IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAMME AND THE US-IRAN RELATIONS

Iranian Nuclear Program during the last few years has become one of the burning issues for international community and a cause for confrontationist and adversarial relations between the US and Iran. It evokes concerns for many reflected in the diverse reactions and positions. The debates on the issue have been passionate and partisan, due in some part to the likelihood of war and its serious consequences. However, it is an obvious fact that more than anything else, it is this issue which has become most emblematic of the gulf between the two countries. Although it is clear from the previous discussions (Chapters) that the US-Iranian struggle for influence in the region of West Asia has been shaped by various issues, yet these have been overshadowed by the nuclear conflict, which is now widely seen as the dominant problem for both the rivals. Therefore, it is widely realized that in the present international political scenario, Tehran’s nuclear program has become the most significant source of friction between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the West, especially the United States. It is true that at this point, Iran’s policy is less ideologically driven than it may at first appear. The present President of the United States, Barack Obama, unlike his predecessors, has offered to negotiate with Iran without preconditions over its nuclear ambitions.¹ Success, or even minimal progress, in this respect requires an understanding of the internal
dynamics of Iran’s nuclear decision making. This chapter endeavors to shed light on Iran’s nuclear calculus. It is worth mentioning here that discussion in Iran on the country’s acquisition of nuclear weapons has tended to focus on Iran’s right to acquire the technology needed to develop an independent nuclear energy programme. US efforts to impede the flow of requisite technology have been cast by the Iranian as an attempt to keep Iran backward and dependent. US policy has been viewed as a hostile action toward an independent Iran. The principle of independence, of course, was one of the touchstones of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, and few Iranians of whatever political persuasion—nationalists, secularists, or advocates of a strict religious government—would dissent from its importance.\(^2\) However, Iran’s national perspective on its nuclear policy is shaped by a multiplicity of domestic, regional and global variables. Ever since 2002, when Iran’s nuclear issue was elevated in the West as a growing threat to regional stability and the nonproliferation regime, the leadership of the Islamic Republic has couched the issue in terms of both its absolute rights under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and its right to engage in the research and development of all phases of peaceful nuclear energy.\(^3\)

The purpose of this *Chapter* (study) is to analyze some of the main factors that have shaped the evolution of Iran’s national thinking for generating nuclear energy in the post-revolution era and to examine contemporary debates inside
as well as outside the country on the logic of its nuclear policy. The study is primarily concerned with the evaluation of US-Iran relation in the context of Iranian Nuclear Programme and their divergent stands on the issue along-with its effects on the foreign policies of both the nations and prescribing some probable future options for both the countries. Simultaneously, it is necessary to discuss briefly about the response of the neighboring countries of Iran on the nuclear issue as they are on the one way or the other connected with either of rivals. However, prior to enter into the depth of the US-Iran standpoints on this issue, it is as well required to have an overview of the Iranian Nuclear programme in order to make it convenient to comprehend the crisis.

The Nuclear Crisis: An Overview

Iran’s relations with the world are multifaceted and complex. Within its region, Iran’s policies are shaped by instabilities in neighboring countries and the West Asia in general, questions of Persian Gulf security, the Israeli—Palestinian conflict and various contests for power and resources. Iran’s relations with Europe, as well as with Russia, China, India and other actors in Asia, Africa and Latin America, have long been shaped by economic interests on the one hand and, particularly in the case of Europe, political differences on the other, in addition to the growing influence of the nuclear conflict. Iran’s bilateral relations with the United States are themselves far more intricate than
they sometimes appear. While the nuclear conflict has become central to it, there are host of bilateral issues that have also shaped this particular relationship. These include historical events such as the US-backed coup against Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadigh in 1953 or the 1979—81 Hostage Crisis, disputes over frozen Iranian assets, Iran’s dealing with organizations US deems terrorist, Iran’s denial of Israel’s right to exist, and more recently and increasingly, a serious geopolitical competition for predominance in the West Asia.

As briefed in the Chapter Two that Iran’s pursuit of a nuclear capability goes as far back as the 1960s. In the initial period Iran’s nuclear program was designed to build nuclear power plants, which are the units utilized to produce energy for industry. The US signed an agreement with Iran to help it acquire nuclear technology in 1966 for peaceful purposes. Therefore, the United States was the first country to help Iran gain nuclear technology. It supplied a five-megawatt research reactor to Iran that began operation in 1967. Iran signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968 and ratified it in 1970. An analysis over the matter reveals that the Iranian nuclear program was ambitious from the beginning. Oil prices soared, especially after the 1973 Arab- Israeli war, allowing the Iranian government to invest more in nuclear-energy development. Under Shah Muhammed Pahlavi’s administration, the Iranian government made deals with German and French contractors.
Germany’s Kraftwerk Union (a subsidiary of Siemens) agreed to build two 1,200-megawatt nuclear reactors at Bushehr, and a French company agreed to supply two 900-megawatt reactors. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) also signed a contract with the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) to train the first cadre of Iranian nuclear scientists in 1975. Iran’s domestic nuclear cycle included an advanced nuclear research center and the development of uranium mining and ore processing. The United States also supported Iran’s plans to build a nuclear-energy capacity. According to declassified confidential US government documents, the shah’s government planned to purchase eight nuclear reactors from the United States for electricity generation purpose. In July 1978, only seven months before the Islamic revolution, the final draft of the US-Iranian Nuclear Energy Agreement was signed. This agreement was designed to facilitate Iranian-American nuclear cooperation, including the purchase of equipment and material from the United States and help in the search for uranium deposits. The political upheaval preceding and following the revolution halted the Iranian nuclear program. However, until 1979, beside technical support of the United States, some German and French companies, which were competent in the nuclear technology, also involved in the project of constructing a nuclear power plant in Bushehr. Iran declared that Bushehr power plant was designed for energy production but there were claims arguing that, even before the
revolution, Iran had the goal of obtaining nuclear weapons. By 1979, one nuclear reactor, Busher 1, was 90 percent complete, with 60 percent of its equipment installed, Busher 2 was 50 percent complete.

The US authorities and European firms fulfilled their commitments until the Iranian Revolution took place, and when the revolution occurred, the nuclear facilities were half finished. Once the revolution broke out, cooperation between the contractors and Iran ceased, and the controversies regarding contracts between Iran and European companies have been an issue throughout the 1980’s. The first prime minister after the revolution, Mehdi Bazargan, concluded that Iran did not need nuclear energy and discontinued the project. The pre-1976 history of Iranian nuclear issue has been discussed in the Second Chapter with a separate heading and therefore, it would not be elaborated here other than referring the matter whenever necessary.

Iranian Revolution marked a new phase with regard to the Iranian nuclear program. After the revolution, Iran declared that it halted its nuclear program, but the commitment to this declaration seems a little bit ambiguous because of the facts observed in the following years. Iran's nuclear program remained as an issue, although in an unheated pace, during 1980’s and in an increased pace in 1990’s. Several Iranian attempts to complete Busher power plant in 1980’s
in cooperation with some European companies have been abortive because of the US pressure.\textsuperscript{13} 

There were/are others factors that prevented Iran from developing a nuclear capacity. In post-revolution Iran war happened with Iraq in 1980 and ended in 1988. This was a major factor. Iraq bombed Iran’s nuclear reactors and research centers, hitting the two reactors under construction in Busher six times. That experience drove Iran to consider on the security of nuclear facilities against foreign attacks in its following initiatives to run a nuclear program. Almost all the nuclear activities of Iran in 1980’s were related to Busher power Plant, although there has not been any progress recorded in that project either. Compared to other nuclear-related facilities of Iran, most of which were built after 1990, construction of Busher power plant has cost too much to Iran, because it has been half-built, ruined and rebuilt several times because of the attacks, change of the contractors, and incompatibility of the technologies of different contractors.\textsuperscript{14} 

With the end of the war, Iran’s need for electricity significantly expanded. According to the official Iranian line, this led President Hashemi Rafsanjani’s government to review its policy and decide to continue with the quest for nuclear-energy projects. The Iranian government sought international technical assistance and collaboration to complete the nuclear facilities from Germany,
Argentina, Spain, the Czech Republic, Italy and Poland. However, these attempts were prevented by the United States as a part of the dual containment policy. The programme was later discontinued by Ayatollah Khomeini, only to be revived again under President Rafsanjani during the 1990s.

In 1990’s Iran gunned up its nuclear power plant building activities, this time with nonwestern countries, Russia and China. These plants were essentially designed for energy generation and their construction was totally contracted to institutions in Russia or China. Russia also cooperated on uranium mining capabilities with Iran, and according to the contract between Russia and Iran, the fuel for the power plant contracted to Russia would also be procured by Russia.

These attempts of the Iran to get nuclear technology have been blockaded by the US, however, the real concern of the United States has always been Iran's attempts to have nuclear indigenous technology which can be either utilized for peaceful or military purposes. West believes that besides trying to build nuclear power plants, Iran also began to establish its indigenous uranium enrichment capabilities in 1990’s. Yet these activities were not a major issue in the agenda of international community.

In 1995, after long negotiations, an Iranian-Russian agreement over Iran’s nuclear program was signed. It called for finishing the reactors at Bushehr,
which, under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), would have been capable of producing a maximum of 180kg of plutonium per year. According to the agreement, ‘Busheh 1’ was supposed to be completed by 1999. But it remained unfinished and so Russia announced it will finish the Busheh power plant in 2009, according to Reuters. The agreement also stipulated that Russia would provide further technical assistance and the training of Iranian nuclear scientists.

Russian completion of the Busheh reactors was an immensely complex task. Back in the 1970s, the Kraftwerk Union did not provide any technical documents for the installation of the reactors. In addition, Russian and German reactors are significantly different technologically. The Iranian nuclear program is highly dependent on foreign technology transfer, and it seems that it will continue to be. Another point that raised concern about Iranian intentions has been the rapid developments in Iranian missile delivery capabilities. Iran’s middle-range ballistic-missile capabilities can reach all the West Asia and Eastern Europe. Israeli and American analysts, in particular, suggest that the development of these capabilities poses a security threat to the region. Iran’s efforts to develop missile capabilities in parallel with its nuclear program have led many analysts to believe the latter is intended for military purposes rather than energy production.
The incident that triggered the debate and global attention directed toward Iran and its nuclear ambitions were started because of a leakage of information in 2002. The crisis was initiated in August 2002, when an Iranian exile opposition group, the National Council of Resistance (Mujahedin-e-Khalq), accused Tehran of hiding a uranium-enrichment facility at Natanz and a heavy-water plant at Arak. Soon, IAEA inspections also revealed that Iran undergoes an indigenous programme to advance its nuclear capability, and as the West alleged that some of the necessary equipments for nuclear facilities have been procured illegally from two countries and A.Q. Khan Network. According to NPT rules these activities and transfers are subject to IAEA safeguards and IAEA should have been notified, yet, these transfers between the foreign suppliers and Iran have not been reported to IAEA and were violation of NPT rules.

This was followed by Iran’s announcement that its nuclear programme had peaceful aims and that it would allow IAEA inspections. In November 2003, Iran suspended its nuclear program and announced it would allow stricter IAEA inspections. The IAEA concluded that there was no evidence of the program, but the United States insisted that Iran ultimately aims to produce nuclear weapons, particularly as the country possesses enormous fossil-fuel reserves and does not need nuclear energy in the short and medium term. In addition, three other factors discredit the “peaceful nuclear energy” argument:
(1) Iran kept its nuclear program secret until it was discovered in 2002, (2) there are alleged military connections and weaponization studies connected to the nuclear program as well as missile development, (3) and from an economic perspective, indigenous enrichment is not logical.  

To mediate between Washington and Tehran, the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Britain (the EU3) visited Iran in October 2003. They asked Iran to stop enriching uranium and suggested that it sign an additional protocol to the NPT and provide full cooperation with the IAEA. The EU3 offered economic concessions, if these conditions were met. The rest of the world, including the United States, supported the EU3 initiative and a diplomatic solution to the problem. In August 2005, Iran rejected the proposal, and the talks were stopped. In fall 2005, Iran resumed uranium conversion at its Isfahan plant, and an IAEA resolution declared it in violation of the NPT. During fall 2005, Iran was encouraged to resume talks with the EU-3, to refrain from enrichment at other nuclear facilities and to halt enrichment at the Isfahan plant.

In January 2006, Iran broke the IAEA seals at its Natanz facility, and the IAEA referred the matter to the UN Security Council (UNSC). Iran also declared that it had resumed its uranium conversion at Natanz. On March 30, 2006, the UNSC demanded that Iran should suspend uranium enrichment
within 30 days. In April 2006, Ahmedinejad, the President of Islamic Republic of Iran announced that uranium enrichment had been successfully achieved. As a response, on December 23, 2006, the UNSC unanimously adopted Resolution 1737, imposing sanctions specifically on the Iranian nuclear program, calling for Iran to suspend all enrichment related and reprocessing activities, and to take all steps required by the IAEA to ensure that its program is for peaceful energy production only. Iran did not comply and has continued with its enrichment activities. On March 24, 2007, the UNSC unanimously accepted Resolution 1747 tightening sanctions against Iran and giving Tehran 60 days to suspend its uranium enrichment program. Iran did not comply, declaring that it had begun “industrial scale” enrichment.\textsuperscript{27} As of early 2009, the IAEA estimates that industrial-scale enrichment involving about 4,000 fuel rods is ongoing.\textsuperscript{28}

On October 1, 2009, Iran participated in a meeting with representatives of the so-called ‘P5+1’ (the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, China, France and Germany) in Geneva, at which an agreement was drafted under which a new Iranian nuclear facility would be opened to inspection and a major portion of the country’s low enriched uranium (LEU) exported to Russia and France for processing into higher enriched fuel rods for the American built research reactor in Tehran. Even before this meeting took place, Iranian President Ahmadinejad demonstrated a willingness to engage with the international
community, including the United States, over the nuclear issue. For example, even though Iranian officials had repeatedly stated that they would not accept any deadlines for talks on Iran’s nuclear programme, they still submitted a proposal just in time for the meeting of the P5+1 in September, which in turn made the October meeting possible. Iranian policymakers had also previously stated that they would discuss their nuclear file only with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and not the P5+1, but still submitted their proposal to the representatives of P5+1 six countries.29

The draft agreement, which the international community and Iran seemed very close to signing after the Geneva meeting, was certainly the most creative proposal in many years. If implemented, the agreement would not have ended the nuclear conflict outright, but could have become a game changer. For the first time since the Paris agreement of November 2004, under which Iran had agreed to a voluntary suspension of enrichment activities while further negotiations took place, there was a chance to rebuild some trust over the nuclear issue. Any transfer of Iranian LEU to Russia for processing would have reduced Iranian stockpiles of a material which, at least in theory, could be further enriched to bomb grade. Perhaps more importantly, the agreement would have inaugurated a form of multilateralization of the fuel processing that European policymakers and the IAEA have repeatedly proposed and which Iran has never explicitly rejected. Moreover, such an agreement would
have allowed Iran to claim that the international community had finally, at least implicitly, accepted its successful enrichment activities as a legitimate part of a peaceful nuclear programme.\textsuperscript{30} 

In a nutshell, Iran is still a member of the NPT and, under the terms of this agreement, member states have the right to develop a nuclear programme for peaceful purposes, including enrichment. This is why Iranians repeatedly emphasize that they are simply doing what they are allowed to do enrichment. However, the fears of the United States, the EU and regional actors are not all groundless. As the IAEA has confirmed, Iran maintained a secret enrichment program for 18 years, until it was discovered in 2002. Even though Iran has categorically denied allegations that its programme is for producing nuclear weapons, Iranian officials have not convinced others, most of all the United States.

The completion of the Bushehr power plant has given confidence and experience to Iran in dealing with nuclear technology that has diminished the international pressure on Iran to stop its nuclear research.\textsuperscript{31} On the other hand, the fuel spent in the power plant seems to continue to be a cause of concern. Since the spent fuel is a kind of substance that could be reprocessed in order to produce plutonium, the scrutiny of international community will continue and IAEA would keep the nuclear activities of Iran under control.\textsuperscript{32}
Currently, the situation has escalated to its highest point to date, as the Security Council deliberates on the possible diplomatic options and strategies to pursue in order to dissuade Iran from its goal of domestic uranium enrichment.\(^{33}\) While events advance at a dizzying pace, one element that has remained constant throughout the nuclear crisis is a clear effort by both sides to manipulate public and international perceptions. During the course of the crisis, both nations have made tangible efforts to manipulate both their own image, and that of the other side. Within this phenomenon, Iran has largely been represented internationally as irrational, duplicitous and dangerous. In a similar vein, within Iran and sympathetic nations, the United States has been portrayed as a self-serving imperialist intent on advancing a destabilizing and war-like agenda.\(^{34}\) In essence, misperception within the nuclear issue is both conducted, and capitalized upon.

**Iranian Position on the Nuclear Issue:**

Since the revelation of the Iranian nuclear programme, Iran has made a consistent public position that its nuclear goals are peaceful in nature. As it has stated on many occasions, Iran’s objective is to develop a viable nuclear energy infrastructure. While most security analysts maintain the primacy of weapons manufacture in Iran’s agenda, much European and US analysis overlooks Iran’s considerate economic and social objectives in seeking nuclear
power. In pursuing this agenda, Iran is attempting to fulfill several long-standing economic goals. These involve the diversification of the Iranian economy away from a reliance on oil, the reduction of domestic oil consumption (thereby increasing foreign exports), the stimulation of economic growth in peripheral industries, and finally, diversification of Iran’s energy infrastructure in the face of staggering demographic trends.\(^{35}\) Iran also has a legal basis in its position, as from the perspective of international law, Iran is within their rights to pursue these aims. Iran is a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) signatory and possesses the right under Article 4 of the treaty to pursue and develop peaceful nuclear energy. To reinforce this position, it should be noted that at present no direct evidence has been found that clearly illustrates the actual construction of a nuclear weapon.\(^ {36}\)

However, despite these facts, it appears that Iran has conducted questionable activities within the scope of its nuclear programme, and it is within this field that the real roots of the issue are to be found. In every sense, the Iranian nuclear crisis is a crisis of confidence, as both the IAEA and many nations are not secure in believing that Iran is pursuing a peaceful nuclear agenda. The tally of evidence which has propelled the crisis is quite long, and for most this is of sufficient quantity to justify such a lack of confidence. One notable example is the existence of the Natanz facility itself, as the case has been made
that the construction of such a facility (being underground), combined with evidence of undeclared nuclear research, is a clear violation of the NPT.\textsuperscript{37}

Furthermore, Iran has also failed to provide an explanation behind Ahmadinejad’s public assertion that Iran was conducting research with P-1 and P-2 centrifuge method, a technology Iran had previously declared had been abandoned\textsuperscript{38}. The lack of international confidence towards Iran also stems from political differences between Iran and much of the rest of the world. In particular, the election of President Ahmadinejad and the abrupt change in Iran’s foreign policy position to a more confrontational stance does not present the international community with a positive image of Iran. Nor has the president’s hard-line rhetoric provided much hope for successful negotiations. This dubious image of Ahmadinejad’s Iran was further reinforced by the unusual nature of Iranian bilateral diplomacy taken prior to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) referral vote, which saw Iran make threatening statements to its immediate neighbors as well as to the US itself.\textsuperscript{39}

These statements, combined with the perceived unwillingness of Tehran to work towards a compromise with the main concerned parties, namely Russia and China have confirmed to many the futility of pursuing diplomatic initiatives with the new government in Tehran.\textsuperscript{40}
Within the field of popular perception, the present situation has provided the Iranian government with a very useful opportunity to mobilize the domestic population. While the existence of contradictions, as well as the dangers posed by the changes in Iranian foreign policy is evident to many within Iran they are factors which are not given any attention in official public media. In reacting to the crisis, the Iranian government has managed to effectively redirect popular attention towards the nuclear program into different channels. To do so, the Iranian government has framed its nuclear policy within a framework of highly appealing popular nationalism. Within this context, the government’s foreign policy actions are based on a steadfast commitment to pursue Iran’s national rights, as well as resisting malicious foreign agendas. This message is also conveyed abroad with the intention of gaining support from likeminded populations and governments. A notable example is Ahmadinejad’s 2005 UN speech, where he accused the west of “trying to enforce a system of nuclear apartheid.”

In application, this policy has proved to be successful. By linking the progress of the nuclear programme to cultural attitudes of national pride, the government has garnered an incredible amount of support from the population. Telling evidence in this regard is the massive outpouring of support within Iran following the president’s statement that Iran had successfully enriched uranium. Through this endeavor, the Iranian government has also successfully
presented highly defined and highly negative representations of the concerned parties on the other side of the crisis, such as Germany, France, Britain and the United States. Often the public position emphasizes the baseless nature of their statements, while committing to continued compliance with IAEA inspectors and safeguards (despite continued non-compliance).  

**Iranian Interest and Politics in the Nuclear Development:**

The Iranian state has two primary interests: to protect its territorial integrity and the Islamic regime, and to become the leading power in the region. However, it can be argued here that Iran perceives American influence as the greatest threat to the survival of its regime and uses its nuclear program to gain leverage in its relations with the world. Moreover, Iran has some geopolitical advantages. It has access to the world’s two energy rich regions, the West Asia and the Caspian Basin. North-South and East-West control of energy transit lines and the ability to control the Strait of Hormuz increase Iran’s leverage over other actors. Its great land mass and inhospitable terrain is of enormous advantages against foreign military penetration.

In addition, Iran holds the world’s second-largest oil reserves (11.4 percent of the total reserves), as well as gas reserves (15.5 percent). In 2006, Iran was the fourth-largest producer of oil and natural gas in the world, while current oil production is estimated to be 4.3 million barrels per day (about 5.4 percent of
global output). Its reserves of oil and gas have not yet been revealed. Despite an underdeveloped technological capacity in production and a lack of adequate investment, Iran has the ability to influence world energy markets. The third factor that gives Iran an advantage is its young and comparatively well-educated population: two-thirds of its near about 85 million inhabitants are under the age of 30. The weakness of the Iranian population is its multiethnic character. For example, about a quarter of it is ethnic Azeri, mostly in the north. Foreign influences can use ethnic groups to interfere with the Islamic regime. Finally, Iran’s long history as a nation and its bureaucratic competence make the regime stronger. It is opportunistic and flexible. The economy is the regime’s weak point.

The United States regards Iran as the greatest threat to its regional interests. According to the Bush administration, Iran supports terrorism, denies its people human rights, seeks to acquire WMDs, destabilizes the region and is a serious threat to Israel. To eliminate this “threat,” Iran must be saved from the current authoritarian regime, and a democracy must be established that would be integrated politically and economically with the rest of the world. If Iran were to produce nuclear weapons, its military capabilities would insure the Islamic regime from attack. Iran perceives acquiring a nuclear weapons capability as the only way to eliminate the American threat. The problems between the United States and Iran are all intertwined with the nuclear issue.
For the United States, the real aim is regime change: however, to achieve that, Iran must first be prevented from producing nuclear weapons. Iran is trying to acquire a nuclear capability to thwart US aims, just as North Korea did.\textsuperscript{47}

**Israeli Threat Perception:**

Even though the playing out of the protracted dispute between primarily the United States and Iran over the latter's nuclear programme is rife with implications for non-proliferation in both regional and global terms, its most direct relevance has, for a number of reasons, remained to the case of Israel. One of the multifarious consequences of the 1979 Revolution in Iran was a complete reversal in the country's equation with Israel. Iran during the Shah era was one of the only two Muslim majority countries in the world (together with Turkey) to have established diplomatic relations with Israel soon after the latter's creation in 1948. But, the Revolution, given its Islamic bedrock, changed all that. Israel thereafter was, and continues to be, placed by Iran as one of its top-most enemies. In its new state of avowed hostility toward Israel, post-Revolution Iran has continued to maintain bitter opposition to Tel Aviv's nuclear-weapon stockpile. Important as that plank of Iran's regional approach did remain even before the countries own nuclear programme became controversial, the same premise has taken the centre stage of its political position in the controversy with the IAEA.\textsuperscript{48}
Iran would thus highlight the duality inherent in the actual implementation of the NPT, particularly the role of the major Western powers in that regard, where nothing has been seen objectionable about Israel's nuclear arsenal even as Tehran's demonstrably peaceful nuclear programme has been made such a big issue of. The fact that Israel is not a signatory to the NPT is also cited to strengthen the argument. Not only that, Tehran would also bring out how some of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, in disregard of their nonproliferation obligations, have actively helped Israel in the development of its weapon-oriented nuclear programme. At the same time, the fiery rhetoric against Israel employed frequently by President Ahmadinejad since his coming into power in August 2005 has anything but helped to ease apprehensions of his country's ongoing nuclear programme in Western capitals as also in Tel Aviv.

Nevertheless, the strong Western and Israeli response to such pronouncements would, if nothing else, further accentuate the Tehran-Tel Aviv nuclear co-relationship — an outcome no doubt to President Ahmadinejad's likings. All said and done, therefore, even as observers all over the world would wonder at the desirability of Iran adding to its difficulties vis-à-vis the Western powers over the nuclear question through such anti-Israel pronouncements, it has in fact strengthened Iran's case. Also relevant in this regard has been the possibility of a military strike against Iran either by Israel and/or America.
hinted at periodically by both.\textsuperscript{49} Israel had started hurling threats of an attack on Iran much before President Ahmadinejad's assumption of office that would have contributed to his country's resolve not to cave in to the combined US-Israeli pressure for dismantling its nuclear programme. That, for the sake of record, was happening during the tenure of the moderate President Khatami in Iran. Such aggressive Israeli talk solicited an understandably harsh Iranian response.

Israel and its supporters in the United States, in order to keep Iran under constant pressure, saw to it throughout the protracted process of international negotiations on the Iranian nuclear issue that no compromise solution was reached by the interlocutors. Together with its influence on the US policies in the region, Israel's consistent raising of the ante against Iran thus effectively both scuttled the chances of a negotiated settlement and gave added reason for Tehran not to buckle down. Israel also considered it expedient to keep sounding alarm bells on Iran's nuclear programme. A US 'National Intelligence Estimate', as reported by the \textit{Washington Post} on August 1, 2005, concluded that “Iran is ten years away from developing a nuclear weapon”. Israel warned that Iran could have the weapon much sooner: “Israeli military chief General Aharon Zeevi says US estimates that Iran is 10 years from producing a nuclear bomb are inaccurate. Barring an unexpected delay, Iran is going to become nuclear capable in 2008 and not in 10 years,' General Zeevi adds.”\textsuperscript{50}
The American Position on Iran’s Nuclear Programme:

In parallel with Iran, the American position within the nuclear crisis has generated positive and negative attitudes both domestically and internationally. Much of the criticism towards US strategy is linked with the Bush administrations failures in Iraq, both in improperly assessing the threat posed by Saddam Hussein, and in committing the United States to a prolonged and destructive conflict based on specious evidence. During the 2004-2005 Iranian-European negotiations, the Bush administration drew heavy criticism for not participating in the negotiations. This criticism was further heightened as media reports detailing potential plans for nuclear strikes within Iran intertwined with latent fears of overly militaristic trends within the American government.51

The interest that the United States has in blocking the Iranian nuclear program is not a new phenomenon. Since its inception, the Bush administration had made a concerted effort to isolate and act against Iran. The current policy climate has largely emerged from the ashes of past failures, such as a prior effort to bring Iran to the Security Council in 2003. Furthermore, the position that the United States has taken with regard to the Iranian nuclear program is also a continuation of its policy of isolating and “containing” so-called “rogue states,” a policy which it has pursued in numerous forms for over a decade.52
In the current crisis, however, the United States has been measured in its approach to Iran. Despite criticism for non-involvement, the US has supported the European negotiations and did so until the talks were discontinued. Upon their failure, the US then placed its full support behind the office of the IAEA in assessing the threat posed by Iran and the possible responses. Furthermore, in its public statements the US has consistently emphasized a diplomatic solution. In a statement, President Bush re-iterated this position, stating that “the diplomatic options are just beginning”. However, it should be noted that the United States has tempered such statements with vague implications towards a more forceful position, such as their assertion of a unity among many countries on a basic principle that “Iranians should not have a nuclear weapon, the capacity to make a nuclear weapon, or the knowledge of how to make a nuclear weapon.” In manipulating perceptions of its foreign policy, the United States has closely followed past actions. One notable element being the steadfast refusal of the United States to acknowledge the Iranian economic motives behind nuclear energy, stating instead that Iran has no need for additional forms of energy.

While there has been much speculation regarding military action (to which the United States has ambiguously replied that “all options are on the table”) they have not yet taken an overt position of hostility towards Iran on the nuclear issue, although that may very well change in the near future. At the
moment, the United States is putting its faith and effort into international institutions. While doubtless it is concerned about the threat that a nuclear Iran would pose to both regional stability and US interests, the US approach to Iran is largely dictated by the overarching concern of sustaining the viability of the NPT treaty. Within this context, the US administration sees Iran’s actions as a threat against the NPT regime and the established system of nuclear order. As the NPT regime has come under pressure from numerous proliferation instances in the recent past, the Iranian nuclear issue is being approached with the intention of gaining a victory for the NPT regime and maintaining the status quo in the face of defiance. Also by taking a strong stance in defense of the NPT, the United States has so far managed to redirect or avoid further criticism (particularly from internal sources) of its own failures to reduce its nuclear stockpile in accordance with its NPT commitments.

To many in the US government, the IAEA, and other concerned parties, this approach is both legitimate and necessary. A lingering fear within the United States and other western nations is the future transference of nuclear technology (particularly towards countries of questionable international record). Further diplomatic moves by Tehran have served to heighten this proliferation anxiety, with Iran’s recent offer of nuclear exchange to Sudan being a case in point. Regarding the larger American strategy, the United States seems to be focusing on diplomacy while analyzing potential military
options. Attuned to the high amount of international anxiety surrounding the program and well aware of the difficult situation it has found itself in Iraq, the United States seems confident it can create a multilateral response to Iran. In many ways, this would be a coup for the United States, as it has been trying to undertake such an initiative for some time. However, with the high level of concern surrounding the nuclear crisis, the opportunity may have finally presented itself. This position was best described by R. Nicholas Burns, the under secretary of state who has led the diplomatic negotiations for the administration. According to Burns, “what they have done is created a coalition against them, they have forced a dynamic where they will have some action against them, whether it is in the Security Council, or outside the Security Council by likeminded nations.”

**US Interests and Policies:**

Although the current crisis between the United States and Iran seems to be about the latter’s nuclear program, the actual problem stems from the conflicting interests in the West Asian region. According to the National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2006, the major interests of United States are (1) providing security for the oil and gas supply, (2) eliminating threats from terrorist organizations, (3) preventing the spread of WMDs, and (4) maintaining Israel’s existence and qualitative military
advantage. Successive American administrations have claimed that a major US goal is to promote democracy and economic liberalization in the region. However, even if this is the case, it can only be as a means to achieve these four genuine security-oriented goals above. They are truly intertwined losing out in one of them can induce serious costs in others. For example, the spread of WMDs would make terrorist threats more critical. Similarly, terrorism is a threat to both energy security and Israel. Therefore, interests must be considered together.

A striking fact about US-Iranian relations is that these four US interests conflict with Iran’s goals. First and foremost, Iran is not under US influence when it comes to oil and gas production and transportation. In fact, Iran is capable of interrupting the transport of oil from the Hormuz Strait and making its own energy-export deals with Russia, China and Turkey (and perhaps also the EU in the future). Second, Iran is alleged to be the greatest supporter of Hamas and Hezbollah in the region. Third, the United States claims that Iran is meddling with Iraqi Shi’a groups and preventing the stabilization of Iraq, and represents the biggest obstacle to thwarting radical Islamic groups in the region. Meanwhile, the harsh rhetoric used by these groups and the Iranian regime against Israel also goes against the American desire to protect Israel’s security. Lastly, the possibility that Iran could produce nuclear weapons is a nightmare for the United States. It would give Iran an enormous strategic tool,
secure the Islamic regime’s survival, threaten Israel, and fuel a nuclear arms race in the region while holding the potential to be transferred to terrorist groups. As a result, Iran’s influence in the region would increase immensely, shifting the precarious balance of power.61

**Reality of Iranian Threat to US Interests:**

It is widely accepted that secure extraction and flow of oil is the most obvious interest of the United States. The problem begins when many analysts do not show any hesitation while saying that Iran threatens the US oil related interests in the region. Would really the secure flow and extraction of oil be something that Iran like to sabotage? Given the Iranian economy’s heavy dependence on oil revenues it is not wise to imagine that Iran would be a threat to US interests on oil flow. In contrast, Iran would really like to benefit from both extraction and flow of oil. On the other hand, Iran extremely needs the investment in its oil fields which suffers from the old technology and blockade of US, actually, White argues that Iran looks for American investment more than that of any other country.62 Meanwhile, Vakil argues that Iran looks to west not to east.63 So why people fear that a strong Iran would threaten the US interest in expense of undermining its own economy? The answer is nothing but the perception about its Islamic identity. The equation goes like this line, Islamic politics is anti-American. Its adherents are blind and the only thing that should be
expected from them is destruction of the American/western civilization. They cannot cooperate! Cooperation would embolden them. Do whatever you can to stop its rise! Iran has a regime oriented on political Islam. Block it whenever you can! Isolate it! Don’t let it go nuclear! If it acquires nuclear weapons, it would not make rational political calculations. It would act differently from any other nation. What it would do is blindly attacking to US interests. This is the line of the thinking about Iran which causes the people to think that Iran is a threat to secure flow of oil. When closely examined neither the facts support this line of the thinking nor there is a claim of Iran saying that if Iran go nuclear it would directly blockade the flow of oil, nor Iran’s nuclear capability would be able to do this blockade, the only thing that this capability would serve is deterring other states from attacking on it, because it could be able to harm the attackers seriously with nuclear weapons.\(^6^4\)

An interest of US is supposed to be Israel’s survival and its qualitative military superiority in the region.\(^6^5\) Many sources accept the survival of the Israel as a primary interest of the United States without questioning. However, first of all, it should be noted that Israel has not a status that would never be discarded by the United States, even when Israel’s interests contradict with those of the United States. The United States is a global player while Israel is a regional player.\(^6^6\) As once the US dismantled its special relationship with France and showed it can dismantle with Britain, it can also dismantle with Israel. This
needs to be expressed in order to avoid misconceptions. It is not proposed that the US should break its relations with Israel. However it is to say that Israel is not a national interest of the US. Even if in a particular period of time, in the cold war period, Israel’s survival has been accepted as an interest of the US, it should be expressed that it was situational not perpetual. For a fair and stable future for both Israel and other regional countries, Israel needs to pave the way of survival by employing policies other than reliance on special relationship with US. An Israel which only relies on the security measures would not be able to protect its security, Israel needs to develop less problematic relations with its neighbors and thus prevent them to use an anti-Israel discourse. Furthermore, Israel’s heavily reliance on military approach was something that goes beyond reliance on Israel’s own capabilities.  

Second, there is no evidence that Iran is the enemy of the Jews, and is not so irrational to attack Israel. Iran is not the enemy of Jews because there is a wide community of Jews who has not left Iran until now. There is a bias that Iran would launch a nuclear attack if it acquires the weapons, because it is a ‘fundamentalist’ state. Iran would not launch a military attack because Israel and US had an absolute nuclear advantage compared to Iran. If Iran attacks first then it will be the end of Iran. Moreover, there is Iranian rapprochement to Israel, including Israel-Palestine and WMD issues. Considering these fact, it seems that, the fear of Israel is not justified on the technical and political
grounds, and the current considerations need to be reviewed in light of the new world political conditions.

Third, Iran uses anti-Israel language because it plays a regional role and it has to voice its existence, because Israel’s actions in the region influence whole of the regional politics, which almost none of the states in the region embrace. The reason behind the view of some authorities that Iran would use these weapons is because of the bias against the Islamic politics. It is believed Islamic politics is blind and would cause irrational moves. However, it is interesting, when analysts examine the Iranian retaliation in a case of the American or Israeli attack, they really rationally think in their analyses, and say, for example, that Iran doesn’t use its cards now, but if it is attacked then it will use its cards. This is a very rational reasoning, and reveals that Iran is not so lunatic to use every kind of violence in any case, it would use violence if when it is under pressure. So if Iran would not be attacked then it will not use those weapons and may manage very well like it manages its cards today, regarding its proxy violent groups in the region. Fourth, in the global play today between US, China and Russia, Israel has little to offer, while Iran has much to offer to the US. 71
West Asian perception of Iranian Nuclear Programme:

**Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC):** The six member state of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in the immediate eastern and south-eastern vicinity of Iran has suggested that the Gulf region should be free of weapons of mass destruction. A report carried by the *Forbes* magazine on December 2, 2005 quoted Sheikh Abdu Rahman al-Attiyah, GCC Secretary General, as “calling on NATO 'to exercise direct pressure to eliminate WMDs (weapons of mass destruction) from our region, without exception.' The GCC, Secretary General Attiyah, who was speaking on the sidelines of a conference in Qatar on NATO's role in Gulf regional security, said 'we do not want our region to be sandwiched by arms here and arms there.”

Heba Kandil and Andrew Hammond of the *Reuters* reported at the conclusion of the summit meeting on December 19: “US-allied Gulf Arab leaders called on Monday for a nuclear weapons free West Asia, but singled out only Israel, not Iran, despite having voiced alarm at Tehran's nuclear ambitions during their two-day meeting. In a final statement, the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) focused on Israel's failure to join the nuclear Non- Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which Iran has signed. GCC Secretary-General declined to explain why the statement did not mention Tehran. But one Gulf official said it was because the GCC wanted to keep diplomatic channels open. 'They (GCC leaders) are very worried about
Iran's nuclear programme. They opted for diplomacy so as not to alienate Tehran,' the official told Reuters."73

The Arab World and the Iranian Nuclear Programme:

Arab countries have in the course of the controversy had no hesitation in either calling for the banishing of weapons of mass destruction from the entire region of West Asia or making a specific demand for denuclearization of Israel. And, that is where the real effectiveness of Iran's targeting Israel in the context of the Western uproar over its nuclear programme has come to light. Egypt, for instance, minced no words in this regard when the US vice president visited Cairo in early 2006. According to a Reuters dispatch on January 18, “Egypt told US Vice President Dick Cheney it supported efforts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons in the West Asia but slammed the West for turning a blind eye to Israel's atomic program, one official said. Cheney was in Cairo as part of a West Asia tour that includes Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. “He held talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on several subjects including a standoff between the West and Iran over Tehran's nuclear programme. The last thing we need in West Asia is a nuclear weapon arms race,' presidential spokesman Suleiman Awad said. 'But we cannot ignore Egyptian and Arab world public opinion (that refuses) to make all this fuss about the Iranian nuclear program while turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to the Israeli nuclear
Syria, which has come to develop a close alliance with Iran, especially since President Ahmadinejad's assumption of office, has been the most forthright supporter of Tehran's nuclear programme as also the opponent of Tel Aviv's nuclear weapons.

Even as the United States and its West European allies were enlisting international support for their opposition to the Iranian nuclear programme, Tehran too mustered the backing of the Arab countries in particular for its right to the peaceful use of nuclear technology. Iranian vice-President for Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Ahmad Mousvi took a tour of Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Libya, Algeria and Jordan for the purpose in January 2006. Although the degree of support he could get varied from case to case, Ahmad Mousvi was largely successful in his mission. The divergence of positions on the Iranian nuclear programme as between the GCC member countries and most of other Arab states was highlighted by Diana Elias of the Associated Press ahead of a summit meeting of the 22-member Arab League (or, the League of Arab Nations) held in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum in late March 2006. In a dispatch filed from Kuwait on March 22, she observed: “This tiny Gulf country is increasingly nervous — as are some of its neighbors about Iran's controversial nuclear program, right across the water. But heading into a key summit, Arab leaders are divided, and publicly squabbling, over how to defuse a crisis that has caused the West to haul Iran before the UN
Countries close to Iran, including Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, have focused on safety issues, the threat of a possible regional arms race and the possibility that a crisis with the West could spill onto other nations. Iran's nuclear program 'still poses a big worry,' Sheik Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nayyan, the foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates, said this month. “But Arab countries farther away from Iran have insisted that the United States and Europe should not pressure Iran over its program unless they also push for an end to Israel's nuclear program. In January, the secretary-general of the Arab League, Amr Moussa, an Egyptian, quarreled publicly with the Emirates' foreign minister after Moussa sent a message to the Gulf Cooperation Council summit, urging the leaders of the UAE, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain and Qatar to focus on Israel, not Iran.

Moussa repeated his stance, saying at one Arab meeting: 'We should avoid double standards. As they head into next week's Arab League meeting in Sudan, both Iran's program itself, and the fight over it, have many in the Gulf nervous. “Accidents happen in developed countries. What would reassure us that they won't happen in a Third World country?" asked Kuwaiti strategist Sami al-Faraj. His Kuwait Center for Strategic Studies is advising the Kuwaiti government as well as the secretariat-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council, on how to prepare for any nuclear accidents in Iran, he said. The country's first nuclear reactor, expected to go online this year, is in Bushehr in southern Iran,
just 150 miles across the Persian Gulf from Kuwait. Iran is seismically unstable, and an earthquake could cause an accident that would be more disastrous for Gulf countries than for Iran.

'A catastrophe that kills 200,000 people could mean wiping out half of Bahrain,' he noted. "In addition, any pollution of the Gulf would shut down the six water desalination plants on the Arab shore, he said. But it's not just safety issues that concern the Gulf States. Leaders also worry about a possible regional arms race, and fear the dispute with the West might prompt US or Israeli air strikes against Iran, something sure to rile Shiite Muslim communities in the largely Sunni Muslim Gulf countries. During a Gulf Cooperation Council summit in December, a government-run think tank, the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies, warned Gulf states against maintaining 'silence' over the nuclear issue, saying they will pay the price for any escalation between Iran and the West. Gulf nations utterly refuse any idea that Iran should own a nuclear weapon, and they want Iran to stop uranium enrichment except under international control," said Dawood al-Shirian, a Saudi Arabian analyst. He said a nuclear-armed Iran would be a 'justification' for foreign countries to keep their forces in the Gulf longer to protect their oil interests."
Iran, of course, is not a member of the Arab League, but its nuclear programme did form one of the agenda items to be discussed at the Khartoum summit meeting. Secretary-General Amr Moussa set the tone in this regard in his opening speech at the summit meeting on March 29 by asking the Arab countries to develop their own nuclear programs as well: “As the UN Security Council debates how to confront Iran over its nuclear activities, the head of the Arab League called on the world's Arab states to pursue 'peaceful' nuclear energy programs. Amr Moussa, the secretary-general of the 22-nation bloc, said Arab states should 'enter into the nuclear club and make use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes with all speed and momentum,' according to wire service reports from Khartoum” “Moussa, on a number of occasions, has publicly supported Tehran, saying that the West was employing a double standard by pressuring Iran while turning a blind eye to Israel. (Israel, which has not signed the NPT, is believed to possess nuclear weapons but has never officially confirmed this.) Nonetheless, Moussa's call in Khartoum came as a surprise, since the Arab League is not united over Iran and the nuclear issue.”

In the event, member states of the Arab League decided to send out a call for elimination of Israel's nuclear arsenal.
Future Options:

It is in the debate over potential responses to the crisis where the misperceptions on both sides end up influencing the course of events. Both Iran and the United States have moulded their positions round ingrained cultural and strategic misperceptions, and both are likely to act within their respective contexts. For the United States, the Cold War goal of containment and isolation is still the desired objective, particularly on a multilateral basis, as this in turn fulfils the goal of preserving an American led international system. For Iran, the objective is the opposite, as the Iranian approach largely falls on a history of aggressive self-reliance in the face of collective sanction. This drive, and its nationalistic framing, can be seen in Iranian public statements over the course of the crisis. For instance, President Ahmadinejad’s response to the threat of security council resolutions, where he stated that “the Iranian nation won’t give a damn about such useless resolutions,” as well as the statements of government ministers emphasizing Iran’s strength in the face of adversity, gives insight into this line of reasoning.\(^{79}\)

Regarding the future course of events, the current state of affairs is precarious and largely depends on how the Security Council decides to proceed in the medium and long term. Should Iran be clearly indicted as being in default, and should future diplomatic options be exhausted, then it is likely that there will
be a motion before the Security Council to undertake disciplinary action. Based on the IAEA vote in March, a rough consensus currently exists regarding the need for some measures to be taken. It is in this form of action that much controversy exists. At present, there are two main options: Sanctions and Military Action.

It is in the sanctions option that much of the past experience in approaching Iran comes into effect. In keeping with Iran’s long-standing pariah status, numerous sanction options have been floated within the IAEA that largely emphasize containment and other isolating measures. As for sanctions, there are two likely courses that will be proposed. The first are “light sanctions” and mainly involve coercive measure designed to limit Iran’s accessibility to its neighbor’s and vice versa. This option would involve travel bans to certain countries, limits on Iranian citizens travelling abroad, the removal of Iran at international events (particularly sporting events), and other general restrictions that would reduce Iran’s international interaction. A stronger approach would likely focus on denying Iran conventional military equipment and “dual use” technology (civilian technology easily converted to military applications) and cutting off international lending to Iran.

Should the situation escalate to require strenuous action, the option of economic sanctions could be much more destructive. Despite official Iranian
statements by Ahmadinejad and other government officials who emphasize the resolute nature of the Iranian economy, Iran’s economic foundations are particularly vulnerable to any form of collective action by the western powers. This is due to the present system of buy-back contracts Iran uses in its oil and gas industry. The nature of this system allows for foreign companies to construct and operate installations for a set number of years, following which the facility would be taken over by Iran.\textsuperscript{83} While this ensures Iranian control over its oil fields, it presents a special weakness as it forces Iran to depend on external sources to apply the necessary technology to create the necessary infrastructure. Should a set of sanctions be comprehensive enough to target and restrict technology transfers, the damage to the Iranian economy would be extreme (it should be noted that this is an option the IAEA has considered recommending). However, while containment has always been presented as a desired goal, questions still remain regarding its effectiveness. Iran has been a nation with a startling ability to “go it alone” in the past and succeed and the failures of multi-lateral sanction regimes are well documented.\textsuperscript{84}

While sanctions options are being considered, there is still much speculation regarding potential military action. However, at present, the realistic options regarding a military strike are limited. Any viable strike against the Iranian nuclear program would have to be an airborne campaign, amongst which the United States would be the main participant.\textsuperscript{85} However, such an air campaign,
even if limited, would also be a major undertaking requiring a significant political and logistical commitment by concerned nations. While the United States does have the military potential to meet such a challenge (and Iran lacks the ability to stop them), there are several re-enforcing facts that preclude such a decision. Those being: that such an action would be unable to completely halt the program, Iran is in a very good position to create further difficulties in Iraq, and that the United States’ political position in the region is already quite precarious.

With few military options available on both sides, the likely course of action will involve more diplomacy, political maneuvering and media manipulation. In many ways, the US-Iranian conflict is very much a war of words and images, where great investment is made by both nations in the hope that the consistent application of soft power will yield some tangible results in the future. Such hopes are not inconsequential, as there seems to be little possibility for an immediate solution to the crisis. The effort of simultaneous demonization and self-justification further complicates the crisis, as both nations have legitimate concerns behind their positions. Unfortunately, the legitimacy of these concerns, and any means of rational dialogue in addressing them, are often drowned out on both sides by the weight of history, popular opinion, and entrenched political interests. As both have larger ambitions of regional influence and potential hegemony, the whole scale manipulation and
use of political attitudes will perpetuate, and will likely perpetuate the present conflict for years to come.

Iran’s nuclear program and the prolonged international debate over what to do about it are certain function of the irreconcilable interests of the United States and Iran in West Asia. The characteristics of US-Iran relations since revolution do not seem to be very promising for a resolution of the issue. Since the Islamic revolution in Iran, the United States has chosen to isolate and contain it. It is difficult to argue that this policy has worked effectively towards the US security goals in the West Asia: energy security, prevention of terrorism and the spread of WMDs, and Israel’s security. On the contrary, an isolated Iran has defied the United States on each of these four issues. In fact, the effort to develop a nuclear-weapons capability is the result of Iran’s own need for security, its desire for legitimacy at home, and its increasing influence in the region.

No analyst can accurately know what Iran aims to achieve with its nuclear program. Given the limitations on information channels and the regime’s lack of transparency, most researchers try to infer Iran’s specific goals. Is Iran’s ultimate aim to develop nuclear weapons at all costs or is it using the nuclear issue as a bargaining chip to end its international isolation? From our research and interviews with area experts, we conclude that for the time being, Iran’s
major aim is to develop its nuclear capacity as soon as possible. Whether Iran will use technological advancements as a base for nuclear weapons is a decision for the future. The following analysis about Iran’s short term goals is illustrative: Iran’s leaders do not yet need to make a decision about whether to produce nuclear weapons. They can wait until the fissile material is produced to decide if and when to develop the physics package needed for a weapon. What Iran has certainly decided is to acquire the technical capability to produce fissile material. Its nuclear hedging strategy is designed to bring the country right up to the threshold of a break-out capability while remaining within the legal limits of the NPT.

Developments in late 2008 seem to confirm the view that Iran has advanced its nuclear program to a great degree. In September 2008, an IAEA report confirmed that Iran had significantly developed its nuclear capacity and did not allow required IAEA inspections. As to the nuclear weapons experimentation plan allegedly found in an Iranian diplomat’s computer, the report indicated that the IAEA “has obtained information indicating that the experimentation described in this document may have involved the assistance of foreign expertise.” For the first time in its report, the IAEA mentioned possible “foreign” technical assistance for weapons technology development in Iran.
As early as 2009, the crisis over Iran’s nuclear program seems to have reached an equilibrium that favors Iran. Except for the least likely scenarios — regime change from within and a military strike — all other options favor Iran. Acquiring the technical capability to make the bomb, making the bomb or getting assurances from the West and breaking its international isolation are all good results for Iran. On the other hand, except for the regime-change scenario, all other scenarios challenge US interests in the West Asia. Therefore, the best option for the United States might be to engage Iran diplomatically to try to prevent the development of a weapons program. The Obama administration may be able to give assurances to Iran about regime survival, which would enable the more pragmatic Iranian position to prevail. This could lead Iran to cooperate with the international community on the issue. If the Obama administration cannot achieve what the Clinton administration did with North Korea in 1994, time will favor Iran. Regardless of whether or not it is developing a nuclear weapon, this protracted crisis increases the popularity of the Islamic regime in the eyes of people and nongovernmental groups in the West Asia, may spill over into a conflict with Israel, can create a security dilemma for other regional powers like Egypt or Turkey, and would damage the four major American interests in the region. In November 2008, an IAEA report confirmed that Iran had made 630 kilograms of low-grade uranium, which many experts consider adequate to make an
atomic bomb. Whether to convert this material and technology into the world’s deadliest weapon and begin a new era in the West Asia is a decision in the hands of the Islamic regime’s elite.

The question of whether and how an Iranian leadership can manage to open political routes to Washington may eventually be more important for its domestic legitimacy than the number of centrifuges spinning in Iranian nuclear facilities. And the fact that former US President George W. Bush named Iran as ‘one of the two greatest threats’ to the United States may well have pleased the Iranian president. Iranian policymakers often tend to see the United States as the only counterpart worth dealing with on equal terms. Commentators trying to find a single doctrine or underlying driver to explain Iran’s regional and international policies, as well as its nuclear programme, have traded various possibilities, including Persian imperialism, the export of the revolution, or the religious zeal of Iran’s ruling elite. None of these explanations are convincing. Rather, Iran’s regional, international and even nuclear policies are driven by a combination of ambition and fear for the Western civilization.

Whatever the fact may be laid here, it cannot be denied that Iran’s struggle for nuclear technology intensifies the crisis between the US and some other Western countries with Iran. Iran offers its own reasons for accessing nuclear
technology, as the West has its own perceptions and fears. The US plays a vital role in this crisis. The growing crisis may have terrible impacts on the region, the Islamic world and the whole international arena. So, Iran and the Western countries, and the international society should plan a workable strategy to manage the crisis based on peaceful means and non-violent sustainable cooperation.
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3. See, Nader Entessar, op.cit. p.26

4. Volker Perthes, “Ambition and Fear: Iran’s Foreign Policy and Nuclear Programme” Survival, Vol.52, No. 3I, June—July 2010 p.95


6. IAEA Website, “In Focus: IAEA and Iran,” http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter /Focus/Iaea/Iran/index.shtml, Retrieved on 2010/10/02


13. See, Koch, *op. cit.*, p. 2


20. “Reuters” (November 27, 2008)


27. See, Ibid. op.cit.


31. *See*, Koch, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4


43. Staff Editor, “Iran is Hard Target and Difficult to Confront,” *Tehran Times*, April 8 2006, www.tehrantimes.com


49. Ibid. op. cit., p. 7


52. See, Beeman, William O. op.cit. p 156.


55. See, Beeman, William O. op.cit. p.139.


57. Proliferation incidents that have put pressure on the existing NPT regime are both well-known and widespread. A brief list includes North Korea, Lybia, the India-Pakistani conflict, and the A. Q. Khan network.


62. See, Ozcan, op. cit., p.127 and also see, Anthony, op. cit., p. 6.

64. See, Chomsky, op. cit., p. 141


66. Ibid., op.cit., p. 61.


68. See, Anthony, op. cit., p. 20


70. See, Chomsky, op. cit., pp. 232 & 233


75. See, *ibid., op.cit.*, p. 2

76. *Ibid., op.cit.*, p. 9

77. *Ibid., op.cit.*, p. 21

78. *Ibid., op.cit.*, p. 10


