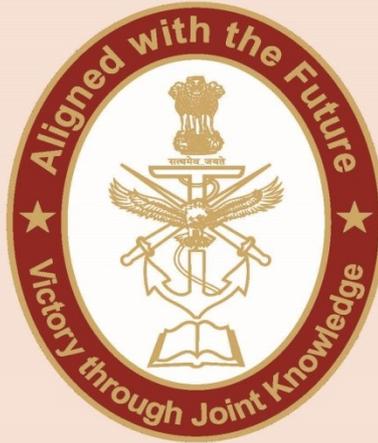


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US AND IRANIAN STAND OFF ON NUCLEAR ISSUE

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“While there is “staunch support” among Member States for the 2016 Iran nuclear deal, known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, that is tempered by concerns over some of its other activities, which Iran “should carefully consider and address” according to the latest report on the deal from the UN Secretary-General.”

The UN debate on Iranian nuclear deal on 12 December, 2018 brought out the differential in perspective of the US and other signatories of the Iranian nuclear deal with import of discussion on accommodation and reconciliation. As per the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report to the UN Security Council, Iran continues to abide her commitments as regards to reported missile tests carried out by them since January 2018. However, the US voiced her concern on increase in Iranian efforts to develop her missile forces and transfer of missiles to her allies in the Middle East which has potential to threaten the world peace.

While cautioning Iran not to indulge in any action raising suspicion, the European Union members voiced their support to Iran and need to continue and effectively implement the deal so as to ensure that Iran does not develop nuclear weapons. The Russia and China expressed their support to Iran and their concern on coercive unilateral sanctions by the US on nations conducting trade with Iran. Iran conveyed that their

missiles are designed for conventional warheads necessary to meet any threat to their security. Iran also requested the Security Council to condemn the Withdrawal of US from the deal. They further emphasized on need to resolve the differences through diplomatic channels instead of imposing punitive economic sanctions. It appears that the impasse between the US and Iran is likely to continue as the reasons go beyond the nuclear deal per se.

The ongoing US and Iranian standoff has its strings connected to geo politics of oil and gas and in turn its regional sectarian afflictions of Islamic West Asian political milieu. In that, the nuclear capability of the Shia Iran is considered to be an existential threat to the Sunni dispensation under leadership of the Saudi Arab who enjoys the patronage of the US. Israel is also seen to be part of the perceived Iranian threat as Israel is considered as an usurper of Islamic Palestinian homelands by the Jews on the excuse of unsubstantiated mythological believes. Iran is considered to be leading the remnants of Islamic anti Israeli camp in the face of others having being weaned away by the US over period of time.

The US strategy, in essence, dwells on controlling the energy resources of Asian landscape either by political support, or its denial to the extent of military intervention and regime change if required in case of resistance to their dictates. Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and Syria have been on the receiving end of this grand game with its focus on doctrine of supremacy of American politico-economic interests. In case of Iran, it is her potential to impact on economic leverages of US, alongside her regional rival Saudi Arab. Besides this, Iran is also seen as an irritant to US objectives of regime change in Syria and a proponent of threat to existence of Israel with her emerging nuclear calculus. **Therefore, the Iran needs to be defanged as regards to her politico-military advantage of nuclear capability and its delivery means.**

Apropos, the new political dispensation in the US under president Trump has pulled out of Iranian nuclear deal signed by his predecessor Obama alongside Russia, China, Germany, France and United Kingdom in 2016. Iran on their part has been adhering to the agreed terms and conditions to the satisfaction of the signatories. The US has objection to the development of the missiles capability which they believe would be capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

In order to pressurize Iran into submission to the US dictates, severe economic sanctions have been imposed which would impact

daily life of common man. The sanctions also intend to deny Iran means of income by imposing restrictions on purchase of Iranian oil by other countries who would also be subjected to sanctions if they disobey US dictates. However, the Iran on their part have kept doors open for return of the US to negotiating table as stated by the Iranian president Rohani.

The Iran despite punitive economic sanctions does not seem to be relenting from her political intransigence contrary to US expectations. The US realizing the sensitivities of her NATO allies seem to be showing signs of de escalating the ante, albeit from political position of strength by imposing difficult conditions as enunciated by Mike Pompeo in the UN Security Council. US despite an apparent tough stance seem to be keeping the window open for wider diplomatic options. It is kind of a balancing act before the matter gets out of hands especially when it is hyphenated with the Syrian theatre wherein Russia has become the reference point after her Sep 2015 military intervention. Iran is providing military support to the Syrian government in opposing the US backed Syrian rebels which is of not liking of US.

Accordingly, the efforts to neutralize the afflictions of acquiring nuclear power/WMD by the states with potential of destabilizing the world peace seem to be back on centre stage under leadership of US. Iran and North Korea are the latest objectives of this global exercise with **opinions ranging from managing the capabilities to the desire for a total roll back of their nuclear ambitions.** The opinion differential, obviously, is a function of world view of each member of the 'nuclear Haves group' through prism of their own national interests.

The debate lies in the realms of freedom of using the nuclear capability for generating clean energy for development on one end, and its use as a weapon to create military deterrence on other extreme. While the first objective is fully justified on the strength of rationale of human development, it is the weapon part which is needs scrutiny based on assessed intentions of the countries, who have nuclear programmes in some form or other.

The picture gets shaded and skewed when viewed from the geo political perspective of the big powers who have assumed the mantle of custodians of the world peace. **They, obviously, do not want to dilute their dominating stature in the world affairs which incidentally is contingent on their strong economy and coercive nuclear military capabilities.** Therefore, anyone challenging this domineering position is looked at with suspicion as a potential trouble creator, hence needs to be controlled or finished altogether.

It is quite clear that the **US with her complicity in creating and supporting the Syrian rebels to bring about the regime change has not succeeded due to support of Russia and Iran to the Syrian president Assad.** They know that Russia is here to stay and amenable to negotiated settlement as long as their strategic interests are taken care of, irrespective of future political dispensation in Syria. Moreover, Russia and US are on same page in bringing about reconciliation between the government of Syria and the rebels. **It is, therefore, Iran which needs to be neutralized being the key military force coming in the way of geo political interests of the US in West Asian landscape.** It is probably this sentiment which has made US to increase the ante by invoking the nuclear calculus to pressurize Iran into political submission.

Besides above, it is also linked to politico-economic interests of all the parties involved in the Syrian crisis. Iran wants to capitalize on religious sectarian opportunism for their economic interests **as they have plans to lay an Iranian gas pipe line via Syria to Europe as against US sponsored Qatar gas pipe line.** Accordingly, the US and her allies are supporting Sunni rebels with an aim of change of Shiite regime in Syria.

In that, the biggest US concern is use of nuclear weapon by Iran against Israel and her European and regional allies. The US fears get further pronounced as Iran has been talking about such contingencies during their Cultural Revolution and subsequent consolidation phase. Iranian nuclear capabilities are also looked at from the Shiite advantage over US backed Sunnis dispensation under leadership of Saudi Arab in their regional sectarian rivalry. US objectives of controlling the geopolitics of oil and gas in West Asia is contingent on support of the Sunni leadership. Hence, need to deny the higher military deterrence to Iran which entails nixing her nuclear capabilities. **In consequence, appreciating the chances of military defeat of the Syrian rebels and its strategic consequences, the US has shifted the goal post to nuclear domain with threat of punitive economic sanctions.**

The Russian interests lie in her geo-political quest to ensure their military presence in the Mediterranean Sea which provides the opportunity to dominate axes to Asia, Europe and Africa, besides access to Indian and Atlantic oceans. They also have an aim to occupy the strategic space being vacated by the US once they move out of the region as per their draw down plan, which seems to be on hold as of now. Iran is an ally of Russia and likely to be supported by them all the way including ensuring that the nuclear deal stays intact. Accordingly,

Russia has put their weight behind Iran and need to honour the Iran nuclear deal as against US stance on this issue.

The European signatories UK, France and Germany are **keen to resolve the Syrian crisis at the earliest as more than 4.5 million Syrian refugees are economic burden, besides impacting on their cultural and security milieu in a big way.** Moreover, their interest lies in ensuring their energy security for which they have to depend on wider range of suppliers from the West Asia. Consequent to Russian intervention in Syria, it is reasonably clear that they cannot ignore Syria, Iran and Russia for their strategic interests. **Hence, it would be a better model to control the Iranian nuclear calculus so as to ensure that it is not weapon oriented rather than rolling it back which seems to be the US intent.**

The timings of US pull out from the Iranian nuclear deal probably was also an exercise in coercive diplomacy aimed at North Korean president Kim Jong-Un prior to their meeting in Singapore in June. In that, US had show cased her unambiguous intentions to nix the nuclear calculus of Iran, thereby prompting North Korea also to roll back their nuclear ambitions. Apparently it did have right impact on the North Korean leadership at that time.

While doing above, the US seem to have left windows in both the cases for de escalation of their hardened stance, if situation so demands. In case of Iran, other five signatories continue to be part of the deal **providing political space for US to agree to rejoin, albeit on modified terms of the deal. It may include cap on Iranian missile programme and other structural changes so as to ensure that Iran does not have nuclear weapon capability at all.**

There is a direct impact of US and Iranian stand off on the energy security of India. India on their part is moving cautiously and has conveyed her concerns as regards to her economic interests to the US which in turn would impact ongoing Indo-US trade and big ticket arms purchases also. In order to accommodate US, India has reduced the quantity of oil imports from the Iran on one hand, and at the same time trading with Iran in Rupees is being considered as was the practice during the previous sanction regime.

Looking at the sensitivity of the matter India should explore alternate sources of energy supply, should the US and Iranian equation get murkier in future. It also calls for maintaining higher levels of reserves as part of contingency planning to cater for such turbulences in

the energy markets given the unpredictability of geo politics of oil and gas.

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