US pressure. During

Fuelling the Bushehr Reactor Give Iran the Bomb?", http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11045291, accessed on 26 October 2010.

[11] Hua Limin, 2007, *op cit.*

[12] For further details, see, BBC Online , "Remembering the Hostage Crisis", November 2004, available at: www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3978523.htm, accessed on 22 October 2010.

the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), the Bushehr reactor was jeopardized by multiple Iraqi air strikes, forcing Iran to stop work on nuclear programme.

In spite of the setbacks, the Iranian government decided to restart its nuclear programme in light of the missile and chemical weapon attacks during Iraq War in 1980s. During that period, the government sought technical cooperation from the IAEA. The IAEA finally agreed to assist Iran under its Technical Assistant Programme (TAP) to produce enriched uranium. Nonetheless, the initiative was strongly intervened by the US, and the IAEA eventually stopped to cooperate with Iran.[13] Afterwards, Iran had to look for new partners for its nuclear research and development. During the 1990s, it engaged with Russia in building Bushehr nuclear power plant (see, the Appendix). In 1995, Russia agreed to build the plant and supply the fuel rods, taking back the spent fuels so that Iran could not modify those for making plutonium. As a result, the US stepped back and remained silent on building the power plant. At the same time, the US government, in particular, the Clinton administration initiated diplomatic efforts to halt Russia from building four commercial light reactors in Iran which became a failed effort later.[14]

Iran's aspiration for gaining superior nuclear technology can be explained by its regional ambition, historical legacy, distinct geopolitical entity, cultural influence as well as mutual mistrust with the Arab countries. Historically, Iran has been an aspiring superpower in the ME as well as in Central Asia.[15] Therefore, explaining the apparent desire to expand its nuclear programme is far reaching. Iran's cultural influence, to some extent, spreads beyond its current territorial boundary. The ancient Persian Empire used to rule an area between the rivers of Euphrates and Indus (Black Sea to western China). The Persian Empire came under the rule of the Muslims during Hazrat Umar (RA), the Second Caliph of Islam in 637 A.D. After several hundred years of ruling by the Sunni Muslims, Iran came under the rule of Shi'a Muslims by the Safavid rulers. During that time, Shi'a beliefs replaced the Sunni ones in almost every part of the then Persia. However, this led to the increase in conflicts between the Shi'as and Sunnis, and a number of wars took place between the Ottoman Empire (Sunni followers) and the Safavid (who were Shi'as) dynasty, creating historical mistrusts between these two separate ideological groups.

Another strategic reason for Iran's nuclear programme has been the nationwide psyche against foreign intervention as Iran had to face regular foreign interventions initially by Britain, later by Russia and the US. Iran is the second largest country in terms of land area, possessing huge energy reserves and thus

[13] Mark Hibbs, "US in 1983 Stopped IAEA from Helping Iran Make UF6", Nuclear Fuel, 4 August, 2003.
[14] Hua Limin, 2007, *op cit.*
[15] Mark Fitzpatrick, 2008, *op.cit.*

making the country one of the most powerful nations in the ME region. Iran's unique geo-strategic location and abundant resources including oil instigated both Russia and Britain to exploit the country during the First and Second World Wars.[16] The geographical reality has also increased Iran's anxieties and vulnerabilities as the country is surrounded by Iraq and Turkey to the west, Pakistan and Afghanistan to the east as well as central Asia and Russia to the north.

Moreover, Iran has hostile relationships with almost all of its Arab neighbouring countries.[17] Due to the absence of regional allies, Iran wanted to be a trusted ally of the West. After the First World War, the Shahs of Iran tried to maintain good relations with the West and took initiatives to modernize[18] the economy coupled with increasing military strength of their country. Capitalizing on this, the Western companies invested heavily in the petroleum sector, and captured full control over Iran's petroleum reserves and oil industries. Since the mid 1950s, as mentioned earlier, Iran initiated the nuclear programme with the US assistance with the aim to using nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. With the rise of nationalism in 1951, Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh, the first elected Prime Minister of Iran, nationalized the petroleum industry and oil reserves. This initiative, however, severely went against the interest of the UK and irked the Anglo-American axis. In 1953, the UK and the USA allegedly organized a successful plot to overthrow Dr. Mossadegh and reinstated the control of Shah in Iran. In addition, the Western companies recaptured control over the petroleum industry of the country. This event, nevertheless, made long lasting negative impressions about the USA and the UK in the minds of the common Iranian.[19]

There were also other factors that instigated Iran to expand its nuclear programme. For instance, during the oil crisis of 1973, one of the reasons behind Iran's nuclear programme was its limited capacity to produce refined petroleum. Although it has a stock of around 10 percent of global crude petroleum reserves for meeting its domestic demand, the country had to import refined oil from outside.[20]

Quite obviously, another crucial driving force that induced Iran to enhance its nuclear programme has been the long eight years of Iran-Iraq war (1980-

[16] Karl Meyer, *The Dust of Empire: The Race of Supremacy in the Asian Heartland*, London: Time Warner Books, 2003, p.54.
[17] Fariborz Mokhtari, "No One will Scratch My Back: Iranian Security Perceptions in Historical Context", *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 59, No.2, Spring 2005, p.210.
[18] Here, "modernization" needs to be considered as a process of cultural alignment with the West.
[19] For further details, see, Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men. An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*, New York : John Wiley and Sons, 2003.
[20] Habib Siddiqui, "Western Meddling with Iran's Nuclear Programme is Unacceptable", *The New Age*, 3-4 February 2010.

1988). During this war, Iraq resorted to chemical weapons and missiles against Iran for several times. The war resulted in loss of lives and humiliation to Iran. As perceived by some experts, during that time, the Iranian regime certainly realized the need for possessing nuclear weapons which could have been a source of deterrence against its perpetual enemy.[21] Following the hostage crisis, the US had taken a series of actions against the Islamic Republic, like freezing Iranian assets in the USA. All these broke the diplomatic ties between the two countries which continue to date. Therefore, Iran has not only evolved as a rival of the West in the ME, but its rise has also challenged the Western dominance in the region.

The issue of Israel was conceivably another factor behind Iran's nuclear ambition as the former is considered as a persistent security threat for Iran. Iran has always believed that the Jews are the enemy to Islamic fundamentalism.[22] Ayatollah Khomeini once stated that deterring Israel and its allies was inevitable to preserve the pride of Islam.[23] In line of a similar thinking, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, since coming to power in 2005, is also giving emphasis on Iran's nuclear ambition and trying to reduce the influence of Israel and the US in the region.

In the widest sense, Iran's aspiration for acquiring nuclear technology may be motivated by its desire to increase its national pride by being a member of the nuclear club. In this regard, the US National Intelligence Agency Report (2007) revealed that since 2003, the Iranian government did not pursue any nuclear weapon programme but wanted to develop their nuclear enrichment capacity. Furthermore, the nuclear programme received huge support from the Iranian people who consider this endeavor as a symbol of pride and nation's permissiveness in the technological field.[24]

3. Core of Iran's Present Nuclear Crisis and the Role of International Community

3.1 *The Crisis*

The core of the current nuclear crisis is Iran's development of fissile materials, not nuclear weapon building, as widely perceived. At present, Iran has enriched uranium up to 19.75 per cent which is required for medical research

[21] Mark Fitzpatrick expressed this view, for further details, see, Mark Fitzpatrick 2008, *op cit*, p.14.
[22] Hamid Algar, *Islam and Revolution: The Writing and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981.
[23] *Ibid*, p.127.
[24] "Iran's Nuclear Programme", *The New York Times*, available at: http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iran/nuclear_program/index.html?scp=1- spot&sq=iran%20nuclear&st= cse, accessed on 25 October 2010.

purpose.[25] There is a common perception that the West has always been skeptical about Iran's motives for nuclear programme, and they would not like to see Iran to enrich any sort of uranium as they fear that the country will use enriched uranium for making nuclear bomb rather than using the nuclear development programme for peaceful purposes. The steadily raised apprehension among the West is that, Iran being very close to making nuclear warhead for the ballistic missile, would easily convert its stockpile of High Enriched Uranium within a short period of time for making weapon grade uranium.[26]

Another concomitant issue of concern for the West is Iran's development of the missile programme. The country has developed fairly well ballistic missile capacity. In its missile inventory, Iran has a Shahab-3 missile which has 1300 kilometers (km) range with a payload capacity of one ton and an airframe diameter of 1.2 meters. This particular structure of missile is suitable enough to carry the nuclear weapons. The range of Shahab-3, as anticipated, is able to encompass Israel, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Shahab-3M, another variant of this series, has a range of 2000 km. These weapons are strongly capable of carrying nuclear warhead, and therefore, is a threat, particularly to Israel. It is reported that Hezbollah, one of the most powerful non-state actors in this region, has become stronger than before as Iran in collaboration with Syria provided around 50,000 missiles, rockets and other arsenals since 2006.[27] Israel fears that if Iran has more capability of nuclear arsenals, it would be a direct threat for Israeli existence.

Under the prevailing situation, on 9 June 2010, the UNSC adopted Resolution no. 1929, with 12 votes in favour and 2 votes against it (Turkey and Brazil) with Lebanon and the remaining UNSC members abstaining from voting.[28] The new round of sanction against Iran added much harder conditions in addition to the earlier three rounds[29] by putting arms embargo and banning transaction with Iran's financial institutions and shipping companies that are in

[25] "Uranium enrichment is the process of increasing the concentration of radioactive U-235 isotopes from the average 0.7% found in the uranium found in nature either to 3.5-5% to make for fuel reactors or to above 90% for nuclear weapons.", from Mark Fitzpatrick, 2008, *op. cit,* p.19.

[26] "Iran and the Nuclear Issue", BBC Online, available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4031603.stm, accessed on 20 September 2010.

[27] Quoted from *The Economist*, "Please, not again", 01 January 2010.

[28] UN Department of Public Information, "Security Council Imposes Additional Sanctions on Iran", 9 June 2010, available at: http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs /2010/sc9948.doc.htm, accessed on 18 October 2010.

[29] The previous three rounds of sanctions blocked trading of sensitive materials, banning of arms export of Iran, freezing financial assets of entities and investigating Iranian banks which are involved in nuclear programme of Iran. For details, see, Mark Fitzpatrick, 2008, *op.cit.*

some way or the other involved in the country's nuclear programme.[30] The sanction was the hardest attempt so far to compel Iran for giving up it's much debated uranium enrichment and reprocessing programme (the fuel cycle). In reply to the latest round of sanction, Iran refused to stop its nuclear enrichment programme. In addition to the UNSC sanctions, on the other hand, the US and the European Union (EU) have imposed further unilateral economic sanctions on Iran.[31] The confrontational attitudes of various actors, however, have driven the situation towards a "perpetual stalemate".[32]

3.2 *Initiatives by IAEA and the UN to Solve the Crisis*

Imposing sanction on Iran is not new. Prior to the latest round of sanction in 2010, the IAEA and the UNSC have imposed a series of sanctions on Iran's activities from time to time, relating to uranium enrichment, processing of uranium, installation and development of centrifuge technology, and building and installation of heavy water reactor which could produce plutonium from used uranium fuel.[33] Since 1992, the Western media has regularly been accusing Iran for trying to make nuclear weapons, whilst the IAEA regularly inspected the nuclear sites to unpack the truth. However, the frequent IAEA inspections could not find any covert nuclear weapon generation programme.[34] Against the backdrop of mistrust and suspicion, the UN, as well as the IAEA have undertaken a number of diplomatic consultations to diffuse the tension.

In 2002, a dissident group of Iran known as the National Council of Resistance of Iran published a report stating that Iran was secretly building two nascent plants in Natanz and Arak for uranium enrichment and heavy water reactor respectively. It created a controversy about Iran's nuclear ambition as it contradicted IAEA's previous report that Iran's nuclear venture would be for peaceful purposes. Following that controversy, international community mounted on Iran regarding its secret nuclear establishment. The IAEA Board of Governors passed two consecutive resolutions demanding that Iran should disclose information about those secret plans and allow IAEA for intrusive inspection on

[30] UN Department of Public Information, 9 June 2010 , *op. cit.*

[31] Simon Tisdall, "Dread Juggernaut of Conflict with Iran is Drawing Closer: The US Drive to Isolate Tehran is Unrelenting But There is Little Evidence Iran's Leadership will Change Its Ways", available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/oct/21/dread-possibility-of-conflict-with-iran, accessed on 23 October 2010.

[32] Liu Wei, "Recent Development of the Iranian Nuclear Issue", *International Strategic Studies*, 2nd Issue, 2009, China Institute for International and Strategic Studies (CIISS), Beijing, China.

[33] Production of plutonium is an alternative means to produce nuclear weapons. For details, see, "Q & A : Iran Nuclear Issue", available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8495086.stm, accessed on 26 October 2010.

[34] For details, see, The IAEA Inspection Reports, available at: www.iaea.org accessed 29 October 2010.

those sites.[35] Based on this, the IAEA immediately wanted to visit those sites. However, as per the NPT's original Safeguard Agreement, it was not obligatory for Iran to allow IAEA for inspection prior to six months. Under severe international pressures, Iran had to sign NPT Additional Protocol in 2003, allowing IAEA to conduct intrusive inspection to its nuclear sites at any time.

Meanwhile, in 2003, Germany, Britain and France (EU-3) started negotiation with Iran for a peaceful solution to its nuclear programme. In November 2004, Iran agreed to sign the Paris Agreement with the EU-3, voluntarily suspending its enrichment activities in order to build confidence among the international community on its peaceful motives. In response to Iran's initiatives, the EU-3, on the other hand, agreed to recognize Iran's rights for peaceful nuclear development. The negotiation intended to find a "satisfactory assurance" for Iran to pursue its nuclear programme and gain access to modern technology. However, both Iran and the EU could not come to an agreement in August 2005 as the latter demanded that Iran should hand over all of its enriched uranium in exchange for a package that offered political, economic and trade facilities. Iran, however, rejected the EU's demand. Several months later, Iran restarted its nuclear programme under the close monitoring of IAEA.[36] This time, Iran refused to help the IAEA inspector beyond the original Safeguard Agreement of NPT and as a result, the crisis turned more complex.

In 2003, after disclosing the secret nuclear programme, the IAEA made intrusive investigation on Iran's nuclear activities. During this time, IAEA did not find anything covert regarding Iran's nuclear programme, but expressed suspicion in its report about the possibility of a clandestine nuclear programme in Iran. To come to a solution, Iran engaged in a dialogue with the EU-3 and voluntarily implemented the Additional Protocol. The EU believed that maintaining trade ties with Iran could be a step forward to cool down the situation. The discussions, at this point, did not bring much fruitful outcomes; rather, Iran restarted its nuclear enrichment programme. In late February 2006, 35 members of the Board of Governors of the IAEA reported their split decisions (27 members were on behalf of the decision, 3 were against it and 5 abstained) to the UNSC. The initiative was supported by UK, France and Germany, and it was predominantly backed by USA. Russia and China, agreed on condition that the Security Council would take no action before March 2006. Venezuela, Syria and Cuba, however, voted against the decision. In response to the report of IAEA, on 6 February 2006, Iran suspended its voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol and all other voluntary and non-legally binding cooperation with the IAEA required for materializing the initial Safeguard Agreement.[37]

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[35] *Ibid*, p.19.
[36] *Ibid*.
[37] Website of IAEA, available at: www.iaea.org, accessed on 25 October 2010.

On 31 July 2006, the UNSC adopted Resolution no. 1696, demanding Iran's suspension of all it's enrichment and reprocessing related nuclear activities. The resolution was passed by 14 votes while Qatar only voted against it.[38] On 26 December 2006, the UNSC adopted Resolution no. 1737, following a report from IAEA that Iran had permitted inspection under its Safeguard Agreement but did not suspend its nuclear enrichment activities. The resolution imposed a series of sanctions on Iran for its non-compliance with the earlier Security Council resolutions demanding that Iran should suspend enrichment related activities without any delay. The sanctions were primarily targeted against the transfer of nuclear and ballistic missile technologies. On 3 March 2008, the UNSC decided to extend those sanctions to cover additional financial institutions, restrict travel of additional persons and bar exports of nuclear and missile related dual use goods to Iran.

Table 1: List of the UN Sanctions on Iran

Resolution No.	Date	Core Aspects
Resolution 1696	31 July 2006	Fixing the time limit until 31 August 2006 to meet the demands of IAEA; Making alert the UN members to sell any sort of nuclear technology to Iran.
Resolution 1737	23 December 2006	Sanction to sell any kind of nuclear-oriented technology required for Iran; Freezing the financial assistance to Iran's 10 nuclear producing firms.
Resolution 1747	24 March 2007	Prohibition of nuclear enrichment by 24 May 2007.
Resolution 1803	3 March 2008	Ban the items sold for dual purposes; Prohibiting financial transactions with some banks of Iran like Bank Melli and Bank Saderat.
Resolution 1887	24 September 2009	Impose conditions while increasing nuclear programme in accordance with the NPT.
Resolution 1929	9 June 2010	Prohibition against Iran to participate in anti-ballistic missile activities; Freezing the funds of Iran's army and shipping lines.

Source: Syeda Fizzah Ali, "International Nuclear Regime and the Iranian Nuclear Challenge, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol. 61, No.4, October 2008, pp.87-109. Also see, the UN News Centre, "Historic Summit of Security Council Pledges Support for Progress on Stalled Efforts to End Nuclear Weapons Proliferation", available at: http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2009/sc9746.doc.htm, accessed on 2 November 2010.

[38] UN News Centre Press Release, "Security Council Demands Iran Suspend Uranium Enrichment by 31 August, or Face Possible Economic, Diplomatic Sanctions", 31 July 2006, available at: http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8792.doc.htm, accessed on 29 October 2010.

Resolution no. 1929 adopted on 9 June 2010 imposed complete embargo on Iran's nuclear programme and travel ban on certain figures. It decided to freeze all assets of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, Iran Shipping Lines, and inspect all Iranian cargos or financial institutions, such as banks on their territory. The resolution passed by a vote of 12-2. Turkey and Brazil voted against the resolution and Lebanon abstained. The Iranian government responded with a denial to stop their uranium enrichment programme. Moreover, Ali Ashghar Solanieh, Iran's envoy to IAEA commented, "Nothing will change. The Islamic Republic of Iran will continue uranium enrichment activities."[39] Along with the statement, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad further declared if higher enriched nuclear fuel was supplied by the other countries, Iran would firmly consider suspending its nuclear enrichment activities. He, at the same time, accused the members of the IAEA for not fulfilling their pledges to supply up to 20 percent enrichment uranium to Iran.[40]

On 17 May 2010, Iran entered into a prospective deal with Brazil and Turkey. Iran agreed to send low-enriched uranium to Turkey in return for higher enriched uranium fuel for a research reactor. Consequently, Iran informed the IAEA and requested it to inform the USA, Russia as well as France to come to a written agreement and make contingent arrangements between Iran and other parties.[41] The proposal was welcomed by the Arab leaders, China and cautiously by Russia.

3.3 *Responses by Major Powers*

The international actors, per se, differed in their respective positions regarding Iran's nuclear programme. The US, Israel, UK, France, Germany as well as other likeminded countries viz. Australia and Japan are against any sort of nuclear programme in Iran, although in many forums, the major powers acknowledged Iran's rights to peaceful nuclear research development. In course of time, they have shown such postures that helped to give a clear perception about their intention on the issue. On the other hand, Russia and China, the two other permanent members of the UNSC, have been supporting peaceful development of the nuclear programme. But they are also aware of Iran's capability to build nuclear weapons. These two countries, nonetheless, have changed their positions in recent times, and are largely divided into two groups: those who supported and those who did not. This segregation gave a signal that

[39] "UN Imposes New Sanctions on Iran", *The Gurdian*, available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/ jun /09/un-sanctions-iran-nuclear-ahmadinejad, accessed on 28 October 2010.
[40] "Iran Will Stop Uranium Enrichment, If Fuel is Provided", *Prothom Alo,* 26 October 2010.
[41] *Ibid*.

they would not allow Iran to develop any kind of nuclear weapons. Given these ground realities, the following section briefly discusses the position of the big powers on Iran's nuclear programme.

3.3.1 *The US and Israel*

The US and Israel have almost the same positions on Iran's nuclear issue as both countries are strongly against Iran's nuclear capacity development. In case of the US, the country always tries to conduct "uncompromising containment policy" against Iran.[42] This ideological approach is clearly apparent from USA's different actions against the country. In 1981, before reinitiating nuclear programme, the government of Iran first sought cooperation from IAEA. But, the US took diplomatic measures to refrain IAEA from assisting Iran.[43] Since 11 September 2001, the US has perceived Iran's nuclear vision in the context of 9/11, particularly on the issues of war against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In 2007, the US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) reported that Iran might be capable of producing nuclear weapons between 2010 and 2015 if it enriches High Enriched Uranium.[44] Amidst all these, Condoleezza Rice, the then US Secretary of State, opined that Iran is the only country which posed strategic threats to her country.[45] Although the US is not Iran's direct threat due to its geographical distance, the concern is, the US military installations in the ME, may be a target. Likewise, Israel considers Iran's ballistic missile capability as a security threat to its existence. The fear has been further intensified by Iranian President Ahamadinejad's statement on wiping out the Israeli regime and wiping out the country from the world map.[46] In recent years, Iran tested missiles like Shahab-3 and Ghadr-1 which have a range of about 1,800 km and 2000 km respectively.[47] This has led the tension of escalating further conflicts between Iran and Israel. It is crucial to ponder that Israel is USA's number one ally in the ME and has a strong influence in US domestic politics. Therefore, Israel always gets a blind support from the US about its nuclear capability. Despite that, Israel is opposing Iran's nuclear enrichment

[42] Bayram Sinkaya, "Turkey and the Iranian Nuclear Issue: From a Passive Stance to the Actual Contributor to the Peaceful Solution", Paper presented at the MERIJ-ORSAM-METU Joint Meeting titled *Contemporary Middle East: The Turkish and Japanese Perspectives*, held in METU, Ankara, Turkey, 23 November 2010.

[43] Zhu Qianguo, "The Sticking Points and the Prospects of the Iranian Nuclear Issue" in *Peace*,, Beijing , Chinese People's Association for Peace and Disarmament, June 2007.

[44] Daniel Mockli & Andrin Hauri, "Iran Nuclear Crisis: Status and Options", *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, Vol. 3. No.43, November 2008.

[45] Syeda Fizzah Ali, 2008, *op.cit.*

[46] Abdullah A Dewan, "No Nonsense: The Iranian Missile Test", *The Daily Star*, 7 July 2008, available at: http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=46022, accessed on 24 October 2010.

[47] For more details, see, Fitzpatrick 2008, *op cit.*

capability as the latter has been supporting Hamas of Palestine and Hezbollah of Lebanon who are in struggle for regaining sovereignty over their respective land against Israeli occupation.[48] Israel fears if Iran could achieve the capability of building nuclear weapons, Hamas and Hezbollah may gain access to that and thereby threaten Israel's national security.

3.3.2 *The EU Countries*

The West European countries have always shown strong reservations against Iran's nuclear enrichment. But unlike the US, they try to adopt a policy of "diplomatic engagement and negotiation" about Iran's nuclear issue.[49] Before the Iranian Revolution in 1979, France and Germany were active partners in Iran's nuclear programme. During that period, both France and Iran had joint investments in Eurodif. West Germany had a deal to build the Bushehr nuclear power plant. Since the early days of revolution, the West European countries showed its opposition towards Iran's nuclear programme. In this continuation, France refused to return Iran's investment on Eurodif after the revolution. Germany which initially supported in building Bushehr nuclear power plant stopped cooperating with Iran. As a result, Iran had to turn to Russia for its assistance on that reactor. After 2003, UK, France and Germany actively engaged in negotiation with Iran, compelling the latter to voluntarily suspend its nuclear enrichment programme. The EU-3 demanded that Iran should stop its nuclear activities and continuously discuss with the officials to come to a final solution. Iran, however, refused to agree and withdrew itself from the negotiations.

3.3.3 *Russia and China*

Since the beginning of cold relationship with the EU countries, Iran steadily built up good relations with Russia and China. Historically, both the countries have had strong economic ties with Iran and showed their keen interest in Iranian nuclear fields. Russia, as discussed earlier, has played a decisive role to complete Bushehr nuclear power plant and is incessantly supplying nuclear fuel rod for smooth running of that plant.[50] China, at the same time, imports petroleum from Iran and has become the largest trading partner of Iran. Although both countries supported Iran's rights for nuclear development for peaceful purposes, they do not have full trust in Iran. In the past, both China and Russia blocked any tough sanction on Iran by the UNSC. On the one hand, China and Russia blocked hard

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[48] "Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad "Backs United Lebanon," *BBC News*, 13 October 2010, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11526143, accessed on 24 October 2010.

[49] Bayram Sinkaya, *op.cit.*

[50] "Iran Begins Loading Fuel at Nuclear Reactor", *New York Times*, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/27/world/middleeast/27nuke.html?_r=1&ref=nuclear_program, accessed on 26 October 2010.

conditions or economic sanctions on Iran; on the other, they supported sanctions that asked Iran to stop its uranium enrichment activities. Thus, it is apparent that these two countries too are apprehensive about Iran being armed with nuclear weapons.

3.3.4 *The Arab States*

The Arab countries have different approaches towards Iran's nuclear issue. Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait and other Sunni Muslim states in the Arab region do not have trouble-free relations with Iran as the later may diminish their dominance in the region. The historical mistrust among the Shi'a and Sunni is a pertinent reason behind this uneasiness. Iraq now has a nascent democracy, while Iran has already increased its influence through its vast Shi'a majority. People in Iraq perceive this with mixed opinions. Other important countries in the region, like Syria and Lebanon have different viewpoints. Syria has good relations with Iran and firmly supports Iran's nuclear programme. In Lebanon, the Hezbollah, the major elected body of the government, is a long trusted ally of Iran and receives regular support from them. However, other factions of the government have lukewarm relations with Iran. Therefore, in the UNSC, Lebanon abstained from voting for several times believing the fact that Iran has the right to develop its peaceful nuclear programme.

3.3.5 *Others*

Apart from the West and some of the Arab countries, Iran has received strong vocal support from the non-aligned countries which agreed that Iran had a right to pursue its peaceful nuclear programme. Recently, Turkey's compromising attitude towards Iran's nuclear programme indicates that the country is going to change its foreign policy remarkably. Turkey, by now, wanted to balance a relationship with Iran to preserve its national interest and get involved in mediation efforts between Iran and the West. Turkey, along with Brazil, already negotiated with Iran for a peaceful solution to its nuclear programme. Iran and Turkey made a nuclear swap deal, under which Iran exported a batch of low enriched uranium to the latter. However, the P5+1[51] countries were not convinced with that deal and passed the latest round of sanction on Iran which was opposed by Turkey and Brazil. Apart from Brazil, Iran has developed warm relations with a number of South American countries namely Venezuela and Bolivia that also support Iran's peaceful nuclear activities.

[51] Five permanent members (US, Britain, China, France and Russia) of the UNSC plus Germany.

4. Implications of Iran's Nuclear "Crisis" on Regional and Global Security

4.1. *Regional Peace and Stability*

From the above discussion, it is clear that Iran's nuclear ambition is supported by some countries and opposed by others. The question that arises here, what kind of implication does Iran's nuclear programme have on regional and global peace and tranquility? It is widely believed that Iran's position as a nuclear power state might shift the regional balance of power. In particular, the expansion of Iran's nuclear programme as well as Iran's good relations with the Hezbollah and Hamas, will have both regional as well as global implications. According to the security experts, Dana H. Allin and Steven Simon, "A nuclear Iran would spur countries of the region to try to enhance their security in the face of what they would perceive as a significant, and in some cases existential threat".[52]

It goes without saying that in regional politics, the Arab states are aware of Iran's ambition as the regional power. Countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have a cold relationship with Iran and they will not welcome Iran as a regional superpower as Iran's strong position in the region might diminish their influence. Already, Saudi Arabia has made a US $60 billion arms procurement deal with the US.[53] It is an indication that they are ready to challenge Iran's influence in the region. Besides, Iran's democracy is a threat to the Arab monarchs. In recent times, Syria is also trying to get out of the US influence and look for independent allies like Iran. Presumably, Syria is the only country apart from Turkey in the region that has support for Iran's peaceful nuclear programme. Turkey has not only signed an agreement with Iran for enriched uranium swap, but also has voted against the sanction on Iran in the Security Council. Thus, it is fair to say that Iran's nuclear issue might bring a radical change in the regional power balance.

Iran's nuclear ambition may start a nuclear race in the region. Like Iran, many Arab States are also trying to develop their nuclear capabilities and some of them have already progressed significantly. Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are the prominent names of a few. Egypt signed an agreement with Russia to establish nuclear reactors in 2008 and Turkey planned to build three new reactors in 2008.[54] Besides, procuring advanced weapons from the US and Saudi Arabia as well as the signing of nuclear agreement with the US and France for developing civilian nuclear facility for medical treatment and power generation

[52] Dana H. Allin and Steven Simon, "Obama's Dilemma: Iran, Israel and the Rumours of War", *Survival*, Vol.52, No.6, December 2010-January 2011, pp.15-44.
[53] Peter Custers, "US-Saudi Arms Deal in the Making: Needs Public Scrutiny, *The Daily Star*, 5 October 2010.
[54] Joseph Cirincione, "A Mideast Nuclear Chain Reaction", *Current History*, Philadelphia, December, 2008, p. 440.

purposes are noteworthy initiatives. France had also made nuclear deal with Qatar, UAE, Algeria, Jordan, Morocco and Libya.[55] It is apparent that Iran's nuclear development will have a far-reaching impact on regional power politics as many countries are willing to commence nuclear programme in the name of peaceful purposes.

Apart from regional and global implications, the sanctions have already shown negative impacts on Iran's domestic economy. Iran needs to import one third of its gasoline for domestic consumption. By now, the additional sanctions by the West had adversely affected trade and other business sectors in Iran. Notwithstanding the fragile economic condition, it is assumed that the sanctions could prove to be a plus point for the Ahmadinejad regime. It could now easily blame the sanctions for Iran's economic misery and would make them determine to clinch their nuclear goal by any means. Moreover, the nuclear programme has received a vast popular support in Iran. Therefore, it is perceived that, the sanctions might not be a viable tool to reduce the domestic support.

4.2 *Global Implications*

The rise of Iran's influence in the ME is a threat to the US dominance in the region. The US has a strong influence on almost every country in the region except Iran. In addition, it has vast petroleum and arms businesses in the region. Increasing military and nuclear strength of Iran may possibly challenge the presence of the US in the ME in future. However, the US would try to keep its dominance in the region in order to ensure petroleum supply for its domestic consumption as the ME countries solely supply more than 70 per cent of total petroleum production of the world and it would be further increased to 83 per cent by 2020.[56] The heightened tension between the two countries will most likely increase instability in the region.

As mentioned earlier, Iran has cultural influence on its neighbouring countries both in the ME and central Asia, especially in Iraq where the majority of the population are Shia's. Iran has gradually increased its ties with the Shi'as in Iraq and Afghanistan as well.[57] Therefore, the US would never allow Iran to become a nuclear power state within the region. On the contrary, Iran has disbursed huge amount of money in aid to the Afghan government.[58] Iran appears to be caught in the middle of fire now. The US has strong military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq, while maintaining equally strong influence in Pakistan.

[55] *Ibid*.
[56] Institute for the Analysis of Global Security (IAGS), "Future of Oil", available at: www.iags.org/futureofoil. html, accessed on 3 November 2010.
[57] It is crucial to mention that the US has a huge oil business in Iraq for the development of its economy.
[58] "Cash and Keeping Friendly Relations in Afghanistan", *BBC News*, 25 October 2010, available at : http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11621525, accessed on 29 October 2010.

The concern is that all these states have borders with Iran. If the negotiation does not fall through, and Iran is attacked by any external force, a huge area (from Pakistan to Mediterranean region) would be in war. Consequently, it is likely to have spill over effects and can draw other countries of this region in war. It is also believed that "..the peace becomes a little more fragile and the danger of war increases. Sadly, there is reason to believe that unless remedial action is taken, 2011 might see the most destructive such war for many years" in the ME region.[59]

On top of these, Iran's rise in the ME as a nuclear power might challenge the Israeli dominance in the region. Iran does not recognize Israel as a state, therefore, the latter always considers the Islamic regime as a threat to its existence. The Israeli government fears that nuclear armed Iran may attack Israel at any time. The recent development of Iran's ballistic defense capacity has also raised tension in Israel. Israel has already threatened that they would organize air attack to the Iranian nuclear establishment like the similar attack they did on Syria in 2007.[60] In Israel's Intelligence Report, it is suspected that the country would go beyond 2012 for Iran to build any nuclear weapon and is planning to launch air attack on Iran's nuclear facilities.[61] In order to do that, they are collecting state of art aircraft from the US.[62] On the other hand, Iran has declared that it has acquired the technology of enriching uranium up to 20 percent and has the ability to take it up to 80 percent and above.[63] However, the paradox is, Israel is not a party to NPT or Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NNPT). They do not even disclose their nuclear capacity. The US and other Western nations are strongly backing Israel. Therefore, Iran has always raised its voice against this double standard.[64] This rivalry situation might ignite the conflagration in the region as Israel is likely to involve any confrontation with the support of the US.

It is pertinent to point out that the US and the EU countries have imposed additional unilateral economic sanctions on Iran in line with the sanctions of the UNSC. Russia and China, however, are comparatively flexible in this regard. It is likely that the UNSC could not take severe action as Russia and China opposed further tough sanctions. Earlier, both the countries prevented the UNSC from

[59] Quoted from *The Economist,* 2010, p.7, *op.cit.*
[60] Mark Fitzpatrick , 2008, *op cit.*
[61] *Ibid.*
[62]BBC, "Iran and the Nuclear Issue", available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4031603.stm, accessed on 23 October 2010.
[63] Jaydesh Mukh, "Iran to Propose Third Party Uranium Enrichment: Ahmadinejad", Agence France Press (AFP), 30 October 2009.
[64] CASMI Fact Sheet on US-Iran Standoff, "Campaign against Sanctions and Military Intervention in Iran", Willie Nelson Peace Research Institute, available at: http://willienelsonpri.com/peace/7488/casmii-fact-sheet-on-us-iran-standoff.html, accessed on 29 October 2010.

taking any tough economic sanctions against Iran. They were, however, assured by the West that their business interest in Iran would not be hampered in spite of their support for the sanctions against Iran. Russia, as discussed before, had completed Bushehr plant, which was built only for power generation in October 2010 after sanctions were imposed. It has already showed its opposition over additional sanctions imposed on Iran by the West.[65] Thus, it can be argued that any further persuasion by the West to put any punitive measure on Iran would not get consent from Russia and China that may result in further hostilities among the other permanent members of the UNSC.

5. Future Challenges of Iran's Nuclear Programme

5.1. *Challenges for Iran*

The prime challenge for Iran, in future years, would be to continue with its nuclear programme and simultaneously convince the international community regarding their peaceful ambition. In addition, confidence building of the West and its allies would be one of the major challenges for Iran. At present, there is a big "Trust Deficit" between the West and Iran.[66] Therefore, both parties are suspicious about their opposition's motives. This "Trust Deficit" gradually slows the process of negotiation and often fails to achieve any peaceful solution to the crisis. Moreover, the US might prefer regime change in Iran and consider that it will make easier to reach a solution for Iran's nuclear crisis.[67] This has apparently raised mutual impatience between the two countries. On the other side, the EU has already offered Iran to restart negotiation and Iran has responded cautiously. In November 2010, Iran and the West engaged in talks and the former officially announced that it would discuss with the latter after sometime in November 2010.[68] As continuation, there is little bit of progress in negotiation. Iran joined in talks in Geneva with P5+1 countries on 6-7 December 2010. The meeting ended without any further development of the issue but the negotiating parties agreed to meet again in Istanbul soon.[69]

Overall, the West wants to go through the sanctions imposed on Iran within a short period of time. Perhaps, that is not going to happen under the current regime in Iran. This is because, Iran's nuclear programme has gained acceptance among its people who consider this as a symbol of their nation's superiority in knowledge and technology. Besides, President Ahmadinejad's support for Iran's

[65] John Cherian, "Tightening the Screw", *Frontline,* 16 July 2010.
[66] "Iran Nuclear Talks in Geneva End First Day without Deal", *BBC News,* available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11923194, accessed on 21 December 2010.
[67] See, Mark Fitzpatrick, 2008, *op.cit*.
[68] Jon Leyne, "Iran Nuclear Talks: Threats, Rhetoric, Shadow-boxing", available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11653749, accessed on 20 October 2010.
[69] "Iran Nuclear Talks in Geneva End First Day without Deal.", *BBC News, op.cit.*

nuclear expansion should be taken note of.[70] Therefore, Western sanctions may have very little impact in reducing the mass support for the programme; rather, economic sufferings from the sanctions possibly will reunite the people against the West thereby, increasing the support for the current regime.

Another pressing concern is the sanctions, especially the economic ones imposed on Iran, have made the lives challenging for the Iranian people. Due to the sanctions of these sorts, the government has been currently facing revenue loss and has already withdrawn subsidy from the fuel sectors, consequently, raising the price of fuel in Iran's domestic market five folds.[71] Besides, with limited export income, it would be difficult for Iran to manage its economy. Such economic downturn may make the current regime unpopular, turning it to the advantage of the opposition political parties. Hence, maintaining domestic support will also be a great challenge for the current regime of Iran. In the regional front, gaining confidence among its Arab neighbours will also be a big challenge for Iran as the Arabian countries from the past do not have enough trust in the Iranian regime. Moreover, they perceive Iran's nuclear programme as a way to gain control over the ME region.

5.2 *Challenges for External Powers*

Iran's nuclear crisis poses greater challenges to Russia, China and other big powers. As Russia and China have not supported any harsh sanctions on Iran earlier, it is likely that in future, both countries will not support anymore sanctions, given the condition that IAEA does not find any military nuclear facility in Iran. Previously, both countries supported Iran on the condition that the latter would develop nuclear programme only for peaceful purposes. If Iran violates that condition, they would naturally withdraw their support. Brazil, Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia are also supporting Iran. With that, it is anticipated that anti-American ties among these countries may become stronger.

The EU countries also have economic interests in Iran. Consecutive sanctions on Iran are restricting the firms from the EU countries to do business, which is being taken away by the Chinese and Russian firms in Iran. Therefore, they will also prefer a peaceful solution to the problem. However, for the US, as mentioned earlier, banning the nuclear enrichment is not the prime goal; rather, they want to see a regime change in Iran.[72] This apparent desire of the US makes the crisis more complex. Although in the 2005 election in Iran, the US showed unconditional support to the opposition party of Ahmadinejad, the crisis today is now more centered on Ahmadinejad versus the US establishment. The US is

[70] Moreover, he is supported by the hardliners, including the supreme leader Khamenei, who are the main patrons of the nuclear programme in Iran.
[71] "Iran Fuel Prices Soar as Subsidies Cut", *The Independent*, 20 December 2010.
[72] Mark Fitzpatrick 2008, *op cit.*

using every means to topple down Ahmadinejad but has failed to do so. Facing severe criticism for the Iraq war, the US government is highly unlikely to pursue any military attack on Iran within three years.[73]

Moreover, the future of Iran's nuclear issue would depend on the regime change of the US. In recent mid-term election in 2010, the Democratic Party suffered a setback. If the Republicans come into power in 2012 election, the crisis may deteriorate further as the US may take hard-hitting action against Iran. Recently, the US's signing of arms deals with Saudi Arabia raised the speculation that the Arab countries are developing their military in fear of increasing Iranian dominance in the region.[74] This might lead increased tension among the ME countries.

Israel is also showing impatience on the Iran's nuclear issue. Although their Intelligence Report has shown that Iran would not be able to produce nuclear weapon before 2012, the country is anxious about Iran's gradual increase of ballistic missile capacity which is a great threat for its own security.[75] As there is likelihood that Israel might conduct air attack on Iran, they are buying advanced warplane from the US. The predicament for Israel is that, Iran may retaliate with missile attack which would initiate another war in the ME. As Iran has strong influence on the Shi'as of Iraq, Hezbollah of Lebanon and Syria, the war may prove to be very costly for Israel. Moreover, disperse location of Iran's nuclear facility is also reducing the probability of success of Israel's air attack. Therefore, Israel will calculate carefully before making any air attack on Iran. Conversely, Iran might regroup and take action against this country in association with the other ME countries and non-state actors like Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine.

6. Conclusion

The tension is mounting regionally as well as globally on Iran's nuclear programme which could certainly deteriorate the stability and security of the region. The IAEA and other concerned parties are aware of Iran's nuclear programme since its inception. On the one hand, the world community recognizes Iran's rights for peaceful nuclear development, on the other, the US and its allies have always obstructed any international cooperation on Iran's nuclear programme. Despite the absence of any concrete evidence of nuclear weapons development in Iran, the Western countries do not want to acknowledge that Iran has no secret project for making nuclear weapons. Moreover, the series of sanctions imposed by the UNSC poses a great challenge to Iran. Already, Iran

[73] This assumption is based on the fact that the US is taking back all its troops from Afghanistan by 2013.
[74] Peter Custers, *The Daily Star*, 5 October 2010 , *op.cit.*
[75] Fitzpatrick, 2008, *op cit.*

has assured that it would give up the nuclear enrichment programme, if the country is provided with higher enriched uranium for medical research purpose. The active involvement of Gulf countries to come into an acceptable solution and further negotiation with all the internal and international actors might show the way to peace and tranquility in the region. In the absence of consultation and compromise among the stakeholders and Iran's bitter relations with its neighbours, the US and Israel, the situation might be further worsened and the ME might turn into a field of battle which would have far-reaching global as well as regional implications.

APPENDIX
Iran's Nuclear Sites

Name of the Sites	Facility/Capacity
Tehran Nuclear Research Centre (TNRC)	Established in 1967, Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) with the capacity of 5 MW; managed by Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI).
Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant	Construction started in 1975 and yet to supply electricity with a capacity of 1000 MW power nuclear power plant.
Esfahan Nuclear Technology Centre	Run by the AEOI, the facilities are: Light Water Subcritical Reactor, Miniaturized Neutron Source Reactor, Heavy Water Zero Power Reactor, and Fuel Fabrication Laboratory.
Natanz	Fuel Enrichment Plant.
Lashkar Ab'ad	Pilot Uranium Laser Enrichment Plant.
Arak	Iran Nuclear Research Reactor.
Yazd Radiation Processing Centre	Engaged in geophysical research for analyzing mineral deposits.
Saghand	Iran's first uranium ore mines, operational in March 2005. Estimated deposit 3,000 to 5,000 tons of uranium oxide, operational from 2006.
Karaj	Radioactive Waste Storage.
Anrak	Waste Storage Site.

Source: IAEA Directors General Report on *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran,* Vienna, November 2004.