

*Monzima Haque***THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR AGREEMENT: REGIONAL AND GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS****Abstract**

Over the last two and a half years, negotiators from P5+1 and Iran are trying to reach out a diplomatic solution on the issue of nuclearisation of Iran. The motive behind such an arrangement had been to ensure that Iran's nuclear ambition remains exclusively peaceful in harmony with the international non-proliferation principles. Iran too, wanted to break out from the shackles of sanctions that had limited its global commerce in the past years. With the conclusion of a nuclear agreement in Vienna, it is expected that Iran will not pursue actions to develop nuclear weapons, at least in the immediate future. Nevertheless, implementation of the agreement requires walking down an even more complicated path than negotiation and is considered to have significant implications for the Middle Eastern region. Given this context, this paper makes an attempt to review the nuclear deal being signed and looks into its future implications.

**1. Introduction**

After a phase of intense negotiation and consultation for nearly two and a half years, in July 2015, six world powers - United States, China, Russia, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Iran hammered a nuclear agreement known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The long negotiated landmark agreement aimed to bring an end to Iran's alleged nuclear ambitions in exchange of release from sanctions imposed by the United States (US), European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN). This agreement is considered as a landmark one because it demonstrated the prospects of a diplomatic solution to a decade long nuclear stalemate.

The agreement concluded in Vienna (2015) should be seen as a continuation of the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) made in Geneva (2013) and Framework for the Comprehensive Agreement concluded in Lausanne, Switzerland (2015). The Joint Plan of Action of 2013 was the first phase of the attempt since 2006 for a 'mutually agreed long term comprehensive solution'. It came up with a six months long interim agreement expecting Iran to ice up its nuclear programme offering relief from some sanctions in exchange. Followed by the interim agreement, in April 2015, countries came up with a framework for a comprehensive agreement that set the outlines for a deal on the basis of which restrictions will be placed on Iran to keep its nuclear activities within a peaceful reach.<sup>1</sup> Within a few months of the framework agreement, negotiating parties

---

**Monzima Haque** is Lecturer, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Dhaka. Her e-mail address is: monzima\_irdu@yahoo.com

© Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), 2015.

<sup>1</sup> Mentioned in the Joint Plan of Action concluded by P5+1 in Geneva in November 2013.

finalised a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Vienna anticipating that its implementation would contribute to the peace and stability of the Middle Eastern region and usher in a new era of hope.

This nuclear agreement is hailed as well as debated internationally. It is welcomed as a historic deal because it ended years of stagnancy in Tehran's nuclear programme negotiation and finally allowed involved actors to reach a point of consensus. However, the deal did not satisfy all actors since claims have been made that there remains numerous *buts* and *ifs* in its path of implementation and afterwards. Against this background, the objective of this paper is to review the nuclear agreement between Iran and six world powers. The key questions to be addressed are: what are the key issues in the agreement and how were these reached? What are the benefits and constraints of the agreement? What are the implications of the agreement in the region and beyond? The paper begins with the theoretical debate on nuclear proliferation and then follows the sequence of the aforementioned questions.

## 2. Theoretical Debates on Nuclear Proliferation

Growing urge for nuclearisation worldwide has garnered serious debates and discussions in the international relations theoretical discourse for long. Various scholars have listed different motives as fueling a state's desire to acquire nuclear weapons and these can be summarised with three 'P's: power, prestige and politics. The urge to be more powerful in systemic structure to pursue political and security goals; the stature of being a nuclear power and finally, domestic political context are some of the causes that drive a state towards nuclearisation. In case of Iran too, the decision to pursue nuclearisation can be linked with the three 'P's. As a member of the nuclear club, Iran will certainly have more regional and global voice as well as increased bargaining power in influencing global decision-making structure. Moreover, as a country seeing itself placed in the 'axis of evil' and given the 'fate of Iraq', Iran just cannot be out-rightly blamed for having nuclear weapon based security impulses. It is also important to note here that nuclear weapon is a powerful deterrent and in some cases, an inexpensive alternative to creating a large conventional force which can also be seen as one of the reasons for nuclear motivations of Iran.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever are the motivations, whether nuclear proliferation is dangerous or not, is still a matter of debate among international relations scholars. Nuclear proliferation optimists argue in favour of its deterrence value stating that nuclear weapons reduce the probability of war because countries know that using the weapon will be too destructive. There also remains the threat of retaliation in the back of their mind while planning to use it. This argument builds on the experiences of the Cold War. According to proliferation optimists, like Kenneth Waltz, a nuclear Iran

---

<sup>2</sup> Scott D. Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons: Three Models in Search of a Bomb?", *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3, Winter 1996/1997, p. 56.

would be more stable and responsible in its conduct.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, nuclear weapons reduce the imbalances in military power, and thus, it would actually bring stability in Middle East by breaking Israeli nuclear monopoly. The chance of weapons being transferred is also reduced because when countries develop the weapon, it becomes more concerned and acts reasonably to prevent such transfers, at the least will not do it deliberately.

By contrast, nuclear proliferation pessimists argue that acquiring nuclear weapons does not make states rational rather more aggressive and increases the risks of a conflict break-out. Similarly, nuclear pessimists state that Iran is not a 'security-seeking' state, rather a 'greedy' one and becoming a nuclear state would make it even more dangerous. As a result, once crossed the nuclear threshold, Iran would advance its revisionist agenda in the region and become more aggressive.<sup>4</sup> The country might also let the proxies' access to its nuclear weapons which increases risk of nuclear weapons falling in the hands of terrorist groups.

Looking into these debates, it is understandable that the policy makers of P5+1<sup>5</sup> builds more on the arguments of proliferation pessimists and look into a nuclear armed Iran as a potential danger. As a result, initiatives to bring a diplomatic solution to the concern, while simultaneously imposing sanctions to discourage the Islamic republic have been observed in past years.

### 3. The Nuclear Agreement: Background and Key Issues

The Iranian nuclear energy programme was established under the Shah regime in late 1950s with the help of the United States. This is the very first phase of Iranian nuclearisation and this phase was based on 'cooperation' with the United States. In 1957, an agreement was concluded named 'Atoms for Peace'. This programme helped flourish nuclear cooperation between Iran and other countries under the context of President Eisenhower's address in 1953 that called for the use of nuclear materials in serving 'the peaceful pursuits of mankind.'<sup>6</sup> The Shah established the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI) in 1974 and in the same year announced plans for an ambitious nuclear programme that would eventually include over 20 nuclear power reactors. This programme was then actively supported by the major Western powers.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb: Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability", *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Colin Kahl and Kenneth Waltz, "Iran and the Bomb: Would a Nuclear Iran Make the Middle East more Secure?", *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2012.

<sup>5</sup> The 'P5+1' is a group of six world powers which, in 2006, joined the diplomatic efforts with Iran with regard to its nuclear programme. The term refers to the P5 or five permanent members of the UN Security Council, namely China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, plus Germany.

<sup>6</sup> "Iran's Nuclear History from the 1950s to 2005", *ISIS Report*, available at [www.isisnucleariran.org/assets/pdf/Iran\\_Nuclear\\_History.pdf](http://www.isisnucleariran.org/assets/pdf/Iran_Nuclear_History.pdf), accessed on 22 April 2015.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* See also, "Iranian Nuclear Weapons? The Uncertain Nature of Iran's Nuclear Programs", *CSIS Report*, available at [http://csis.org/files/media/csispubs/060412\\_iran\\_uncertainty.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csispubs/060412_iran_uncertainty.pdf), accessed on 28 April 2015.

Gradually, 'cooperation' turned into 'discontentment'. Iran expressed its interest in acquiring domestic reprocessing plant, an action opposed by the United States. Instead, the United States encouraged Iran to participate in a multinational plant.<sup>8</sup> During this period, it was alleged that Iran's nuclear programme also included nuclear weapon intentions. However, the establishment of the revolutionary Islamic government in 1979 ended US participation in Iran's nuclear energy programme.<sup>9</sup> The then Supreme Leader also decided to discontinue the nuclear energy programme as it was considered 'sinful'. Nevertheless, the devastating human costs of Iran's war with Iraq influenced its leaders' decision to develop nuclear and other unconventional weapons.<sup>10</sup>

Since 2003, the US has alleged that Iran has a programme to develop nuclear weapons. Iran says that its nuclear programme is only to generate electricity.<sup>11</sup> In 2002, it was revealed that Iran has been building sophisticated facilities at Natanz and other places. With this revelation, the phase of 'sanctions' against Iran started. Since Iran was a signatory of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran was accused of violating the treaty by not reporting its nuclear activities to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Based on these circumstances, Britain, France and Germany launched a diplomatic effort and signed the Paris Agreement (2004) with Iran to persuade it to abstain from its uranium enrichment and reprocessing-related activities. In 2006, based on these allegations, the US and European countries call on Security Council of United Nations (UNSC) to act against Iran.<sup>12</sup>

From 2006 till 2010, the Security Council adopted a total of six resolutions and imposed gradual sanctions on Iran, including freezing assets, banning the supply of nuclear-related technology to the country etc. Relations between Iran and the West deteriorated to the extent that the US even started considering air strikes against Iran considering the threats on the security of Israel, the key ally of the US in the region. The US government also accused Iran of state sponsored terrorism and human rights violation against Iranian people.

Nevertheless, since 2013, the US started back-channel diplomacy via Oman, beginning series of secret talks with Iranian officials.<sup>13</sup> This phase of 'negotiation' made its way when both Iran and the US supposedly realised that mutual hostility and mistrust would get them nothing. The process was delayed because the Obama

<sup>8</sup> Dafna Linzer, "Past Arguments Don't Square with Current Iran Policy," *The Washington Post*, 27 March 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Greg Bruno, "Iran's Nuclear Program", *Council on Foreign Relations*, available at <http://www.cfr.org/iran/irans-nuclear-program/p16811>, accessed on 15 May 2015.

<sup>10</sup> "The United States and Iranian Nuclear Program: Policy Options", *Watson Institute for International Studies*, Brown University, available at <http://www.choices.edu/resources/twtn/documents/choices-twtn-iran-options.pdf>, accessed on 19 May 2013.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* See also, Ilan Goldenburg, "US Strategy after the Iran Deal", *Center for New American Security*, available at [http://www.cnas.org/sites/default/files/publications-pdf/CNAS\\_Iran\\_Deal\\_061015.pdf](http://www.cnas.org/sites/default/files/publications-pdf/CNAS_Iran_Deal_061015.pdf), accessed on 01 June 2015.

<sup>12</sup> "Iran has extremely advanced nuclear program", *CNN*, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/03/09/iran.nuclear/>, accessed on 01 June 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Ben Smith, "Iran's Nuclear Program and Sanctions", *House of Commons Report*, available at [www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn05275.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn05275.pdf), accessed on 01 June 2015

administration was under pressure from the pro-Israeli segment in the political system of the United States. Washington realised that relations with Iran are crucial for the US to manage the complex Middle-eastern political dynamics, in its fight against Islamic State (IS) and to ensure security of its key allies there. The strategic decision of Tehran to cut a deal to get sanctions relief came at a moment when Hassan Rouhani was elected as Iran's President in 2013. The changed realities encouraged the move towards openness from both side and negotiation for a nuclear agreement received the necessary impetus.

With the passage of time, interaction between the two main actors, the US and Iran increased and in November 2013, Iran and the West (P5+1) reached an interim agreement known as Joint Plan of Action (JPA). The Lausanne Agreement should be seen as an extension of this JPA that failed to reach its deadline for a comprehensive agreement; first in, July 2014 and, second in November 2014. The deadline was finally extended to end of June 2015, with the target of reaching a framework understanding by end of March. On 02 April 2015, Iran and world powers announced framework deal to restrict Iran's nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief.<sup>14</sup>

A draft of the nuclear deal had been developed in June 2015 that outlines the key parameters of a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The key points in the agreement included limiting production of centrifuges as well as reduce installed enrichment centrifuges; reducing uranium enrichment; halting construction of additional nuclear facilities; covert arrangements would be converted so that it stops producing uranium; halt the production and additional testing of fuel for the Arak reactor; allowing inspection to all its declared nuclear facilities, maintaining the time period for rolling-back; and finally, in return, the US and EU would lift their nuclear-related sanctions placed on Iran.<sup>15</sup>

Two issues are important to understand the road towards the deal. Firstly, the talk received a momentum with the election of President Hassan Rouhani in June 2013. He has previously been the nuclear negotiator and is known for his efforts towards constructive engagement to end Iranian policy of isolation. And the second is, several bilateral meeting arranged in Oman by the Obama administration in March 2013 in this regard.<sup>16</sup> These two initiatives set the stage for reconciliation between Iran and the West, and ultimately, an understanding was reached.

<sup>14</sup> "Everything you need to know about the Iranian nuclear deal", *The Economist*, available at <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2015/04/economist-explains-3>, accessed on 02 May 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Eric Bradner, "What's in the Iran Deal?", *CNN*, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/02/politics/iran-nuclear-deal-main-points-of-agreement/>, accessed on 27 April 2015. Also see, "Iran's Nuclear Deal: Key Points", *BBC News*, available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25080217>, accessed on 27 April 2015.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

Based on this understanding, after several attempts beginning with the interim agreement, Iran and six leading world powers signed the comprehensive plan on 14 July 2015. Issues that were open for debate and discussion in the 'parameters of the deal' were resolved and clarified in the final agreement. Decisions were taken on establishment of a joint commission to monitor the implementation of the action plan and handle dispute situations. The IAEA has been tasked with verifying voluntary nuclear-related measures by Iran. In addition, all involved world powers and Iran decided to hold ministerial-level meetings at least once every two years to monitor the progress.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from establishment of commission, the agreement also presents a list of provisions. With regard to enrichment, limits have been placed and Iran is supposed to carry out enrichment only at the Natanz facility enriching uranium up to maximum of 3.67 per cent. Stockpile of uranium, one of the ingredients which can be processed into bomb-grade fuel, should not exceed 300 kg of uranium hexafluoride or equivalent chemical forms. The Fordow facility has to be converted into an internationally-supported technological centre. The Arak nuclear reactor should be modified for peaceful research and the spent fuel should be shipped to other nations for re-processing. Tehran has also been restricted from using reactor designs that require heavy water. Break-out phase has been agreed upon keeping in mind the minimum amount of time it would take Iran to assemble a single nuclear weapon. For the next fifteen years, Iran should be responsible to reduce its current stockpile of low-enriched uranium. In addition, it would also be required to reduce the amount of spinning machines used to enrich uranium known as the centrifuges to 5,060. Iran currently has about 19,000 centrifuges.

To maintain transparency, Tehran requires allowing IAEA to monitor its facilities and safeguard measures for the next 25 years at a row. Tehran has pledged not to conduct research relating to development of nuclear explosive devices. In return, the UN Security Council will lift its nuclear-related sanctions against Iran. The EU and the US will also lift their sanctions, including those on banking services, insurance, sale of aircraft parts, access to airports etc.<sup>18</sup> However, all these will come at a moment when the IAEA has completed monitoring and verifies that implementation of certain measures mentioned in the agreement has been ensured by Iran. Proliferation-related sanctions will also be lifted by the EU and the US, but in eight years of time of the adoption of the agreement. This implies that sanctions would be lifted only when Iran fulfills its pledges and respects the deal. No additional embargo would be imposed on Iran as long as the timeline of the deal does not end.<sup>19</sup> But provisions have also

---

<sup>17</sup> Gary Samore (ed.), *The Iran Nuclear Deal: A Definitive Guide*, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, August 2015.

<sup>18</sup> "Key points of historic nuclear deal reached by Iran and 6 world powers", *RT News*, available at <http://www.rt.com/news/273553-iran-nuclear-deal-highlights/>, accessed on 25 July 2015.

<sup>19</sup> "Reactions to the Deal on Iran's Nuclear Program", *The New York Times*, available at <http://www.nytimes.com>.

been made that sanctions can be re-imposed in case of Tehran violating the agreement.

#### 4. An Assessment of the Agreement

An assessment of the nuclear agreement is necessary to realise its implications. In view of the uncertainty of the situation with regard to Iran's nuclear desire and the turn it might take, the agreement was a sigh of relief for all the concerned actors. The US had only a few options available to deter Iran from its path towards nuclearisation. The first would be full-scale military strike or preventive war as it did in Iraq. Given its experience in Iraq in 2003, it was highly unlikely that US would have public and political support to plan another war. The second option would be imposing sanctions which was in play by both the US and the EU. But the result was far less than expected. Another option was sabotaging Iran's nuclear activities. Aimed to slow down Iran's nuclear efforts, the US used cyber-weapons against Iran's nuclear efforts. Upon revelation, Iran responded with declaration of building its own cyber military unit.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, it seemed to have caused escalation rather than being an effective deterrence. And, the final option at the exposure of the US was diplomacy. It could be said that the agreement resulted from the US administration's effort to balance diplomacy with sanctions.

Benefits of the agreement lie in the detailed nature of the provisions. The thoroughness and comprehensiveness of the agreement necessarily blocks all the pathways to the expansion of nuclear capability by Iran. Nuclear fuel can be developed using two paths: either using enriched Uranium or Plutonium. The current deal addresses both; it includes clauses to eliminate more than 95 per cent of the enriched uranium as well as blocks its capacity to move forward on the alternative plutonium path. The plutonium side is blocked since Tehran would have to ship all the spent fuel from that reactor and other research reactors out of the country. Adding to these cuts, the deal expands inspections and transparency on nuclear activities in Iran.<sup>21</sup> Covert facilities would also have to be modified and closely inspected. Thus, the detailed provisions of the agreement greatly reduce the chances that Iran could continue to build a covert programme without being observed.

The agreement was made in presence of technical experts from all sides along with high- level officials. This certainly has increased its credibility and acceptance. Iran's approval of the inspection and decisions to establish voluntary safeguard and surveillance measures is an important demonstration of willingness from its side

---

com/live/iran-nuclear-deal-live-updates/key-provisions-of-the-accord/#, accessed on 25 July 2015.

<sup>20</sup> David Sanger, "Obama Order Sped up Wave of Cyberattacks Against Iran", *The New York Times*, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/01/world/middleeast/obama-ordered-wave-of-cyberattacks-against-iran.html>, accessed on 02 October 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Doug Gavel, "Analyzing the Iran Nuclear Deal", available at <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/news-events/news/articles/matthew-bunn-on-the-iran-nuclear-deal>, accessed on 25 July 2015.

reflecting that they are acting rationally on this issue. Since Iranian government has expressed its readiness to roll-back, it was also a matter of political gain for the US. From the Iranian side, the achievement is the probability of lifting of sanctions which would improve its economic standing. This issue of lifting sanctions has been debated a lot since critics consider that it would give Iran an upfront relief. However, it is pertinent to note that, according to the agreement, sanctions related to energy and financial industries will be lifted, as soon as Iran adopts all the key nuclear related steps that would be verified by IAEA.<sup>22</sup> This refers to the fact that only compliances can bring an end to sanctions. It has also been stated that non-nuclear sanctions will remain in place. Moreover, the accord also has 'snapback' provisions which means that sanctions will be re-imposed if Iran does not comply. 'Additional Protocol' also allows IAEA to visit sites that it finds suspicious on short notice. Most importantly, IAEA has the technical expertise to figure out presence of uranium even if it is as tiny as a Nano cm. Thus, the argument of the critics that there remains chances for Iran to 'cheat' on uranium and clean it off before inspections take place is irrelevant.<sup>23</sup>

However, the agreement necessarily has downside to it. It would eventually come to an end in fifteen years of time and restrictions on uranium enrichment would be lifted by then. Thus, it is debated to be a temporary solution to the problem allowing Iran to buy time to continue developing its nuclear capability. The argument goes on as, a country with technical know-how can always revert back to nuclearisation; a concern of both Israel and Saudi Arabia. In this regard, the true success of the agreement would still be dependent on how these fifteen years are put to use.

Another major constraint is the domestic situation of both Iran and the US. The implementation of nuclear agreement is subject to the approval of the US Congress and there remain chances that Congress revokes the agreement. In such a situation, Iran would feel betrayed invoking hostile responses from them. If the agreement is blocked at this stage, the international community would blame the US. It might further antagonise US-Iran relations and would also reduce chances of any future deal over the issue.<sup>24</sup>

Even more concerning is that the moderate forces in Iran are very enthusiastic about the deal while hardliners are worried about its possible impact. The President of Iran Hassan Rouhani, the reformist in Iran and key person to bring an end to the isolationist policies of Iran, considers the deal as a political victory. This pragmatist, from 2003 to 2006, tried to prevent the nuclear dossier to be referred to the Security

---

<sup>22</sup> Kyle Crichton and David E Sanger, "Who Got What They Wanted in the Iran Nuclear Deal", *The New York Times*, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/07/14/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-deal-who-got-what-they-wanted.html>, accessed on 02 October 2015.

<sup>23</sup> "Iran Nuclear Deal Background", *Congressional Digest*, Vol. 94, Issue 9, November 2015, p. 16. See more at Daryl G. Kimbal, "Assessing a Nuclear Deal With Iran", *Arms Control Today*, Vol. 44. No. 6, July/August 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Oran Dorell, "Iran-US differences over the Nuclear Deal Widens", *USA Today*, available at <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/04/17/politics-and-details-divide-usa-and-iran-on-nuclear-deal/25944199/>, accessed on 01 May 2013.



Council. After being President, for the last two years, he had been able to get Iran out of Chapter VII of the UN Charter and this helps him justify concessions being made at the deal.<sup>25</sup> It is expected that a successful completion of the deal would strengthen the pragmatists to exercise greater influence and would ultimately moderate the actions of the country. Nevertheless, there are also risks of hardliners reasserting their influence after the agreement as they feel threatened. Iranian Supreme Leader has already emphasised that he is not committed to any agreement and also mentioned ‘sanctions must be lifted at the start of any agreement’ and ‘international inspectors would not be permitted in military sites.’<sup>26</sup> It certainly indicates that hardliners are not taking the deal positively and would not let Iran reconcile with the US so easily.

In sum, Iran has managed to enter into an agreement that allows it to shake off sanctions in return of pausing, or turning-back its nuclear activities, at least in the short term. It can be termed as a success for Iran if the objective of Tehran nuclearisation was to use it as a bargain. If the aim was to actually entering the nuclear club, Tehran has made a huge concession. For the world powers, the agreement is certainly a relief, at least temporary, if not a full-fledged success.

## 5. International and Regional Implications

Contrasting views exist with regard to the future of the nuclear agreement. Optimists hold that if successfully implemented, the Iranian nuclear agreement would open up new avenues of cooperation. It would allow reintegration of Iran in the regional dynamics and help improve its relations with the US. The opposing view holds that Iran would take advantage of the arrangement. Lifting sanctions would in turn allow it to gather more resources increasing its spending on militias.

If the agreement is implemented, it can be stated that a positive vive would be created. Global nuclear proliferation regime would experience the success of diplomacy over coercive stances; the triumph of policy of engagement over policy of coercion. It would reinforce the foundations of NPT and encourage development of peaceful nuclear energy and technology in adherence to proper scrutiny of the mechanism. It would add confidence to the UN and IAEA safeguard mechanism. The comprehensive agreement could even emerge as the building block for nuclear-weapons free zone in the Middle East and beyond. Emerging and aspiring nuclear powers would realise the probable and required level of transparency it needs to add to the development process of nuclear technology in its country which might reduce the urge to building such weapon. On the contrary, in case the agreement is

<sup>25</sup> Emma Graham-Harrison, “Hassan Rouhani: Reformist insider who has ended Iran’s isolation”, *The Guardian*, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/05/profile-hassan-rouhani-iran>, accessed on 12 May 2015.

<sup>26</sup> “Iran’s Ayatollah Ali Khomeini Blasts Terms of Nuclear Framework Deal”, *The Wall Street Journal*, available at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/ayatollah-blasts-terms-of-nuclear-framework-142862350>, accessed on 12 May 2015.

not implemented, any alternative left to the US is to withdraw from the agreement and plan for military actions which may further increase the Iranian urge to rebuild its facilities and continue with the current pace of its nuclear programme. This option would put things in a state of perpetual war and create increasing acceptance of Iran's activities at home and in friendly countries. This can further cause radicalisation in the country and in the region which is against the interest of the West in every absolute term.<sup>27</sup>

With regard to the bilateral relations between the US and Iran, this is the first time since the Iranian revolution of 1979 that Washington and Tehran have entered into an overt deal on an issue vital to the national interests of both countries.<sup>28</sup> This deal is crucial since a US-Iran nuclear detente reflects a change in approach of the two countries over core issues of strategic interests. It is also expected that cooperation between the two countries would widen and would be applied to other points of contention in the region like Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Bahrain. This would create a space to further cooperation in issues of national and regional interests. This would foster progress towards an entirely new beginning. On the part of the US, the country is already strained with war in Afghanistan and Iraq and, therefore, needs the support of Iran to stay away from another war. Moreover, economic growth in Iran would strengthen moderate forces that are in favour of rapprochement which is in the interest of the US.

Russia has played a favouring role with regard to this agreement although they have had intricate records with Iran. This is because the Vienna agreement has opened up avenues of civilian nuclear cooperation with Iran. Moreover, Russia is one such probable country where Iran might ship its low-enriched uranium of current stockpile. Thus, Moscow is one of the crucial actors in the implementation of the agreement. It sees the deal as upholding stability in the region and looks forward to expanding cooperation with Iran. Through this, the energy-rich Persian Gulf would be open to the former superpower for energy trade. However, there remains apprehensions in Russia that the possible energy trade between Iran and Europe would reduce Europe's dependency for energy on Russia. Arms trade is another area of involvement between the two countries. Apart from its collaboration with Tehran, another reason for Moscow to support the nuclear agreement is its bargain with Washington on the NATO missile defence system in Europe.<sup>29</sup>

Relations between China and Iran would continue to grow after the agreement. Primarily, because both countries does not have any complicated history

<sup>27</sup> James M. Dorsey, "The Iran Nuclear Deal: Rewriting the Middle East Map", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 16, No.1, Winter 2014, p. 59.

<sup>28</sup> Nazir Hussain and Sannia Abdullah, "Iran Nuclear Deal: Implications for Regional Security", *Journal of Political Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Winter 2015.

<sup>29</sup> "Russia Contemplates Arms Deliveries to Iran Following Nuclear Deal", *The Moscow Times*, available at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russia-contemplates-arms-deliveries-to-iran-following-nuclear-deal/525605.html>, accessed on 24 July 2015.

which is the case for US-Iran and Russia-Iran bilateral ties. In addition, China has good trade relations with Iran. Bilateral trade between the two countries constituted almost US\$ 50 billion in 2014.<sup>30</sup> China also played a constructive and facilitating role in delivering the agreement and provided Iran with technical expertise to sort out issues of contentions in the provisions of the agreement. It might be a result of China's deep sense of suspicion about the intentions of the United States. By remaining a credible partner of the six negotiating world powers, the strategy of China probably is to make sure that relations between the US and Iran do not deteriorate to a level to hurt its energy interests in the Persian Gulf region.

On the regional front, followed by the nuclear agreement, the expectation is that Iran would emerge as a more responsible regional actor playing a significant role to craft solutions for conflicts in the region. There also remain scopes for further economic cooperation among regional actors, like Oman, and Iran. In such a scenario, the nuclear agreement might end up opening the doors of dialogue in the Middle East and thus, assist in building regional peace. Countries in the Middle East see the nuclear accord as a positive development and consider it as preventing the region from descending into a critical nuclear weapon competition. Nonetheless, the nuclear agreement and sign of gradual rapprochement between the US and Iran has also invoked bitter responses from Israel, one of the key allies of the US in the region. Saudi Arabia, another ally of the US, is also very doubtful about the prospects of the agreement. By contrast, countries like Oman, Kuwait, and Qatar have expressed positive sentiments about the developments.

For Israelis, Iranian nuclear programme has always been an existential threat. The country that is believed to be the only Middle East country to possess nuclear weapon dubbed the nuclear agreement as a 'historic mistake'. As a result, Israel is trying to harbour and project similar fear and suspicion among other Arab countries. Another US ally, Saudi Arabia, sees the agreement as an attempt of Iran to pursue an aggressive policy to gain regional hegemony using proxies and sectarian instability. Given their skepticism, it will not be surprising if Saudi Arabia tries to look for new alliances within and beyond the region. Through the air campaign in Yemen against Houthis, Saudis have already displayed their activism against potential rise of Iran's influence in the region. Certainly, they would not let Iran alter the balance of power in the Middle East by entering into an agreement with the US.

These countries are concerned that an economically powerful Iran followed by sanction-relief would emerge as a powerful player in the regional political landscape. In such a reality, one cannot rule out the possibilities of an increasing struggle for regional power and prestige among the major powers in the region. However, followed by the nuclear agreement with Iran, it can be stated that, given the

<sup>30</sup> Michael Singh, "The Sino-Iranian Tango", *Foreign Affairs*, available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2015-07-21/sino-iranian-tango>, accessed on 26 July 2015.

scrutiny and inspections that a country would be subjected to if it attempts to develop nuclear weapons, the agreement would reduce desire of the Arab States to enter into any such arrangements. If Iran is allowed to continue with its nuclear programme, and ultimately gathers a nuclear weapon, that would certainly encourage countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan to develop such weapon. This resulting security dilemma would put things in a state of war. Interestingly, to deal with the regional insecurities, some experts have also advocated for an American- sponsored regional security framework as a form of extended deterrence in the Middle East. Such expectations are not practicable, especially in the context when the US is shifting its pivot to Asia and trying to limit its commitment as security provider in the Middle East. Therefore, limiting the scope of deadly war and creating a space for dialogue in the region should be the utmost priority.

Involvement of European powers in the deal is a manifestation that these countries recognise Iran as a powerful force to ensure a more peaceful and stable Middle East. Increased coordination between Iran and the EU would allow undertaking coordinated steps to combat rising trends of terrorist groups like ISIS. With regard to the implication in the intra-state political dynamics of Iran, there remains a lot to be considered. Since both reformers and hard-liners hold different views of the accord, the future of the country as well as the Middle East would be determined by which power emerges as the beneficiary of the accord.<sup>31</sup>

In South Asia, the nuclear agreement offers prospects of enhanced economic cooperation with Iran. India is already deeply looking into prospects of making heavy investments in Iran. Bangladesh should also make use of this opportunity as well. Bangladesh's trade relations with Iran would receive a boost if the nuclear agreement is implemented. Bilateral trade relations between the two countries are tilted in favour of Bangladesh. However, a decreasing trend has been exhibited in trade relations when the sanctions were imposed. Value of bilateral trade was nearly US\$ 160.3 million in FY 2011 which reduced to US\$ 67.4 million in FY 2014. Thus, an Iran without embargo means a market for Bangladeshi products like textiles, chemicals and jute items. Bangladesh can also benefit from importing oil at a cheaper price from Iran.<sup>32</sup> With gradual stabilisation in the Middle East, manpower export from Bangladesh to the region would be positively impacted as well.

---

<sup>31</sup> Yaroslav Trofimov, "Will Nuclear Deal Boost Iran Moderates or Hard-Liners?", *The Wall Street Journal*, available at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/will-nuclear-deal-boost-iran-moderates-or-hard-liners-1432808828>, accessed on 28 May 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Asjadul Kibria, "Post-Sanction Iran Offers Business Opportunities", *The Financial Express*, available at <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2015/07/25/101403/print>, accessed on 25 July 2015.

## 6. Conclusion

The Iranian nuclear agreement has been a successful demonstration of years of negotiation, a landmark achievement for global proliferation discourse and an accomplishment for diplomacy. It has created options for reconciliation between Iran and the US which can be crucial for the future of Middle East security architecture. The US has demonstrated its leadership role through this initiative; while Iran has extended the deadline for bringing an end to its nuclear development programme. Whether this new change would alter the power balance of the region is yet to be observed. But, the ground reality is, years of negotiation has come to an end with a formal agreement which in itself is a success. The agreement is detailed and it looks forward to ensuring nuclear weapons free Iran for at least ten to fifteen years; while, on the contrary, opposing the deal offers nothing except an Iran as determined to have developed nuclear weapon in a short time even in face of sanctions.

The bottom line of the agreement is that understanding and consensus can help to create ground for dealing with instability in the region in immediate future. Moreover, engagement rather than containment might help in curtailing Iran's hegemonic aspiration and allow for a consensual regional role-playing. As the timeline of a decision from US Congress and Iran's Parliament approaches, it is understood that the agreement will be the next step in a long and complex process. It is the mindset of the politicians, intra-state dynamics of Iran and the US, as well as the regional and international geo-political players evolving in the next fifteen years, all of which would determine the future of the agreement.

## BIISS Publications

- **BIISS Journal (Quarterly)**
- **Bangladesh Foreign Policy Survey (Quarterly)**
- **BIISS Papers (Monograph Series)**

The Assam Tangle : Outlook for the Future (1984)

The Crisis in Lebanon: Multi-dimensional Aspects and Outlook for the Future (1985)

India's Policy Fundamentals, Neighbours and Post-Indira Developments (1985)

Strategic Aspects of Indo-Sri Lanka Relations (1986)

Indo-Bangladesh Common Rivers and Water Diplomacy (1986)

Gulf War : The Issues Revisited (1987)

The SAARC in Progress : A Hesitant Course of South Asian Transition (1988)

Post-Brezhnev Soviet Policy Towards the Third World (1988)

Changing Faces of Socialism (1989)

Sino-Indian Quest for Rapprochement: Implications for South Asia (1989)

Intifada : The New Dimension to Palestinian Struggle (1990)

Bangladesh : Towards National Consensus (in Bangla, 1990)

Environmental Challenges to Bangladesh (1991)

The Gulf War and the New World Order : Implication for the Third World (1992)

Challenges of Governance in India : Fundamentals under Threat (1995)

Bangladesh in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (1998)

Nuclearisation of South Asia : Challenges and Options for Bangladesh (1998)

The Middle East Peace Process and the Palestinian Statehood (2000)

Pakistan and Bangladesh : From Conflict to Cooperation (2003)

Integrated Coastal Zone Management in Bangladesh : A Case for People's Management (2003)

WTO Dispute Settlement System and Developing Countries: A Neorealist Critique (2004)

State Sovereignty and Humanitarian Intervention : Does One Negate the Other? (2006)

Unipolarity and Weak States: The Case of Bangladesh (2009)

Japan's Strategic Rise (2010)

● **Books**

South Asian Regional Cooperation: A Socio-economic Approach to Peace and Stability

Nation Building in Bangladesh: Retrospect and Prospect

The Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace

The Security of Small States

ASEAN Experiences of Regional and Inter-regional Cooperation: Relevance for SAARC

Development, Politics and Security: Third World Context

Bangladesh and SAARC: Issues, Perspectives and Outlook

Bangladesh: Society, Polity and Economy

South Asia's Security: Primacy of Internal Dimension

Chandabaji Versus Entrepreneurship: Youth Force in Bangladesh

Development Cooperation at the Dawn of the Twenty First Century: Bangladesh-German Partnership in Perspective

Conflict Management and Sub-regional Co-operation in ASEAN: Relevance of SAARC

National Security of Bangladesh in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Civil Society and Democracy in Bangladesh

Regional Co-operation in South Asia: New Dimensions and Perspectives

Confidence Building Measures and Security Cooperation in South Asia: Challenges in the New Century

Bangladesh-Southeast Asia Relations: Some Insights

Security in the Twenty First Century: A Bangladesh Perspective

25 Years of BISS: An Anthology

Politics and Security in South Asia: Salience of Religion and Culture

Small States and Regional Stability in South Asia

Religious Militancy and Security in South Asia

Global War on Terror: Bangladesh Perspective

Towards BIMSTEC-Japan Comprehensive Economic Cooperation: Bangladesh Perspective

Democracy, Governance and Security Reforms: Bangladesh Context

Whither National Security Bangladesh 2007

National Security Bangladesh 2008

Human Security Approach to Counter Extremism in South Asia: Relevance of Japanese Culture

National Security Bangladesh 2009

**South Asia Human Security Series:**

Nepali State, Society and Human Security: An Infinite Discourse

Evolving Security Discourse in Sri Lanka: From National Security to Human Security

Violence, Terrorism and Human Security in South Asia

Women and Human Security in South Asia: The Cases of Bangladesh and Pakistan

Human Security in India: Health, Shelter and Marginalisation

Pakistan: Haunting Shadows of Human Security

Human Security in India: Discourse, Practices and Policy Implications

Human Security Index for South Asia: Exploring Relevant Issues

Ethnicity and Human Security in Bangladesh and Pakistan