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### **Here's Why the Iran Deal is a Non-Proliferation Winner & What it Means for India**

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The issues of nuclear non-proliferation can be understood well with two caveats; 1) a proliferation problem cannot be completely eliminated, the drive towards nuclear non-proliferation thus would always remain a work in progress and 2) a proliferation problem can best be contained. If a state is willing to pay any cost for acquiring nuclear capability, it most likely would innovate strategies towards the desired end. If judged through the lens of these two caveats, the recent nuclear deal with Iran appears to be a non-proliferation winner primarily for these reasons:

I. A breakthrough on Iran is not only a successful and encouraging breather for the EU-3+3 countries before they fix more non-proliferation predicaments as negotiations were going on for more than a decade. The global nuclear order has been plagued by examples of inefficacy of the nuclear non-proliferation regime for more than two decades now. The global nuclear scholarship have viewed the nuclear security situation worldwide as in a state of flux in which the issues of North Korea and Iran have been identified as the tip of the iceberg. The last two NPT-RevCons too, have not been able to add any sanguine outcomes on these issues. The Iranian deal has been able to break this stalemate. For twelve years the Iranian proliferation crisis would swing between "American and Israeli doubts about a possible military diversion" to "Iranian claims on peaceful nuclear enrichment". The conclusion of the Iran deal has finally sorted out this dilemma and presented itself as an example as to how diplomatic options can be best utilised to enclose a proliferation crisis at an advance stage.

II. The deal clearly actualises the Article-IV of the NPT that states, "*... nothing in this Treaty shall be interpreted as affecting the inalienable right of all the parties to the treaty to develop research,*



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*production, and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination....”* It is for the first time an NPT party has rightfully been allowed to acquire a full nuclear cycle for peaceful purpose. While this may provoke other members to ask for similar concessions; the detailed monitoring and verification procedures can be made into a gold standard for future civilian nuclear cooperation agreements. However, the pressure of foolproof guarantees in detecting the ‘cheating’ would remain.

III. Iran has spent almost three decades in investing in the alleged ‘nuclear weapons options’. As mentioned earlier, the nature of its nuclear programme has never been fully known. If at all Iran was on a pathway to a nuclear weapon, the deal elongates the break-out time to 25 years. In Aaron Stein’s words, “*...It is not the next President’s agenda... it is a 25 year sunset on the remote possibility of Iran developing a nuclear weapon....This will take us to 2040...*”<sup>i</sup> The deal has reduced the sense of urgency to the crisis. It has expanded the time frame for Iran to break out, at the same time reduced its future size of uranium enrichment programme.

IV. Opportunity for IAEA monitoring and verification system to prove itself and silence the skeptics. Indeed the criteria in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) have been cleverly crafted to prevent an attractive option of ‘sneaking out’. Critics have argued that the deal does not provide a provision of ‘anytime anywhere’ IAEA inspections. However, this has been dealt with an innovative compromise. Similar to the IAEA’s Additional Protocol’s provision, the Iran accord calls for IAEA’s monitoring on declared yellowcake and to declared centrifuge components. This prevents a secret diversion. Secondly, the provision of “Procurement Working Group” would be responsible to oversee all nuclear related equipment and material. This implies that cheating on Iran’s part would possibly be caught<sup>ii</sup>.



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V. If Iran decides to cheat or follow the path of weapons capability, it can always do so with an NPT withdrawal. The NPT itself explicitly provides the States with this option; moreover even the Iranian deal doesn't prohibit any such course. One must recognise that North Korea has already set a precedent for this action and even diplomacy did not amount to much in that case. Iran's renouncement of NPT obligations however, may or may not invite a military response. In case of a military response, one can argue, it would only add more fuel to the fire and could become counterproductive in the long run.

VI. Lastly, the deal has subdued the military option to curb Iran's proliferation problem. The option of military attack on Iran's nuclear facilities has been doing the rounds in the US for a long time, with considerable domestic support. By bringing Iran closer towards the nuclear non-proliferation regime, President Obama has taken away a strong rationale from the conservatives to manoeuvre the military option into a non-proliferation solution as such an option would only strengthen the Iranian will to acquire the 'great equalizer' with more passion than ever.

### ***Implications for India:***

It is needless to suggest that the Iranian deal carries with it, assurances for the Indian nuclear diplomacy. India's long held position on nuclear non-proliferation had conditioned its attitude on the Iranian nuclear crisis. Critics had argued for a blind support to Iran against the US sanctions. However, by taking a long term view of the issue, Indian diplomacy was able to successfully walk a diplomatic tightrope between the realpolitik and ideological policy options.

Additionally, the historic accord has indirectly lifted many constraints from the Indian foreign policy. In the aftermath of the US-India Civilian Nuclear partnership, the Iran nuclear issue had created a catch-22 situation for India. The Indian vote at the IAEA against Iran in 2009 and its subsequent deliberate reduction of oil imports from Iran for the month of February-March 2015 had opened fissures in the India-Iran bilateral relations.



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It is noteworthy here to mention that India-Iran oil imports dropped to the lowest<sup>iii</sup> since July 2013. In this context the call to further cement the India-Saudi Arabia buyer and seller relationship were gaining more prominence. It was anticipated that, *“India will continue to import Saudi Arabian oil until such time as our two traditional suppliers — Iran and Iraq become stable...”*<sup>iv</sup>

Had the Iran deal taken longer, the chances of this geopolitical variable affecting the India-Iran relations could not have been ruled out especially when viewed in the context of US and Iran’s bilateral equations with Saudi Arabia. India’s growing proximity with both US and Saudi Arabia in the light of Iran’s proliferation crisis might have enhanced the Catch -22 situation. Furthermore, this could have come in the way of India’s policy of diversification of its oil imports. Thus the deal has played a smaller but vital role in allowing India’s execution of its energy security options more freely.

By ushering a new era of relationship between the West and Iran; most specifically the United States, the Iranian deal has provided New Delhi with a more open space in expanding its foreign policy interests with Iran. It is argued that lifting of sanctions as a part of the deal would be likely to *bring large amounts of Iranian oil into the market and would also push petroleum prices down for an extended period of time*<sup>v</sup> favoring India’s economic stability.

India is clearly looking at the re-normalised energy equation with Iran with more keenness, and it expects a positive spinoff in the India- Iran strategic interests. In-fact recently Iranian President Rouhani had invited India to invest in infrastructure projects, especially in the development of the Chabahar port in southeast Iran.<sup>vi</sup> Thus the Iran deal offers more than just non-proliferation gains to India.

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*(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])*



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<sup>i</sup> Aaron Stien, "The Iran Deal, Explained In Clear Language By A Nuclear Expert", *Vox World*, Available at <http://www.vox.com/2015/7/16/8974507/iran-deal-explained-expert>, Accessed on July, 20, 2015.

<sup>ii</sup> James Acton, "Argument: Iran Ain't Gonna Sneak Out Under This Deal", *Foreign Policy*, July, 16, 2015, Available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/16/iran-aint-gonna-sneak-out-under-this-deal-verification-inspections/>, Accessed on July, 20, 2015,.

<sup>iii</sup> Nidhi, Verma, "India's Feb Iran Oil Imports Fall To Lowest Since July 2013", *Reuters*, March 02, 2015, Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/02/india-iran-imports-idUSL4N0W13Z620150302>, Accessed on July, 20, 2015.

<sup>iv</sup> Rajendra Abhyankar, February 23, 2015, "Should India Prioritize its Relations With Saudi Arabia?", *Fair Observer*, Available at [http://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle\\_east\\_north\\_africa/should-india-prioritize-its-relations-with-saudi-arabia-10287/#sthash.fevFy05H.dpuf](http://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/should-india-prioritize-its-relations-with-saudi-arabia-10287/#sthash.fevFy05H.dpuf), Accessed on July, 20, 2015.

<sup>v</sup> C. Raja Mohan, "How the Iran nuke deal gives India room in the Greater Middle East" *Indian Express*, July 15, 2015.

<sup>vi</sup> Nidhi Verma and Frank Jack Daniel, July, 17, 2015 "Interview - Iran Says Offers India Bigger Role In Strategic Port" *Reuters*, Available at <http://in.reuters.com/article/2015/07/17/iran-india-gholam-idINKCN0PR1EW20150717>, Accessed on July, 2015.