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Iran and Regional Security

Understanding Tehran's Predicaments, Objectives and Strategies

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Understanding Tehran's Predicaments, Objectives and Strategies

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Summary

- Iran has the capability of being a 'regional hub' when looked at from Morocco to South Asia. But its capability of emerging as a 'regional hub' is closely dependent upon recognition and acceptance by the United States of America.
- Indian establishment should engage with Iran from an independent perspective irrespective of the interests of a third country. Engagement and not isolation should govern future Indo-Iran relations.
- Indo-Iran relations lack clarity. Emphasis should be laid on not just how the Indian establishment views Iran but also on how Iranian nationalism perceives India.
- Iran is not an 'abnormal' state as being an ideologically or religiously oriented country is not an expression of abnormality.
- Iran has a sophisticated foreign policy and well developed diplomatic tools. It has started to constructively engage with other countries.
- Iran's dream of possessing nuclear weapons has become synonymous with Iran's national interest.



**Prof. P.R. Kumaraswamy,
Centre for West Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru
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Iran's capability and intention of being a 'regional hub' is closely dependent upon recognition and acceptance by the United States of America, which is uncertain given the 1979 baggage.

The Indian establishment's experience with Iran is a story of messed up relations, something which only a minority of Indians would agree to. Partly responsible is the 'US-India-Iran inevitable triangle' which has continued to plague the Indian establishment's thought processes. India is unable to follow an independent policy on Iran because of its reliance on United States, as a follow up to the Indo - US Civil Nuclear Deal. This also reflects the reason behind India voting against Iran in the IAEA - International Atomic Energy Agency - a privileged club. India also

does not seem to be ready for another nuclear power in the neighbourhood. It, however, has not been echoing the same tone for Pakistan, as it is with the latter's nuclear status that India can justify its nuclear ambitions.

But Iran-India relations are cumbersome even at the bilateral level, discounting the inevitable triangle. If we look at the energy perspective alone, there are three things that define India-Iran relations: pipeline, liquefied natural gas and oil. All three factors are problematic even without US presence or pressure. These three factors are problem ridden owing to considerations of price, technology or security. But, US pressure continues to be regarded as the factor for the India-Iran problem, merely for the reason that it suits all interests. Iran also factors in India-Israel relationship.

Despite the problems, some amount of convergence can also be traced. There appears to be an element of convergence between both the countries with reference to Pakistan. India's access into Afghanistan is also a source of convergence between the two. The India-Iran convergence on Afghanistan seems to epitomize the US-Iran convergence that surfaced between them over Iraq. But, one needs to understand that Iran is not doing any favour to India and that India need not be good to Iran for the fulfillment of its strategic interests.

The problem lies in the inability of India to echo its interests with clarity. In this reference, India needs to learn from Japan which follows an independent policy with regard to the Middle East, despite it being under the US nuclear umbrella. This is the phenomenon of 'non-parallel interests'; agreeing with one country on one issue but not necessarily agreeing with the same on another issue.

With regard to India voting against Iran in the IAEA this time, it should be borne in mind that China and France have done that seven times with the motive of isolating Iran. The reason for the current focus on India's negative vote is the contradiction between the Indian establishment's statement and the decision itself.

There is need for India to distinguish between Iran and the current regime in Iran as territorially Iran will and shall always be important for Indian interests."

"It is the ability to define your interests in categorical terms that India lacks the most. There is need for India to distinguish between Iran and the current regime in Iran as territorially Iran will and shall always be important for Indian interests."

**Prof. Anwar Alam,
Director, Centre for West Asian Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia**

In the historical context, Iran's aspiration to emerge as a regional power was linked to its close relations with the United States. Even so, today this aspiration depends on US restricting its zone of influence in West Asia. The proposition that Iran has not been a 'normal state' is flawed and cannot be agreed to. How does one define normality and abnormality? Labeling Iran as abnormal or rogue with respect to its religious orientations is an incorrect statement to make. Although Saudi Arabia is a conservative state but was never classified as abnormal or rogue because of its cordial relationship with the US. This means if a state has good relationship with greater powers, then its behaviour is acceptable, regardless of the ideology it follows.



The other important dimension is the lens through which the emerging Iranian Nationalism views India. The relationship between India and Iran is different as there exist a paucity in the clarity of their foreign policies with respect to one another. Iran is very clear about its perceptions of Pakistan, but this is unlikely in India's case. India and Iran's interests converge at the mention of Taliban and Pakistan.

India is concerned about the growing relationship between Taliban and Pakistan, which could possibly make India vulnerable. Pipeline from Iran should be of great concern to India. It will be a blunder for the Government of India to not take a stand at the moment.

Iran is dominated regionally by Sunni states but presently Shias have also begun to emerge in the region. Iran shares a large border with Pakistan and landmass is an important factor. Iran has a problem with the Sunni- Islamist Fundamentalists in the border regions. If one takes a look at the past 30 years of Iran's relations with its neighbours, it has never engaged in an overt conflict, instead it has developed close relationships with Syria, and Hamas and Hezbollah who by definition are non state actors. The presence of the US military in the region along with its constant attempt to politicize the issues related to Iran compels Iran to view the US as a threat provoking Iran's proximity with Syria and other non state actors.

“The Iranian nuclear policy shall be perceived irrespective of what regime comes into power. You will become a responsible nuclear power only when you are a democracy. This obsession with equating responsive behaviour over nuclear weapons with representative government is troublesome.”

With respect to Iran's nuclear ambitions, it is believed to pursue its nuclear aspirations without an iota of doubt. Iran has an extremely sophisticated foreign policy, which has proved to be an advantage for the country. Iran has never been reluctant when approached with the possibility of negotiation. This aspect of its foreign policy will be beneficial to the country's aspiration to emerge as a dominant power in the region.

With regard to Afghanistan after 2014, Iran will certainly not appreciate the Taliban coming back to power in the country.