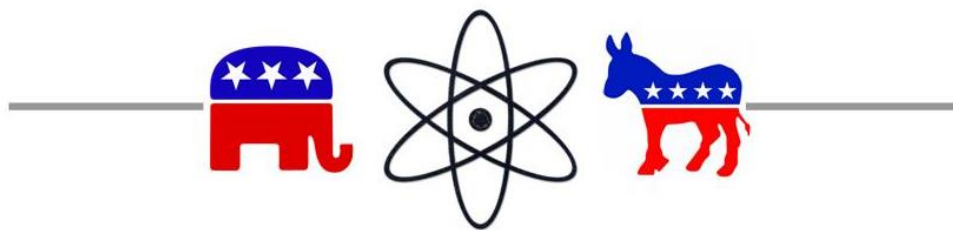


★ IPCS US ELECTION SPECIAL ★

**CLINTON VS TRUMP**



*Anticipating US Nuclear Behaviour*

SPECIAL REPORT #185 ★ NOVEMBER 2016



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INSTITUTE OF PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES

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## Presidential Elections and US Nuclear Policy: Clinton Vs Trump



**Dr Manpreet Sethi**

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When the second largest democracy and the most powerful country of the world begins the process of choosing a new leader for itself, it is automatically a matter of global concern. Obviously then, for the last year or so, the twists and turns in the complicated US presidential elections have been on the watch of every government and international analyst across the world. It is now only a matter of weeks before the new occupant of the White House will be decided between Senator Hillary Clinton and billionaire business tycoon Donald Trump. However, neither of them has particularly impressed, nor emerged as a discerning student of nuclear issues.

Given that the US holds a formidable nuclear arsenal that can destroy the Earth several times over, it is normally expected of US presidential candidates to display a reasonably sophisticated understanding of relevant issues. It should, at the least, be enough to inspire confidence in their capability to be stable and able commanders of thousands of nuclear-tipped missiles. In the 2016 presidential race, however, it is disconcerting that a group of US air force officers in the nuclear command and control structures have signed an open letter expressing reservation on the idea of entrusting nuclear launch codes to Donald Trump. Even more distressing is the fact that the letter does not repose faith in the other candidate either!

Meanwhile, at a more tangible level, the stance of the two candidates on significant nuclear issues is peppered with vague articulations and evasive statements to even direct questions posed to them at various instances. Of course, nuclear matters are complex and one cannot expect a deep understanding of all dimensions. But, what has emerged so far has not been very reassuring on whether and how the incoming president would seek to address the many complicated issues that he/she would inevitably confront on the contemporary nuclear landscape.

Amongst the early contenders for attention would be North Korea's nuclear behaviour. Both candidates seem to believe that China holds the key to the problem and that it could/would be pressurised to use its leverages with Pyongyang to get Kim Jong-un to mend his ways. However, it is not clear what leverages the US itself has over China, and even more importantly, as to why Beijing should be inclined to do US bidding when it enjoys the benefits of North Korean heckling of its largest rival. Trump has expressed readiness to directly engage with Kim and that might be a direction worth exploring. Hopefully, he would realise the folly of his other idea of finding a solution to the problem

through further nuclear proliferation into US allies in the region. Clinton, meanwhile, is likely to continue with more or less the same approach as that of the Obama administration – more sanctions and international consensus building on dealing with the delinquent state – the limits of which have long been upon us.

Another nuclear issue on which Trump and Clinton have diametrically opposite views is on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) concluded with Iran in 2015 and which began being implemented earlier this year. The Republicans have been strident critics of the agreement. Trump and his running mate have mentioned their intention to “rip up the Iran deal” and re-open negotiations to extract greater concessions from Tehran. It is quite likely though that he would end up unravelling the fragile arrangement currently in place. Clinton, meanwhile, has been a supporter of the agreement and is likely to continue with implementation of the agreement while keeping a close watch on Iran’s nuclear and missile activities.

On nuclear security, Clinton has clearly rated the threat of nuclear terrorism as an urgent priority and expressed the desire to find ways of getting nations to secure their nuclear material since Obama wound down his Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) initiative in March 2016. She has been candid in expressing great concern over the threat of a jihadist takeover of the Pakistani government, thereby gaining control over the country’s nuclear weapons and posing a danger to international security. Trump too has rated the threat of access by non-state actors to nuclear material high on his list of nuclear priorities, but has not articulated any roadmap to address the issue. It can be expected that the next US president will keep his/her focus on the issue.

The outgoing administration of President Obama has set in motion a very expensive process of nuclear modernisation. A trillion dollars have been pledged towards making the ‘ageing’ US nuclear warheads and delivery systems safe, secure and reliable. This includes investing in systems such as nuclear-armed cruise missiles, which have been criticised for their adverse impact on strategic stability. Acknowledging this, Clinton has, in some of her pronouncements on the subject, expressed a willingness to re-look at the decision for its wider implications on triggering a new arms race and vitiating nuclear stability. Having been part of arms control negotiations with the Russians on the New Start treaty as Secretary of State, Clinton can be expected to have been sensitised on strategic stability issues. Trump, however, is likely to hold a more puritan Republican line on this subject setting into motion an action-reaction cycle with other near nuclear peers.

There is no doubt that the manner in which these four issues are handled would have direct and indirect implications for India. Stemming further proliferation, enhancing nuclear security, as well as steps towards nuclear modernisation that add salience to nuclear weapons and compel the country to respond with measures to redress its own deterrence, are all consequential matters. It can be largely expected however, that the next US administration, irrespective of who heads it, will continue to honour India’s nuclear accommodation into the non-proliferation regime. As a nuclear technology proficient nation with a large nuclear energy market potential, and as a nuclear armed nation with a reasonably modest arsenal, India is too large to be ignored by any US president. By now, New Delhi

has the experience of dealing successfully with both Republican and Democrat presidents and it must continue to develop this relationship further on basis of common nuclear interests and concerns.

Meanwhile, it needs to be highlighted that irrespective of the personal predilections of US presidents, the administration has a tendency to mould him/her into positions that are largely acceptable and conventional. Fortunately or unfortunately, the system does not allow its presidents to stray too far. President Obama started his White House journey with an inspiring and radical speech at Prague that described a new nuclear agenda for the US. But myriad vested interests and lobbies at work constantly tugged at his coattails to bring him back in line with traditionalist positions. It is indeed ironical that the president who put the weight of his personal conviction behind a nuclear weapons free world is leaving office having approved a major modernisation of the country's nuclear weapons.

The next few weeks are going to be extremely interesting and it is certain that Trump and Clinton will be monitored incessantly. In fact, every time they utter the word nuclear, it will be scrutinised for its national and international implications. And, once one of them is the president of the US, their nuclear pronouncements will hopefully acquire greater depth and maturity. The world cannot afford anything less.



## Hillary's Nuclear Policy: A Time of Change, Dithering, or Sameness?



**Vice Adm (Retd) Vijay Shankar**

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### **An Inexpedient Second**

The last time a Democrat president was elected to office after two terms of a Democratic presidency was 180 years ago. A certain Martin Van Buren succeeded Andrew Jackson in 1836. Coincidentally he was a former Secretary of State. The occurrence is unique in an unflattering way for a variety of reasons which has little to do with the candidate's merits but more with the ballotter's disposition. Significant of these fancies are: exaction for change, anti-incumbency, voter fatigue, absence of choice and the resigned philosophical knowledge that this would be a one-off, destined to enter office as a 'lame-duck'.

In the current presidential race, two candidates have been thrust on the electorate who under circumstances of choice would have been spurned. Donald Trump comes with dangerous impetuosity while Hillary carries a baggage of alleged chicanery and unimaginativeness. However reality and opinion polls suggests that Hillary would enter the oval office as US' 45th President (this assumption is central to the narrative).

The 1837 inauguration of Van Buren proved less of a celebration and more of banality. His inaugural address took melancholy note of it: "In receiving from the people the sacred trust twice confided to my illustrious predecessor...I know that I cannot expect to perform the task with equal ability and success. But, I may hope that somewhat of the same cheering approbation will be found to attend upon my path." And Van Buren pledged to "tread generally in the footsteps of President Jackson." Needless to state that Buren lasted just one term, his presidency was troubled, weak and had little success to legate; the economy collapsed, there was hostility to Native Americans and compromises in securing the frontiers with Canada and Mexico. On leaving office he was re-baptised 'Martin Van Ruin'. Clearly if history is to prevail and Hillary elected, then 'continuity' is her only deliverance.

### **Survival of Obama's Nuclear Policy**

In addition to his 'Global Zero' initiative, one of the most significant promises Obama made in his now less-than-lustrous, 2009 Prague speech was to "put an end to Cold War thinking" by reducing the role of nuclear weapons in US security strategy. The Cold War had ended decades earlier and while the

US nuclear arsenal had decreased, little else had changed in US nuclear weapons policy. As the Commander-in-Chief he could have made meaningful changes without the agreement of Russia or Congress. He did not. Changing the deeply entrenched status quo and overcoming inertia in the US security establishment, however, demanded more than a vision; it required statesmanship, profoundly lacking, it would now seem. In some areas his administration has made nuclear matters worse. The 2010 Nuclear Posture Review considered "making deterrence of nuclear attack on the United States or allies and partners the sole purpose of US nuclear weapons." However, it did not take this step. Instead, US policy still allows the US to use nuclear weapons first in a crisis. This suggests that nuclear weapons have legitimate uses in warfighting. In addition to this, Obama announced a US\$1 trillion plan to rebuild and upgrade the US nuclear arsenal. Whatever became of the resolve to bemoan the Cold War nuclear paradigm? With such a distracted policy inheritance, Hillary's by now well acknowledged dawdling on nuclear matters is more than likely to return to Cold War beliefs.

### **The No First Use Non-Starter**

Obama, towards the last few months of his term in office, toyed with the idea of unilaterally declaring a No First Use (NFU) nuclear weapons policy to impel a first step towards goals of global zero. It would have been a landmark change in the US nuclear posture. America's overwhelming conventional weapon superiority provided the logic for such a step and the probable dividend was that the other nuclear weapon states would follow suit. This, notwithstanding protests from allies who believe that "extended first use deterrence" works, despite convincing arguments of the "first use illusion" (after all, first use not only suggests a break down in deterrence but also brings with it an assurance of retaliation). To declare that the sole purpose of US nuclear weapons is to deter and if necessary only respond to the use of nuclear weapons by other countries would not only conform to the Nuclear Posture Review of 2010, but would also provide incentive for Hillary to veer away from Cold War nuclear theology and set the NFU agenda to give fresh meaning to the idea of continuity. Nevertheless, the question is really not of rationality but of whether the Hillary administration will have the resolve to take on a Republican-dominated Congress. Clearly if Cold War thinking were to prevail, then such a transformative change in posture is destined to collapse.

### **Test Ban and START**

Seeking a UN Security Council resolution affirming a ban on the testing of nuclear weapons was Obama's scheme to enshrine the US' pledge not to test without having to seek the Senate's unlikely ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Then again, this runs contrary to the one trillion dollar upgrade of the nuclear arsenal. Could the state really contemplate warhead and vector enhancements without testing, was the conundrum? Hillary will have to juggle this very complex issue of making large investments without a corresponding assurance of reliability, but will the nuclear establishment give her the leeway to make such compromises? Time will of course tell, but the prospect of such an event transpiring is stacked against her.

The Obama administration had noted that offering Russia a five-year extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) treaty's limits on deployed nuclear weapons (even though those limits do not expire until 2021) would pave the way for his successor to not let the treaty lapse. Hillary undoubtedly would have recognised this and it is reasonable that she will take steps to give legitimacy to the proposition provided Russia 'plays ball'.

### **Long Range Stand Off Weapon (LRSOW)**

The development of a new LRSOW nuclear cruise missile may have held logic for a limited nuclear strike but it also suggests a warped rationality that can only push the risk of nuclear weapon proliferation. In the circumstance of it being used against a nuclear weapon state, then, the risk of retaliation and a nuclear exchange spinning out of control is very real. It is a capability Obama does not believe the US needs and by any wisdom, is worthy of cancellation. It would also fulfil his campaign promise to take US land-based missile off hair-trigger alert. Discarding the option of launching weapons-on-warning was his way of rejecting the very Cold War thinking he was calling the world to cast off. It will remain an awkward irony that Obama won the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize for his vision of a world without nuclear weapons if he is unable to pass down such a legacy to his successor. Yet, robust opposition to such a dramatic remodelling of the nuclear doctrine can, with some certainty, be expected to come from the Pentagon and the military-industrial complex.

### **US Nuclear Arsenal**

There are two issues related to US' nuclear arsenal that the establishment has never really attempted to resolve. These are: firstly, why is the Pentagon embarking upon a trillion-dollar programme to modernise the Triad? Is the programme necessary (remember Hillary, in January 2016, had already dismissed the expenditure as meaningless)? And secondly, how do advances in non-nuclear weaponry affect theories of nuclear deterrence devised during the 1950s and 1960s? Does the logic of those early theories still hold, particularly in the light of overwhelming conventional and technological superiority? And will a Hillary administration be resolute enough to put 'actions where their mouth is' and review the trillion-dollar proposed outlay in addition to challenging the 'word' of Washington's nuclear ayatollahs? The matter seems dubious given the current relationship with Russia and China's modernisation of its nuclear arsenal. This will imply more Cold War rationality rather than less.

### **Future of the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal**

On the successful conclusion of the Indo-US civil nuclear deal on 10 October 2008, the late K. Subrahmanyam, one of the early proponents of India's independent nuclear deterrent and an architect of its nuclear doctrine, argued that the convergence of strategic interests between the two nations made such a remarkable agreement a reality, overcoming decades-long US stand on non-proliferation. What he did not mention was that it also put an end to an equally long antagonism between the two establishments. While much of the world's approach to India in the past had been to limit its access to nuclear technology, a former director of Los Alamos National Laboratories (a



leading institution for nuclear weapons design during the Cold War) in a Senate hearing in 2008 put the matter in perspective. He suggested, "...it may well be that today we limit ourselves by not having full access to India's nuclear technology developments."

While the full potential of the civil nuclear deal is yet to be realised, there can be no two opinions on changes in bilateral strategic orientation since the deal was struck. The extent to which transformation has occurred may be judged by several episodes in the relationship which include the deletion of many high technology sanctions imposed on India since 1974. Enhancing nuclear power generation through imported uranium and purchase of new reactors is an example, while convergence of strategic perspectives holds great promise for the future. These could be measures to bring about strategic equilibrium in the Indo-Pacific or whole hearted support for India's admission into the UN Security Council as a permanent member and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), as steps to buttress stability in global security and nuclear politics and commerce.

The US has become India's largest trading partner in goods and services and the two sides have set an ambitious goal of half a trillion dollars for future trade; cooperation on counter-terrorism, information-sharing and intelligence-partnership have expanded rapidly in recent years. In military cooperation the US has become one of India's major suppliers of arms, and the two sides have on the table agreements that were improbable a few years ago, such as the Logistic Memorandum of Understanding (LEMOA) or entry into the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) or even rejecting the idea of mediating between India and Pakistan, especially on the Kashmir question. All these advances are direct dividends of the nuclear deal for it provided the strategic ambience that facilitated partnership.

About the UNSC and NSG membership, Hillary has made it amply clear that her backing for India's full membership is comprehensive. It includes the three nuclear/chemical and biological weapon export control regimes; the NSG, the Wassenaar Arrangement and the Australia Group.

### **Continuity and a Retreat to Cold War Thinking: A Forecast**

Much like the hapless Buren, the 45th presidency is more than likely to face an unsympathetic Congress, a hostile Pentagon and the prospect of a near certain 'lame duck' term. The only virtue that history may remember Hillary for is that she stayed the course laid by her predecessor. And yet even here it cannot be easy, for the geopolitical script has changed. There is, today, a far more assertive Russia than in the first decade and a more forceful China set on rewriting the rule book. In the nuclear field, the early flirtation with ending Cold War thinking is a pipe dream. So for Hillary, continuity may prove an arduous abstraction that could boomerang with more recoil than forward momentum. Perhaps her only redemption may come from building an entente cordiale with India as a balancing power.



## Trump's Nuclear Policy: Global Implications



**Prof Chintamani Mahapatra**

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The US is experiencing one of the most turbulent, contentious and vitriolic political campaigns in the race to the White House in its entire history. Negativities have engulfed the US so much that the entire world has been affected.

While several countries are raising diverse questions, the weightiest concern within the US and in the rest of the world is the future of the global nuclear order. What would be the effect on that order if Donald Trump becomes the next US president? The US is the first country to make a nuclear weapon, the first and only country to have used the bomb during the Second World War, the pioneer in efforts to prevent other countries from acquiring nuclear weapons capability, and, above all, the most powerful nuclear-capable country in the world. The pervasive disquiet related to his views and policies on nuclear weapons thus are unpretentious.

President Barack Obama has backed the idea of a nuclear weapons free world, at least in principle. Will Trump endorse the idea of a world rid of nuclear weapons? The Republican presidencies historically have shown less faith in non-proliferation policies and have tilted towards strengthening the country's preparedness to handle any nuclear offensive. Will Trump do the same or spend more time and energy in nuclear arms control negotiations with Russia? China has always conveniently kept itself aloof from US and Russian efforts for nuclear arms control. More recently, it has been spending billions of dollars to expand and bolster its nuclear arsenal. In the perceived march of China towards super power status, will Trump take steps to rope in China for arms control negotiations?

How will a probable Trump presidency handle the Iranian nuclear question? His campaign has repeatedly condemned the Obama administration's nuclear deal with Iran. He has called it a deal that has financially benefitted Iran, that has made room for Iran to walk out of the deal after fifteen years and make the bomb, and that this has made Israel more vulnerable. Will Trump nullify the agreement? Will he renegotiate the nuclear deal with Tehran? Will Iran agree to join hands? If not, will Trump resort to military means to end Iran's nuclear programme? How will a Trump administration handle North Korean intransigence on the nuclear proliferation issue? North Korea has repeatedly defied the US, members of the Six Party Talks that negotiated several times with Pyongyang for a Korean Peninsula nuclear free zone, and has intermittently conducted nuclear and missile tests in order to thumb its nose at the international community.

Much more significant will be a Trump presidency's policy towards Japan and South Korea. Will he adopt as policy what he campaigned during the election year and compel Tokyo and Seoul to fend for themselves in the defence and security fields in the face of a rising China that has been flexing its military muscles, and a North Korea that has been brandishing its nuclear and missile capabilities at the drop of a hat?

All these questions have preoccupied strategic analysts around the world, including those of the US. The fundamental development that is truly bothersome is the doubt expressed by a large number of people who have served as very high officials during the previous Republican administrations about the trustworthiness of Donald Trump as the Commander-in-Chief with the ultimate authority to take decisions on the use of nuclear weapons. In fact, Hillary Clinton, the Democratic hopeful for the presidency, has expressed her apprehension about the start of a nuclear war under a Trump presidency.

One can dismiss her concern as a mere campaign stratagem to belittle the intelligence of her competitor, but the overall views of Donald Trump during the campaign do raise serious questions about global nuclear stability under his administration. Of particular relevance is Trump's idea to alter the decades-long time-tested US role in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

If NATO disintegrates under the US demand for more burden-sharing and some of the powerful NATO members choose to espouse independent defence postures and abandon the collective security model, new nuclear weapons powers are likely to mushroom. Coupled with Trump's call for Japan and South Korea to developing their own nuclear arsenals, if Germany and Italy follow the same, the global nuclear order will simply collapse. The NPT will be buried in the sand. Export control regimes may disappear. There may be nuclear winter without a nuclear war! Terror groups may find an easier path to acquire nuclear weapons/materials.

Such an analysis may be termed as doomsday scenarios that may not actually happen. But when the security of the world is in question, no scenario can be discounted. One would, of course, take refuge in the obvious argument that the US system will prevent the president from unleashing his ideas without checks and balances. And, of course, the Indo-US nuclear agreement will most likely remain unaffected under a Trump presidency.



## The Iran Deal Under a Clinton Presidency



**Vivek Mishra**

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Tweaking contextually and semantically what Ronald Reagan said about Russia during the Cold War - "Trust, but verify" - Hillary Clinton proclaimed her strategy apropos the nuclear deal with Iran in September 2015 at the Brookings Institution in Washington DC as "Distrust and verify." Since then, the Iran nuclear deal that was signed on 14 July 2015 between Iran and the P5+1 has created a lot of controversy. The timing of the secretly organised airlift of US\$400 million worth of cash to Iran that coincided with the release of four US citizens detained in Iran has put the Obama administration and his party in a bind, besides drawing sharp, theatrical criticism from the Republicans. The Iran deal continues to bedevil conjectures about US' Iran policy under the next president and remains one of the primary bones of contention in the US presidential run-off.

Hillary Clinton evinced a strong posture towards Iran through her choice of words and promised potential action, referring to Iran as a "ruthless, brutal regime." As part of her agenda to play rhetorical hardball with Iran, she has premised her Iran strategy on three likely future scenarios: first, Iran violates the tenets of the deal; second, Iran prolongs its adherence to the deal until there is a regional or global distraction for the US, to eventually enrich; and third, Iran seeks to flex its muscles in the region. All the three possibilities appear to be coming from the reductionist assumption that Iran will try to violate the deal.

However, quite in contradiction, Iran has recently alleged non-compliance by the US vis-à-vis the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In July earlier this year, six months after the Iran nuclear deal began taking effect, Iran raised the non-compliance issue in sanctions relief from the US in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The complaint essentially underscored that Iran was yet to fully benefit from the lifting of multilateral and national sanctions, especially in relation to the US' Visa Waiver Programme (VWP) that lists new eligibility requirements for Iranians travelling to the US. This situation not only upends Ms Clinton's presumptions on Iran's behaviour but also creates scope for possible Iranian non-compliance, especially through the recalcitrance that has quintessentially characterised Iranian strategy towards the US post the 1970s strategy. In fact, signs of Iran's retaliatory posture have already started emerging with Iran launching war drills amidst accusations that the US is violating the nuclear deal.

Hillary Clinton is the Democratic candidate, representing the party that was instrumental in getting the Iran deal through, which gives her high political mileage to chest-thump on stopping Iran from going nuclear, for now. The moral high ground for the Democrats for having struck the deal and the subsequent euphoria might not be so well deserved after all. For one, the US is already delaying some of the sanctions relief to Iran and second, the lifting of more important sanctions like those on conventional arms and missiles have been delayed by as much by eight years. Essentially, the lifting of some sanctions could well see the Clinton administration through, if she assumes office. This gives Hillary Clinton a timeline-cushion for rhetorical play against Iran without much accountability. Moreover, the deal only limits Iran's capability to research, develop and enrich uranium for fifteen years.

### **US-Israel Dynamics**

The Obama administration has been widely perceived to be behind the recent waning of US-Israel ties. An initial bilateral dip that saw no visit by President Obama in his first term to Israel, further plummeted with the Iran deal. Israel's Defence Minister Avigdor Liberman compared the Iran nuclear deal to the Munich Agreement of 1938 and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he would rather sign with the next president a package offered by the Obama Administration.

With ebbed bilateral ties, the onus for restoring warmth in US-Israel ties will be high on Hillary Clinton if she assumes the presidency. Hillary has promised to continue defence sales to Israel, signalling that she is ready to embrace Israel back. She has also announced that she would invite the Israeli Prime Minister to the White House in her very first month as president. However, her road to such efforts are land-mined with the Iran deal. Furthermore, an eventual bump in the US-Israel relationship could surface if and when Israel demands the coveted Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP) from the US. Designed to penetrate through 200 feet of earth and 60 feet of concrete before detonating, the MOP is one of the largest non-nuclear weapons in the world today, making it an ideal weapon against Iran's underground and highly secure nuclear sites like Fordow.

### **Historical Fixation**

Iran has been at the heart of the US' Middle East policy since the Cold War, and the Shia majority country has come a long way from being an ally to becoming an avowed enemy of the US. Most US presidents since Nixon have tethered their Asia policy around the Persian Gulf area with Iran as the pivot. The Carter Doctrine stands out in marking the US' fixation with the Persian Gulf area in history. This obsession with Iran is likely to continue in the event of a likely Hillary Clinton win, albeit in a different manner.



## The Iran Deal Under a Trump Presidency



**Kimberley Anne Nazareth**

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With the US only just days away from electing its 45th President, it is important to understand and analyse Republican candidate Donald Trump's stance on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran deal. Much has been said about his opposition to the Iran deal. However, there will likely be little to no change in US' official position on the deal even in the event of a Trump presidency. This article looks at the reasons why.

### Trump's Rhetoric

Donald Trump's anti-Iran deal statements over the course of his election campaign have changed from being purely anti-deal during the primaries to lukewarm opposition after the Republican Convention of July 2016. This is visible from his statements on the issue - from calling it "one of the worst deals ever made by any country in history," to his statement at a rally in September, where he said, "When I am elected president, I will renegotiate with Iran...and ask Congress to impose new sanctions that stop Iran from having the ability to sponsor terrorism around the world." In September itself, he spoke about keeping the deal at an MSNBC interview: "We have a horrible contract, but we do have a contract..."

The main aim of the Iran deal was to postpone Iran's ability to weaponise, rather than completely cutting off Iran's access to nuclear technology. In many ways Donald Trump's anti-deal statements simply seem to reinforce the Republican position, which for the most part is against the deal, but the rhetoric has changed over time. So the bigger question is that if he wins, would all this rhetoric be translated into action?

### Reality

Even if Trump were to try to renegotiate the deal, a number of factors would have to be considered. Firstly, the deal took more than three years and a great deal of bargaining to come to fruition. Secondly, the deal is multilateral in nature, signed between Iran and the P5+1. Therefore if the US under Trump were to consider withdrawing/renegotiating the deal, the sanctions-wise impact would be

minimal on Iran as the strongest sanctions came from the European countries who continue to support the deal.

There is also an economic factor involved. After the deal was implemented earlier this year, some P5 nations, including China and Russia, signed multiple deals with Iran. For instance, a US\$800 million dollar defence cooperation deal was signed with Russia and a trade deal approximating US\$600 billion was signed with China. Companies have also signed deals with Iran, such as Boeing, to the tune of US\$30-40 billion. The linkages established through these economic deals will further strengthen the foundation of the nuclear deal itself.

On the down side, the Republicans are using the 'regional card' to their advantage in opposing the deal. US' regional allies have opposed the deal since negotiations began, fearing a nuclear Iran and the impact of sanctions relief allowing Iran greater leverage in the region, especially over US' allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

### **Implications**

It would be difficult for Trump to bring about major changes in the deal - he would be damned if did and dammed if didn't. If he keeps the deal, he will be held accountable for the 4 to 8 critical years of the deal when Iran could strengthen its enriching technology. On the other hand, if he takes any action against the deal and consequently, Iran, he will be criticised for destroying the deal and the rapprochement it facilitated with Iran. In terms of legacy, irrespective of what happens, he will be have to answer his support base for a 'nuclear Iran' either by acts of commission or by acts omission.

However, in a presidential election year, it is not only the White House that is up for grabs but the House of Representatives and the Senate as well. The Republican Party (though commonly known for its anti-deal stance) is not monolithic; there are those within the party that have supported the deal, which will also have to be considered. If the Democrats take over both houses, bargaining and compromise will be an uphill battle.

Trump really has only one option: that of conducting business as usual. A reason for this is that the very nature of the deal - Trump will have to stick by the JCPOA irrespective of the regional and domestic complications.





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