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IRAN'S NUCLEAR POLICY: NATURE, AMBITION, AND STRATEGY

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Abstract: *Nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons represent the biggest danger to humanity. During the Cold War, the US and USSR provided 'umbrella protection' to convince allies not to acquire nuclear weapons. Most 'newly' independent nations never had such security during the Cold War since they were not part of a power bloc. During the Iran-Iraq conflict (1980-1988), the Islamic Republic of Iran was attacked with chemical weapons. Since Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), an Iranian exile organization, exposed Iran's hidden nuclear program in 2002, the topic has gained worldwide attention. Iran's nuclear agenda has produced a worldwide catastrophe despite its NPT membership. Iran says its nuclear program is peaceful and respects Islamic values. Most US politicians and academics consider Iran a rough nation with political and strategic concerns, including regional hegemony, human rights, terrorism, WMD proliferation, and military operations beyond the border. This study examines Iran's nuclear policies to demonstrate its essence, goal, and strategy.*

Keywords: *Iran; Nuclear Weapon; Nuclear Policy; Chemical and Biological Weapon*

INTRODUCTION

After World War II, the atomic bomb took center stage in the global race for armament. Britain and the Soviet Union joined the race immediately after the war, and other countries followed suit later. However, now, any state that tries to acquire an atomic weapon has to comply with the rules and norms of the IAEA and other nuclear-owned states. According to the Arms Control Organisation and SIPRI, the United States possesses almost 1,597 strategic nuclear warheads deployed, compared to Russia's 1,582, followed by France, the United Kingdom, and so on (Woolgar-James 2016). According to Thakur (2015), the world has over 17,000 nuclear warheads, with the US and Russia together holding over 16,000. The highly enriched uranium is estimated to be around 1380 tons, with nearly 98% held by nuclear-weapon states, particularly the United States and Russia.

According to Amiard (2021), as of 2013, almost 495 tons of plutonium are also owned by nuclear states. Some countries were once nuclear weapons states or nuclear-capable states but have voluntarily outlawed and dismantled them. South Africa was once secretly developing a nuclear weaponization program. However, it later decided to dismantle it by joining the NPT (the NPT is a landmark international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology) in 1991 (Liberman 2001). Again, countries like Iraq, Libya, and Syria were compelled to dismantle their nuclear weapons programs through external power intervention. However, despite being a member of the NPT, Iran has been pursuing an alleged nuclear weapons program (Makdisi and Hindawi 2017). During this time, nations such as Argentina, Brazil, South Korea, and Taiwan voluntarily abandoned their efforts to develop nuclear weapons and decided to become nuclear-free states.

The history of Iran's nuclear program began during the Shah's time in the 1950s. Nevertheless, it did not generate the kind of controversy that has lingered in the last few decades during his time. During the Shah's era, Iran's nuclear program was considered 'civilian'; it was done in cooperation with the United States under the 'Atom for Peace' Programme (Shojaei and Bayli 2019). In 1967, the Tehran Nuclear Research Center (TNRC) was established, and three years later, in 1970, Iran became a signatory member of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) (Lodgaard 2007). Furthermore, in 1974, under the NPT's safeguards agreement, Iran also signed an agreement with the IAEA allowing full inspection and verification of its nuclear facilities to ensure its nuclear program remains peaceful and to check for any possible diversion into nuclear weaponization or related activities (Gerli 2019). However, after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran suspended its nuclear program for some time, but later it was restarted after the Iraq-Iran War and pursued secretly. It remained secret for nearly two decades until it was revealed in 2002.

The disclosure revealed that Iran pursued weapon-grade plutonium plants in its Natanz and Arak facilities. The revelation shocked and led the international community - particularly the IAEA and the UNSC - to pressure Iran to halt its enrichment activities. Despite this, the government in Tehran did not listen to the IAEA or the UN Security Council. They said that their program was ultimately 'peaceful'. Since then, Iran has faced various unilateral and multilateral sanctions and embargos from the international community under the United Nations Security Council sanction resolutions. However, those economic sanctions are not efficient enough to convince Iran to give up its nuclear ambitions. Iran has consistently refused it by admitting that sanctions have failed to bother their socioeconomic condition or the regime's political affairs. This shows that Tehran's current and previous leadership put little or no value on integration into trade and the economy, which is also obstructed by Western countries. It instead promotes and values self-sufficiency and independent sovereignty by pursuing an independent policy that disregards Western or Eastern political legitimacy - believing that it could effectively protect its cultural values by portraying itself as the sole legitimate guardian of the Islamic Republic based on Shia Islam's principles.

Due to its lack of cooperation with the IAEA, Iran has been put under harsh sanctions by the UN and the West for the last few decades. After a series of negotiations, an interim agreement was reached in 2013. However, Iran refused to withdraw its enrichment and research activities even after the deal, claiming they were peaceful.

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This work aims to comprehend and analyze the nature, strategy, and ambitions of Iranian nuclear policy to draw a picture of the civilian-military debate and, most importantly, to understand the ambitions of the Iranian nuclear program.

IRAN'S NUCLEAR AMBITION

Historically, the Persians were well-known for their cradle of science and their contributions to various fields such as medicine, mathematics, philosophy, etc. (Mishra *et al.* 2019). According to the New Scientist Report, despite international sanctions, Iran has made considerable achievements in science and technology during the past 30 years (Tatfi 2017). As per the report, Iran ranked first in the fastest scientific progress globally, and in 2011, Iran was considered the fastest developing country in the telecommunication industry. However, the country has been experiencing a 'brain drain' situation due to its limitations in opportunities affected by the 'strained' relationship with the advanced countries of the West. Thus, Iran criticized the West for its double standards and discrimination without acknowledging the importance of self-nuclear fuel production (Fitzpatrick 2017). Iran is advancing in scientific development as it successfully launched a satellite domestically, is an expert on the cloning of sheep and goats, and has the most significant number of students and publishes books related to scientific fields compared to any other Muslim country. Article II of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran reads:

> the employment of sciences, technologies, and advanced human experience with the aim of their further development (...), which can be used for higher education, ethical values, scientific and technological development, rejection of foreign influence, and against tyranny, autocracy, etc. most importantly the complete strengthening of the national defense, through universal military training, to secure the country's independence, its territorial integrity, and its Islamic system. Securing self-sufficiency in sciences, technology, industry, agriculture, military affairs, and other matters (Shevlin 1998, 358).

Iran is one of the fastest-growing science and technology and rising demands on information and technology sectors and military engineering industrialization program. Historically, let us broadly look into the Iranian nuclear program. We can divide it into two main phases based on its policy, institutional structure, the behavior of the regime and leaders, and responses to the external environment. The first phase was during the Shah's regime from the 1950s till the end of the Shah's regime in 1979. This period was considered relatively peaceful under the rigid supervision of the West, particularly by the United States. After a successful 'coup' sponsored by the United States and the United Kingdom against Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq in August 1953, the Shah became Iran's ruler. Iran's efforts to develop a nuclear energy program started during his time in 1957 (Bayandor 2012). In 1957, the Shah signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with the US under the 'Atom for Peace' program to build a 5MW research reactor at Tehran University. During that time, Iran enjoyed close political ties with the West, particularly the United States (Sergi 2017).

The Shah's dreams of building a modern industrialized Iran based on the western institutional model, ignoring its traditional values. As a result, of Iran's nuclear program, Shah desired closer ties with the West to receive assistance and support in transforming Iran into a nuclear-capable state. Therefore, Shah showed the seeds of Iran's nuclear program, which later paved the way for developing a successful nuclear research program in Iran. Thus, in the late 1950s, the Shah implemented Iran's nuclear program under the auspices of the 'Atom for Peace' program. This program was inaugurated under the leadership of US President Dwight D. Eisenhower in Geneva at the 470th Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, which is also known as the "Atoms for Peace Conference" (Roos 2015). The Conference aimed to develop a program of peaceful use of nuclear materials rather than their use for making bombs. The agreement also agreed to provide technical assistance and lease several kilograms of enriched uranium to all signatory member states for peaceful use.

In 1957, Iran joined the peaceful nuclear program by signing a nuclear cooperation agreement concluded under 'Atoms for Peace'. Following the bilateral agreement with the United States, the Shah established the Tehran Nuclear Research Center (TNRC) at Tehran University in 1967 to demonstrate its policy on nuclear research (Rubin 2002). Since then, TNRC has been one of the crucial players in Iran's nuclear activities. In the following year, Iran also signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). It was the beginning of Shah's dreams becoming a reality. Tehran nuclear project started receiving a small amount of enriched uranium (to start a 5 MWt pool-type water-moderated research reactor supplied by US nuclear company GA Technologies (Kessides 2012). A few years later, in 1974, the Shah founded Iran's Atomic Energy Organization (IAEO). That was followed by signing a contract with the German nuclear firm Kraftwerk Union, which has agreed to build the first power reactors (two 1,200 MW (e) PWR) at Bushehr (Ufomba and Dod 2010). Apart from that, Iran invested hundreds of millions of dollars in France's 'Eurodif' uranium enrichment consortium. After all, Shah announced that his future ambitions for Iran's nuclear program were to develop over 20 nuclear power reactors to produce some 23,000 MW of power energy by 1995 (Sargent 2020). Thus, during the Shah, Iran's nuclear program received active support from the United States and other European nuclear states.

With that opportunity, Shah took several steps toward acquiring a domestic plutonium separation plant for its power reactor. In an interview with the French newspaper 'The French Weekly Les' on 23 June 1974, Shah was asked if Iran would have nuclear weapons. He said, "Absolutely, without a doubt, and sooner than anyone would think" (Montgomery 2005). The Shah's statement became the bone of contention in its relations with the West, particularly the United States. The United States trade administrator, William Simon, called him a "nut" (Milani 2018). This remark, however, explains the undercurrent tensions between Iran and the United States bilateral relations. In February 1979, the Islamic Revolution toppled the Shah's government, putting a setback to the country's nuclear program.

Iran also lost many of its top nuclear scientists and engineers due to the revolution, which triggered their escape from the country. Foreign nuclear suppliers became reluctant to cooperate with the new Iranian regime, particularly after the United States campaign to bar civilian nuclear cooperation with Iran. The new Islamic government was forced to halt the construction of nuclear energy facilities as it was left without funding, talent, international assistance, or initiative and under pressure from the eight United States (Talbott 2010).

At the time of the revolution, the nuclear reactor Bushehr-1 was almost 90% completed, installing almost 60% of the necessary equipment. While the second reactor, Bushehr-2, was already 50% complete, and some others were in the planning stage to go into production within that short time (Pedraza 2015). After the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the overthrow of the Shah, Iran became the Islamic Republic of Iran. A new theocratic state was established based on the Shiites' Islamic principles under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's revolutionary leader. According to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini, who had severe religious reservations about nuclear weapons and supported a nuclear-free West Asia region, "nuclear weapons are evil and forbidden by Islamic ethics" (Mousavian 2013, 148). With its new leaders, Iran started a new foreign policy based on the ideology of an independent foreign policy of neither East nor West, focusing on protecting its great Persian civilization and maintaining its sovereignty. These new Iranian leaders refused to continue their nuclear program. Then Iran started to look toward Africa, Latin America, and East Asian countries in high demand for energy resources and shared political aspirations against Western hegemony (Ikegbu and Bassey 2019). However, the new policy did not last long, and the second phase of Iranian foreign policy developed after the end of the war and Ruhollah Khomeini's death in 1989.

Iran has historically felt insecure due to its location in a volatile geostrategic region, surrounded by hostile neighbors and backed by a powerful western ally. Again, Iran has been embroiled in a protracted war due to Iraq's use of chemical weapons, and Western powers back it. These factors have prompted the Iranian leaders to push for a new strategy for the nuclear program. The devastating war with Iraq persuaded the Iranian leaders of the need for a robust long-term deterrent capability. During the war, Iran faced chemical weapons and Scud missile attacks from Iraq. According to Richard, "the Iran-Iraq war taught the Iranians a valuable lesson about the importance of having a credible deterrent force of their own; Iran had none, and they were extremely vulnerable" (Tabatabai and Samuel 2017, 153). Therefore, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) heavily influenced Ayatollah Khomeini's decision to restart Iran's nuclear program. A 2009 IAEA working document indicated that in April 1984, then-President Ali Khamenei announced to top Iranian officials that Khomeini had decided to reactivate the nuclear program as the only way to secure the Islamic Revolution from the schemes of its enemies, especially the United States and Israel.

After years of looking to the West to complete its first nuclear power plant, Iran turned its policy to Russia and China. The first protocol of the Bushehr project was signed between the two countries in March 1990. The agreement called Moscow to complete the Bushehr project and build two reactors in Tehran, but the deal was delayed due to financial problems. In 1991, Iran imported approximately 1 metric ton of uranium hexafluoride (UF6) from China. The Islamic Republic of Iran resumed the nuclear power program in 1991 with a bilateral agreement with China to supply two 300 MW (e) PWR units of Chinese design, similar to that of the Qinshan power plant in China (Fartash 2010). Neither country reported the transfer to the IAEA (China was technically not obligated to as it was not a member of the NPT in 1991). However, Iran was obligated under its IAEA safeguards agreement to report the acquisition of the material). In 1993, the AEOI and the Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy signed an agreement to construct two Russian reactors at Bushehr. However, the contract was never carried out as Iran faced significant financial problems. Finally, in January 1995, Iran signed a contract with the Russian

Ministry of Atomic Energy to finish the reactors at Bushehr. The agreement called for Russia to complete the first reactor at Bushehr within four years, to provide a 30-50 megawatt thermal light-water research reactor, 2,000 tons of natural uranium, and training for about 15 Iranian nuclear scientists per year. Iran and Russia also agreed to discuss the construction of a gas centrifuge uranium-enrichment facility in Iran. However, in May 1995, the US announced that it had convinced Russia to cancel the centrifuge agreement. The light-water research reactor deal has also been canceled (Koch and Wolf 1997).

In 2002, a few months before the revelation of Iran's secret nuclear activities, President Bush declared Iran a part of the 'axis of evil'. The Iranian IRGC projects its relations with the US on two opposite fronts, such as sound (jebeh-e Hagh) and evil (jebeh Batel), in which the US represents evil, imperialist, hegemonic, etc. Furthermore, Iran represents a champion of resistance, fighting against meddling in regional politics and its regime and domestic interests (Vegel and Quinn 2017). Regarding this issue of concern, the Supreme National Security Council of Iran (SNSC) exSecretary Hassan Rouhani appealed for a 'constructive and positive' decision - a sentiment in European countries to help make the Middle East a WMD-free zone. He also pointed out the danger posed by Israel's WMD (IRNA News 2003). It was not until an Israeli security intelligence warning that Iran's nuclear weapons program was approaching dangerously close to the point where it could not be halted that this became the most significant threat to Israel. So, since 2002, the issue has been not just the secret nuclear program but also a part of a political issue that has continued for three decades after the Islamic Revolution. There was a time when Iran benefited from the extended nuclear energy program of Russia, China, North Korea, Pakistan, and Europe, especially in terms of technology and materials for the construction of Iran's nuclear research reactor. However, the US Congress remains convinced that Tehran has pursued a clandestine nuclear weapons program without regard for legality (Voss 2014).

Table 1: List of Iran's Nuclear Facilities Under IAEA Safeguards (2014) (Source: IAEA (GOV/2014/10) (GOV/2011/7))

Location	Facilities Declared Under IAEA Safeguards
Tehran	1. Tehran Research Reactor (TRR)
	2. Molybdenum, Iodine, and Xenon Radioisotope Production Facility (MIX Facility)
	3. Jabr Ibn Hayan Multipurpose Laboratories (JHL)
Bushehr	4. Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP)
Esfahan	5. Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR)
	6. Light Water Sub-Critical Reactor (LWSCR)
	7. Heavy Water Zero Power Reactor (HWSPR)
	8. Fuel Fabrication Laboratory (FFL)
	9. Uranium Chemistry Laboratory (UCL)
	10. Uranium Conversion Facility (UCF)
	11. Fuel Manufacturing Plant (FMP)
Natanz	12. Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant (PFEP)
	13. Fuel Enrichment Plant (FEP)

Arak	14. Iran Nuclear Research Reactor (IR-40)
Karaj	15. Karaj Waste Storage
Darkhovin	16. 360 MW Nuclear Power Plant
Fordow	17. Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP)
Locations outside facilities (LOFs)	18. Nine LOFs where nuclear material is customarily used (all situatedwithin hospitals)

According to Tofigh and Abedian (2016), Iran's nuclear program costs more than $170 billion. Furthermore, Iran remains a weak nation with limited ability to deter external threats, and it is unclear whether a nuclear deal with the P5+1 would ensure its security.

NATURE OF IRAN'S NUCLEAR POLICY

Iran's nuclear policy is a complex issue for various reasons, mainly how Iran has dealt with international institutions and political issues related to threats and security. Other external factors include Western powers' perceptions of the issue and their pressure on non-western countries and the P5+1 (representing the international community). In addition, the issue has some distinctive characteristics because Iran is a signatory member of the NPT. Being a signatory member of the NPT, the issue is bound by legal and political considerations. Indeed, there is no standard, reliable way to characterize the nature of Iran's nuclear policy. Among the scholars and policymakers in Iran, there are strong claims of an active Iranian interest in acquiring nuclear weapons since the time of the Shah. However, no reliable source of such efforts conclusively proves their existence. The Iranian leadership has consistently argued that its nuclear efforts are for peaceful purposes, despite Western claims that Iran intends to develop nuclear weapons for security (Bahgat 2006).

Furthermore, the West has argued that nuclear proliferation by Iran could have a significant impact on the evolving balance of power in the region. In Iran's policy-making, including its nuclear policy, all crucial decisions are made or approved by the Supreme Leader. It also controlled the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) and the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). In the context of its nuclear policy-making, three overlapping circles affect the outcome of all decisions. Nevertheless, the final approval is made by the Supreme Leader, who is generally politically conservative (Entessar 2009). According to the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the SNSC (Supreme National Security Council) is to determine the national defense and national security policies within the framework of general policies determined by the leaders to coordinate in areas concerned with politics, intelligence, social and cultural, economic, and foreign policy of Iran. The council is also responsible for the protection and prevention of exploitation of material and intellectual resources of the country, as well as facing internal and external threats (Thaler *et al.* 2010). As a result, SNSC is instrumental in controlling and supervising Iran's nuclear policy.

Besides, Islam also played a crucial role in Iran's nuclear program. For example, from an Islamic point of view, Iran's attitudes towards the international community are derived from

traditional Shiite doctrines. Therefore, at the regional level, Iran finds it challenging to have good diplomatic relations with other Sunni-dominated countries due to deep sectarian division. In contrast, at the global level, Iran finds it hard to deal with the 'civilizational' difference with the West, particularly the United States. So, to have a successful security policy, Iran needs a solid caveat to protect its politics. The controversial nuclear program of the Islamic Republic of Iran can be divided into two main issues - legal and political. The legal issues are related to NPT obligations and various other extended treaties and agreements that must be dealt with through the IAEA and the UNSC. Secondly, the political issues concern security, ideology, perception, national interests, etc. These are issues that require political and diplomatic dealings.

LEGAL ISSUES INVOLVING IRAN NUCLEAR DEALINGS

Iran is considered one of the founding members of the IAEA and is also a signatory member of the Treaty on Nonproliferation (NPT) (Braun and Chyba 2004). Iran established its Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI) in 1974 to acquire a civilian nuclear program that could produce power as a long-term ambition. It includes an ambition to master the nuclear fuel cycle domestically. During the Shah's time, Iran agreed with the Western country's nuclear firm worth the US $4-6 billion to develop the Bushehr nuclear power plant (Tarock 2006). However, following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, international nuclear cooperation with Iran was withdrawn and cut off all support for constructing its nuclear power facility. After the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Iran submitted a report to the IAEA notifying it that its nuclear development was continued and asking for scientific and technological support to fill the knowledge gap. The Agency showed positive responses, but due to US pressure, the Agency was unwilling to help Iran (Rezaei 2019). Following the revolution and the hostage-taking of the American Embassy in Tehran, most Western countries were unable to help Iran finish its nuclear power plants. As a result, Iran started to ask non-Western nuclear states, like China and Russia, for help with their nuclear programs.

In 2002, during Iran's nuclear revelation, the US was busy in its war in Afghanistan and intervened in Iraq over the issue of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and terrorism. Thus, it was not only Iran but also the international community's fears of another military action against Iran's nuclear facilities, with or without transferring the issue to the Security Council. However, almost everyone in the international community and the Agency wanted to end the conflict peacefully. The IAEA Director-General, M. ElBaradei (from December 1997 until November 2009), immediately held a meeting with President M. Khatami regarding the secret disclosure of Iran's nuclear program. The Agency's board members began to discuss the immediate implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement with Iran in June 2003. In November 2003, in his concluding remarks on Iran's non-compliance with the NPT Safeguards Agreement, under the implication of Article III of the NPT, it was also announced that the multilateral talks with EU3 agreed to suspend its uranium enrichment activities and sign an Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement, granting the IAEA greater inspection authority over Iran's facilities (Soltanieh 2005). It demanded free and open verification of Iran's nuclear facilities to clarify various outstanding issues, including the past and present Iranian activities related to nuclear proliferation. The process was developed through negotiation with the EU3 and Iran, in cooperation and support

from the IAEA. The Agency's report on Iran's nuclear program was almost closely similar or comparable to its refusal to fully cooperate, ignoring most of the Agency's demanding reports and with limited access to inspecting its facilities. However, after two years, in August 2005, the Agency reported mentions of breaches, constituted non-compliance, and removal of Agency seals with the starting of its process lines and the UF at the Uranium Conversion Facility in Isfahan (Ritter 2018). The newly elected President M. Ahmadinejad was responsible for Iran's withdrawal from the Paris agreement. His view was the opposite of his predecessor, President A. Rafsanjani's policy on nuclear arrangements. He criticized A. Rafsanjani as a facade of liberalism and political change, showing softening toward the West, which had polluted the revolutionary principles through corruption and materialism (Ansari 2007). So finally, in March 2006, IAEA Director-General M. ElBaradei reported the issue of Iran's nuclear controversy to the UN Security Council following the Agency's board meeting (Thakur 2012).

Contrary to the request of the Board of Governors, Iran has neither implemented the Additional Protocol nor cooperated with the Agency in connection with the remaining issues, which give rise to concern regarding the possibility of military dimensions in Iran's nuclear program. With its limited options in the Agency and rising awareness of danger among the international community due to limited cooperation from Iran, the IAEA board of governors was forced to refer the matter to the United Nations Security Council. The Agency report mentions Iran's ignorance of and breaches the obligation to comply with the NPT safeguard agreement. The reports reached the United Nations Security Council on 4 February 2006 (Mousavian and Mousavian 2018). It was nearly two months after M. Ahmadinejad announced the resumption of uranium enrichment activities in Natanz and Arak research facilities.

Following the consideration, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) issued a notice to Iran to cancel all enrichment activities. It recommended ratifying by re-implementing the additional protocol demanded by the IAEA. It was nothing less than a warning, calling Iran to cooperate with the IAEA guidelines. However, Iran continues to ignore the Security Council's suggestion. Therefore, on 31 July 2006, citing Article 40 of the UN Charter, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1696, giving Iran a formal deadline of 31 August 2006 to take the required steps or face further Security Council actions until Iran agrees to accept the IAEA's previous resolution (Lodgaard 2016). The resolutions were designed to impose targeted sanctions measures to constrain Iran's development of sensitive technologies in support of its stopping its uranium enrichment and related activities. As a result of Iran's failure to comply with the UN Security Council's resolution on the IAEA, the UN Security Council subsequently followed a series of failed negotiations between Iran and the P5+1, as well as a series of resolutions with new additional extensive sanctions under Article 41 of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. In articles 40 and 41, Chapter VII of the UN Charter states that:

> (Article 40) In order to prevent an aggravation of the situation, the Security Council may, before making the recommendations or deciding upon the measures provided for in Article 39, call upon the parties concerned to comply with such provisional measures as it deems necessary or desirable. Such provisional measures shall be without prejudice to the rights, claims, or position of the parties concerned. The Security Council shall duly take account of failure to comply with such provisional measures (...) (Article 41) The Security Council may

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> decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations (Kelsen 2000, 93).

The US and European countries proposed the duel-track strategy against Iran because they believe it will successfully change Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile policies. It advocates that nobody in the Security Council proposed denying Iran's rights or preventing Iran from benefiting from developing a peaceful nuclear energy program. Indeed, they also want Iran to be bound by non-proliferation safeguards listed in Articles I, II, and III of the NPT as per the 1970 agreement. The 1970 Iran-NPT safeguard agreement (Articles 1, II, and III) indicates that;

> (Article I) Each NWS is not to transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices directly or indirectly; and not in any way to assist, encourage, or induce any NNWS to manufacture, acquire, and control any weapons or explosive devices.
>
> (Article II) Each NNWS Party to the Treaty undertakes not to receive the transfer from any transferor directly or indirectly, not to manufacture, not to acquire, and not to seek or receive any assistance in the manufacture of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.
>
> (Article III) Each NNWS Party to the Treaty undertakes to accept safeguards, as outlined in an agreement to be negotiated and concluded with the IAEA on verification of the fulfillment of its obligations to prevent diversion of nuclear energy from peaceful uses to nuclear weapons. It needs to maintain safeguard through IAEA in transferring all nuclear-related items (Hafemeister 2016, 190).

Earlier, the legal debate was predominantly the US, the UK, France, and Germany, which was meant to justify their actions against Iran's nuclear issue. However, later, China and Russia turned to actively participating in this legal fight. They made a legal argument with solid diplomatic backing for the issue. While the common thesis is that international law is at the core of their legal argument, it was also considered a part of diplomatic dialogue. For the past few years, the international community has failed to resolve Iran's problematic activities at its nuclear facilities. Throughout this period, Iran has constantly argued that its development and implementation of new technology in its nuclear facilities are purely for civilian purposes. Therefore, it is permitted under the NPT. Iran has also attempted to take countermeasures based on its safeguard obligations under the NPT legal conditions. Iran has argued that the obligations imposed on it by Security Council resolutions are incompatible with its NPT obligations. According to NPT Article IV, which guarantees the inalienable rights of all parties, the right to develop research, production, and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination is guaranteed under the same Treaty (Shenasaei and Shirvani 2014). So, Tehran claims the ongoing program is a legal right, and it does not violate the NPT's norms. Article IV,

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Paragraph 1 of the NPT also guarantees all state parties the 'inalienable right' to conduct peaceful nuclear research and material production for peaceful nuclear energy purposes.

Iran typically demands and fights for its NPT rights, including all parties' ability to facilitate, participate in, and exchange equipment, materials, and scientific and technological information for peaceful purposes under Article IV of the NPT. Furthermore, they also demanded full implementation and protection from discrimination related to developing research, production, and nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination (Fleck 2016). Nothing in the NPT can change the right of all the countries that signed it to research, produce, and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and following Articles I and II of the Treaty.

The Islamic Republic of Iran argued in one of its letters to the Director-General of the IAEA that the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is an "unforgivable sin" and proposed the concept of a "nuclear-weapon-free Middle East" (Mousavian 2008, 147). In 2013, Iran and the P5+1 agreed on Iran's nuclear crisis, also known as the Geneva Interim Agreement and officially titled the Joint Plan of Action, signed in Geneva, Switzerland. On 23 December 2013, Iran and P5+1 negotiators reached a successful interim agreement. Iran has accepted invites from the IAEA's inspector to their facilities. They receive the right to uranium enrichment, but the legal justification will be decided in six months.

POLITICAL ISSUE WITH IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME

After revealing Iran's secret nuclear program in 2002, it escalated political confrontation and debates between Iran and the major Western powers. Then US President George W. Bush's administration hastily set the course for military action to deter the secret nuclear program. While the European powers, Russia and China, caught between Washington's demands and their own strategic and economic interests in Iran, have preferred to appease the US. The West imposed unilateral sanctions on Iran as the US has repeatedly stated that all options, including a military attack, are on the table. The Iranian leaders' primary goal in ongoing nuclear projects and activities is to produce the nuclear fuel cycle, as they already have the technology, facilities, capabilities, and knowledge. In a press conference in 2006, Zarif stated that Western threats and pressure did not work with Iran, so negotiation would be the solution. Tehran was ready, just as Iran was ready to impose a ban on nuclear weapons. Iran also claims that the Western powers use the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the UN Security Council as tools to further their political goals.

Similarly, Porter (2014) stated that Israel and the United States claim Iran's pursuit of a secret nuclear militarization program was 'manufactured', as the accusations are false. To him, the western claims on Iran's nuclear-weapons program have all been based on false history and falsified records of the description presented by think-tank experts and in the media. Likewise, Iranian leaders have often criticized Western powers for having purely political motives that do not justify the minimum standards of legitimacy and legality. In response, Iranian leaders repeatedly stated that their nuclear issues are more political than legal and that Western countries' use of language threats and force against their civilian nuclear facilities is entirely

unacceptable. Ahmadinejad also said Iran did not maintain any allies in Europe or the United States, so the Agency pressured and treated Iran 'politically' beyond legal bounds.

In contrast to what Iran thinks, the West, especially the United States, thinks that Iran is breaking international law by trying to get nuclear power and making other WMD-capable missiles. The West also believes that Iran's domestic political and social system is based on Imam Mahdi's Shiite Islamic ideology (Gordon 2012). In addition, it is thought that Iran's view of Mahdi is another form of violence, much like the strong support, as former President Ahmadinejad said, to get rid of Israel from the Middle East. Western powers believe Iran's nuclear policy goal is to acquire nuclear weapon capability. Iran's nuclear bomb is the most likely threat to regional peace and stability due to its asymmetrical military capability, which will lead to a severe nuclear arms race in the region. Beyond the region, nuclear proliferation has become an eminent direct threat to the international community, particularly the US security interests in the region and beyond (Patrikarakos 2012).

It is important to note that Iran, after the revolution became the most prominent and hostile nation in the West Asia region, especially towards one of its most trusted allies, Israel. The United States views Iran as one of the most dangerous nations that openly supports and sponsors international terrorism (Naji 2008). Thus, the West has a severe fear of a nuclear Iran, which could proliferate sensitive nuclear technologies and materials into the wrong hands, particularly non-state actors or terrorist groups (Ouhiba 2021). In 2002, former President Bush listed Iran in the 'axis of evil' for supporting terrorism and seeking WMD. The US State Department's (2013) report on global terrorism listed Iran as a state-sponsor of terrorism. It said that Iran had helped fund, arm, and train many regional armed groups, including Hamas, Hezbollah, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), which were all fighting against the peace process between Israel and Palestine.

Table 2: The List of Iran's Alleged Involvement in Terrorist Attack (Source: Katzman 2015)

The Date of the Attack	Event and Claimed Perpetrator
18 April 1983	Iran's sponsored group (Hezbollah) is accused of bombing the US Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon. Hezbollah killed 63 people, including 17 Americans.
18 April 1983	Iran's sponsored group (Hezbollah) is accused of bombing US Marine barracks in Beirut. Hezbollah killed 241 Marines using a car bomb.
12 December 1983	The Da'wa Party of Iraq-Iran supported the Iraqi Shiite militant group, which bombed the US and French Embassies in Kuwait City, resulting in five fatalities.
20 September 1984	The truck bombing of the US Embassy annex in Beirut killed 23 people. Iran's sponsored group (Hezbollah) is accused of carrying out the terror.
25 May 1985	Iran is said to have some links with the suicide bomber who drove a car bomb into the royal car carrying the emir of Kuwait.
14 June, 1985	The group Hezbollah, which Iran backs, is blamed for hijacking TWA flight 847, where US Navy diver Robert Stethem was tortured and killed.
5 April 1988	Iran's sponsored group (Hezbollah) is accused of hijacking a Kuwait Airways flight, resulting in two persons' death.
17 March 1992	Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Lebanese terrorist organization, was said to be behind the bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Argentina's capital of Buenos Aires.
16 July 1994	Iran is accused of sponsoring Hezbollah in the bombing of the Argentine-Jewish Mutual Association (AMIA) building in Buenos Aires by Hezbollah.

25 June 1996	Iran is accused of sponsoring Hezbollah in the bombing of the Khobar Towers housing complex near Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, where 19 US Air Force personnel were killed.
19 July 2012	Hezbollah is said to have been sponsored by the Iranian government to bomb a bus, killing five Israeli tourists and one Bulgarian.
July-August 2006	Iran was accused of precipitating a conflict with Israel through the Hezbollah cross-border raid.
11 October 2011	United States officials alleged there was a plot tied to the Iranian government to assassinate Saudi ambassador Adel al-Jubeir in the United States
13 February 2012	An Israeli diplomat's wife was wounded when a bomb was planted under her car in New Delhi.
19 July 2012	A bus bombing in 2012 killed five Israeli tourists and their Bulgarian driver.

IRAN'S NUCLEAR POLICY: A STRATEGY

Why do nations like Iran pursue nuclear weapons? Many political approaches attempt to explain why Iran proliferates. The approaches are all different, but the all-encompassing model tries to explain everything at a particular analytic level. Sagan (2011) argues that the conventional wisdom for (nuclear or WMD) proliferation is security-driven. He means that threats in the international political system drive state to proliferate, much like Iran's security situation, which demands it. Historically, Iran experienced humiliating events from external intervention, insecurity because of being a weak state, threats from external powers, isolation from international communities, and exploitive behavior from the existing international institutions. Iran usually lacks trust as it falls back on discrimination toward international institutions. Iran has repeatedly criticized institutional legitimacy for applying a double standard to Iran. So, it believes the existing international institutions are instruments of western powers and that their acts of injustice and ignorance towards the Islamic republic were justified.

Since Iran has had protracted conflicts, it is usually connected to proliferation. Nuclear proliferation is generally a function of states engaged in conflicts. This is due to the states' having acute security threats. Sometimes, states may proliferate to obtain self-sufficient security, enhance national prestige, or acquire bargaining leverage capacity. The variables are shaped by a state's engagement in a particular conflict. Thus, the factors behind Iran's nuclear policy never represent a single key reason for invoking its proliferation options since the country faces multiple security threats. Iran's nuclear ambition is characterized by the experience of external threat and influence and national interest in promoting its defensive capability. Some of the immediate threats are the Iran-Iraq war and rivalries, Iran-Israel competition, and becoming a rival global hegemonic power to the United States. In addition, the other factors are political and economic isolation, the threat of external intervention, and promoting and protecting the Islamic regime. The Iranian people's culture, ideology, Islamic beliefs, and leadership are also the main factors shaping their worldview, sometimes related to their nuclear policy. Iranian leaders also have the crucial responsibility for reflecting different views and opinions in the decision-making process, particularly regarding nuclear policy. So, to maintain national security, sovereignty, and prestige, Iran's national perspective on its nuclear policy is shaped by various variables, threats, and insecurity. Most importantly, the necessary political and security demand for deterrence capability lies as the primary motives behind Iran's nuclear policy.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has an important place in the world system because of its current geostrategic location and abundance of hydrocarbon resources. This attracts external

powers, making it the most critical determinant of Iran's critical national security and strategic concerns. At the beginning of the XX century, Iran was dominated by British and Soviet colonialism, followed by the United States' influence in Iran's domestic political and economic affairs by the 1940s. Among the Arab states, under the Saddam Hussein regime, Iraq was the key regional competitor and a threat to the Islamic Republic of Iran. In early 1980, Iraq under Saddam invaded Iran and broke out into a protracted war (Iran-Iraq war 1980-1988), which was one of the biggest challenges for Iran to save its Islamic government in Tehran as the issue was asymmetrical military capability. It was an unforgettable and embarrassing experience for Iran. During that long war, Iraq used chemical and biological weapons against Iranian civilians, and much of the Iranian population were victims of those illegal weapons (Walker 2017).

Moreover, the UN Security Council and the western powers refused to designate Iraq as an aggressor state and officially opposed Iraq's use of chemical and biological weapons illicitly under international law. Instead, Western powers support Iraq by providing advanced military arms. So, Iran became the victim of Iraq's invasion. Iran fought the war without receiving support from the international community (Mattair 2008). It was Iran's deadliest war, as many lives were lost. It was also a disgraceful defeat for them because Tehran was forced to accept the cease-fire to avoid further civilian deaths.

Most Iranian leaders feel the Iraq-Iran war represents the most critical milestone in the history of Iran's security doctrine (Venter 2005). After the end of the war and the death of Ruhollah Khomeini, the two new Iranian leaders, Ali Khamenei and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani became the Supreme Leader and President, respectively. The two leaders made a serious effort to strengthen Iran's strategic capability with the ambition to address any such possible threats effectively. The Iraq-Iran war left a significant impression on President Rafsanjani, who became the most consistent proponent of WMD. In 1989, Rafsanjani addressed the IRGC. He said;

> Chemical and biological weapons are poor man's atomic bombs and can be quickly produced. We should at least consider them for our defense. Although the use of such weapons is inhuman, the war taught us that international laws are just scraps of paper. Concerning chemical, bacteriological, and radiological weapons training, it was made very clear during the war that these weapons are very decisive (…) We should fully equip ourselves both in the offensive and defensive use of chemical, bacteriological, and radiological weapons (Cordesma 1999, 234).

An exceedingly shocking experience pushed Iranian leaders to adopt a new policy that preferred to go for a nuclear weapons program and become a regional hegemony power. They shift diplomacy to a more pragmatic approach because all of their neighbors can not be true friends while the West refuses to cooperate with Iran. This was one of the main reasons Iran started talking about 'self-help' to improve its military power (when trying to get nuclear power). Furthermore, since the US and NATO allies began an intervention in Iran's neighboring countries (Afghanistan and Iraq), there has been a tremendous impact on the Iranian people and its top decision-makers because of fear of possible military action. As a result, Iranian leaders believed that the only possible option was to possess a self-defensive capability to deter similar threats in the future to deal with such fears and insecurity. According to Kenneth Waltz, "in the moments

of fear when a hegemonic power threatens a country like Iran, the only possible option is to deter with a nuclear weapon" (Knepper 2008, 75).

Also, Iranians have often felt that the protection of Israel in the region is the West's priority. The US has always considered the survival of Israel as a matter of its national interest and has officially announced that it considers Israel a friend and ally. Likewise, both the US and Israel see Iran as a more significant threat than the Saddam regime in Iraq (Larrabee and Nader 2013). However, Iran thinks the more significant threat to the region is Israel, which continues to be a more significant threat. This is because Israel is the only nuclear-weapon state in the region that is not a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), and the Convention on the Prohibition of Ballistic Missiles and WMD. However, from Israel's point of view, Iran's nuclear ambitions pose a possible future nuclear threat. The existence of Israel, the only non-Muslim with a nuclear weapon capability in the region, is considered a direct and imminent threat to Iran. Iran's nuclear program is an imminent and existential security threat for Israel from direct military and proxy wars.

Similarly, for the Arab states, it is a sign of Iran's drive for regional domination, so "the basic fact is that the Iranian nuclear program poses a serious and equal threat to all the GCC states" (Chubin 2010). However, Iran is against the Western policy in the region as it views it as the West's imperialism and colonialism in the Islamic region. Thus, they need to maintain their status quo to maintain this status, which means Iran has to possess self-protection or defensive capabilities.

The loud and proudly championed bellicose tones of Ahmadinejad against the United States and Israel have magnified fear. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 also reflects the beginning of a new strange conflict with the US. It carries the solid psychological force of being anti-American or anti-Western in their culture and foreign policy. Tehran is against the Western policy in the region, as it views it as the West's imperialism and colonialism in the Islamic region. They need to maintain their status quo to maintain this status, which means Iran has to possess self-protection or defensive capabilities.

CONCLUSION

Despite numerous efforts, the question of Iran's nuclear policy remains a controversial issue producing an intense debate in both regional and global affairs. Iran's nuclear program has been at the center of global attention in the last few decades. Iran's position and image in international affairs are determined by its nuclear activities. On the one hand, Iran has been asserting its right to pursue nuclear activities as a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In contrast, the international community led by the United States and its European allies has been putting intense pressure and scrutiny on Iran's nuclear program due to the clandestine nature of its nuclear activities. Though Iran claims it has a peaceful program, the US, Israel, the West, and many countries, including its neighbors, have constantly asserted the military nature of Iran's nuclear activities. According to them, Iran is 'secretly' building its facilities with the ambition of acquiring nuclear weapons. Thus, with all these claims and counterclaims, Iran's nuclear controversy dominates the headlines and remains a significant

challenge to the international community. European sanctions (both unilateral and multilateral) or 'restrictive measures' have been in place since 2007. The EU has advocated for them as part of its dual-track approach to pressuring Iran to accept NPT obligations.

Meanwhile, Russia and China are Iran's two most prominent and leading economic and energy partners. Both the countries also benefited from filling the gap created by Iran and western competition in closing the balancing tie with Iran. The two countries are also the key technology suppliers in developing Iran's advanced missile program. At the same time, Iran, China, and Russia wanted a multilateral world against the US hegemony in the global political system.

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