



Iran, the Bomb and Turkey

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Abstract :

The question of Iran “ going nuclear” is of global concern. Iran has up to now used devious methods to violate the Non-Proliferation Treaty and has indeed misled the world community. The Obama Administration is concerned about these developments as much as the previous Bush Administration was. However, President Obama’s approach to nuclear weapons in general and talks with Iran have been different both in essence and form. Another matter of concern has been the attitude of Israel and the manner in which the US has tried to handle the Israeli dossier towards Iran. The October 1st negotiations with Iran have been considered constructive by the West. These negotiations will take time and probably prove to be difficult. Turkey’s attitude towards a “nuclear” Iran seems to be ambivalent in recent times, whereby while Turkey does not want a nuclear Iran, it seems to be pointing a finger to nuclear Israel.

Iran’s nuclear activities have been on the international agenda for a while. The latest disclosure about the existence of a second uranium enrichment facility added to the prevalent suspicion. In reality, Iran and its nuclear work go back in history. Bruno Tertrais examines this topic in depth in his book “The Black Market Bomb: A Secret History of Nuclear Proliferation”. Negotiations between Pakistan and Iran go as far as 1984; it is apparent that Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of Pakistan’s bomb, has helped Iran, often without the knowledge of, and sometimes despite the

directives of Pakistani political authority. Imam Khomeini, who initially opposed all nuclear activity started during the Shah’s reign, seems to have changed his opinion following the Iraq war and Iraq’s use of chemical weapons. Nuclear activity then picked up pace after the Imam’s death. In 1990s, there was some cooperation with China, but the bulk of the information and assistance came from Pakistan.

Iran, which is party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), has sour relations with the International Atomic

Energy Agency (IAEA), as it sometimes blocks the Agency from carrying out the necessary inspections, as well as having a bad record. Iran has also admitted to having misled the Agency in 2000s. Now it looks like the existence of the second uranium enrichment facility has been added to the record.

While Iran, rich in gas and oil, has declared its nuclear program is peaceful, the suspicion created within the international community and Iran's so far negative attitude towards the IAEA inspections have led to serious uneasiness for not just the US, but Iran's neighbors as well.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

The document, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1968 and later became an international treaty, aims to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Apart from the five countries known to have nuclear weapons (the US, USSR {later Russia}, China, the UK and France), parties to the treaty would not try to acquire nuclear weapons, and would be subject to IAEA inspections to ensure the peaceful use of nuclear energy. India, Pakistan and Israel never became parties. India stressed the uneven character of the Treaty. The apartheid regime in South Africa joined the Treaty following the regime change in

that country. North Korea, which initially was a party, later withdrew and made its own bomb.

According to the NPT, the five countries that have the bomb would not help other parties to acquire it. They would also be under the obligation to not transfer nuclear technology to non-parties, even for peaceful purposes.

A generally accepted point is that the NPT did not reach its goal; by now there is an understanding of the necessity to accommodate countries that want to make use of nuclear energy in a peaceful manner. However, the 2007 Review Conference did not witness any progress. President Obama's promise of universal nuclear disarmament, the latest UN Security Council decision on this topic, and Obama's strategy to accommodate countries that want to use nuclear energy for civilian purposes are all promising developments for the next scheduled conference in 2012.

Double Standards

Previously there have been sanctions against North Korea, India and Pakistan, which have developed nuclear weapons. The ones on North Korea are still in place, and on and off negotiations continue with this country. Pakistan is an important ally of

the West in terms of the terror in Afghanistan. India, on the other hand, has come to an almost privileged position following a recent agreement signed with the US. The NPT has banned the transfer of technology to non-parties from nuclear states that are party to the Treaty. Despite this provision, the US has made an agreement with India for transferring nuclear technology to be used in a peaceful manner, provided it will be subject to inspections by the IAEA. India has come to this privileged status thanks to being a democracy and its prospective support of America's global approaches. As can be seen, the treatment a nuclear state is subject to can have different criteria, based on its position, regime or the role it can play globally. Iran is in some sort of conflict with the West on almost all matters. Additionally, Iran's leader had made a remark about wiping Israel off the map. Iran's politics, especially in the Middle East, are in opposition with that of the US and the West. This is why the approach to Iran is different.

President Obama's Approaches

Obama's approaches are different than Bush's; he has stated before that he's ready to be in a dialogue with Iran. He made a Nowruz gesture to Iran, making provocative statements regarding the dubious Iranian elections and invited Iran to the meetings on

Afghanistan. He also delivered a separate speech addressed to the Muslim world in Cairo. In addition to these, he has signalled that the NPT, which is accepted to be unequal by many states, can be amended. In short, he has opened the way for a new page.

Put forth by France, the UK and Germany for the EU, previous proposals of aid and accommodations in the fields of trade and technology in exchange for Iran giving up its uranium enrichment effort have been fruitless. Certain sanctions adopted by the UN Security Council have harmed Iran to a certain extent. It is also hard to say any progress was made during the negotiations among the 5+1 (five permanent Security Council members and Germany). On the contrary, Iran has adopted an increasingly bellicose attitude and has in a way defied the international community by putting its missile training on open display. Finally, On the eve of the negotiations on October 1st, Iran announced the existence of a second enrichment facility in Qom (It is understood that the US and the IAEA have long been aware of this facility).

What Happened on October 1?

The five permanent members of the Security Council and Germany started negotiations with Iran, which acted against

its previous statement that it would not discuss its nuclear activities. Iran announced that it would open the new facility to inspection and that it would send a "significant" portion of the enriched uranium to Russia for it to be converted to fuel. These are important developments, since Iran had before rejected an offer for the uranium enrichment to be done in Russia and sent to Iran to produce fuel. It is being calculated that this way Iran's -if determined- production of nuclear weapons will be stalled. Obama and the Western sources have characterized the October 1 negotiations as constructive. That being said, the West is not wholly convinced yet. What does a "significant" portion of the uranium mean? Are there other hidden facilities? And most importantly, how is Iran's capacity to make nuclear weapons to be stopped? There are no answers to these questions yet.

If the change of attitude in Iran is serious, why did it happen just recently? It is hard to make a definite prediction. Although, it is known that so far Russia and China have been dragging feet in terms of imposing tougher sanctions on Iran. That being said, it is obvious Obama expects reciprocation from Russia in turn for his gesture of scrapping his plans for a missile defense shield. That Medvedev gave the green light for tougher sanctions before the October 1 meeting might have affected Iran. If Iran

rejected Obama's "considerate" attitude, which is different and softer than that of Bush's, could push the Obama administration to consider a military option. Moreover, president Obama has warned Israel to not engage in a military operation against Iran and promised for tougher sanctions against Iran. The Obama administration has cool relations with the Netanyahu administration. The possibility of Israel acting alone in the case of no progress on Iran cannot be ruled out completely. If this should happen, the US, even if it does not want to, will have to be on Israel's side both to protect it and to prevent Iran from laying mines in the Strait of Hormuz. Did Iran become worried about the US not being able to stop Israel? It is hard to predict how much the price of oil will increase in such a disaster scenario, but it is certain that Russia will financially profit from this, along with the damage to the relations between Obama and the Muslim world. Most importantly, however, both Iran and Russia should worry about Obama's initiatives not being reciprocated, and a new change in US foreign policy. If Obama is perceived as "weak" and unsuccessful in his foreign policy, he might change his stance under domestic pressure.

It is expected that negotiations with Iran will not be easy. The US has not played its most important card yet, and neither if it

ever will nor if that card will work is clear. This card is giving Iran security guarantees, meaning to guarantee that the US will come to Iran's aid in the case of an attack. Such a guarantee could be realized in the form of a Security Council decision.

Turkey

Prime Minister Erdoğan initially acknowledged Iran's right to use nuclear energy for civil purposes while opposing its military use. Lately the Prime Minister has been using a rhetoric of "but Israel also has nuclear weapons" and giving the impression, whether intentionally or not, that Israel having nuclear weapons legitimizes Iran's possession of them as well. The forgotten point is that at the time Israel opted for nuclear weapons, Arab countries had a policy of destroying Israel; having nuclear weapons at the time was vital for Israel. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated during a press conference on September 30 that Turkey is against both a military operation and UN Security Council sanctions against Iran. "Carrots and sticks" is an indispensable tool in diplomacy, and Davutoğlu himself is in the position to know this best. Indeed, the fact that he made the approval of the documents signed with Armenia by the Turkish Parliament conditional upon the the solution of the Azeri-Armenian conflict is

nothing other than carrots-and-sticks. At this press briefing, Davutoğlu asked everyone to be agreeable, but unfortunately we do not live in a fairy tale world. It is regrettable that what Davutoğlu wished for cannot be realized. Turkey, being neighbors with an Iran that has nuclear weapons, cannot remain inactive. This is why stopping Iran is crucial for Turkey. If Iran got nuclear weapons, Turkey could either go the same route, or could be forced to ask the US and NATO additional guarantees on top of the already existing ones under the "nuclear umbrella."

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