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Iran's Nuclear Policy: Why is Still Concerned for International Community

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Abstract:

Though the joint action plan has reached a sensible point of agreement by late 2013, it does not mean the end of the prolonged and controversial Iran's nuclear crisis in International political system. In fact, Iran has never changed its core principles on its clandestine nuclear policy, even though there are changes in its leadership, political institutions, and foreign policy. It's nuclear program is deeply rooted within the heart and soul of the Iranian people and its leadership. It is always inevitable for historical analysis on Iran's nuclear policy. In this backdrop, this paper intends to analyse the nature and roles of Iranian leaders' in its ongoing nuclear policy from Mohammad Reza Saha till the present president Rouhani, and how they consistently defend its controversial nuclear program from international communities to meet its ambition to acquire the required nuclear technological capability.

Keywords: Iran, Nuclear, Nuclear Policy, IAEA, UN, Proliferation, Sanction

1. Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Iran has a long history of policy interest on nuclear developmental activities and an ambition to acquire technological knowledge as a part of the peaceful nuclear research program. Iran is the only Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) signatory state whose nuclear policy has generated such a great deal of controversy and debate at both regional and international levels. It is one of those countries that seek to acquire nuclear status with or without external help. With or without considering its legal bounding, she is still continuing its problematic nuclear program. However, it cannot ignore the existing international legal framework and political pressure from regional and international pressure. Beyond that, Tehran is moving ahead, criticizing international organization and international communities, with a strong support from both the public and their leadership in Tehran. This brings in Iran a central pick-apart by isolating from the regional and the international community. While, it's unending negotiation is still in its disputation path. This present Iran's nuclear issue reflects on few core issues; firstly, it's undisclosed dual-nuclear policy which it is expecting to be a threat to western countries and their allies in the region. Secondly, Iran is not ready to cooperate with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA's) official's sites inspections in some of its secret facilities and to suspend its Uranium Enrichment activities. This includes the political and legal procedure under the IAEA additional protocol, and the UNSC (the United Nation Security Council) as she is being a signatory member of NPT. Thirdly, all the leaders in the regime are no difference in their position or ambition, when it comes to nuclear policy decision making. And finally, the issue is also more on political rather than technical and legal position. This includes the security concern among the region and global in the larger context. For an example, the contingency of developing capable ballistic missiles that can carry anuclear warhead and other possible effects of wider nuclear proliferation throughout the West Asia region.

2. Origin of Iran's Nuclear Policy

Since 1953, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, the second and last monarch of the House of Pahlavi of the Iran, and the last person who become a monarch after a successful coup against Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in August 1953 with the help of the US—the UK. He ruled Iran nearly for three decades till the Islamic Revolution of 1979. He was also the ruler who declares himself the “king of king” and also an important ally to the US and the west.ⁱ

It was the Shah's personal interest in dreaming all-round development of Iran by building a modern industrialized country based on the western institutional model rather than its own traditional values.ⁱⁱ Especially, on developing Iran's nuclear policy, after launching a successful nuclear research program bearing advantage from his personal cordial relationship with the US. Shah started his nuclear policy with establishing its nuclear research and development program in the 1950s and joined the peaceful nuclear program after signing the nuclear cooperation agreement under the United States 'Atoms for Peace' program in 1957.ⁱⁱⁱ The agreement was aimed at transforming nuclear programs, from an agent of destruction and weaponization to a force for peace and scientific development, which also includes providing technical assistance and even lease of several kilograms of enriched uranium to only those signatory states calling for cooperation in peaceful research and in used for nuclear energy. Shah then founded the Tehran Nuclear Research Center

(TNRC) in the year 1967, and also signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1974.^{iv} With this opportunity, Shah takes the chances by expressing his interest in acquiring a domestic reprocessing, or a plutonium separation plant to handle power reactor spent fuel. By extending his friendly ties towards Western Europe, he also aims to build two 1,200 MW (e) PWR units to be the first power reactors at Bushehr, with the help from German firm “the Kraftwerk Union” a nuclear power plant construction firm.^v He also invested hundreds of one billion dollar loan to ensure the necessary low enriched uranium fuel and technical access, from “European Gaseous Diffusion Uranium Enrichment Consortium (“Eurodif”)” dominated consortium uranium enrichment based in France.^{vi} He also announced future plans for an ambitious nuclear program that would eventually include over 20 nuclear power reactors to fulfill his ambitious goal of producing 23,000 MWe by the year 1995.

As the nuclear weapon capability becomes a primary in Cold War period and India’s first nuclear test in 1974, he (Saha) however, by claiming the Iranian nuclear policy ‘a peaceful policy’, and argued that, “Iran had no intention of acquiring nuclear weapons but, if small states began building them, Iran might have to reconsider its policy.” He is also mentioned that, in February just after the Iran-France agreement to cooperate on Uranium enrichment to a France daily newspaper ‘*Le Monde*’ that, one day sooner than is believed Tehran would be in possession of a nuclear bomb in 10 to 20 years.”^{vii} He was also of the view that, Iran’s security situation may change in the future or other states may begin to acquire bombs, so the nuclear military option probably would be the priority option, especially for Saha, it was possible that he might follow the suit, if he continued to rule Iran for another decade. So, it means that Shah nuclear ambition was to cultivate its own Iranian people in acquiring the required knowledge for developing nuclear weapons in the future with or without the help of the US or any other nuclear state. Even his loyal government officials were backed off from such remarked. Given his appetite for acquiring a strong military hardware, he encouraged his military to go for the most advanced weapons systems on the same theory of acquiring technology through a possible means. Such as, copying others technology or designed, as he said, “copying was not wrong”. But, it was unfortunate that, there comes a new criticize and oppose action by the United States. In April 1974, the U.S. trade’s administrator William Simon called him a “nut”.^{viii} This remark, however, represented an undercurrent of tension between Iran and the US relation, which was rooted in Shah’s role in raising the oil price policy. With his oil revenues and vision of Iran as the hegemonic power in the region, a nuclear policy was a symbol for Shah’s modernization, progress, and power of Iran. He calls for the full-fledged nuclear power industry policy that can have the capacity to produce 23,000 megawatts of electricity. The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) started recruiting more than 1,500 higher paid employees with its strong budget of \$1.3 billion, in 1976. A year before it was just a \$ 30.8 million.^{ix} So, Saha, under the banner of his peaceful nuclear program, Iran almost included the intentions to produce nuclear weapon motivated partly by potential nuclear threats from Israel, and nuclear achievements of Pakistan, India.

3. Iran’s Nuclear Policy in the Post-Revolution Era

In February 1979, when the Islamic Revolution toppled the old Mohammad Reza Shah’s regime, the Bushehr-1 was almost 90% completed and 60% of its equipment had been installed, while Bushehr-2 was 50% completed, and some other were planned to go into production within that short period time. While, his government’s investment in nuclear program appeared to one billion dollars.^x

This followed another phase to a new domestic institution under the new Islamic clergy and the revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Right after chosen him as the supreme leader of Islamic republic or Iran, he ceases the nuclear policy for sometime as he withdraws Shah’s policy of cooperation towards the West, this includes the western approach to Iran’s nuclear policy. Accompanying a serious religious reservation on peace and nuclear weapons, Khomeini considered the nuclear program as an evil, in terms of Islamic jurisprudence and also against their ethics of foreign policy on the nuclear-free Middle East. He led on the concepts of ‘Neither East-Nor West’ foreign policy against the two-existing block lead by the US and the Soviet Union respectively. His independent foreign policy tries to expose and protect the great Persian civilization and its sovereignty. While, some scholar’s critic that, Khomeini’s disband of the nuclear policy was due to the technical and economic shortage from it disliked with the western powers and subsequently the eight years long war with Iraq.

This new nuclear policy from new Iranian leader doesn’t last long, as it becomes seriously unpopular to its isolated position in the region and insecure national security situation in such volatile geostrategic region surrounded by neighboring adversary countries with powerful Western support. Such nature of Iranian isolation was not only based on the cultural difference but, it was also due to the deepening from ideological, economical and geostrategic situation followed by Shiites Islamic revolution and disastrous experience of eight-year long war with Iraq. The isolation was quite clear that it was not only at the regional level but also at the global level. For example, when Saddam Hussein used its chemical weapons against Iran, there was no criticism from regional or international powers, instead of imposing the U.S.-led arms embargo due to the events of 1979 US embassy hostage crisis. The devastating Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) heavily influenced Ayatollah Khomeini’s decision to restart Iran’s nuclear policy that can defend from such possible external threat against the Islamic republic. In one of the letter Ayatollah himself express to the IRGC and the Military commanders that, “With the grace of God, he wish if the Islamic republic of Iran after 1371 [1992] can embark on offensive operations with possessing 350 infantry brigades, 2,500 tanks, 300 fighter planes and 300 helicopters as well as having the ability to make a substantial number of laser and atomic weapons which will be the necessity of the war at that time.”^{xi} Pertaining to President Rafsanjani, he also called for the development of nuclear and other unconventional weapons based on Iran’s wartime experience as the importance of such weapons was made very clear during the [Iran-Iraq] war. Rafsanjani also mention that “Iran should fully equip both in the offensive and defensive use of chemical, bacteriological, and radiological weapons.”^{xii} While, speaking on many occasions both Khomeini and Rafsanjani rejected both the defensive and offensive use of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons calling it for the complete prohibition and destruction of such destructive weapons.

As Iran's relation with the Western countries is in halt, There was unsuccessful in seeking help from the West in supplying to complete its first nuclear power plant. So, Iran countermanded it and reliant its policy on other main nuclear capable states through illegal means. These include the Inviting of Chinese and Russia's investors along with the technological assistance to complete its nuclear facilities. At the same time, Tehran keepsemphasizing on domestic research activities as a part of its self-sufficiency in acquiring knowledge capability.

Following the first protocol on the 'Bushehr nuclear Power Plant' project that signed with Russia in March 1993 was an agreement called for Russia to complete its first power reactor at Bushehr.^{xiii} By early 1990s, Iran's nuclear policy was an act commencing and exploring for any possible support and opportunities to get its required nuclear scientific equipment or technological knowledge from those nuclear states to acquired it through any possible means either legally or illegally or both. In 1991, Iran also secretly imported approximately one metric ton of uranium hexafluoride (UF₆), and the two 300 MW (e) PWR units of Chinese design was confirmed in 1993.^{xiv} Iran also advanced in its uranium enrichment efforts and conducted research on plutonium reprocessing with the help of well-known Pakistani nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan. In February 1986, Pakistan's leading nuclear scientist A. Q. Khan secretly visited Bushehr and later that year Iran and Pakistan signed a secret nuclear cooperation agreement.^{xv} But, it never reported the details of transfer reports to the IAEA.

4. The Ongoing Debate

The current controversy over the clandestine Iran's nuclear program began a decade back when Alireza Jafarzadeh, one of the former spokesperson for an Iranian dissident group, National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), publicly revealed the existence of two nuclear sites under construction in 'Natanz' - Underground Fuel Enrichment Plant and 'Arak' - Heavy water reactor facility including the production of radioisotopes. Later, the issue has extended to various nuclear research activities in other facilities, including; Isfahan - Uranium conversion plant, Hexafluoride gas - used in gas centrifuges, Uranium oxide - used to fuel reactors, Parchin has been identified as a suspected nuclear weapons development facility, and Qom - Uranium enrichment plant.

The issue becomes a serious concern among the regional and international community, because, it was believed that, some of the possible disclosures of its nuclear program related to military applications are claimed to be secretly processing in their nuclear facilities. And Tehran refused to allow the IAEA inspection team to access to their suspected nuclear sites. This led the IAEA to present a clear report on the status of Iranian nuclear program, especially to throes selective facilities in Parchin, Natanz, and Arak. So, the United State along with its European allies was forced to insist further pressure on IAEA to refer the issue to the UN Security Council to supervise it. During a meeting with Iranian officials in the Netherlands, the Foreign Ministers of Britain, France, and Germany set a deadline for Iran to suspend all their enrichment activities by signing an additional protocol. To assist its negotiations IAEA had offered a guarantee to Iran in supplying fuel for its nuclear power plants in return if Iran abandons its uranium enrichment activities.

The Supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, continues denying Western allegations and offer, by defending that Iran is not seeking nuclear weapons and claimed those accusations as unfounded aimed to prevent Iran's scientific knowledge and technological progress. However, in November 2004, Iran under the head of negotiator Rauhani agreed at the Paris agreement with EU-3 (France, Germany, and the United Kingdom) to imply the 'additional protocol' and allowed IAEA to inspect most of those suspected secret military sites. Besides, the public outrage and protests held in Tehran over the government's decision on signing the additional protocol, and some of officials urge to withdrawal Iran from the NPT membership.^{xvi} The majority of Iranian in all groups favored their country's nuclear program and wanted to see their country to develop nuclear energy. Almost 90% of Iranians believes that it is important for their country and their right to have a full fuel cycle nuclear program.^{xvii} The public interest was one of the strongest weapons in shaping Iranian leadership to decide and continue its nuclear policy by defending and justifying their position within the IAEA legal framework. So, Iran granted limited access to those inspectors (IAEA) from visiting all suspected site. It made Iranian cooperation with IAEA and EU-3 more complicated and failed to bring up a clear conclusion. The IAEA announces it was unable to get additional information on Iran's regarding centrifuge equipment or the source of nuclear contamination discovered during from earlier inspections.

By the year 2005, Iran's nuclear program had become a political issue. Both the executive branch and parliament were dominated by hardliners and conservatives, political leader in Tehran. The new president Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei used the nuclear issue to stigmatize reformists, and depicting them as defeatists willing to negotiate Iran's interests. Their position on the nuclear issue as an instrument of partisan politics and debate was actively encouraged. Ahmadinejad, the new Iranian president who was totally supported and stand by his citizen among hardliners favors Iran's nuclear rights. This was followed by a strange and hatred policy against the Western countries especially the US and Israel. His foreign policy was a flashback to principles and values of early years of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its policy of hostility towards the West was deepened as he feels the great powers don't have the right to decide about Iran's nuclear policy. He feels it is the right of the Iranian nation to move forward in all fields and acquire modern technology. Nuclear technology is the outcome of scientific progress of Iranian youth. Ahmadinejad also argued that "the United States and some European countries are trying to destabilize Iran because it does not accept the unjust and unilateral system. Ignoring it, he criticizes the unjust status quo of the international system and insists that it is not proper and has to be changed. Thus, Tehran withdraws the agreement in late 2005.

Ahmadinejad, himself openly threat Israel to wipe away from the map of World as he feels Israel existence as a serious threat in the region and Iran in particular. The international communities took it seriously, so as the United State and Israel. It starts to criticize that, Ahmadinejad's view was serious and psychological manipulation of the concept of "Mahdi" return in a time of great turmoil was the rallying cry of Iran nuclear right, in creating an atmosphere of global turmoil by possessing the nuclear weapons. Indeed, this is

precisely the reason that Iran preferred to use support for proxy groups (Hezbollah and Hamas or Islamic Jihad) against the West and Israel.^{xviii}

With an immediate referral from P5+1 or E3+3, (China, France, Germany, Russia, United Kingdom, and the United State) the IAEA Board of Governors decided to report its safeguards of non-compliance to the UN Security Council in February 2006. These shows that Iran's nuclear issue has become more complex and was out of IAEA capabilities to establish any possible conclusion. So, it led the United Nations Security Council to monitor in ruling a direct intervention to curb the Iranian nuclear policy and force Tehran to withdraw its enrichment facilities.

In response to Iran's unchanged position on non-compliance behavior on its additional protocols and its unsuccessful negotiation with P5+1 and Iran, the United Nations Security Council passed the Resolution 1696 of 31 July 2006, demanding Iran to suspend all enrichment and reprocessing related activities. However, Iran failed to Comply by ignoring the UNSC demand.^{xix} Therefore, in December, the same year the UN Security Council was forced to passed the Resolution 1737, under which the Council imposed a series of sanctions on Iran for its non-compliance with the earlier Security Council resolution deciding that, Iran suspends its enrichment-related activities without delay. Since then, it was followed by another series of sanctions or extended sanctions on Iran arrogance by invoking the Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter (Action with Respect to threats to the peace, Breaches of the peace).^{xx} Which it includes the Resolution 1747 (24 March 2007), Resolution 1803 (3 March 2008), Resolution 1835 (27 September 2008), Resolution 1929 (9 June 2010), Resolution 1984 (8 June 2011) and Resolution 2049 (7 June 2012) respectively.

Thus, Iran nuclear issue has become a global one where most regional and international communitiescriticism against the Iranian installation of high uranium enrichment facilities and non-cooperating with IAEA. This was proved by supporting economic sanction under the UN Security council resolutions. Beyond that, there is a widespread voice concern over possible military dimensions against Iran particularly from Israel and the United States. After all, in spite of these series of sanctions and several other initiatives, still the United Nation Security Council failed to isolate and stop Iran's nuclear policy. The sanction put on Iran seems unsuccessfully distracting Iran's nuclear program but, it become a big opportunity for Iran to make a successful path in its independent nuclear policy making, maintaining status quo and producing an advantage position to challenge the veto power in creating a diplomatic policy of 'dived and rule' scenario among the veto power countries. It has also given a plus point for Iran to occupy a bigger role in the international political system and gave the option to become a regional superpower.

While, this failure to curb Iran through sanctions turn international community, especially, Israel, United State and their regional allies to feel Iran's nuclear policy as unavoidable threat in the already sensitive and volatile West Asia. So far, the idea of West Asian Nuclear Free Zone remained unsuccessful and perhaps unsuccessful in the near future. The regional parties are more divergent than its integration in successfully implementing the nuclear free zone. Moreover, some of the states in the region wish to follow the same suit to go for nuclear weaponization program or invite other to stationed nuclear weapons in their soil.^{xxi}

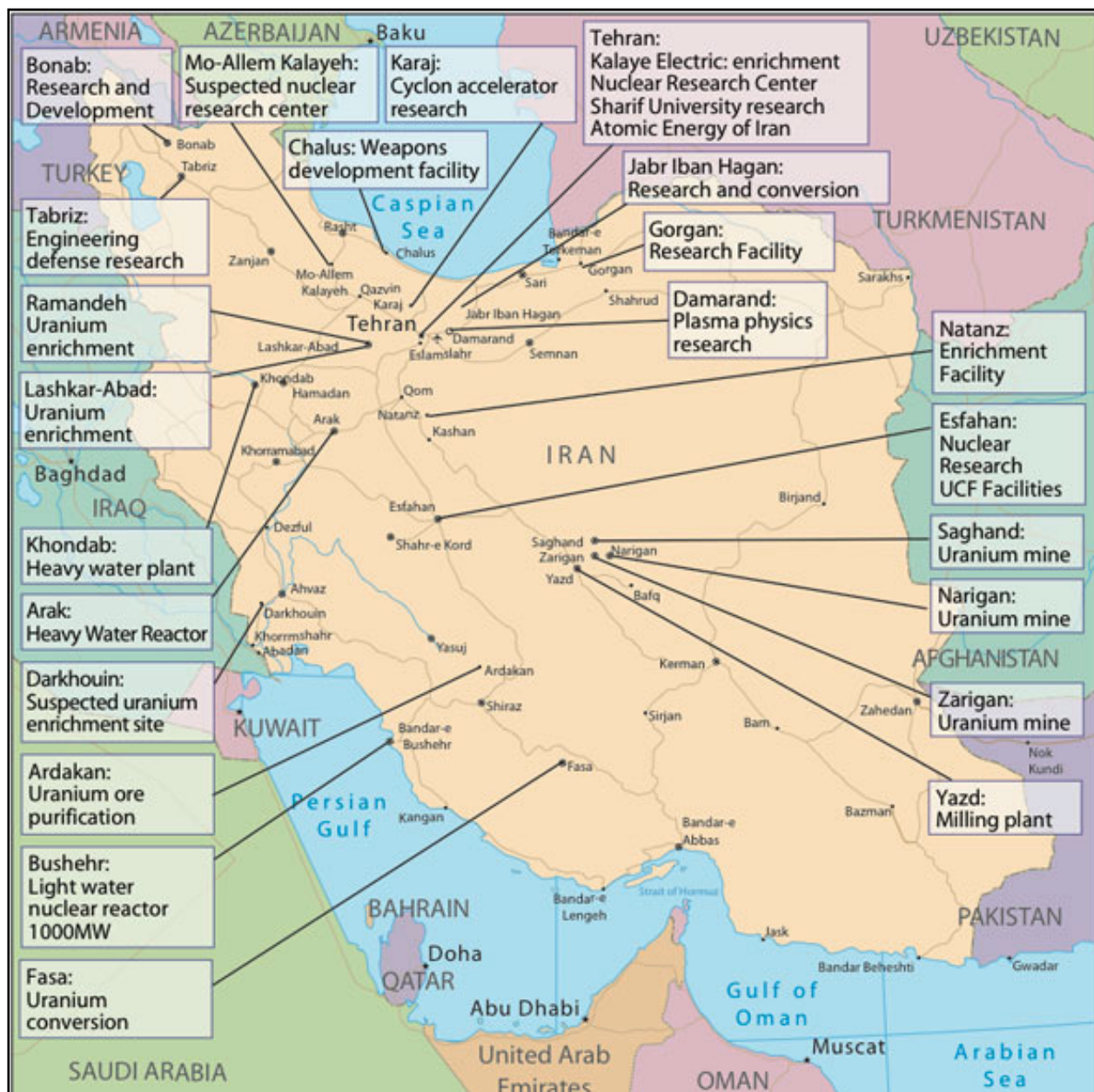


Figure 1: Iran's Nuclear Facilities

The recent interim agreement (Joint Plan of Action, JPA, 2013) between Iran and P5+1 (E3/EU+3) has been extending it to allow time to translate the negotiation into a comprehensive agreement on all of Iran's 18 nuclear facilities and nine outside located facilities where the nuclear material are customarily used.^{xxii} The agreement also agreed in providing Iran about \$14 billion as the sanctions relief and economic improvement demanded by Iranian leaders.^{xxiii} However, the IAEA report bespeaks the possible military dimensions activity. The Joint action plan does not reference in the joint statement with regard to the so-called "possible Military Dimension." It continues calling for to intensify resolution of all outstanding substantive issues for the purpose of providing clarifications regarding access to all relevant information, documentation, sites, material and personnel in Iran. Most importantly, the question relating to the removal/replacement or refurbishment of the site's main buildings and the initiation of high explosives and to neutron transport calculations in those research facilities or to provide the necessary cooperation with the Agency by implementing its Additional Protocol.^{xxiv} As the agency does not mention any authorized it to require member states to provide information access beyond its safeguards agreement including missiles technology or another missile that claim to be capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. Almost all the leadership in Iran has critic that, the UNSC resolutions against Iran's nuclear program is neither legitimate nor justified or acceptable. It is always argued that, the Additional Protocol that imposed earlier (2003-2006) on Iran and trying to re-impose on Iran is not a legally binding instrument but it is a voluntary in nature and it was established by member state, therefore, no sovereign state can force it or cannot turn it into a legal obligation without consent or approval of a sovereign state.

5. Conclusion

Iran has been facing numerous political and economic constraints on its pathway to accomplish its nuclear ambitions. This includes access to necessary resources, technical hurdles, external supports and its financial limitations. Moreover, Iran is targeting from economic sanction along with the political pressure from both international communities and International organizations. So, the Iranian regime has been experiencing a difficult dilemma whether to develop nuclear weapons with whatever means available or to surrender it to the international community by withdrawing its policy ambitions. Since the Iran's nuclear policy will ultimately be determined by the country's capability on its technical advancement and self-building up along with a strong public support. The consequence is rest to the decisions of its leadership and their decision-making capabilities.

Iran is confronting several critics from international communities along with the continuous sanctions from the United Nation Security Council and other individual international powers. All the same, these sanctions were unlikely, that can convince Iran to give up its nuclear ambitions to acquired technical knowledge, possibly the 'breakout'. So far, a sanction doesn't bother Iran's socio-economic and political conditions of Iran as much as western powers are expecting. This shows the current leadership in Tehran put little or no value on integration from the international organization or to consolidate with the international political economy. Instead, Tehran, value more on self-sufficiency in their autonomy and adopting an independent policy to distract and ignore the Western political legitimacy and culture along with portraying itself as a regional power. In 2003, the present president Rouhani was the chief nuclear negotiator agreed to sign the unsuccessful Additional Protocol. Later, in his report presented to the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council, he said that Iran followed the Additional Protocol because, it was to stop the US and its allies from transferring the issue to the UNSC, which might turn into a possible military invasion of Iran. So, He suggested that within that period (additional protocol) Iran can freely progress, research and build up a Knowledge Bridge and also construct a large number of Centrifuges.^{1xxv} And it rightly happened. The recent agreement between Iran and the P5+1 negotiation had reached to a point of agreement on November 23, 2013, in Geneva. Following the agreements, President Hassan Rouhani announced that P5+1 recognized Iran's enrichment rights. But, below 5%, and it will legitimise only if the final deal is passed by six months after the IAEA and P5+1 experts team investigated and examined Iran's nuclear facilities and certified the existing Iran's nuclear program a peaceful one. But, it was strongly criticized by Israeli leaders blaming it a worst agreement. But, this does not mean to end the decade-long issue with Iran and the international organization and international communities on the other side. Because, the long-term Iranian policy is in depth within the heart and soul among the people of Iran, and their leaders are not ready to withdrawal from acquiring required knowledge, as Iranian leaders repeatedly claimed it as their inalienable right and also a part of their knowledge development. So, no one cannot stop Iran from developing and acquire scientific knowledge that can make Iran capable of developing nuclear weapons.

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