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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE IRAN NUCLEAR CRISIS

Iran's burgeoning nuclear activities seem to bear a threat as well as a challenge to international order. Iran has continued to mock the rule-based traditional system for preventing nuclear proliferation. In case the Islamic Republic decides to take a step further and weaponize the nuclear abilities of the country, the threat of war in the Middle Eastern region will become enhanced since Iran as well as its neighbors continue to modify themselves with the constant shifts in power and the stakes continue to grow higher.

Background

Nationalism in Iran coupled with the prevalent religious and ethnic tensions within the land could very well be the cause of the present nuclear scenario in the country. The bitter legacies that were left by border struggles in the land as well as the strong sentiments against autonomy have slowly accumulated over the years and risen to the surface. Religion is also a major element that has been tainted by political developments and the vested interests of certain classes . A lot of speculation deals with the fact that the events in Iraq may be leading to an escalation of the confrontations between the Shi'as and the Sunnis along with a growing sense of competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Therefore, religious and ethnic rivalries dominate the landscape in contemporary Iran and the uneasy perspective that the country bears against the West has not helped matters .

Issues

The main issues that the world seems to have with Iran and its quest for nuclear power is the claim of the Iranian leaders that their nuclear weapons program is completely legitimate while the actual nuclear weapon states have failed to live up to their Nuclear Proliferation Treaty or NPT commitments . Iranian officials have continued to blame the Western powers for double standards. There seems to be a strong correlation between the national pride in the scientific advances made by the country as well as the nuclear program.

Q1: Why is Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons a threat to the international community?

Policy creation has always been a major aspect of the role of the Western nations but given the current status of Iran, the West is still hesitant to address the idea. The nuclear issue has assumed a central role in the lives of Iranian people and they have made up their minds to secure nuclear power and prestige in the eyes of the West by gaining nuclear power. However, given Iran's political and religious background and international relations, the West viewed this idea with suspicion and soon interpreted it as a hostile act; one which if allowed to continue would have enormous negative consequences .

Q2: How does the domestic politics of the country play into this threat?

Iran's posture towards nuclear power has resulted in a deeper inquiry into the different regional and domestic factors that affect the apparent " threat".

The developments in Afghanistan, Iranian behavior and productive working level engagements with other countries are the various factors that have come into play at the moment. Domestic threats will have explicit consequences in terms of the perspective that the outside world bears towards Iran .

Complicating Issues

One of the main points of complication that could hamper the relation between Iran and the rest of the world and inadvertently hasten the process of nuclear threat is if either the US or the UK decides to take matters into their own hands and proceed with military strikes. Not only will this be a glaring misstep but it could be extremely damaging and prove a massive setback for the interests that the United States harbors on a global scale. Military action might have humanitarian consequences and any attacks might result in immediate casualties. Military planning should always involve CDE or collateral damage estimation. Despite the presence of terms like ‘ precision-guided munitions’ and ‘ surgical strike’, any military action undertaken against Iran might lead to long term negative consequences and severely complicate issues . If military strikes are attempted against operation nuclear reactors located within Iran, it could have drastic and long-term impacts on the health of the locals. There are numerous diplomatic implicates present in the current scenario in Iran and a false move could shift the delicate balance. Moreover, not all nations support the decisions of the US and the UK when it comes to making a move against Iran; they are willing to overlook the potential threats that Iran possesses but at the expense of

challenging the UK and the US on grounds that could be considered distinctly hostile .

Possible Solutions

Identification of the ultimate goals of each party in Iran marks the beginning of a possible solution. In light of the current standoff in the nation, a resolution might assume the proportions of a ‘ Grand Bargain’ through unconditional discourses . This outcome would stem from addressing a wide variety of economic, security as well as energy-related topics as part of the process of normalization of the relation existing between Iran and the United States. The US has come to understand that military strikes against Iran would not only be counterproductive but extremely damaging to the interests of the US on the international platform in the long run. In retrospect, a proper approach to reform the regime in Iran might be possible by ceasing the demonization of the US at the hands of Ahmadinejad via engagement. Even though Iran has kick started its plans for a nuclear program and there is a clear sense of emergency pervading the entire proceedings, there is still some time left to engage in talks. There are some critics who believe that Iran’s capability to form and maintain a nuclear weapon has been grossly overestimated .

The role of the UK in the proceedings is fairly two-fold – it can begin by lending proper support to the initiatives of the EU and working with the administration in the US to negotiate direct engagement with Iran. In case of the United Kingdom, flexibility is of the utmost importance if they hope to close off the direct and easy routes for the development of nuclear weapons

while ensuring that the remaining sensitive tasks are monitored closely through thorough inspections. The power brokers on behalf of Iran will no doubt attempt to gain more certain and comprehensive security guarantees. Security cooperation appears to have the potential to not just undermine the ambitions held by Iran for a proper nuclear weapon program but even offer the opportunity to deal with Iranian support for the radical groups present in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq. Therefore, it would be wrong to dismiss completely the concept of a 'Grand Bargain'.

Recommendations

Diplomacy is viable as an option to deal with worst-case scenario. Attempts should be made to foster a sense of confidence within the negotiating partners and provide them with the opportunity to break the sense of mutual hostility. Military action must not be considered the first option since the possible consequences might be highly deadly and the government has to exhaust all diplomatic options before they can even comprehend implementing the idea. There is still some time to act for the benefit of Iran and the world and the major role in the process belongs to UK which may act as a catalyst, mediating between the United States and the member states of the European Union. The diplomatic process will require genuine and continued commitment and only through fair treatment of Iran during the negotiations will the outcome be positive .

There are several difficulties that might crop up in the diplomatic process. As long as the basic hurdles remain in position, like the preconditions involving the suspension of enrichment activities in Iran, the full diplomatic potential

cannot be tapped. The progress of the diplomatic tactics, however, will be assured if the United Kingdom government and other major parties seem willing to either dissipate the preconditions for negotiations or decide upon a compromise that permits both Iran and the US to come to a mutual point without having to compromise on their individual ideals. It would be worthwhile to seek direct dealings between the US and Iran and then prioritize the demands and proposals by assessing the associated security risks with varying technologies which are developed by Iran. A prompt response is required for Iran's plans to use reprocessing technology, Iran must be swayed from its ambitions for reprocessing and this might be possible via the explicit assurance of mutual security for Iran, US and Israel. Therefore, the UK has to play a delicate and balancing role in the entire scenario by fostering a climate that promotes pragmatism .

Summary – Anticipated Outcome

The problems of Iran do not appear to be on the verge of diminishing. In fact, the entire situation is still tense and any rash action on the part of either Iran or the US or UK might ignite the threat of nuclear warfare to an unprecedented extent. Therefore, it seems best to not resort to any sort of military action for the time being.

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