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*Iran's Relations to the East:  
Nonproliferation and Regional Security in  
a Changing Southwest Asia*

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# ***Iran's Relations to the East: Nonproliferation and Regional Security in a Changing Southwest Asia***

## **Abstract**

The nuclear agreement with Iran contains ramifications for the regional politics of Southwest Asia. A major impact could be on policy toward Salafi jihadism, and in addressing this threat in a meaningful and effective way. It is this paper's contention that the Iran nuclear agreement could be a contributory factor for countering Salafi jihadism.

A permanent P5+1 (Britain, France, China, Russia, United States and Germany)-Iran agreement could be a regional game-changer. This is because the agreement would de-escalate the problem of Iran's nuclear program, advance nonproliferation, and allow the major players to address the critical issue of radicalism. It would create a favorable environment for all regional states to find common ground in the collective identification of this key security threat. This agreement would facilitate concentrated focus on the threat of ideological radicalism and help the regional states act willingly and proactively to counter this threat.

In support of addressing these issues, the regional states could work jointly through a Regional Security Forum. This would bring important regional states like Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia into agreement on this central issue. Currently there are three main countries of concern in regard to Salafi jihadism – Afghanistan in South Asia, and Syria and Iraq in the Middle East. A regional security forum would demonstrate the joint resolve to work on a single-point security agenda vis-à-vis these states of concern. Such a collaborative effort could serve as a model for future joint actions in areas of common regional interest.

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## **Acronyms and Initialisms**

AEOI	Atomic Energy Organization of Iran
AKP	Justice and Development Party, Turkey
CBM	Confidence Building Measures
EU	European Union
EU3+3	France, China, Britain, Russia, United States, and Germany
Fatwa	Islamic religious ruling or injunction
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IRGC	Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, Iran
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JI	Jamat-i-Islami (Islamic Party), Pakistan
JPOA	Joint Plan of Action
LEU	Low Enriched Uranium
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
NWFZ-ME	Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East
OPCW	Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
P5+1	Britain, France, China, Russia, United States, and Germany
PKK	Kurdistan Worker's Party, Turkey
PML-N	Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
PYD	Democratic Union Party, Syria

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## **Executive Summary**

Iran's relations to the East attain significance due to the rapid political changes in the Southwest Asian region. This paper looks at Iran both in reference to the Middle East, and also its eastern neighborhood, in particular, Pakistan. Over the last decade, Iran's nuclear program has joined the litany of threat perceptions in Southwest Asia, a region comprising South Asia and the Middle East. The international community represented by the P5+1 (Britain, France, China, Russia, United States, and Germany) has also been concerned about the prospects of the spread of nuclear proliferation and regional instability.

The threat perceptions associated with Iran's nuclear program are genuine and need to be fully addressed. However, the threat of Salafi jihadism is potentially more widespread and insidious. In view of this threat, Iran can assume a new status, provided its pursuit of nuclear weapons is curtailed. Iran is under the rule of a conservative clergy, but there is sufficient culture in the ruling circles to reject Salafi jihadism. The fact that Hezbollah is currently more focused on Syria is good news for Israel. The Iran nuclear agreement could lead to the calibration of the Iran-Saudi Arabia geopolitical competition in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Bahrain.

The success of a nuclear deal with Iran would positively affect regional stability in Southwest Asia. The objective of a nuclear deal should be both nonproliferation and regional stability. A permanent nuclear agreement could usher in a U.S.-Iran détente from which certain long-term geo-strategic advantages could accrue. A détente could: De-escalate the nuclear problem by capping or rolling back the nuclear program to limit Iran's breakout capability, and thereby advance the aims of nonproliferation; allow the major players to address the issue of radicalism because the agreement would increase the prospects for regional security cooperation; and last, but not the least, it could impact the domestic political dynamics of Iran in favor of openness and integration with the outside world.

Iran's relations to the East are important in terms of regional security. The main issues between Iran and Pakistan are Afghanistan, Pakistan's Middle East policy (e.g., Syria), and border security. A permanent agreement between Iran and the U.S. could facilitate increased Iran-Pakistan cooperation with border security. U.S. technological cooperation on border security could be extended through the system of national laboratories, which have a vast and longstanding expertise in this field.

Finally, Iran's nuclear diplomacy over the last decade demonstrates the role of Iranian political culture in both the internal nuclear debate, as well as in nuclear negotiations with outside actors.

While internal politics play a role in nuclear negotiations, conversely, successful nuclear negotiations could have a positive effect on the future internal politics of Iran.



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## **1. Introduction**

Iran's nuclear program raises concerns in the Middle East due to its possible military dimensions. The Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) reached between Iran and the P5+1, or EU3+3 (Britain, France, China, Russia, United States, and Germany), on November 24, 2013, is a first-step towards a comprehensive agreement meant to prevent nuclear proliferation in the Middle East. The contiguous region of South Asia contains two nuclear weapons states in India and Pakistan, who are currently engaged in a debilitating nuclear arms race. The introduction of nuclear weapons in South Asia has not resulted in deterrence stability, thus there have been recurring crises, although all-out war has been so far averted. It is unlikely that a nuclear deterrence between Iran and Israel would result in greater regional stability for the Middle East in general. The need to avert Iran's nuclear weapons program has resulted in the JPOA, which serves as a nonmilitary effort towards nonproliferation. While the fate of a permanent agreement on Iran's nuclear program remains unclear, the political changes in the rest of the region are occurring at a fast pace. In this scenario, Iran's relations with Pakistan will impact regional security in South Asia and the Middle East. This is particularly significant given the fact that a new problem for the future stability of regional states is Salafi jihadism.<sup>1</sup> It is important to assess how this problem would be dealt with in both South Asia and the Middle East. It is contended that once Iran's nuclear program is brought under more intrusive verification and Iran returned to the international community, a regional dialogue could be initiated to control Salafi jihadism in Southwest Asia.

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Would a successful JPOA result in nuclear nonproliferation and regional security in Southwest Asia?
2. Could the Middle East and South Asia work together to contain the threat of Salafi jihadism?

The hypothesis of this study:

*A permanent nuclear agreement could result in nonproliferation and regional security for South Asia and the Middle East. Further, it could result in joint actions against the spread of Salafi jihadism.*

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<sup>1</sup> The Salafist thought espouses notions of jihad, takfir or declaration of non-Muslims and certain Muslims as infidels, and rejection of modernity.

This paper merges two separate, albeit interrelated issues; Iran's nuclear deal and its impact on nonproliferation and regional security in the Middle East; and Iran's relations with Pakistan, which draws the South Asian region into the sphere of study. Therefore, the regional area of interest has been demarcated as Southwest Asia, which includes both South Asia and the Middle East. In this paper's view, the main issue that is instrumental in merging these two regions is Salafi jihadism. A successful effort to counter Salafi jihadism could improve long-term regional security. And the success of an Iranian nuclear agreement could serve as a contributing factor toward joint regional efforts aimed at countering Salafi jihadism.

Structurally, the paper is divided into three parts: The threat perceptions prevalent in the region; the Southwest Asian regional security and Pakistan's role; and finally, the expected outcomes of the Iranian nuclear agreement termed as the JPOA. This paper studies these three areas within the context of the Salafi jihadist situation facing Southwest Asia and the greater international community. The paper focuses and describes the pivotal, key problem affecting the region (i.e., Salafi jihadism) and a desired course of action to address this issue.



Figure 1: Southwest Asia

## **2. Threat Perceptions**

The role of threat perceptions is important in Southwest Asia since the historical trust-deficit has been the main obstacle to any progress toward peace. An understanding of threat perceptions is also important in the context of policy prescriptions because it helps in identifying the starting point for pursuing any policy options. A look at the major threat perceptions in the region from the systems view of the problem reveals that they can be divided into three major types: The threat perception associated with Iran's nuclear program; the threat perception that emanates from growing Salafi jihadism; and the U.S. view of the region and how it impacts measures taken to advance regional security.

Over the last decade, Iran's nuclear program has joined the litany of threat perceptions in Southwest Asia. The international community represented by the P5+1 has also been concerned about the prospects of the spread of nuclear proliferation and regional instability.

For context, the regional demarcation of South Asia and the Middle East would be useful at this point of the paper. The countries of South Asia – India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Nepal, the Maldives and Bhutan – form a distinct geographical entity. The region is bounded by the Himalayas to the north, the Indian Ocean and its offshoots – the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea – to the south, and by mountains and jungles to the east. Only in the northwest, where Afghanistan stands astride the junction of South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia, do the external geographic and political frontiers fail to coincide. The Middle East is comprised of Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. In addition, there are the Arab states bordering the Persian Gulf – Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, and United Arab Emirates; all of which are part of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The main threat perception connected with Iran's nuclear program is its possible military dimension. An Iranian nuclear weapon would pose a challenge to Israel. An Iranian nuclear weapons capability could alter the current situation in the Middle East to one of regional nuclear deterrence. The prospects of regional deterrence stability are slim due to deep mistrust arising out of regional complexities. So far, the example of regional nuclear deterrence in the contiguous region of South Asia is not very reassuring. This is due to the stability/instability paradox, and lack of necessary confidence-building measures. In South Asia, regional crises have not abated, though all-out war has been averted. The overall conclusion about regional nuclear deterrence is that the amount of instability remains high, unlike the example of stable global deterrence during the Cold War. The Cold War example, despite proxy wars and incursions, has demonstrated that the policy of nuclear deterrence was accompanied by peace talks on core disputes, trade negotiations, and arms control treaties. This model was not adopted in South Asia. And in the case of the Middle East, following the P5+1-Iran JPOA, there is no evidence so far that suggests Israel and the Arab states are prepared to engage in peace efforts with Iran.

Furthermore, if we look at the example of sub-conventional warfare witnessed in post-nuclearized South Asia, it can be assumed that the same pattern of proxy wars would be repeated in a nuclearized Middle East. Thus, Iran's nuclear weapons capability would give it a *carte blanche* and a protective shield to support regional proxies (e.g., Hezbollah and Hamas) against

the interests of Israel. Even more worrisome is the looming threat of Salafi jihadism. The second issue is the risk of regional multipolarity of the nuclear equation, which may result from Iran's nuclearization. This could happen if an Arab state (e.g., Saudi Arabia) acquires or seeks to acquire nuclear weapons in response to Iran. This would factor in a three-way deterrence situation and put the theory of rational deterrence under increased pressure due to multiple nuclear weapons states in the region.

### **2.1. Radicalism versus Moderation and the Rise of Salafi Jihadism**

The rise of Salafi jihadism signifies that the main conflict in the region is between moderates and radicals. The sectarian rivalry is one facet of this overarching conflict. This categorization accords with the general perception about regional geopolitics, which describes an axis of moderation comprised of GCC states and an axis of resistance/radicalism comprised of Iran and Syria. These two camps are positioned on opposite sides of the regional geopolitical divide. Moreover, this categorization is also in line with a statement made by Jordan's King Abdullah in 2004 that warned of a Shia crescent in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. But if the new threat of Salafi jihadism unites the moderate states in a single bloc, and Iran also joins this new moderate camp, then the traditional configuration of who is a moderate and who is a radical could undergo a change.

In the Middle Eastern region, a stifling political atmosphere and worsening economic situation has given way to some destabilizing developments.<sup>2</sup> As the wave of change reached neighboring Bahrain, Saudi Arabia sent its military to quell the predominantly Shia public demonstrations on its borders. In Syria, a Sunni-majority state was ruled by an Alawite (Shia sub-sect) minority. Furthermore, Syria was the only regional ally of Iran. Thus, Syria became the foremost battleground between Iran on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia and Turkey on the other. As the conflict progressed, the specter of Salafi jihadism threatened to cause region-wide damage.<sup>3</sup> Turkey realized this threat, and is currently trying to pull away from the Syria situation. Saudi Arabia and Jordan are increasingly becoming concerned about internal and external security vis-à-vis this threat.

In South Asia, Salafi jihadism poses an existential and ideological threat to the state of Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> The problem also extends to India, due to attacks carried out by groups of Pakistani origin, as well as by India's indigenous groups influenced by this ideology. The growth of Salafi jihadism in Afghanistan and Syria is detrimental to the general security situation in South Asia and the Middle East. Afghanistan's criticality is both geopolitical and ideological. Afghanistan lies at the crossroads of South Asia and the Middle East, so much so that there is some confusion about which region in which it falls. Ideologically, it is the modern incarnation of the ancient land of Greater Khorasan,<sup>5</sup> which is the center of certain Islamic traditions of apocalyptic revolution,

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<sup>2</sup> There were two main destabilizing developments. The first was Salafi jihadism in Syria, and the second was the Arab Spring, which was met with the sectarian fault lines within the region.

<sup>3</sup> Entous, Adam and Julian E. Barnes, "John Kerry, US Military Clash on Approach to Syria's Rebels: Pentagon Opposes Direct Military Intervention Against Assad," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 7, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Taliban, a variant of Salafi jihadists came into power in Afghanistan in 1996, and the Pakistani Taliban, another Salafi jihadist variant, have been waging an insurgency in Pakistan since 2001, which was intensified in 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Historically, Greater Khorasan included the eastern part of Iran and some parts of Central Asia, known as Western Khorasan and Afghanistan was known as Eastern Khorasan.

viewed as authentic by Salafi jihadists. For instance, Khorasan is the area that the tradition of ‘black banners’ is attributed.<sup>6</sup> Afghanistan could become the hub of Salafi jihadism once the U.S. pulls out in a post-NATO withdrawal scenario.

The Salafist thought espouses notions of Jihad, takfir (declaration of non-Muslims and certain Muslims as infidels), and rejection of modernity. The phenomenon of Salafi jihadism can be thought of spreading via the “butterfly effect.”<sup>7</sup> This ratchet mechanism of phenomenal growth has been evidenced in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Inside Iran, the Salafists exist in Kurdistan, Baluchistan among its Arab population, and in cities like Tehran and Isfahan. The Salafist presence in the country is an important factor in Iran designating them as a national security threat.<sup>8</sup>

The Saudi Arabian perceptions about Iran can be seen in reference to both regional geopolitics and national interest. In terms of national interest, Saudi Arabia is concerned about the safety of the Straits of Hormuz. Also, Iran’s return to full oil production would reduce Saudi oil hegemony in the Persian Gulf. In terms of regional geopolitics, Saudi Arabia remains wary of Iranian political hegemony in the region. Finally, Saudi Arabia seeks reduced Iranian influence in all regional theatres of existing or potential conflict.

Iran’s threat perceptions originate from the needs of both regime survival and regional preponderance. The national psyche is shaped by the paranoia caused by the 1953 royalist coup against nationalist leader Mohammad Mosaddegh, the eight years-long Iran-Iraq War, and fears of forcible regime change by the U.S. As far as Salafi jihadism is concerned, Iran reckons this threat as existential. Iran fears Salafist encirclement via Salafist ascendancy in states around it and would likely be amenable to joining a regional security architecture focused on countering its growth. The two major post-September 11<sup>th</sup> events of regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq were in Iran’s favor. Now as these two wars are winding down (Iraq withdrawal is complete and Afghanistan drawdown is underway) and the threat of Salafi jihadism is growing, Iran should realize that it would be better off without the albatross of nuclear controversy hanging around its neck.

On the nuclear issue, Iran’s threat perceptions vary across the three main political factions: Conservatives, reformists, and pragmatists. The range of views oscillates between conservatives and reformists, while the pragmatists try to find a middle position on most issues. Each faction views Iran’s regional and global role in its own image. The conservatives believe that Iran should opt for isolation through defiance on the nuclear issue, and the reformists seek integration with the outside world through nuclear compliance. The conservatives believe that the regional and global antagonists seek regime change in Iran, while reformists believe that policy change is the objective of the outside world. In terms of policy prescriptions, the conservatives hold the view that Iran should attain security through nuclear prowess amidst growing regional uncertainty, and

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<sup>6</sup> Soufan, Ali, “Prologue,” *The Black Banners: The Inside Story of 9/11 and the War Against al-Qaeda*, W.W. Norton & Co., 2011.

<sup>7</sup> In chaos theory, the “butterfly effect” is the role of an initial state in which a small change can result in large differences in a later state. The term was coined by Lorenz, Edward, in “Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly’s Wings in Brazil set off a Tornado in Texas?” Cam: MIT, 1972.

<sup>8</sup> Khalaji, Mehdi, “Salafism as a National Security Threat for Iran”, *Policy Watch 2211*, The Washington Institute, Feb 20, 2014.

the reformists seek to pursue economic progress through regional and global integration, while emphasizing Iran's nuclear rights under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

## **2.2. United States' View**

There are three main strands of Political Islam in the Muslim World: The Islamist political parties – Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (MB), Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP), and Pakistan's Jamat-i-Islami (JI); Salafists of the Saudi brand; and the al-Qaeda, which supports violence and is seen in a negative light by the United States. However, the U.S. view of Political Islam is incomplete, and that is why it has been difficult for them to understand the fact that al-Qaeda maintains ideological, and in some cases, allegedly maintains administrative links with the MB-AKP-JI trio. There is incomplete understanding of the reasons behind the 2013 coup d'état led by General El-Sisi in Egypt. Similarly, it is difficult for the U.S. to understand the grassroots opposition to AKP in Turkey.

This incomplete U.S. view of the Muslim World has become evident in Syria. The moderate opposition to Assad has all, but collapsed. Only Salafi jihadists remain in the field and once they succeed in Syria, they could violently eliminate substantial minorities within Syria. For example, a significant number of Christians have not only lived in Syria under Assad, but have also enjoyed a high socio-economic status. Furthermore, the Salafi jihadists would also pose a threat to other Arab states, Israel, Europe, and the U.S., beyond the region.

In the 1970s, there was a similar chain of events in Afghanistan. If the geopolitical aspect of ousting Soviets from Afghanistan is put aside, what would remain is the catastrophe at the level of human security. The budding Afghan civil society was badly damaged by the U.S. support of Salafi jihadists in their desire to rout the Soviets. Apart from the significant damage caused inside Afghanistan and the region, the most prominent outcome was the terrorism experienced on U.S. soil on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

A disregard of security at the human level will likely be the case in Syria if U.S. support to the political opposition ultimately ends up strengthening the hands of the Salafist groups. There could be two main reasons for U.S.-Syria policy. The first is the long shadow of the Cold War. The bitter legacy of the Cold War still affects the U.S.-Russian relations in general, but also in Syria. Given Russia's growing influence in the region, there is need for a U.S.-Russia reset vis-à-vis the Middle East. This should be done regardless of recent developments in the Ukraine.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the Cold War alliances created an environment in which both the superpowers assumed certain identities in the perceptions of Islamic states. In the post-1979 Iranian perception, the U.S. was the Sunni-allied superpower, whereas Russia was the Shia-allied superpower. This persisting perception exacerbates Iranian fears and provides Saudi Arabia with a sense of regional influence. Similarly, the U.S. perceptions – regarding Iran as an unstable actor – were formed by the 1979 revolution. These mutual perceptions are the main stumbling blocks in the realization of a U.S.-Iranian detente.

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<sup>9</sup> An example is provided by Israel-Russia relations, which are valued by both states for their strategic importance in view of the Salafi jihadist threat. See Saunders, Paul J., "Israel-Russia ties strong despite Ukraine", *Al Monitor*, April 7, 2014. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/04/israel-russia-strategic-ties-ukraine.html>. Accessed on April 17, 2014.

The second possible reason behind the U.S. policy approach towards Syria is the security of Israel. Currently, the main opposition to Israel is Lebanon (via the Hezbollah), which has been diverted away from Israel to Syria. However, the growing power of Salafi jihadism in Syria poses a long-term threat to Israel that might be significantly more serious than Hezbollah or even Iran, which is ruled by a conservative clerical regime.

In view of possible rapprochement with Iran, the U.S. would have to strike a balance in its policy towards Iran and Saudi Arabia. By reaching a deal with Iran, the U.S. would not be betraying allies in the region. After all, under the Twin Pillars policy, when Iran was a strategic ally of the U.S., it was not viewed as a betrayal of Saudi Arabia.<sup>10</sup> However, a necessary U.S. condition of permanent settlement with Iran would be for Iran to assuage regional fears by pursuing status quo, as opposed to revisionist policies. This is similar to when the U.S. opened up to India at the end of the Cold War and de-hyphenated its relationships with India and Pakistan, which was not seen as a betrayal of Pakistan. However, after the Indo-U.S. rapprochement, the Pakistani hopes for Indian interest in the resolution of the core dispute of Kashmir – through the good offices of the U.S. – were not realized and remain a cause for some heartburn in Pakistan. In a similar perspective, Iran's entire regional role (nuclear, conventional, and sub-conventional) needs to be accounted by the U.S. in order to instill confidence among the Arab states.

An end to the Iranian nuclear weapons program could become a factor in regional stability. If the U.S. establishes a permanent nuclear agreement with Iran, it also draws itself closer into the fight against Salafi jihadists. Consequently, Iran will have to deal with both U.S.-oriented groups and Iran-oriented groups. The U.S. and Iran need to recognize and come to the conclusion that Salafi jihadism is fundamentally wrong and not just wrong because they are 'currently' fighting one or the other.

### **3. Southwest Asian Regional Security**

The regional threat perceptions associated with Iran's nuclear program are genuine and need to be fully addressed. However, the threat of Salafi jihadism is potentially more widespread and insidious. In view of this threat, Iran can assume a new status provided its pursuit of nuclear weapons is curtailed. Iran is under the rule of a conservative clergy, and there is sufficient culture in the ruling circles to reject Salafi jihadism. The fact that Hezbollah is more focused on Syria is good news for Israel. Similarly, an Iran nuclear agreement could lead to the calibration of an Iran-Saudi Arabia area-of-influence competition in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Bahrain.

An effective method of dealing with the emerging security challenges would be a regional security regime through a joint forum where all major states (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan) can ensure that Salafi jihadism is prevented from undermining their sovereignty and stability. Through such a security forum, the U.S. could reassure Saudi Arabia, support Pakistan, engage Iran, and avoid a short-term solution in Syria. Such a forum could work out a formula for Syria and devise a framework for post-NATO withdrawal Afghanistan.

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<sup>10</sup> Pollack, Kenneth M., "Securing the Gulf," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2003.

A permanent Iran nuclear deal is not a sufficient condition for regional peace and security, but it is a necessary one. The deal also provides an opportunity to work with Iran on other regional challenges. Conversely, the breakdown of a nuclear deal would adversely affect regional stability. The objective of an effective nuclear deal should be both nonproliferation and regional stability. Although these are two separate tracks, progress with one would affect the other. Even if the nuclear deal breaks down, the regional challenges are unlikely to go away.

A positive outcome of the JPOA can have a useful effect in molding Iran's regional role. Iran's regional influence is the overriding concern of Saudi Arabia, while Israel is more concerned with nonproliferation. And, regional security is not possible without dealing with Salafi jihadism. However, it is also not possible for the U.S. and Iran, along with regional states, to jointly work toward eradication of Salafi jihadism unless Iran's nuclear problem is resolved to the satisfaction of all parties.

In addition, the South Asian states are not comfortable with the prospect of Iranian nuclear weapons in the region. India wishes to see Iran as a non-nuclear weapons state.<sup>11</sup> Pakistan has had longstanding ties with Iran, but in recent times, there has been an estrangement due to violence against Shias in Pakistan, its close ties to Saudi Arabia, and disagreements over Afghanistan and Iran's ties with India. Pakistan would also be, in principle, uncomfortable to be positioned in the midst of two Nuclear Weapons States (i.e., Iran and India). As for Iran's motivations for nuclearization, while the psychological impact of living in a nuclear neighborhood might have played a general role; there is no evidence to suggest that Pakistan's nuclear capability had any specific role in forming Iranian nuclear intentions. Finally, Pakistan-Iran relations have experienced an adverse trend regarding Afghanistan, and more recently, over border issues, but they cannot be characterized as hostile.

### **3.1. The Role of Pakistan**

Pakistan, though not located inside the Middle East, is still too close to be insulated from developments there. At a psychosocial level, Pakistanis wholeheartedly accept influences from the Middle East. There are three significant friends of Pakistan in the Middle Eastern region; Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Within Pakistan, there are three mindsets in competition for political ascendancy: Inside the governmental circles (i.e., civil-military) the prevalent mindset is that of nationalism; and among different sections of the civil society, there is internationalism and Islamism. The Islamists are in favor of Pakistan's ties with Saudi Arabia, internationalists look favorably upon Iran, and nationalists admire Turkey. But out of the three states, it is only Iran with which Pakistan shares a common border.

Pakistan generally follows the lead of Saudi Arabia in matters related to the Middle East (e.g., the Palestinian issue); however, Pakistan's Iran perspective might not be totally in sync with Saudi Arabia. After all, Iran and Pakistan share a common border. Iran was the first state to recognize Pakistan after its formation and it provided material and moral support to Pakistan in all its wars with India. The cultural influence of Iran – through the Persian language – has historically been pervasive, and now continues through Khana-e-Farhang (cultural centers) in

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<sup>11</sup> Dikshit, Sandeep, "Iran nuclear deal consistent with our stand, says India". *The Hindu*. Nov 24, 2013.



various Pakistani cities. The national poet of Pakistan, Allama Iqbal wrote most of his poetry in Persian, and in Iran he is known as Iqbal-e-Lahori (Iqbal of Lahore).<sup>12</sup> However, the cultural exchanges between Iran and Pakistan mostly belong to the realm of high culture. This stands in contrast to the equally pervasive cultural influences from Saudi Arabia, which generally relate to the popular classes through the madrassah culture.

Pakistan approves of Iran's nuclear program sans military capability. A permanent U.S.-Iran nuclear agreement would remove economic sanctions on Iran and allow Pakistan to pursue the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project. And more importantly, it would allow Iran to exercise its influence in post-NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan, which could help Pakistan and Iran jointly restrain the influence of Salafi jihadism in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Unfortunately, the recent trends in Iran-Pakistan relations have been downward. It is Pakistan's dilemma that as the U.S. and Iran draw closer, Pakistan appears to be drawing away from both. New questions have popped up in Iran-Pakistan relations as the recent incidents of Shia-killing in Pakistan have served to vitiate bilateral relations.<sup>13</sup>

The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline is also under question, as there is talk of laying an Iran-India gas pipeline under the sea bypassing Pakistan. The earlier proposed project of an Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline, known as the 'peace pipeline,' has been shelved. What was left of this project is the Iran-Pakistan pipeline, hastily signed by Pakistan in 2013 by the outgoing Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government. But a question mark hangs over its fate after the Saudi-oriented government of Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) took over. Another question mark in bilateral ties is the Gwadar-Chahbahar competition.<sup>14</sup> Iran-India relations have witnessed an upturn, as India is helping Iran build a road from Chahbahar to Afghanistan, thereby providing landlocked Afghanistan with an alternative route to the sea, apart from the sole Karachi route it has so far relied on. A permanent agreement on the Iran nuclear program would remove trade sanctions, facilitate the peace pipeline project, and thus help improve Iran-Pakistan relations.

Iran-Pakistan relations have wider regional security implications including Salafi jihadism, Afghanistan, and secure borders.<sup>15</sup> The issue of border security between Iran and Pakistan has assumed importance in recent days. The Iran border, until recently, was the only stable border of Pakistan's four borders. The Indian border is conflict-prone, the Afghan border is unreliable, and the Chinese border is inaccessible. That is why recent events of disturbances on Iranian border have been unsettling, and better border management is needed.

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<sup>12</sup> Ali Shariati "Ma Wa Iqbal" (Iqbal and I), [urduadab4u.blogspot.com/2011/08/ham-aur-iqbal-article-on-iqbal-by-br.html](http://urduadab4u.blogspot.com/2011/08/ham-aur-iqbal-article-on-iqbal-by-br.html)

<sup>13</sup> In Iran there are 62 million Shias, in India 40-55 million, according to the 2001 census, and in Pakistan there are 30-45 million Shias. The Shias make regular visits to Iran for pilgrimage to Shia holy sites, and in Pakistan their convoys have become targets of Salafi jihadist attacks.

<sup>14</sup> Pakistan has been trying to develop its Arabian seaport, Gwadar, with Chinese assistance. Just 43 miles further along the same coastline lies Chahbahar, the Iranian port, which it has declared as a Free Trade Industrial Zone, the only such Middle Eastern free port outside the Persian Gulf.

<sup>15</sup> Pakistan's four borders include 1509 miles with Afghanistan, 325 miles with China, 1809 miles with India, and 564 miles with Iran.

The demographic composition of the Iran-Pakistan border is based upon the encompassing Sistan-Balochistan region. On the Pakistani side, there is the sparsely populated and arid Balochistan province, which comprises around 44 percent of Pakistan's land mass, and only five percent of its population. On the Iranian side, the similarly arid and sparsely populated Sistan-Balochistan province is the largest in size among Iran's 31 provinces, though containing only two percent of its population. The majority population group on both sides is the ethnic Baloch, who are overwhelmingly Sunni, of the Hanafi School of jurisprudence or *fiqh*.

Both Iran's province of Sistan-Balochistan and Pakistan's province of Balochistan are restive. The former because it is home to Sunni minority in Shia Iran, where they form an insignificant, and in some cases, persecuted minority; and the latter because it is ethnic Baloch, which is an inconsequential minority in the largely Punjabi, Pakistan.<sup>16</sup> In the Sistan-Balochistan capital of Zahedan, an unclaimed bombing on February 17, 2007 killed 13 people, including nine Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) officials. In the aftermath of this incident, Iran started building the Iran-Pakistan barrier; a three feet thick and 10 feet high boundary wall stretching 435 miles from Taftan to Mand.

The Sunni militant group active in Sistan-Balochistan province has been the Jundullah (soldiers of God), whose leader, Abdul Malik Rigi, was hanged by Iran in June 2010 for the militant group's attacks on civilians and officials in Sistan-Balochistan. However, a new group known as Jaish-i-Adl claimed in November 2013 that it had assassinated a local official prosecutor in Sistan-Balochistan, and in October it ambushed Iranian border guards, killing 14. In response, Iranian authorities executed 16 rebels, eight of them were Sunni insurgents and eight were drug traffickers.

An incident that caused recent diplomatic bitterness between Iran and Pakistan took place on February 8, 2014. According to news reports, five Iranian border security guards were captured and taken across the border by the relatively new group, Jaish-i-Adl. Iran sought Pakistan's help in recovery of the guards, but Pakistan declared that the guards were not on its side of the border. As a result, the Iranians protested and the Iranian interior minister threatened to create a 'security zone' in the border region through military action.

Interestingly, this incident occurred exactly one year after Iran and Pakistan signed a security agreement, under which both countries were required to cooperate in preventing and combating the activities that posed a threat to national security of either country.<sup>17</sup> The two interior ministers had signed a "bill concerning Security Cooperation Agreement between Islamic Republic of Iran and Republic of Pakistan," in Tehran on February 9, 2013, to deal with border security and counterterrorism.

Following the February 8<sup>th</sup> incident, an Iran-Pakistan Joint Border Commission meeting was held on February 21<sup>st</sup>, after a four-year interval. The Deputy Governor of Sistan-Balochistan on the

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<sup>16</sup> Punjabis are the numerically largest ethnic group in Pakistan, concentrated in the Punjab province. The second largest is the Sindhis in the Sindh province. The third largest is Pukhtoons in the Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa, including Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The smallest ethnic group is the Baloch of Balochistan province.

<sup>17</sup> Accessible at: [rc.majlis-ir/en/news/show/852240](http://rc.majlis-ir/en/news/show/852240)

Iranian side and the Chief Secretary of Balochistan on the Pakistani side resolved to improve border security issues, agreeing to the extradition of captives and joint border patrolling.

The February 8<sup>th</sup> incident highlights two issues – the Iran-Pakistan differences over border security and Iran's frustration with Pakistan. The border area is remote, rugged, and sparsely populated. It is patrolled by Pakistan's paramilitary Frontier Corps on the Pakistani side and border security guards on Iranian side; however problems with the movement of drugs and militants across the border ensue. Iran's frustration with Pakistan indicates that either Iranians believe that the border on the Pakistani side is a lawless zone, or worse still, they think that the Pakistanis disregard their feelings. Iran has been strict on both drug smuggling and growing militancy on its border, and harbors complaints about non-cooperation of ISAF/NATO forces on its Afghanistan border. Furthermore, the Iranians allege that the border issues with Pakistan are, in fact, being instigated at the behest of Saudi Arabia because of the Syrian conflict.<sup>18</sup>

A permanent agreement between Iran and the U.S. could facilitate increased Iran-Pakistan cooperation on border security. For example, U.S. cooperation in science and technology could be extended through national laboratories, which have vast and longstanding expertise in the field of border security. Nonetheless, the difficulties of managing the Iran-Pakistan border areas are considerable. Both ground patrolling and aerial surveillance are expensive options. In case of ground patrolling, there is the cost incurred by vehicle maintenance, while aerial surveillance is expensive and also lacks any mechanism to physically arrest border violators.

A new question in Iran-Pakistan relations is going to be Pakistan's tilt toward the Saudi Arabian position on the Syria situation. The Saudi Crown Prince visited Pakistan on February 15, 2014. Pakistan's official position on Syria before this visit was one of neutrality; however, after the Saudi visit, Pakistan declared support for a transitional government in Syria. This signaled Pakistan's alignment with the Saudi Arabian position that there should be a regime change in Syria. Even though Pakistan later officially rejected any policy U-turn under the direction of Saudi Arabia, this perception threatens to damage Pakistan's traditional position of confessional (i.e., sectarian) neutrality within the wider Islamic community.

The broader contours of Iran-Pakistan relations would be improved by Pakistani neutrality in Syria; and this stance should not impact the strong Pakistan-Saudi Arabia relations. According to a Pew Research Center survey, an unprecedented 95 percent of Pakistanis have a positive view of Saudi Arabia.<sup>19</sup> Pakistan receives around four billion dollars in annual remittances from overseas Pakistanis based in Saudi Arabia. In the 1970s and 1980s, Pakistani troops were stationed in Saudi Arabia, and during the Gulf War, Pakistani troops were sent to protect Mecca and Medina holy sites in Saudi Arabia. Under the government of General Ziaul Haq (1977-88), intelligence cooperation between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia was established during the Afghanistan War (1979-89). Saudi Arabia also provides petroleum to Pakistan on concessional rates in times of crisis. However, Saudi Arabia's influence was reduced during the recent PPP tenure (2008-13).

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<sup>18</sup> Mir, Amir, "Strains in Pak-Iran Ties," *Daily the News*, April 04, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/10/17/saudi-arabias-image-falters-among-middle-east-neighbors/>

The government of the PML-N assumed power in Pakistan in May 2013. The promises of change in Pakistan's India and Afghan policy could not make much headway since they are traditionally considered the preserve of the military bureaucracy. However, a policy change has emerged regarding Syria, as a result of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's reliance on the Saudi ruling family due to Pakistan's financial constraints. In addition, the Saudis are Sharif's benefactors because they provided him sanctuary for eight years after General Pervez Musharraf's military coup in 1999.

Pakistan's new Syria position favors Saudi Arabia, but improvement of relations with Saudi Arabia should not be at the cost of Iran, which is an immediate neighbor of Pakistan, and an area Pakistan considers important for its strategic depth. Secondly, there is the factor of the "butterfly effect," as the spread of Salafi jihadism from Syria could become a headache for Pakistan. Considering the legacy of Iranian-Saudi rivalry, which has both sectarian and racial undertones, it is better for Pakistan to maintain neutrality in the same way as it remained neutral in the Iran-Iraq War in the eighties. Pakistan's policy during the Iran-Iraq War paid diplomatic dividends, with a role as neutral arbiter and peace-broker.

The Saudi Arabian outreach to Pakistan on Syria demonstrates that Saudi Arabia is seeking to chart an autonomous course from the U.S on Syria. The prospects of joint U.S.-Saudi hegemony in the region were scuttled by non-violent settlements in Syria and Iran. There are reports that Saudi Arabia has requested military support from Pakistan (e.g., small arms). These types of weapons would be suitable for a battlefield like Syria.

Given the delicate security situation in Syria, Pakistan should support the territorial integrity of Syria rather than the objective of regime change. Small arms transfers might not have strategic implications, but it would indicate that Pakistan is taking sides in the regional polarization. In the context of Syria, Pakistan should also remain mindful of the consequences of involvement. These could appear sooner, rather than later, in the form of a spreading Salafi jihadist threat, and implications for the internal security of Pakistan.

### **3.2. *Proposal for a Regional Security Forum***

A Regional Security Forum could help deal with two main issues in South Asia and the Middle East. These issues are of Salafi jihadism and the worsening regional geopolitical rivalries. Initially, the key states – Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan – must sit together to stabilize the critically weak states (e.g., Afghanistan and Syria). The failure of the Geneva process has demonstrated that Syria is not a problem for the UN to resolve. Similarly, Afghanistan's post-2014 uncertainty can only be improved via by key regional states. These key countries have stakes in regional stability and they are not mere onlookers, but actual protagonists in these conflict zones. Subsequently, stabilization efforts can also be undertaken for conflict-prone areas like Lebanon, Bahrain, and Yemen. Similarly, other major regional states like Turkey and Egypt can also join later. The U.S. does not have to necessarily engage directly, as they did leading the nuclear negotiations with Iran. Rather, Saudi Arabia should be induced to take the lead role. The primary task for the Regional Security Forum is to engage Iran and Saudi Arabia in regional dialogue on security; and include Pakistan as both a facilitator of the talks, and as a significant player in its own right in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Pakistan's history has a precedent of such

activity when it played a role in opening up China in 1971. In case of the Middle East, Pakistan has the rare advantage of enjoying the confidence of both Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The Middle East is a difficult region to manage. The current regional security architecture in the Middle East is based upon the Post-World War I boundaries. This regional structure is under immense pressure in the aftermath of the Salafi jihadist and sectarian conflagration centered on Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. There are also emerging intra-GCC rifts. Al-Qaeda and other Salafi jihadist groups would like to carve out a terrorist state in the border region of Syria and Iraq,<sup>20</sup> which would inject instability in the region.

Given the declared U.S. policy of Asia pivot, the main challenge for U.S. policymakers is to partially expand attention more broadly in the Middle East and Southwest Asia. This would entail improving relations with Iran, while at the same time, managing Saudi anxiety. This might not immediately revert to the Twin Pillars policy of the 1970s, which envisioned joint Iranian-Saudi Arabian support for the U.S. anti-Communist effort. However, it would require some sort of a modus vivendi between Iran and Saudi Arabia for apportionment of regional influence. Iran could also be convinced to come on board in reference to the Arab League offer of 2002 with Israel for permanent peace vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli issue.

There are three broad objectives that could be met through a Regional Security Forum: a U.S.-Russia reset in the Middle East; supporting a regional balance of power; and countering Salafi jihadism. On the first point, the U.S.-Russia rivalry has been managed successfully in the Middle East as demonstrated by the Syrian chemical weapons deal and the JPOA. They both appear to maintain regional status quo and remain valuable partners to regional powers – this needs to be institutionalized. Secondly, the U.S. interests of retaining its military forces and economic influence have regionally been pursued by hub-and-spoke diplomacy. In the Middle East, it appears sensible to uphold balance of power as opposed to direct dominance to prevent any single regional hegemon. A regional security forum could implement this policy in a smooth manner. Additionally, if the JPOA breaks down, the U.S. can consider extending nuclear deterrence to Saudi Arabia, and offshore balancing could continue in Bahrain.

And finally, the regional states should realize that the regional spread of Salafi jihadism is a significant, amorphous, and insidious threat. Before the latest developments in Iraq, Syria, and Pakistan, it could be said that there were cognitive hurdles in the identification of Salafi jihadism as the primary threat by governments in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. This phenomenon is similar to the cases noted by psychologists, wherein the extremist children of conservative parents are not recognized as such by the parents until a terrorist incident by that child occurs. A similar delay in recognition of a Salafi jihadist threat was evidenced in the case of Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, but that phase has passed. Now the only hurdle left is the desire to pursue geopolitical goals through Salafi jihadists under the principle, “the ends justify the means.” This rationale could be removed as a factor if Iran’s nuclear issue is resolved, and it is brought into the regional security framework under a forum where competing influences in Syria and Iraq, et

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<sup>20</sup> “Al-Qaeda’s Resurgence in Iraq: A Threat to U.S. Interests,” Testimony by Brett McGurk, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Iran and Iraq, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Washington DC, Feb 05, 2014. <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/221274.htm>. Accessed on April 17, 2014. On June 10, 2014, Mosul in Iraq fell to the ISIS, which now controls contiguous territory on both sides of the Syria-Iraq border.

al., could be calibrated. Similarly, Iran's positive role in Afghanistan could ameliorate Pakistan's concerns about the security of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border (i.e., the Durand Line).

The Saudi Arabian-Iranian equation is critical to a Regional Security Forum because it is multi-dimensional. Four dimensions can be enumerated. The first is the calibration of Saudi Arabian-Iranian geopolitical rivalry within the framework of the Persian-Arab identity conflict. The second is the sectarian dimension – Saudi Arabia is the leader of the Sunni world and Iran is the leader of the Shia world. This means that the establishment of a Regional Security Forum could have broad impact in the region, and also in the rest of the Muslim world (e.g., South Asia and even Indonesia and Malaysia). The third is an ideological dimension with two non-violent strands in political Islam – the Saudi Salafists and the JI-AKP-MB combination. Iran is closer to the latter group. The regional forum could open dialogue between these opposing camps, resulting in an effective channel of communications that could help manage the regional conflicts (even within the GCC). And finally, such a forum inside the U.S. could unite various political opinions with a soft corner for either of the two sides in the Middle East. An internal political consensus between the White House and the Congress – Democrats and Republicans – on Middle Eastern security could also help guarantee the success of a regional forum.

The process of initiation of the proposed Regional Security Forum could begin with Iran-Pakistan border security, which could serve as a confidence-building measure. Then with Saudi Arabia's involvement, the forum could take up Syria as its first order of business. The immediate regional issue for the Middle East is the meltdown of Syria. The regional insecurity is bound to multiply if the war spreads north and south into Turkey and Jordan. Syria enjoys symbolic centrality in the Middle East, as Afghanistan does in South Asia and Central Asia. Just as the South Asian threat perceptions would rise if the security situation in Afghanistan worsens, similarly the regional security architecture in the Middle East is closely tied to the fate of Syria.

#### **4. Implications of the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA)**

The JPOA provides Iran and P5+1 a six- to ten-month time window to resolve the nuclear impasse. Its significance lies in its landmark role in removing the taboo since 1979 of bilateral interaction between Iran and the U.S. It marked the U.S. policy shift from containment to cautious engagement with Iran and signaled Iran's return journey toward normalization.

An end to the Iranian nuclear weapons program could become a factor in regional nonproliferation. The possible Saudi pursuit of a nuclear option would lose its *raison d'être*. It would also remove the possibility of Saudi Arabia seeking a nuclear umbrella, whether from the U.S. or Pakistan. On the part of Israel, it could convince Israel to enter into negotiations on a possible Nuclear-Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East (NWFZ-ME).

If Iran were able to find a balance between national sovereignty and international responsibility, the nuclear agreement could help foster a nuclear safety culture in Iran. A permanent nuclear agreement would set a new gold standard in the field of nuclear development. It would be closer to the NPT central bargain of allowing civilian nuclear development to non-nuclear weapons states; and could lead to advancement on the flipside of the NPT central bargain by decreasing

the weapons of nuclear weapons states. This could all be accomplished by working on a framework for NWFZ-ME.

#### **4.1. Attaining a Permanent Agreement**

It is evident that Iran's reason for coming to the table was economic sanctions, as Iran's main sources of revenue – oil exports – were cut by half. Yet, Iran wanted to give the impression that its will was not forced by sanctions; so as sanctions tightened, it kept moving quickly toward a breakout capability. However, escalatory measures on both sides (i.e., sanctions and centrifuges), were worsening the situation. Under the JPOA, the paradigm shifted from escalation, to concessions and incentives. The nuclear program still remains deeply entrenched in the Iranian psyche, and Europe and the U.S. will have to offer something tangible to change its calculus in the ultimate analysis. For example, the P5+1's offer of suspending sanctions on gold and precious metals versus closure of Fordow is not realistic.

It is important to assess whether the JPOA would result in a long-term settlement of the Iranian nuclear issue. The foremost common factor between the two sides is the trust-deficit. Therefore, both sides tend to follow the old Arab saying that, "Trust in God but tie your camel." During the negotiations, the U.S. said that, "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed," demonstrating the low level of trust. Similarly, the opaqueness of the Iranian nuclear program itself is a factor of the political and social opaqueness of Iran. There is hardly any openness vis-à-vis Europe and the U.S., so much so that embassies have remained closed since 1979. The crux of the JPOA is that the world needs foreknowledge about Iran's nuclear intentions. Iran has to accept that if the world knows about its nuclear program, it might gain insight into its politics, and may, in turn, get involved in some political matters. Iran has to accept that this is a state of normalcy in today's interconnected world.

A final agreement cannot go beyond the NPT. Iran has the right to enrich uranium, but under sufficient safeguards (monitoring of every step), to ensure that it does not move toward a weapons program. Lowering enrichment to a level that would be non-weapon grade<sup>21</sup> may be an achievable accommodation in the final agreement, satisfying both the Western position of no enrichment and the Iranian position seeking the right to enrich.

The Iranians often cite Japan as a model for Iran. The Japanese system is based upon transparency, resulting in the deployment of an annual white paper, which communicates the needs and status of the nuclear program. It was the first country to sign the Additional Protocol, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has spent many years in Japan under the Additional Protocol to ensure its program's peaceful nature.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Iran can begin the process of transparency by signing the Additional Protocol.

The permanent deal would have to include significant physical limits, the number and type of centrifuges, the level of permitted enrichment, stockpiles of low enriched uranium, and the number of enrichment facilities, as well as enhanced monitoring and verification measures. The

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<sup>21</sup> Uranium needs to be enriched to 95 percent to produce nuclear weapon.

<sup>22</sup> "The Protocol to the Agreement of the International Atomic Energy Agency Regarding Safeguards in the United States (Treaty Doc. 107-7)," *108<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session*, Diane Publishing Co., 2004. p.108.

Arak facility can be changed from heavy water to light water to prevent plutonium extraction; and there should be alteration and unhindered access into Fordow. In this entire process, the role of inspections is most important because, ultimately, only inspections and verification-based solutions can provide the necessary limitations and transparency.

The deal is good for Iranian-oil energy consumers such as China, Japan, India, and South Korea. It is also good for arms suppliers, as Iran is a market for China and Russia. And at the same time, de-emphasizing conflict with Iran could lead to significant change in how the U.S. Navy is deployed, and thereby, improves its regional leverage without raising troop levels. A permanent JPOA creates an opportunity for all parties to work on the contours of a broader framework of regional and nuclear security. And then there is the possibility of a lasting solution; however, the JPOA was born with an inherent flaw – it was signed on both sides by nuclear doves. The amount of nuclear latency retained by Iran at the end of the deal will determine its long-term sustainability and acceptability by hawks, both inside the U.S. and Iran.

The interim deal implies that Iran could be a nuclear threshold state as long as the reaction time to a breakout capability is sufficient for the outside world to try to stop Iran. For this, there should be transparency through inspections. If the terms of the agreement hold during the duration of the agreement, then Iran would be treated as would any other non-nuclear weapons state – in good standing under the NPT. The clearest deal breaker would be if Iran goes for highly enriched uranium, and it could be *casus belli* for military action as well. If the interim deal breaks down, the role of the European partners, the U.S. Congress, and the four major buyers of Iranian oil – China, South Korea, India, and Japan – remain critical to reinstatement of sanctions.

Moving from containment to cautious engagement, is an important role in handling Iran's return to the international community if a permanent nuclear agreement is reached with the U.S., in addition to Europe, which has traditionally considered Iran to fall within its area of influence due to extensive geographical linkages. Iran sent its first ever internet message of greetings outside Iran to the University of Vienna, Austria, in 1992. Europe, because of geographical proximity and its soft power, can set the social standards and their compliance would advance the cause of human rights and social wellbeing in Iran. Also, Japan can play a role, since Iran seeks to emulate them in scientific development.

Three important points during negotiations for a permanent nuclear agreement:

1. Iran cannot be allowed to create gaps between Europe and the U.S., which could break international consensus and prevent renewed sanctions on Iran.
2. The final agreement should include the possible military dimensions of the nuclear program; the JPOA does not.
3. The degree of nuclear latency in the final agreement should be low enough to give the West reaction time in case Iran moves toward breakout capability.

The breakdown of the JPOA could result in:

- Strengthening of conservatives inside Iran,
- Worsening of economic ties and border security between Iran and Pakistan,



- Saudi attempts to acquire its own nuclear deterrent,
- Continuance of the regional role of Salafi jihadism,
- Renewed U.S. sanctions on Iran, and
- Possible Israeli strikes on Iran.

#### **4.2. Iran's Domestic Politics**

Whether the JPOA results in a rapprochement between Iran and the U.S. depends much upon Iran's internal political dynamics. But it is also significant that a U.S.-Iran nuclear agreement could result in long-term effects upon the future of Iranian domestic politics. The Iranian political outlook has been noted to be receptive to the U.S. actions and even internal political developments in the U.S. For instance, the Iranians elected the hardliner Mahmud Ahmedinejad when George W. Bush was President, and elected the pragmatic Hassan Rouhani during Barack Obama's Presidency.<sup>23</sup>

The Iranian political system is quasi-democratic, as there are both elected and unelected officials in the Iranian decision-making system. And, there are different factions across the Iranian political spectrum ranging from conservatives, to pragmatists, to reformists. While the buck stops with the Supreme Leader, the regular elections have resulted in gradual maturation of electoral politics. In the run-up to the 2013 presidential elections, the reformist camp (e.g., former President Khatami) presented a united front and withdrew all but one of its candidates just 72 hours prior to voting, leaving only Hassan Rouhani, who had emerged as the most winnable candidate in opposition to the conservative party. This tactic revealed the larger political reality of Iran, which is that a two-party system has practically emerged as a result of electoral alliances.

Iran's political culture is characterized by different factions, which are in disagreement over Iran's role and purpose in the world, and the mechanism to achieve its national objectives. These factions are given legal cover through the Iranian Constitution, which gives parallel authority to both elected and unelected officials. The elected President and Parliament vie for power with an unelected Supreme Leader, the judiciary, and the IRGC. In matters of national security and foreign policy, the latter group has greater leverage due to the veto power of the Supreme Leader. Nonetheless, the presidency is an important platform within the Iranian political structure due to its elected status.

Considering that it is always hard to tone down religious rhetoric, or reverse religious extremist decrees, Rouhani has a difficult balancing act ahead of him. In terms of the importance of gestures in Iran's identity and political culture, the nuclear conservatives and pragmatists share religious discourse, and nuclear pragmatists and reformists share nationalist discourse. In this milieu, the role of the *Fatwa*, or religious decree, opposing nuclear weapons is critical, as this can be used to turn public opinion in favor of a peaceful program. Iran's nuclear program is presented as national progress in science and technology, not as a pan-Islamic effort to counter Christian-Jewish-Hindu power in the world, as the Pakistanis did by presenting their weapons

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<sup>23</sup> This parallel between the U.S. and Iranian election results was pointed out by Dr. Faraj Ghanbari during Q & A session at Sandia National Laboratories, Albuquerque, NM, on April 23, 2014.

capability as the ‘Islamic bomb.’ This feeling should be carried forward through the *Fatwa* to ensure the peaceful nature of program. Finally, the most significant long-term impact of a successful JPOA could be the impact upon the power equation and equilibrium between political actors inside Iran. This could have long-term implications for Iran’s political behavior and regional posture.

In addition to Iran’s decentralized political system and divergent views, which make nuclear negotiations difficult, there is the factor of bureaucratic politics. The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) and the IRGC are theoretically considered supporters of expanding the nuclear program. The influence of nuclear conservatives (e.g., former president Ahmedinejad) has been demonstrated even after the signing of the JPOA. The Parliament (Majlis) has drafted legislation to increase uranium enrichment levels to 60 percent for nuclear-powered submarines should the U.S. Congress pass additional sanctions against Iran.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Iran announced development of new and improved centrifuges, tested long-range ballistic missiles,<sup>25</sup> and announced that an Iranian frigate was in the North Atlantic Ocean, approaching U.S. maritime borders. The latter announcement has, however, since been rescinded.<sup>26</sup> Soon after the interim deal, Foreign Minister Zarif stated, “Enrichment is an inseparable part of (Iran’s) nuclear program. None of the nuclear facilities will be shut down.” Furthermore, “All of our confidence building activities and commitments are reversible, and we can undo them in a matter of a few weeks.”<sup>27</sup> These actions and statements were clearly attempts to appease the nuclear conservatives. In spite of the fact that the nuclear conservatives hold a veto over national security affairs, the ruling pragmatists (e.g., President Rouhani) can sell the nuclear deal to the Iranian public if the economic benefits are palpable to them.

## 5. Conclusion

The problem with Iran’s nuclear program encompasses two conundrums: Possible military dimensions of the nuclear program; and Iran’s regional role. Iran’s nuclear issue can be resolved through the twin factors of inculcation of trust and robust verification. The interim deal outlined by the JPOA lays out limited conditions for both sides. On the Iranian side it entails slowing down uranium enrichment to prevent a possible breakout capability. On the P5+1 side, it entails lifting some of the strict economic sanctions on Iran. However, working out a permanent agreement will need to have a much broader framework. The guarantee of an Iranian peaceful pursuit of nuclear capability can best be offered by Iran through the adoption of the IAEA Additional Protocol. It would allow announced and unannounced inspections of declared and undeclared sites, providing P5+1 the best assurance in regards to Iranian nuclear intentions.

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<sup>24</sup> Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington D.C.: Washington Institute and Konrad Adenaur Stiftung, 2000), pp. 47-48

<sup>25</sup> Accessible at, [thediplomat.com/2014/02/iran-tests-long-range-ballistic-missiles/](http://thediplomat.com/2014/02/iran-tests-long-range-ballistic-missiles/)

<sup>26</sup> “Iran scraps plan to send warships to Atlantic: Fars,” *Reuters*, April 13, 2014

<sup>27</sup> Zarif: We Are Ready to Start Negotiations for a Final Solution, *Fars News Agency*, November 24, 2013. <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13920903001672>

Then there is the question of Iran's regional role. A permanent nuclear agreement supports Iran's normalization and return to the global community of states as a regular member. It implies potential replacement of Israel's nuclear hegemony and Arab Sunni hegemony with a Balance of Power situation involving Iran. The most important questions in this scenario are: What does it entail for regional states? What does such an agreement entail for the U.S.? The central point in this context is Iran's posture: Is it a status quo power or a revisionist power? This brings Iran's domestic political dynamics into play. For Iran's return to normalization, it would have to convince both regional and global state-actors that it is a status quo power. Revisionist postures evoke natural responses of unease and panic. Finally, in order for both Iran and Saudi Arabia to prove that they are responsible regional actors, they should work together toward regional stability in Syria.

Iran's relations with neighboring Pakistan involve both competition and cooperation, carrying implications for Southwest Asian regional stability. There are three areas that would determine the future bilateral ties and regional stability: Pakistan's neutrality in the Middle Eastern polarization and sphere-of-influence competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia; Iran-Pakistan cooperation in Afghanistan; and acting as good neighbors – vis-à-vis an Iran-Pakistan shared border to ensure border security and trade. In the ultimate analysis, Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia would have to realize the “butterfly effect” inherent in the spread of Salafi jihadism and join together, preferably through a Regional Security Forum, to counter this threat.

### **About the Author**

Dr. Muhammad Tehsin is a tenure-track Assistant Professor at the Department of Defense and Strategic Studies at Quaid-I-Azam University in Islamabad, Pakistan. He received his PhD in International Relations from the University of Vienna, focusing on Iranian Nuclear Proliferation as well as nuclear proliferation throughout the Middle East and South Asia.

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